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Medium-Term Development Planning Processes and Effective Community Engagement: Strategies and Implications for a Fast-Growing Municipality in Ghana

Abstract

The acceptance of decentralization and its participatory planning approach in Ghana indicates that the country has chosen the right path to development with the consultations of its citizens in the drawing up of responsive plans guided by several regulations. Community problems have however persisted in most local government areas in Ghana particularly those experiencing fast urbanisation. Using a mixed method approach and a sample drawn from the Awutu Senya East Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana, this paper seeks to assess how communities are engaged in these processes and the nuances inherent in these processes that may facilitate the better engagement with the community members to solve the myriad of challenges associated with their fast urbanisation. Strategies of engagement employed by the Municipal Assembly were found to still require attention, especially on approaches used during and after the planning consultations.

Keywords: Effective Community Participation, Kasoa, Urban Development Planning, Urbanisation

Extended Abstract

Introductory Background:

In the preparatory stages of the global development objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and upcoming Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notable cross-cutting issues identified in the consultation processes were people's quest for participation, inclusion, capacity building and building partnerships. As expressed in the United Nations Development Group publication "*Delivering the Post 2015 Development Agenda: Opportunities at the National and Local levels*", people's quest for participation opportunities and inclusion were aptly captured as an important element demanded by all stakeholders and hence reckoned as the "most important signal" that people are sending (UNDP, 2014:2). Issues of participation and inclusion are therefore necessary if sustainable development as expected by this new global agenda will be achieved (Kumar, 2002)

Though almost a buzz word, the ubiquitous nature of the concept of participation in development processes does not lend itself to a universal definition and therefore attracted multi-disciplinary interest, resulting in several studies at the international, national and local levels (Mulwa, 2008). Additionally, the terminologies such as community participation,

citizen participation, people's participation, public participation and popular participation have become common in most development discourses (Arnstein 1969; Mansouri and Rao, 2013; Garau, 2012) and stress the need to involve beneficiaries in development processes especially during the design and implementation of any such developmental initiatives.

In the 1970s and 80s, decentralization was massively advocated for particularly in Africa due to the strong attribution of the centralized planning system failure to lack of participation especially in development planning and implementation (Khwaja, 2004; Mansouri and Rao, 2013). The recognition and acceptance of community participation in development and planning in particular is further underscored by the legalities and explicit decentralization mechanisms adopted by various developing countries to ensure and encourage participation (Sanyare, 2013; Mansouri and Rao, 2013). In effect, community participation is entrenched deliberately by designed legal frameworks in many developing nations to ensure it is not overlooked and the case of Ghana is not different.

Chapter Twenty (20) of Ghana's 1992 Constitution, requires that residents of particular *local government areas should be given the opportunity to participate in development processes. The Constitution further indicates vividly that the sovereignty of the nation resides in Ghanaians and hence all development initiatives must be participatory to improve their welfare (Constitution of Ghana, 1992). Other specific regulations, directives and guidelines exist to ensure community participation in the planning and implementation of development projects and programmes in Ghana (Ahwoi, 2010).*

The National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) is the institution mandated to coordinate and guide planning at all levels as specified by the National Development Planning Act and Local Government Act (Act 480 and 462 respectively) (Ahwoi, 2010). Accordingly, these Acts mandate Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) to prepare Medium-Term Development Plans (MTDPs) by consulting local community members to ensure the needs and aspirations of communities are well captured, prioritized and implemented to improve their welfare. Additionally, a specific guideline on developing the MTDPs-which guides development in MMDAs -, is provided by the NDPC periodically before the commencement of its preparation process. This specific guideline details the various processes and spaces for community participation in the MTDP preparation process (Maple Consult, 2010; NDPC, 2013).

The benefits of decentralized development planning as envisioned per the Medium-Term Development (MTD) planning, with its participatory nature are well captured in literature. Lisk (1985) asserts aptly that the real impact of participation for sustainable development can be achieved in the planning system. Community participation is also noted to develop the potential of the local people to make appropriate decisions which affect their own lives by ensuring proper identification and prioritization of community needs, and how these needs can be adequately provided (Olujimi and Egunjobi 1991). Meaningful community participation also aids poverty targeting, builds social capital, increases demand for good governance and ensures that local knowledge and preferences are duly incorporated in the decision making processes of governments and private sector (Mansouri and Rao, 2013). Consequently, service delivery is effective, right beneficiaries are targeted and scarce public resources are equitably distributed and optimally used. Since 1997 when the first MTDP guideline amidst several other regulations was issued to ensure community participation in development planning, the reality is dicey as community problems still persists (Botchie, 2000). It is therefore necessary to understand the MTDP and the extent to which community members are actually involved in its preparation process. This forms the basis of this study.

Globally, participation in development planning processes as depicted by several typologies developed by scholars, show levels of community participation which are unlikely to yield the desired results (Arnstein, 1969; Connors 1988; Jackson, 2001). This was noted as the major deficiency of the centralized planning especially in developing countries (Khwaja, 2004). The success of the decentralized planning system depends largely on the partnership between institution mandated to facilitate the process and community members (Blair, 2004). Hence most decentralized development planning systems are deliberately designed and backed with regulations and guidelines to ensure such partnerships in planning and implementation of development programmes and projects (Sanyare, 2013). The expectation is that the extensive legal provisions and directives will clearly serve as way of facilitating local community involvement to avoid any disconnection between community needs and initiatives aim at improving people's welfare. However, the persistent and perennial development challenges in local government areas including the Awutu Senya Municipality cast some doubts on whether community members were actually involved in the planning process.

Though specific regulations and explicit provision of guidelines to ensure community participation in the medium-term development planning process exist in Ghana, the reality is complex as the actual extent of involvement is not enough (Ofei-Aboagye, 2011). The extent of community members awareness of such provision for their participation is doubtful, while the strategies and techniques aimed at inducing participation are highly cosmetic (Kenny, 1997). The perennial and persistent problems seem to suggest the non-responsiveness of plans to improving living standards of people.

Additionally, the problems of the Awutu Senya East municipality is increasing, due in part to its strategic location to the capital city of Ghana and vibrant market activities as expressed in the name of the capital Kasoa (which means market in the hausa language). It continues to experience high population increase through spill over populations from the capital and the vibrant market activity which offers hope for migrants, making proper planning imperative. In line with the emerging recognition of the role of strategic peri-urban centres as engines of growth and hope for the poor, its role can only be realized when developed plans are responsive to the needs of current and future inhabitants (Owusu, 2013)

However, little research has been conducted on the processes of how these plans are developed, particularly on the involvement of communities in medium-term development plans preparation. It is therefore necessary to consider the extent of community involvement in MTDP preparation process. This paper seeks to assess to what extent communities are engaged in the preparation processes of the Medium-Term Development Plan and the nuances inherent in these processes that may facilitate the better engagement with the community members to solve the myriad of challenges associated with their fast urbanisation. Specifically, the paper will answer the following questions:

- What knowledge do community members have about medium-term development plan and its preparation processes in Awutu Senya East Municipality?
- What level of education do community members have about their roles in the preparation of the MTDP within Awutu Senya East Municipality
- What strategies are employed by the Municipal Assembly to ensure meaningful participation in the Awutu Senya East Municipality
- How responsive is the Awutu Senya East Municipality's 2014 – 2017 MTDP to community needs?

Participation strategies can make or mar the participation process and must be carefully and sensitively selected (Burroughs 1999). Blair (2004) for instance posit that this is necessary

due to some sensitive and critical issues such as stakeholder identification, proper timing of the participation event, informing participants on issues, problems and opportunities as well as mobilizing resources for the actual participation events. Institutional barriers are deemed to put-off possible participants who may regard the local administrative systems as being complex (Burroughs, 1999; Blair, 2004). Thus, community participation in planning processes must be sustained and this critically hinges on the approaches which are employed. This can be effectively done through collaboration with other civic organizations.

Burroughs (1999) succinctly commented that facilitators must appropriately match participation strategies to the aim and nature of the issues considered (Burroughs, 1999). To this end, the literature shows diverse approaches which can be broadly categorized into traditional and modern (Cowan, 2013). Cowan (2013) argues that public meetings, surveys, visioning exercises, open houses, focus group discussions and workshops are traditional methods which have been used globally over the years. In recent times, the proliferation of information and communication technologies (ICT) gadgets and relatively cheap internet access has created another avenue for involving communities in participation processes (Cowan, 2013). Although it is mostly used to disseminate information, its utilization as an avenue by local government institutions is rare but such strategies can complement the traditional methods. In all, participation strategies are evolving progressively alongside the dynamic nature of societies and requires the use of both interactive and collaborative methods (Cowan, 2013; Burrough, 1999; Blair, 2004).

In as much as participation is highly beneficial in decentralized planning processes, it is not a magic bullet. It has some limitations and may not be proper for all situations (Khwaja, 2004). Khwaja for instance in a study conducted in Northern Pakistan found that the limitations of participation are reflected in instances where participants have conflicting positions and decisions have to be democratically made (Khwaja, 2004). This requires proper facilitation to ensure it does not serve as a disincentive for minority groups. This may be further exacerbated by the existence of different interest groups with diverse needs though resources to address these needs are limited. In effect, if it is not properly managed, it might result in conflicts.

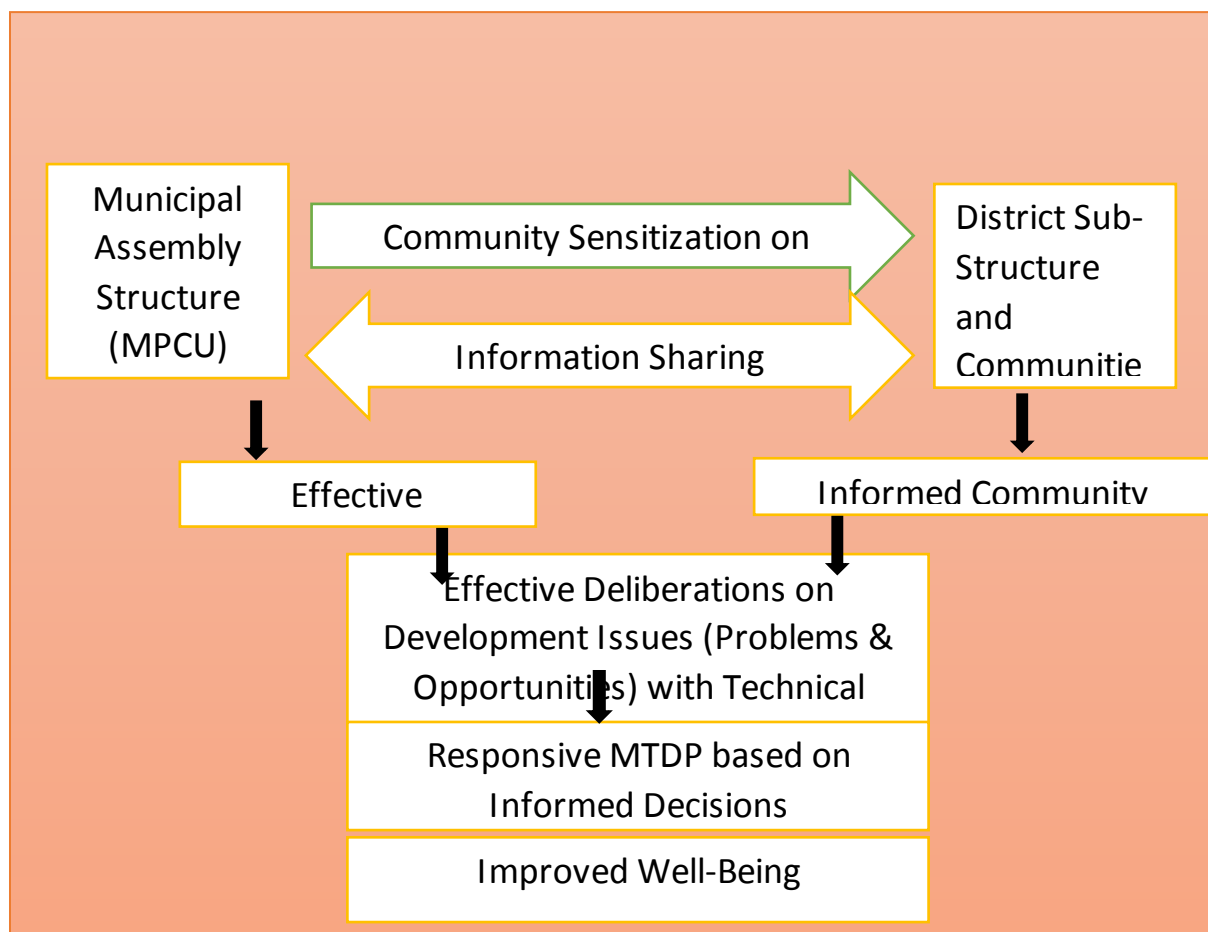
The study further found that community participation is good for making decisions which are non-technical in nature than technical. In effect he concluded that community participation becomes burdensome when it is perceived as a cure-all pill for sustainable development. This is because technical decisions require expertise which may be beyond participants (Khwaja, 2004).

Aguillar (1988) also noted by his study in Mexico that participation processes mostly fail to involve and motivate majority of people in particular local areas, by being bias towards the educated, more politically aware and the middle class. Aguillar (1988) further concluded that distance from settlements to the point where the participation event takes place also affects people's willingness to participate in the planning processes.

The cost of participatory planning is another challenging factor (Dorcey et al, 1994; Mansouri and Rao, 2013; NDPC, 2013). This is mostly reflected in terms of financial inputs required for the main participation events and its time consuming nature (Chompunth, 2011). However, community participation is advocated by most scholars on the basis that its benefits are more than the costs (Mansouri and Rao, 2013).

Essentially, development planning process at district level is expected to commence with awareness creation and public education, followed by the identification of problems and determination of the needs and aspiration from the unit committee level through the Urban/Area/Zonal Council to the MMDAs. It is also expected that this will be done in strong collaboration with the sub-district structure of the Assembly (NDPC, 2013). The plans from the sub-district structures together with the plans of the decentralized departments and functional agencies are thereafter synthesized (Maple Consult, 2010; Sana, 2011; Agyemang, 2010). In all, spaces for community participation include the appraisal (review of previous plan) phase, planning workshops (needs assessment) and public hearings and feedback sessions (Mpere, 2012). These processes are required to be coordinated by the Municipal Planning Co-ordination Unit (MPCU) in collaboration with members of the MMDAs.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



respondents were randomly selected in total making it 40 respondents per zonal council. Additionally, interviews were held with key informants both at the institutional level of the municipal assembly, specifically the staff of the Municipal Planning and Coordinating Unit (MPCU) and at the community level. Data from the survey is analysed using the SPSS version 17 and a content analysis approach was used for the qualitative data.

Findings

Figure 2: Community Knowledge of MTDP and it Preparation Process

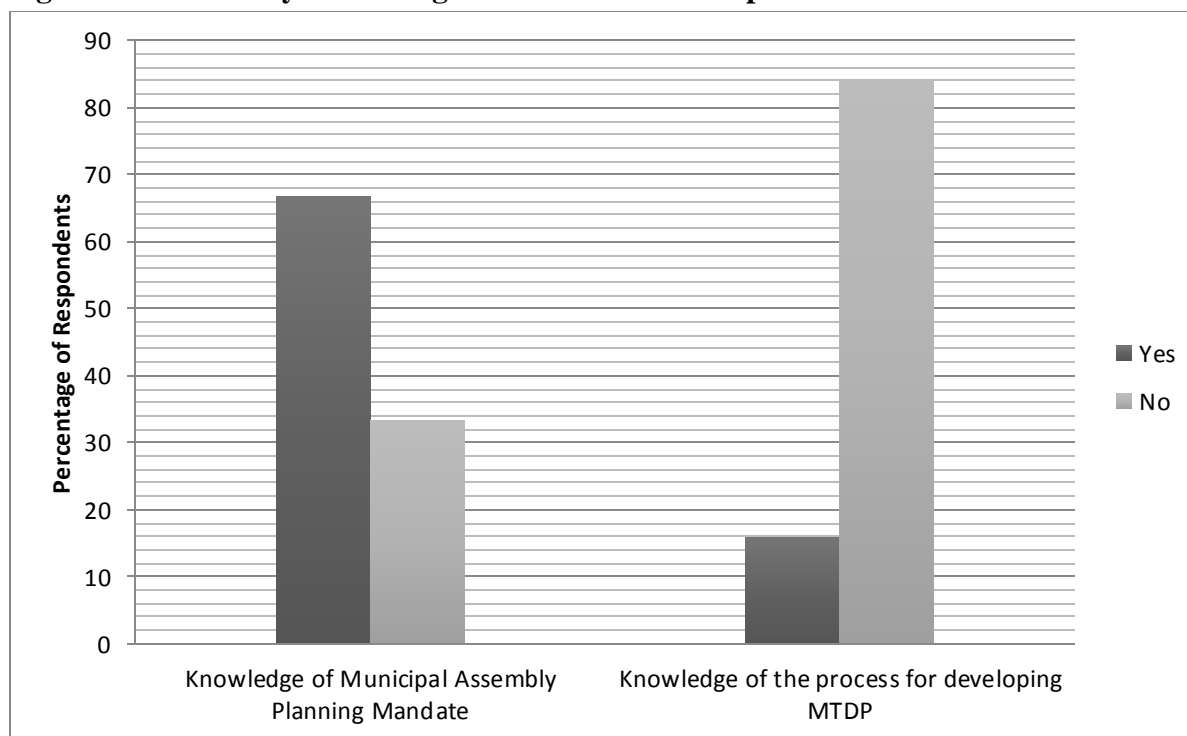


Table 1: Respondents’ perception on the Information about MDTP

	Very High (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Very low (%)	Don’t Know (%)
Knowledge of what the MTDP is	0.8	0.8	40.0	53.3	5.0
When is the MDTP prepared	0	2	31.7	60.0	6.7
Who can be part of the MTDP preparation process	0	3.3	29.2	61.7	5.8

(Source: Field Survey, 2015)

Workable alternatives were made in relation to community education of and participation in the MTDP process, the role of community in the process, the needed efforts of the Assembly to ensure effective participation and the responsiveness of the current plan.

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