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Decentralization and Community Participation in Ghana: The development of District Development Plans in East Mamprusi District

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Table of Contents

List of Tables vii

List of Figures vii

List of Acronyms viii

Abstract ix

Chapter 1 Introduction 1

1.1 Background 1

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem 3

1.3 Research Objectives 4

1.4 Research Questions 5

1.5 Relevance and Justification 5

1.6 Research Methodology 5

1.6.1 Selection of Case Study 6

1.6.2 Selection of Respondents 6

1.6.3 Data Gathering Techniques Employed 7

1.6.4 Secondary Data Employed 8

1.7 Limitations of the Research 8

1.8 Structure of the Paper 9

Chapter 2 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework 10

2.1 Decentralization 10

2.2 Decentralized Planning 11

2.3 Conceptualising Community Participation 11

2.4 Constraints to Community Participation 13

2.5 Framework on Power in Spaces and Places of Participation 14

2.6 Framework on Levels of Community Participation 15

Conclusion 16

Chapter 3 Decentralization and District Planning in Ghana.....17

3.1 Ghana's Current Decentralization System 17

3.2 The Structure of Ghana's Decentralization System 17

3.2.1 The Regional Co-ordinating Councils (RCCs) 18

3.2.2 The District Assemblies (DAs) 18

3.2.3 The Sub-District Structures (SDS) 19

3.2.4 The Unit Committees (UCs) 19

3.3 Planning within Ghana's Decentralization System 20

3.3.1 National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) 20

3.3.2 Sector Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) 21

3.3.3 Regional Planning and Coordinating Units (RPCUs) 21

3.4 Planning Process at the District Level 21

3.5 Planning Process at the Sub-district Level 22

3.6 The Study Area 23

3.6.1 Location 23

3.6.2 Nature of Decentralized Structures in EMD 24

Conclusion 25

Chapter 4 Spaces for Community Participation: Examining Perceptions of Official Policy and Informal Practice 26

4.1 Spaces for Community Participation in the DMTDP Formulation 26

4.2 How Communities are Involved in the Operationalization of the spaces 28

4.2.1 Community Involvement in LAPs Formulation 28

4.2.2 Community Involvement in Public Hearings 30

4.2.3 Who Occupies the Spaces in the DMTDP Formulation? 31

4.3 Citizens Perceptions on the Mechanisms and the Spaces for Participation in the DMTDP Formulation 33

4.3.1 Citizens Knowledge of the Mechanisms and the Spaces for Participation in the DMTDP Formulation 33

4.3.2 Citizens Perceptions on the Functioning of the Mechanisms and the Spaces for Participation 34

4.3.3 Citizens Perceptions of their Involvement in the DMTDP Formulation 36

4.4 Constraints to Community Participation in the DMTDP Formulation 37

4.4.1 Financial Constraints 37

4.4.2 Level of Citizens Organization 38

4.4.3 Selective Participation 38

4.4.4 Lack of Interest in Participation 38

Conclusion 39

Chapter 5 Theory and Practice: Power Relations and Community Participation in District Planning 40

5.1 Spaces and Powers in Participation in the DMTDP Formulation 40

5.2 Levels and Interests in Participation in the DMTDP Formulation 42

Conclusion 43

Chapter 6 Conclusions and Policy Recommendations 44

References 46

Appendices 53

Appendix 1 Guidelines used for Primary Data Collection 53

1A Questionnaire for Councillors/Members of the Sub-district Structures 53

1B Questionnaire for DPCU Representatives/Executive Committee Member 53

1C Guide used for the Focus Group Discussions with Community Members 54

Appendix 2 Picture of an Abandoned Market at Nalerigu in the Study Area 55

List of Tables

Table 1: Funds for Local Development, Internally-Generated Funds (IGF) and District Assembly Common Fund (DACF) - EMD (2006-2010) 6

Table 2: List of Interviewed Representatives 7

Table 3: Framework on Levels of Community Participation 16

List of Figures

Figure 1: Power in Spaces and Places of Participation 15

Figure 2: Structure of Ghana's Decentralization System 20

Figure 3: Structure of Planning System in Ghana 23

Figure 4: Map of Ghana showing the Research Area 24

List of Acronyms

ALPs	-	Area Level Plans
CAPs	-	Community Action Plans
DA	-	District Assembly
DACF	-	District Assemblies Common Fund
DCD	-	District Coordinating Director
DMTDP	-	District Medium-Term Development Plan
DPCU	-	District Planning and Coordinating Unit
EMD	-	East Mamprusi District
FGD	-	Focus Group Discussion
LAPs	-	Local Action Plans
MDA	-	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
NDPC	-	National Development Planning Commission
NGOs	-	Non-Governmental Organisations
PWDs	-	Persons with Disabilities
RCC	-	Regional Coordinating Council
RPCUs	-	Regional Planning and Coordinating Units
SDC	-	Sub-District Council
SDS	-	Sub-District Structures
UC	-	Unit Committee

Abstract

Following the take-off of Ghana's decentralization policy in 1988, planning has changed from a centralized system to a decentralized approach aimed at placing communities at the centre stage of development through the formulation of district development plans. This study explores the spaces for community participation in the formulation of District Medium-Term Development Plans (DMTDPs) in the East Mamprusi District to ascertain the extent of community participation in the plans formulation. It highlights the perceptions of citizens on these spaces and the mechanisms for their involvement, and how they perceive their actual involvement in these spaces. Furthermore, it identifies relevant constraints to community participation in the DMTDP formulation for the district.

Relevance to Development Studies

Decentralization has won global acclaim for its perceived ability to bring about development with the active involvement of the ordinary citizens. In light of this, Ghana has opened up spaces and mechanisms that afford ordinary citizens the opportunity to participate in the development process through decentralized district planning. By exploring these spaces to determine the extent of citizens involvement in the planning process, this study is relevant to development studies through its critical examination of how official policies are implemented and to some extent distorted in practice on the ground.

Keywords

Decentralization, community participation, decentralized planning, district, spaces, power, Ghana.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Decentralisation has been defined in different ways on the basis of what the policy aims to achieve: transferring responsibility for planning, management, and/or resource-raising from the central government to local elected government or field units of central government ministries or agencies (Rondinelli, 1981, cited in Awortwi, 2010). The primary rationales for local-level decentralization highlight that it brings local governments closer to people, allows direct public participation in decision making, and facilitates service delivery based on people's needs (Haque, 2010; Work, 2002). As Awortwi (2010) notes, majority of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have implemented one or more decentralization policy reforms the focus of which has changed over the years. The main reform according to Olowu (2003, cited in Awortwi, 2010) is devolution whereby power to deliberate, make decisions, and plan and execute development programs for their localities is transferred to locally elected politicians. The implication of efforts at devolution implies that the onus of local development has shifted to local government representatives to be pursued with the active involvement of the local people themselves.

The emerging popularity of the decentralization of governmental authority from central to regional, district, and local bodies came from two other converging forces; that is, the desire for participatory management of local development projects and the need for local development planning and implementation processes to be determined by the local people in whose interests the projects are being carried out (Nyendu, 2012). The advantage, Manor (2004) argues, is that the ability of governments to bring about development increases when ordinary people and community organization are drawn into the development process. Moreover, 'when reforms inspire disadvantaged groups to engage in public affairs, their confidence, skills, connections, organisational strength – and thus their capacity to influence their own destinies – grow' (Manor, 2004:27).

Ghana's decentralization policy has gone through several reforms since independence. From 1988 to date, decentralization policy in Ghana has combined elements of political, administrative and fiscal decentralization (Ayee, 2008). The policy necessitated a change in the national planning process from the centralized 'top-down' system to a decentralized 'bottom-up' system (Adams and Anum, 2005). The major objectives of the decentralized planning system in Ghana are to: create an institutional framework for public and community participation in national development to ensure optimal resource mobilization, allocation and utilization for development; provide opportunities for greater participation of local people in development planning and efficient management of local resources; and to establish effective channels of communication between the national government and local communities and increase administrative effectiveness at both levels (Inkoom, 2011).

To implement the decentralized planning system, structures have been put in place at various levels of the governance structure of the country. These structures are the District Assemblies (DAs) at the districts level; the Regional Coordinating Councils at the regional levels; and sector Ministries, Departments and Agencies and the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) at the national level (Republic of Ghana, 1993). This arrangement is aimed at harmonizing local development with the national development objectives of the country. For development to be responsive to the needs of local people in line with the objectives of the decentralized planning system, Legislative Instrument (L.I) 1589 (1994) of Ghana's local governance system established sub-district structures (Urban, Zonal, Town, Area councils, and Unit committees) to facilitate local involvement below the district level in the development process.

Ayee and Amponsah (2003:66) note that most of the functions of the sub-district structures are meant to promote popular participation because they are to be the 'rallying point of local enthusiasm and participation in support of development objectives'. Not only are these sub-structures the focal points for promoting local development but also the initiators of programmes that would involve people to improve their communities and wellbeing, adding that successful performance of some of the functions of the DAs such as the preparation of short, medium and long-term development plans and the enumeration and keeping records of all taxable persons and properties depend on the capacity of the sub-district structures.

The importance of financial resources in ensuring the smooth functioning of the DAs as agents of local development cannot be overemphasized. Traditionally, funding for DAs in Ghana was derived largely from such sources as taxes, fines on stray animals, and licenses among others (Nyendu, 2012). However, these funding sources were found to be inadequate to promote local development especially in rural districts where the traditional funding sources were difficult to mobilize. The inadequacy of these sources of revenues in meeting local development demands resulted in the creation of the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF)[1]. Banful (2010) observes that since the DACF began making disbursements to DAs in 1994 it has become the most importance source of revenue for DAs constituting on average 80% of an Assembly's annual expenditure. With the creation of the DACF it was expected that the DAs would have adequate and reliable sources of funding which would then enable them to perform such developmental functions as the provision of school buildings and structures, feeder roads, electricity, cottage industries, and health facilities, among the many others that constitute their core functions (Nyendu, 2012).

Allocations of the DACF are transferred to the DAs against the submission of District Medium-Term Development Plans (DMTDPs) to the office of the Common Fund Administrator (Dege Consult, 2007). The NDPC which is the coordinating body of Ghana's decentralized national planning system prescribes the format of the DMTDPs and receives them from the

[1] A pool of resources created under section 252 of the 1992 constitution of Ghana. It is a minimum of 5% of the national revenue set aside to be shared among all DAs in Ghana with a formula approved by parliament. See http://www.commonfund.gov.gh/ Accessed 10 September 2012.

DAs through the Regional Coordinating Councils for approval. The NDPC, in line with the decentralized planning system objective of ensuring greater participation of local people in the development process, makes provisions for the local people to participate in the formulation and implementation of the DMTDPs. These participatory arrangements range from the full participation of local people in the development plans formulation, to the conduct of public hearings on proposed development plans for people to express their views on them, and to opportunities for local communities to present Local Action Plans (LAPs)[2] to the DAs for consideration. By these participatory arrangements, members of the DAs (councillors) who are the representatives of the people at the DAs and the district sub-structures have important roles to play in the mobilization of their community members to actively participate in the formulation of the DMTDPs in particular and the local development process at large.

After over a decade of practicing decentralized planning in Ghana evidence on the ground does not seem to point to the involvement of local communities in the formulation of the DMTDPs. It is to this problem that I turn to in the next sub-section.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

The potential benefits of local information and human resources cannot be realised and local development accelerated if the people at the grassroots are not made active participants in the shaping of decisions that affect them (Ayee, 2002). Indeed, decentralization and local governance is not just about providing a range of local public services but also about preserving the life and liberty of people, creating space for democratic participation and civic dialogue, supporting environmentally sustainable local development, and facilitating outcomes that enrich the quality of life of citizens (Bhuiyan, 2010).

These assertions seem to reflect the motive of Ghana's decentralized planning system giving its emphasis on public participation with its attendant participatory provisions in the formulation of DMTDPs in particular and the local development process at large. Botchie et al. (2000, cited in Adams and Anum, 2005) note the importance of participatory local development in a study on rural district planning in Ghana when they observed that to facilitate the implementation of the decentralized development planning system to sustain local community livelihoods, it is important to integrate the development activities of all actors in the local communities, NGOs and departments operating in the districts. They conclude that a prerequisite for successful district planning is to ensure that effective mechanisms are introduced for cooperation, coordination and collaboration among all stakeholders in the local community's development efforts.

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[2] For the purposes of this introductory chapter, the term LAPs is used collectively to refer to the sub-district development plans which are the Community Action Plans (CAPs) at the communities level, and the Area Level Plans (ALPs) at the Sub-District Council levels (See section 3.5 below).

This notwithstanding, after a decade of decentralized planning in Ghana there seem to be little to show for the involvement of the local people in development planning evidenced by the abandonment[3] of completed DACF projects in several communities in protest by community members against their suitability. For instance, Abbey et al. (2010) report in a World Bank study of the DACF, that most people affected by project outcomes are left out of discussions on the whole process. They observed that failure in consulting with community people in most cases has led to investment in projects that communities felt did not meet their needs. The weak nexus between community participation and project outcomes in districts was captured in the Auditor-General of Ghana report (2008:21) into the operations of DAs. The report emphasizes a few specific examples as follows:

> 'We also noted that 5 projects at Kwabre District Assembly completed between 2003 and 2005 at a total cost of ¢1,991,562,050 (€ 99,578.1) were not being utilised by the communities because of complaints on their suitability. At Abiriw, Akwapim North District, a school block completed and commissioned in 2004 was also not being used because of litigation on the land...the lapses noted indicated lack of involvement of intended beneficiaries and the regulatory agencies in project formulation, approval and execution as well as ineffective supervision by management of the Assemblies'.

Juxtaposing this situation with the opportunities afforded the people to participate in the local development process particularly in the formulation of the DMTDPs leaves one questioning the true extent of community people's involvement in the development process. This research will therefore examine the extent of community participation in the development of the DMTDPs for the DACF.

Additionally, given the importance of the DACF to local development and the opportunity it affords for citizen participation through the formulation of DMTDPs, one would assume that the local people, particularly those in rural districts, would be willing to take advantage of the opportunities available to them in the DMTDP formulation process. Questions then arise as to how the local people perceive the spaces and mechanisms available for their involvement in the formulation of the DMTDPs and how they perceive their actual participation in the plan formulation.

1.3 Research Objectives

This research aims to ascertain the level of community participation in the formulation of the DMTDP for the East Mamprusi District (EMD). It will also bring to light how the local people perceive the spaces and mechanisms for their involvement in the district's plan formulation, and how they see their involvement in the plan formulation. The research further aims to contribute to the possibility of improving community participation by highlighting the constraints to participation in the plan formulation.

[3] See Appendix 2 for a picture of one such completed but abandoned projects in the research area.

1.4 Research Questions

The research attempts to answer the following central question: To what extent are communities participating in the DMTDP formulation for East Mamprusi District (EMD)? This question will be answered by tackling the following associated sub-questions:

- What are the procedural spaces available for community participation in the DMTDP formulation? What are the knowledge of these spaces on the part of DA officials, councillors, and members of sub-district structures?

- How are communities involved in the operationalization of these spaces in EMD, and who occupies these spaces?

- How do community members perceive the spaces and decentralized mechanisms for their participation? How do they see their involvement in these spaces?

- What are the constraints to community participation in the DMTDP formulation for the district?

1.5 Relevance and Justification

This research hopes to theoretically and empirically contribute to existing literature on the decentralized planning system in Ghana with particular focus on community participation in the district development planning process. Also, the research has a policy dimension as it could bring new information to light necessary to re-examine current participatory spaces and mechanisms for community participation in the formulation of DMTDPs. This could help avoid the unfortunate situations in Ghana where completed DA projects are left unutilized by their intended beneficiaries.

1.6 Research Methodology

The research is qualitative and employed both primary and secondary data. Primary data[4] sources included interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Interviews were held with key representatives of the District Planning and Coordinating Unit (DPCU), district councillors and members of the district sub-structures (Area council and Unit committees) to gain an insight into the DMTDP formulation for the district and how communities are involved in the process. The FGDs were held in three (3) beneficiary communities of DACF sponsored projects to gain an understanding of community members' perception of the spaces and mechanisms for their involvement in the DMTDP formulation and how they see their involvement. Secondary data sources were employed particularly in corroborating the findings from the field.

[4] See Appendix 1: Guidelines used for primary data collection.

A detailed explanation of the methodology employed in this research is provided in the sub-sections below:

1.6.1 Selection of Case Study

This research was carried out in East Mamprusi District (EMD) of the northern region of Ghana. The rationales behind this choice of a district were both 'access' and 'intrinsic interest' (O'Leary, 2010:176). Firstly, key informants and data required were considered reachable within the space of time (July 14 - August 10, 2012) allotted for fieldwork. Secondly, a study that purports to examine the extent of community participation in the DMTDP formulation which forms the main conditions under which DACF is accessed requires a case district that considerably depends on the DACF for its development. In other words, the stake for participation should be reasonably high. Located in one of the poorest regions in Ghana i.e. Northern Region (Whitehead, 2006; GLSS, 2008), the EMD is a poor and marginal district which considerably depends on the DACF (see Table 1 below) for local development and service provision. Although the DACF has decreased as shown in table 1, its proportion of the total fund for local development is still substantial.

Table 1:
Funds for Local Development, Internally-Generated Funds (IGF) and District Assembly Common Fund (DACF) - EMD (2006-2010)

Year	IGF (GH¢)	DACF (GH¢)	Percentages	
			IGF	DACF
2006	155,964.43	628,120.75	14.8	85.2
2007	174,624.72	871,000.00	16.7	83.3
2008	155,298.85	864,489.66	11.3	88.7
2009	225,471.72	807,764.42	21.8	78.2
2010	271,359.25	682,700.68	28.4	71.6

Source: Own construction as per data received from the finance office, EMD

1.6.2 Selection of Respondents

Primary data were collected by conducting interviews and FGDs. A total of twenty-four (24) semi-structured interviews were conducted with key DPCU representatives, councillors and members of the sub-district structures - Area council and Unit committees (see Table 2). In light of the nature of this research, preference was given to representatives who had experienced the formulation of at least the current/latest[5] DMTDP in the selection of interviewees.

[5] The DMTDP 2010-2013

Table 2:
List of Interviewed Representatives

District Planning and Coordinating Unit (DPCU)	• District Coordinating Director • District Planning Officer • District Budget Officer
Executive Committee member	• Planning sub-committee chairman
Sub-District Structures (SDS)	• Two Area council chairmen • Six Unit Committee chairmen
District Councillors	• Six elected councillors • Two government appointed councillors • Four ex-elected councillors (2002-2010)

The FGDs were held in three communities in the study area to explores the perceptions of community members on the spaces and mechanisms for their involvement in the district's plans formulation. In all, a total of seven FGDs were held, two each with representatives of women, youth and the elderly; One FGD was also held with representatives of Persons with Disabilities. Selection of participants for the FGDs was guided, as much as possible, by the NDPC's definition of primary stakeholders[6]. The membership of the focus groups was 10 in all the cases.

1.6.3 Data Gathering Techniques Employed

Three main primary data gathering strategies were employed for this research: interviews, FGDs and documentation. The rationales for the chosen strategies and how they were employed on the field are explained as follows:

The interview method would provide a rich, in-depth qualitative data regarding issues of community participation in DMTDP formulation and is also flexible enough to allow for the exploration of tangents (O'Leary, 2010). Specifically, semi-structured interviews were conducted in informal settings to enable the development of rapport and trust, and not only to come away with all intended data but also to capture interesting and unexpected data that emerges (ibid). At the root of the in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of respondents and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 2006). In this regard, all interviewees were given the space to freely express their views on the research issues. The initial plan to interview all the 5 sub-district council chairmen and at least 10 each of councillors and UC chairmen was however revised to reflect table 2 above. The reason was that most of the officers reachable during the research period were

[6] Comprises the current poor, those excluded from the decision-making process, and those at significant risk of slipping into chronic poverty. See http://www.ndpc.gov.gh/GPRS/District%20Guidelines.pdf. Accessed 17 August 2012.

only elected into office after the formulation of the current DMTDP which therefore limited their knowledge to providing detail information on the research issues. This gap was however filled by interviewing ex-councillors with substantial experience in the plan formulation (see Table 2 above).

The FGD strategy would engender depth of opinion that might not arise from direct questioning as well as its added benefits of efficiency and lower costs (O'Leary, 2010). The FGDs were held in a nurturing atmosphere which allowed for an interplay of ideas between the participants. Discussions were stimulated using both pictorial and practical examples of DACF-sponsored projects in the communities obtained with the assistance of some councillors. The results of FGDs are however not intended to be generalized but to provide an understanding of how communities perceive the spaces and mechanisms for their involvement in the DMTDP formulation.

Most of the interviews and all FGDs for this research were tape-recorded and transcribed for the research analysis. The analysis of the results was done manually by comparing the various responses and grouping the themes that emerged into categories.

Relevant unpublished documents such as the current DMTDP for East Mamprusi and unpublished information on the district's profile were also collected.

1.6.4 Secondary Data Employed

Secondary data collected and analysed included a literature review of concepts and theoretical frameworks related to decentralization and participation; review of relevant research and publications on decentralization and decentralized planning; the National Development Planning (System) Act 1994, Act 480; The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana; The Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462); The NDPC guidelines for DMTDPs formulation; Official website of districts in Ghana; as well as reports and publications regarding decentralization and local governance in Ghana.

1.7 Limitations of the Research

District Medium-Term Development Plans are prepared for 4-year periods. As such, the data collected and analysed for this research is largely based on the guidelines developed and issued to DAs by the NDPC for the preparation of the 2010-2013 district plans. Thus, the findings of the research are limited to this period and issues arising thereof should be seen a means for improving community participation in subsequent district plans. Also, the public hearing report, list of participants for the final public hearing on the DMTDP and copies of Local Action Plans (LAPs) could not be obtained. These documents would have been necessary to clear doubts on some responses provided by interviewees. A DPCU representative attributed their inability to provide these documents to a problem their IT system suffered resulting in the corruption of the documents.

1.8 Structure of the Paper

The paper has been organized into six chapters. Following the introductory chapter presented above, the rest of the paper is structured as follows. Chapter two discusses the concepts and the theoretical frameworks employed for the study. Chapter three presents a general overview of decentralization and decentralized district planning in Ghana. The chapter also includes a brief description of the case study area. Chapter four presents and discusses the research findings from the field. Chapter five draws comparisons between theory and the practice of community participation in the DMTDP formulation. Chapter six presents the conclusions and policy recommendations.

Chapter 2 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This chapter discusses the concepts employed in this study. It also establishes the framework in which community participation in decentralized planning can be analyzed. The chapter starts with general introduction and explanation of the concepts of decentralization, followed by decentralized planning. The third section presents and discusses a conceptual understanding of community participation in development. This is followed by a discussion on the constraints to participation in development. The final parts builds on the conceptual understanding of community participation to explain two frameworks for analysis of community participation in development.

2.1 Decentralization

The past decades have seen many governments especially those in transition advocate for decentralization as a means of improving the quality of public services delivery and the role of the citizenry in development processes. Efforts to promote decentralisation by both Northern and Southern countries are premised on the assumption that local governments will be more responsive to the needs of the citizens and take their preferences into account in determining the type of services to be provided, the level of resources required, and the optimal means of ensuring effective delivery (Robinson, 2007). This seemingly plausible intent has made decentralization a catchword in today's mainstream development discourse. Notwithstanding the interest and popularity of the term however, its definition and meaning has been a field of contest with different people attributing diverse meanings to the concept (Conyers, 1984; Robino, 2009).

Rondinelli and Nellis (1986:5) define decentralization as 'the transfer of responsibility for planning, management, and the raising and allocation of resources from the central government and its agencies to subordinate units or level of government'. Conyers (1990, cited in McGee et al., 2003:7), in turn, define decentralization as 'the transfer of power and/or authority to plan, make decisions and/or manage public functions from a higher level of government to a lower one'.

The literature on decentralization identifies three distinct forms of decentralization: deconcentration, delegation, and devolution (Bergh, 2004). *Deconcentration* refers to the process by which the central government shifts responsibilities for certain services to its regional branch offices without involving any transfer of authority to lower levels of government (Litvack et al. 1998:4, cited in Bergh, 2004). This is considered the weakest form of decentralisation (Rondinelli 1999:2; Bergh, 2004). *Delegation*, in turn, refers to a situation in which the central government transfers responsibility for decision making and administration of public functions to local governments or to semi autonomous organisations that are not wholly controlled by the central government but are ultimately accountable to it (Bergh, 2004). *Devolution* occurs when the central government shifts authority for decision making, financial

allocations, and management to quasi-autonomous units of local government. Devolution usually transfers responsibilities for services to municipalities that elect their own mayors and councils, raise their own revenues, and have independent authority to make investment decisions (Litvack et al. 1998:5–6, cited in Bergh 2004).

For the purposes of this research, devolution will be the form of decentralization that will most commonly be referred to since it underscores Ghana's decentralization, as a means of bringing the government closer to the people thereby ensuring that decisions are based on the needs and interests of citizens (Friss-Hansen and Kyed, 2009).

2.2 Decentralized Planning

Decentralized planning is one of the many ways of decentralizing decision-making from the government to the people. This planning paradigm seeks to consider community participation, involvement of interest groups, horizontal and vertical coordination, sustainability, financial feasibility and interaction of physical and economic planning (Widianingsih, 2005), in development planning processes.

According to Friedman (2000, cited in Widianingsih, 2005), planning is defined as a process that connects scientific and technical knowledge with activities in the public domain to enhance social transformation processes. He further argues that planning can be seen as both a social learning and social transformation process. As social learning, planning positions the government as a facilitator. The characteristic of this aspect of planning is learning by doing by people (Widianingsih 2005), which brings 'together interests, strategies, and priorities, between civil and political society' (Goundsmit and Blackburn, 2001: 589). As a social transformation, planning is a political process with a collective ideology (Friedman 2000, cited in Widianingsih, 2005).

The appeal of decentralized planning resides in the assumption that communities' views having been taken into account, the policy or the projects will respond better to real needs, will fit into a social and economic reality and people, feeling a sense of ownership, will be more compliant to bear the costs (Hoverman and Buchy, 2000). Moreover, it is believed that it can open spaces for citizens excluded from development not only to participate in decision making but also for them to exact performance, transparency and accountability from their local governments (LogoLink, 2002).

In the context of this paper, decentralized planning will refer to the participatory process of local development planning where the knowledge and experience of the felt needs and priorities of community members as actors in the development process are taking into consideration in the formulation of local development plans through the spaces available to them.

2.3 Conceptualising Community Participation

Participation in development projects and programmes has become commonplace in the development discourse since the 1980s. The popularity of participation has grown to the point of orthodoxy such that by the early 1990s, there was hardly a major bilateral development agency that would not

emphasize participatory policies (Henkel and Stirrat, 2001). This popularity was in response to the top-down approaches that have driven development in the previous decades (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Participation is usually qualified with various prefixes such as *community*, *citizen*, *popular*, *civic*, *political*, *public*, etc., to reflect the different contexts in which the term is used. Despite the popularity of the term however, the myriad of meanings attributed to it has left participation a contested concept.

One of the focal areas of contestation of participation in development projects and programmes is the ambiguity in the rationales for participation as carried by the different definitions of participation. Thus, whether participation is viewed as a means or an end to bringing about development. The Economic Commission for Latin America, 1973 (cited in Parfitt, 2007) defines participation as a voluntary contribution by the people in one or another of the public programmes supposed to contribute to national development, but the people are not expected to take part in shaping the programme or criticizing its contents. In this view, participation is seen as a means to achieving development since people are expected to take part in programmes without having an influence on them.

Paul (1987, cited in FAO, 2007) defines community participation as an active process by which beneficiary or client groups influence the direction and execution of a development project with a view of enhancing their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values they cherish. This definition however emphasizes the end rationale of participation where people eventually influence the course of their development.

Therefore, participation as a means is a way of organizing people behind the predetermined objectives of development agencies, while as an end, it empowers people to pursue their own development activities and projects (Parfitt, 2007). Understanding this means-end debate of participation in development forms the backbone of most typologies of participation which will be discussed subsequently in this chapter. Another facet of the means-end argument of participation is in its relation with the concepts of 'community' and 'power'.

In participatory development processes, the term community relates to a target population or beneficiaries of interventions. However, Berner (2010, cited in Gomez et al., 2010) reminds us that though fashionable to the point of ubiquity, 'the' community is deeply problematic. It has a geographical, and sometimes a cultural or an ideological meaning (Hoverman and Buchy, 2001). Community participation seen as a means, merges these different facets of the community, it oversimplifies reality, and it can act as an obstacle to the proper examination of local power systems (Guijt and Shah 1998, cited in Gomez et al., 2010), eventually excluding some segments of the community. On the other hand, community participation seen as an end recognizes existing differences within the community by paying attention to the different groups in the population to avoid excluding some members from participating. In this sense, community participation is seen as a process of development in its own right rather than as a tool for achieving certain goals (Parfitt, 2007).

On community participation and how it relates to power in the means-end dichotomy, participation understood as a means is indicative that expressions of power or power differentials between the target population and

the development agencies will be left largely untouched. However, a consideration of participation as an end, suggests a transformation in power relations between development agencies and community, 'with the latter empowered and liberated from a clientelist relation with the former' (Parfitt, 2007: 539).

In this study, I will refer to a community in an administrative sense to mean a geographically-defined jurisdiction for local governance inhabited by different categories of people. Consequently, community participation will refer both to the instrumental and empowerment usages discussed in this section to determine where between these two extremes (the extent) participation lies with respect to the objectives of this research.

2.4 Constraints to Community Participation

The apparent gap between the promise of enhanced participation through decentralisation on the one hand, and the everyday realities of participatory politics on the other, suggests the need to understand more fully the barriers to participation (Gaventa and Valderrama, 1999) in local development. Gaventa and Valderrama (1999), and Botes and van Rensburg (2000) identified some constraints to participatory development some of which this study will explore.

Gaventa and Valderrama (1999), from their review of studies on participation and local governance, note financial resources and the level of citizen organization at the local level as two of the major constraining factors to participation.

- *Financial resources*: Financial resources to implement development projects influenced or decided by local communities come mainly from central allocations and local revenues. A common barrier to citizen participation in decision-making found in most studies was the control of financial resources by higher levels of authority and the meagre resources available for local activities (ibid).

- *Level of citizen organization*: Since participation is also about power relations, citizens are most able to counter existing power relations where there is some history of effective grassroots organisation or social movement (Gaventa and Valderrama, 1999).

Botes and van Rensburg (2000:42), on the other hand, identify a number of factors that can 'hinder and indeed constrain the promotion of participatory development', two of which relevant to this study they explain as follows:

- *Selective participation*: Often it is the most vocal and visible, wealthier, and educated people that are allowed to be partners in development without serious attempts to include less obvious partners in the process.

- *Lack of interest in participating*: A major hindrance to community participation is the allegation that the people are not really interested in

becoming involved. An expression of a lack of willingness may result from beneficiaries past experiences of involvement where their expectations were not fulfilled.

2.5 Framework on Power in Spaces and Places of Participation

Gaventa (2006) proposed a framework within which the spaces and levels of participation, and the forms or expressions of power that imbue these spaces can be analysed. Figure 1 shows an integration of these components.

Gaventa (2006) defines spaces as the opportunities, moments, and channels where citizens can act to potentially affect policies, discourses, decisions and relationships which affect their lives and interests. His work suggests a continuum of three spaces: closed, invited and created/claimed spaces. *Closed spaces* refer to where decisions are controlled by a set of actors behind closed doors. These spaces can also be conceived as provided spaces in the sense that an elite group makes decisions and provide services to the people. *Invited spaces*, on the other hand, are where people are invited by authorities (governments, NGO's or others) to participate in decision-making. Finally, *created/claimed spaces* emerge as a result of popular mobilization through shared concerns by less powerful actors against power holders. These spaces are created by community associations, social movements or natural groupings outside of policy arenas.

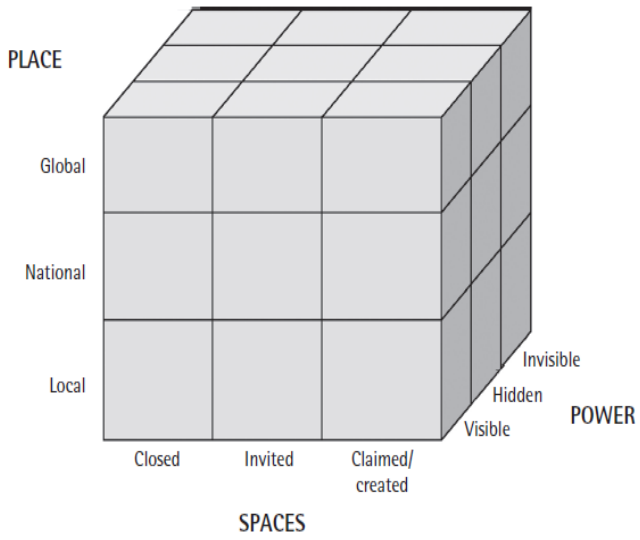
The concern with how and by whom the spaces for participation are shaped intersects with the levels or places where social, political and economic power resides, with much public spaces for participation involving a context between local, national and global arenas as locations of power (Gaventa, 2006). While scholars disagree as to where exactly participatory activities should begin, this research is premised on the local level as the site for participatory practices.

Understanding the nature and meaning of power that imbue the spaces and levels for participation is a matter of dispute given the fluidity of power. One approach to understanding power is Max Weber's view of power as a zero-sum concept - a gain of power by an actor or set of actors necessarily implies a lost to another actor or set of actors. In this view, power is related to our ability to make others do what we want, regardless of their own wishes or interests (Weber, 1946 cited in, Page and Czuba, 1999). Contrary to this however, others see power as not a finite resource; it can be used or created by actors and their networks in many multiple ways (Gaventa, 2006). In this sense, power can be gained by an actor or set of actors without others necessarily losing power.

Gaventa (2006:29) identifies three forms or expressions of power in participatory spaces that work in relationship to place and space to put boundaries on participation, and to exclude certain actors or views from entering participatory spaces: *Visible power - observable decision making*, which refers to the visible and definable aspects of political power - the formal rules, structures, authorities, institutions, and procedures of decision making; *Hidden power - setting the political agenda*, where powerful people maintain their influence

by controlling who gets on to the decision making table and what gets on the agenda; and *Invisible power: shaping meaning*; which shapes the psychological and ideological boundaries of participation by keeping problems and issues from the minds and consciousness of the different players involved.

Figure 1: Power in Spaces and Places of Participation



Source: Gaventa (2005: 11)

2.6 Framework on Levels of Community Participation

In order to understand the extent of community participation in development, scholars have proposed different frameworks for analysis based on the means-end rationales of participation as discussed in section 2.3 above. These frameworks, the ladders[7] of participation, generally depict participation from lower degrees to higher degrees.

White (1996) proposes an analytical framework which outlines four forms/levels of participation: *Nominal*, represents the lowest degree and is where participation exists in name only, and is only significant for the implementing agencies' claim for financial assistance; *Instrumental*, where participation serves as a cost reduction mechanism for implementing agencies and as a means to achieving local facilities for the local people; *Representative*, where participation is an effective means through which people can express their interests; and *Transformative*, represents the highest degree and is where the practical experience of being involved in considering options, making decisions and taking collective action to fight injustice leads on to a greater consciousness of poverty and greater confidence in peoples' ability to make a difference.

[7] See Arnstein, (1969) and Pretty, (1995).

The framework (see Table 3) also looks at the different interests at each of these levels for both the implementing agency and for those who participate (beneficiaries). In practice however, the form and uses of participation may be very varied, and any project will typically entail a mix of interests which change over time (White, 1996).

Table 3:
Framework on Levels of Community Participation

Form/Level	What 'participation' means to the implementing agency	What 'participation' means to those on the receiving end	What 'participation' is for (Function)
Norminal	Legitimation - to show they are doing something	Inclusion - to get some access to potential benefits	Display
Instrumental	Efficiency - to limit funders' input, draw on community contributions and make projects more cost-effective	Cost - of time spent on project-related labour and other activities	As a means to achieving cost-effectiveness and local facilities
Representative	Sustainability - to avoid creating an inappropriate project	Leverage - to influence the shape project takes and its management	To give people a voice in the character of a project
Transformative	Empowerment - to strengthen people's capabilities to take decisions and act for themselves	Empowerment - to be able to decide and act for themselves	As an end to participation, citizens empowered.

Adapted from Cornwall (2000:9), in turn adapted from White (1996:7)

Conclusion

The conceptual and theoretical framework presented in this chapter will provide an understanding in the discussion and analysis of community participation in the DMTDP formulation for the East Mamprusi District. In chapter 5, I will apply both Gaventa's power cube and White's framework to analyze the powers in the spaces of participation and the levels/extent of participation respectively in the DMTDP formulation. In the following chapter I concentrate on decentralization and district planning in Ghana as well as the nature of decentralized structures in East Mamprusi.

Chapter 3 Decentralization and District Planning in Ghana

This chapter presents an overview of decentralization and decentralized district planning in Ghana. The first section explains the general nature of Ghana's decentralization system. A second section, contextualizes decentralized district planning within Ghana's decentralization system. The third section narrows down to the research district with a focus on understanding some important characteristics of the area including the nature of the decentralized structures of the area.

3.1 Ghana's Current Decentralization System

The current decentralization process in Ghana is rooted in the 1992 constitution. The constitution provides the objective of Ghana's decentralization in chapter 20, under the title 'Decentralization and Local Government'. In Article 240(1) of the chapter, it states that 'Ghana shall have a system of local government and administration which shall, as far as practicable, be decentralized'. It further provides that 'functions, powers, responsibilities and resources should be transferred from the central government to local government units in a co-ordinated manner' (Article 240[2]). A subsequent provision for the District Assembly (DA) concept is made in Article 241, which states in section 1 that 'for the purposes of local government, Ghana shall be deemed to have been divided into districts'.

To strengthen the decentralization system and to ensure participation, several other legal instruments which serve as the basis for good governance have been enacted. Some of these are the National Planning System Act, 1994, (480); The local Government (Urban, Zonal, Area and Town Councils and Unit Committees) Establishment Instrument, 1994, (L.I. 1589); The Local Government Service Act (2003); The District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF) Act 455; and The Local Government Act, 1992 (Act 462).

3.2 The Structure of Ghana's Decentralization System

The constitution established a four-tier structure for local governance at the regional, district, and sub-district levels. These levels link up to the national level. The structure comprises of 10 Regional Co-ordinating Councils (RCCs), 170 District Assemblies (DAs), over 3000 Sub-District Councils, plus 16000 Unit Committees (UCs) (Inkoom, 2011). However, the Parliament of Ghana in 2010, passed a legislative instrument (L.I. 1967) which reduced the number of UCs from 16000 to 5000 in order that the UC will be at par with the number of electoral areas in the country[8]. The sub-sections below briefly discusses each of the tiers of Ghana's decentralization system.

[8] http://www.graphic.com.gh/dailygraphic/page.php?news=9248 Accessed 26 September 2012.

3.2.1 The Regional Co-ordinating Councils (RCCs)

The RCC is found in each of the 10 regions of Ghana and is headed by a regional minister. The composition of the RCC also includes a deputy minister, the presiding member and District Chief Executives of each DA in a region, two chiefs from the Regional House of Chiefs, and the heads of decentralized ministries in the region but without voting rights. The RCC's main function, among others, is to monitor, co-ordinate and evaluate the performance of the DAs in the region.

3.2.2 The District Assemblies (DAs)

There are three types of DAs in Ghana. These are either Metropolitan (population over 250000), Municipal (with population over 95000) or District (population 75000 and above) (Bandie, 2007). In total, there are 170 DAs in Ghana comprising six Metropolitan Assemblies, 40 Municipal Assemblies and 124 District Assemblies (Fiankor and Akussah, 2012).

DAs are recognized in Ghana's constitution as 'the highest political authority in the district, ... with deliberative, legislative and executive powers' (Article 241[3]). For administrative purposes, DAs consist of the District Chief Executive who is the head and an ex officio member appointed by the president, seventy per cent of elected councillors, the member(s) of parliament from the district, and not more than thirty per cent councillors nominated by the president in consultation with traditional authorities and interest groups in the District.

Members of the DA elect a presiding member who becomes the speaker of the Assembly. The ongoing activities of the assembly are supervised by the Executive Committee which is composed of one-third of the DA members and responsible for general policy and overall development planning (Inkoom, 2011). The executive committee has five permanent sub-committees under it that report to the Assembly via the committee. These are; development planning, social services, works and infrastructure, justice and security, and finance and administration sub-committees.

DAs in Ghana are supposed to be non-partisan. This position is anchored in sections 1 and 2 of Article 248 of Ghana's constitution which states that 'A candidate seeking election to a DA or any lower local government unit shall present himself to the electorate as an individual, and not use any symbol associated with any political party. And, 'A political party shall not endorse, sponsor, offer a platform to or in any way campaign for or against a candidate seeking election to a DA or any lower local government unit'.

Aryee and Amponsah (2003), observe two reasons for excluding partisan politics from Ghana's DAs. First, is the argument that in the past elected governments in Ghana exerted influence on local government bodies to win political advantage. Second, the non-partisan nature of the DAs facilitates the mobilization of the people, and is more conducive to consensus formation, factors that are crucial to development at the grassroots.

3.2.3 The Sub-District Structures (SDS)

The SDS established under Legislative Instrument, L.I. 1589, operate in four levels or councils. These councils depend on the type of District Assembly (DA), with the name depending 'on the size and nature of the settlement' (Crawford, 2004:13). They are non-elective bodies and composed of representatives from the DA, the UCs as well as appointed representatives of the District Chief Executive. The four councils are as follows;

- *The Sub-Metropolitan Councils*: These structures are found directly below the Metropolitan Assemblies and are created for settlements above 100,000 people in the metropolis (LGA [ACT 462]).

- *Urban Councils*: They are peculiar to settlements with population above 15,000 and which are cosmopolitan in character, with urbanization and management problems, though not of the scale associated with metropolitan areas[9].

- *Zonal Councils*: The zonal councils are under the Municipal Assemblies. They are established based on the electoral commission's criteria of commonality of interest, population of 3000 and identifiable streets, land marks, etc. as boundaries[10].

- *Town/Area Councils*: They are found in the Metropolitan as well as the DAs. In the DAs, town councils are established for settlements with population between 5000 and 15000 and Area councils for a number of settlements/villages which are grouped together but whose individual settlements have population of less than 5000 (Bandie, 2007:5).

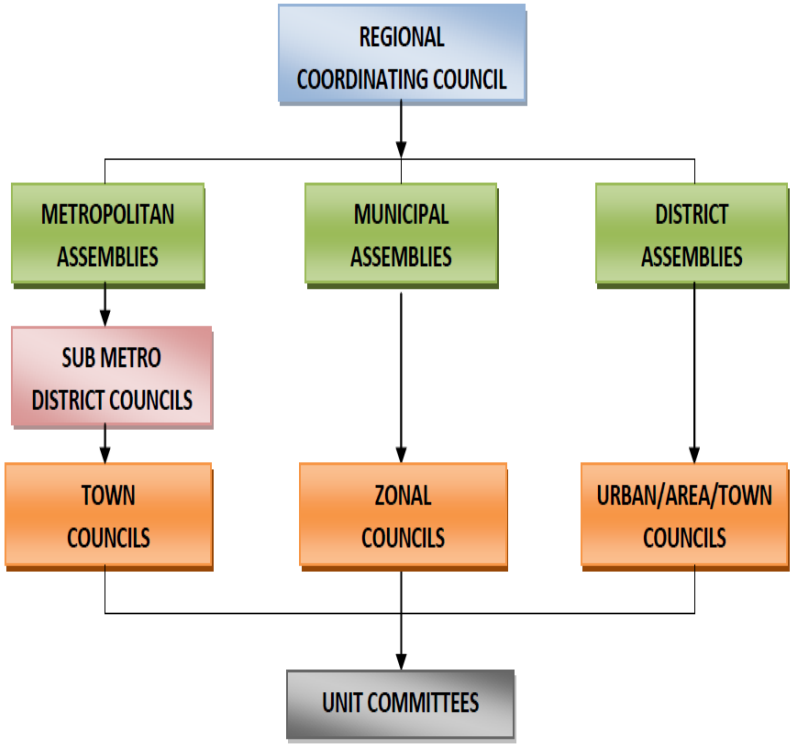
3.2.4 The Unit Committees (UCs)

The UCs are at the base of Ghana's decentralization system and are established under the different DAs in the country. Each UC is composed of 5 members headed by a chairperson and are responsible for units in the districts. A unit covers settlements of between 500-1,000 people in the rural areas and approximately 1,500 in urban areas (Crawford, 2004).

Unit Committees are elected bodies. They perform functions delegated to them by the DA including registration of births and deaths, revenue raising, and organizing communal labour (Inkoom, 2011). Figure two shows the structure Ghana's decentralization system.

[9] http://ghanadistricts.com/home/?_=13&sa=3621&ssa=128 Accessed 9 Nov. 2012
[10] http://ghanadistricts.com/home/?_=13&sa=3621&ssa=128 Accessed 9 Nov. 2012

Figure 2: Structure of Ghana's Decentralization System



Source: Maple Consult (2010:14)

3.3 Planning within Ghana's Decentralization System

Following from Ghana's decentralization system, planning has involved a change from the traditional top-down approach to a bottom-up approach under which the jurisdiction of local development planning is assigned to the DAs and requiring participatory approaches with the identification of the community's problems, forming the basis of prioritization of development efforts, collated by the district and regional level to the NDPC and integrated into national planning efforts of Central Government (Dege Consult, 2007).

The planning system is built on the principle that the development planning process is an integrative, comprehensive, participatory, decentralized, problem solving and continuous task (Botchie, 2000). Thus, the National Development Planning System Act 1994, (Act 480) designates the DA as the body responsible for coordinating the decentralised planning system at the district level; The RCC at the regional level; and Sector Ministries, Departments and Agencies and NDPC at the national level. These levels are explained as follows:

3.3.1 National Development Planning Commission (NDPC)

The NDPC is mandated as per Act 480 to prepare the national development plan. The commission operates under the Office of the President. It is the main body responsible for issuing legislative instruments and guidelines on

which basis Ministries, Departments and Agencies; as well as DAs formulate their sector plans and DMTDPs respectively.

3.3.2 Sector Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs)

Within the framework of decentralised planning in Ghana, sector MDAs refers to institutions whose activities contribute towards a common objective that supports the achievement of the national development goals identified in the national development plan (Maple Consult, 2010). MDAs are required by Act 480 to prepare and submit their sector development plans to the NDPC based on guidelines issued by the commission, the objective of which is to ensure compatibility with the national development goals.

3.3.3 Regional Planning and Coordinating Units (RPCUs)

Section 143 sub-section 1 of the Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462) establishes the RPCUs in each of the ten Regional Coordinating Councils (RCCs) in Ghana to function as advisory units of the RCCs on the coordination, monitoring and evaluation of DMTDPs as well as on other general matters relating to development planning in the regions.

3.4 Planning Process at the District Level

For the purposes of development planning, DAs are established as the district planning authorities for their areas of authority (LGA [ACT 462], section 46[1]), and are as such mandated by Act 480 section 2 sub-sections 1, to initiate and prepare district development plans and settlement structure plans in a manner prescribed by the NDPC and ensure that the plans are prepared with full participation of the local communities. The Assemblies are also required to establish District Planning and Coordinating Units (DPCU) to act as district development planning secretariats.

The Districts, therefore, constitute the main focus of planning action through the DAs, the process of which provides opportunities for the local communities within the districts to participate effectively in the conception, planning and implementation of development programmes and projects (Botchie, 2000). Ghana's district planning process has the following as its essential features[11]:

- Planning at the district level starts with identifying communities' problems, goals and objectives from the UCs level through the district councils (Town/Area/Urban/Zonal) to the DA.

- The sub-committees of the executive committee of the DA consider the problems and opportunities, define, prioritize and submit the plans to the executive committee.

[11] http://ghanadistricts.com/home/?_=13&sa=5109&ssa=1352 Accessed 9 Nov. 2012

- The decentralized sector departments of the DA, sectoral specialist, and other functional agencies confer and make inputs which are synthesized into the district plan formulation.

- The DPCU of the DA integrates and coordinates the various plans into DMTDP and annual plans and budgets for consideration by the Executive Committee and debated by the General Assembly.

- The approved plan is submitted to the RCC for coordination and harmonization with the plans of the other DAs in the region.

3.5 Planning Process at the Sub-district Level

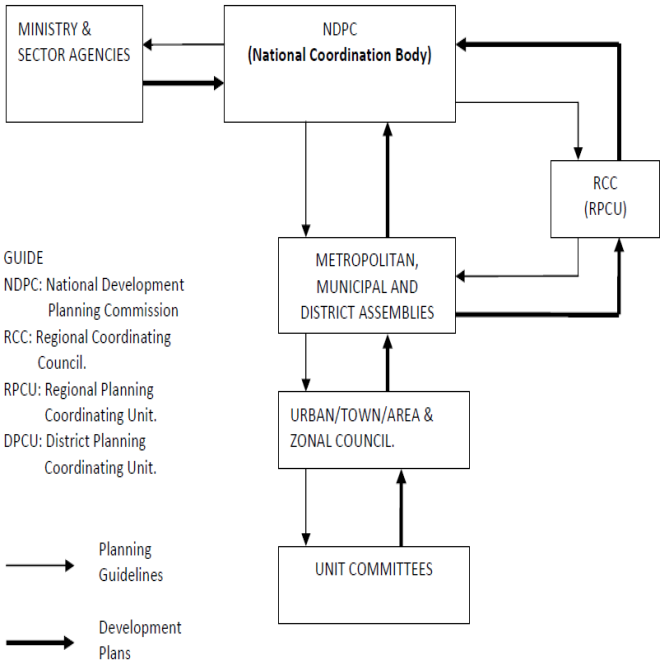
Communities' problems, needs and aspirations form the basic inputs for the formulation of district plans. The sub-district councils and the UCs represent the decentralised mechanisms for local development, and together with elected councillors should work to generate, collect and collate local level priorities for the development of the DMTDP (Institute of Local Government Studies - ILGS, 2006).

Outputs of data collection and collation at the communities level form Community Action Plans (CAPs). The CAPs are basic documents prepared and owned by communities to guide their development process over a period of time and are expected to feed the Area Level Plans (ALPs) at the sub-district councils level, and finally into the DMTDPs at the DAs (Bandie, 2007). The CAPs should be prepared through participatory processes including the poor, the marginal and excluded, and those at risk of slipping into chronic poverty (NDPC, 2006). The ALPs are outputs of harmonization of the CAPs for all communities within the sub-district councils (ibid).

The sub-district development plans or Local Action Plans (LAPs)[12], which are prepared through participatory processes, should be considered as representing community perspective on current needs and aspirations (NDPC, 2009) at the sub-district level. In situations where LAPs do not exist, community perspective on current needs and aspiration should be compiled by the DPCU through consultation with the people in the Sub-District Councils (ibid). Figure three shows the structure of Ghana's planning system.

[12] In this study, refers to both the CAPs and ALPs.

Figure 3: Structure of Planning System in Ghana



Source: Inkoom (2009: 12)

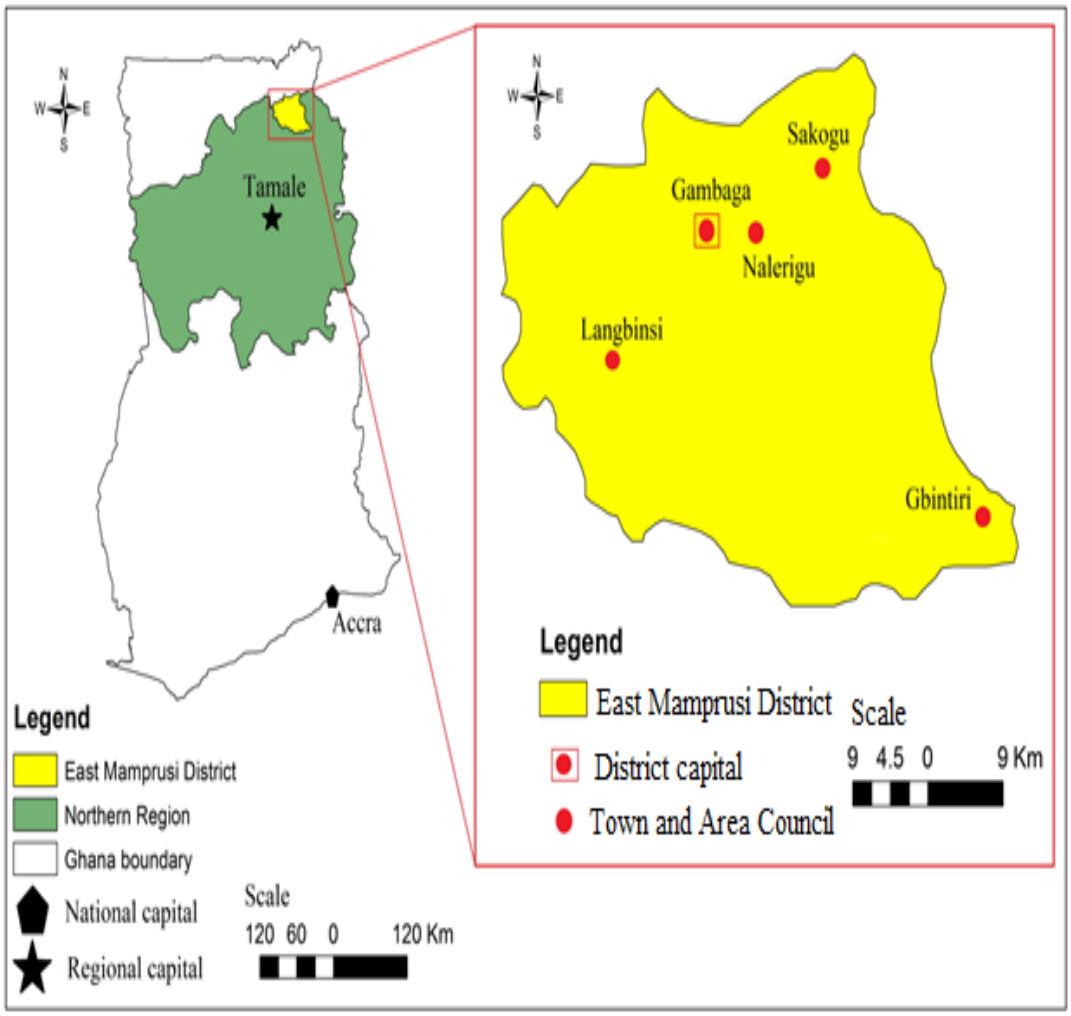
3.6 The Study Area

3.6.1 Location[13]

The study area for this research is East Mamprusi District (EMD). It is a predominantly rural district located in the north-eastern part of the northern region of Ghana. It is one of the twenty districts of the northern region and has Gambaga as its district capital. The EMD shares boundaries with Talensi Nabdam, Bawku West and Garu-Tempane districts, all in the Upper East region of Ghana, to the north; Bunkpurugu-Yunyoo district to the East; West Mamprusi district to the west; and Gushegu district to the south. The district covers a land area of 1,660 square kilometres representing about 2.2% of the total land area of the northern region. Figure 4 shows a map of the study area.

[13] http://mofa.gov.gh/site/?page_id=1603 Accessed 25 September 2012

Figure 4: Map of Ghana showing the Research Area



Source: EMD Assembly (2012)

3.6.2 Nature of Decentralized Structures in EMD[14]

The EMD has 142 communities, with the East Mamprusi District Assembly being the highest political, administrative and development planning authority for the district. The Assembly has 51 councillors of whom two-thirds (34) are elected community representatives while one-third (17) are appointed by the government. The district has one parliamentary representative who is an ex-officio member of the Assembly. The Assembly is chaired by a presiding member elected from among its members.

The District Chief Executive chairs the Executive Committee of the Assembly. The central administration is headed by the District Coordinating

[14] Based on information collected during the fieldwork.

Director (DCD) who is responsible for general matters of administration in the district. The central administration is made up of other departments such as the Planning and Budget, Finance and Records departments.

For the purposes of development planning, the planning and budget department represents the secretariat of the District Planning and Coordinating Unit (DPCU) and is responsible for the formulation of the DMTDP for the district. The DPCU has the DCD as the chairman with the district planning officer as the secretary. Other members of the DPCU for the district's plan formulation include the district budget officer, the district directors of Health and that of Agriculture, and the Gender officer for the DA.

In terms of the decentralized mechanisms at the sub-district level, East Mamprusi has five sub-district councils (see Figure 4 above). Two of the councils (Gambaga and Nalerigu) are town councils while three (Langbinsi, Sakogu and Gbintri) are area councils. There is also a total of 34 UCs in the district. Each UC has a membership of five people headed by a chairperson. Thus, a total of 170 unit-committee persons are in East Mamprusi. These structural mechanisms work together with the elected councillors for local development at the sub-district level.

The EMD has decentralized departments under the DA which provide services to the people and also offer technical support to the DA. These are: the departments of Health, Agriculture, Education, Works, Community development, Disaster Management, and the central administration. There are also some deconcentrated offices of the central government in the district which provide public services to the people. Notable among these departments are the Police Service, the Prison Service, Information Services Department, National Commission for Civic Education, Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice, etc.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of Ghana's decentralization and decentralized planning system. It also gave an insight into the nature of the decentralized structures in EMD, established by legislations to serve as mechanisms for participatory local development and within which participation in the DMTDP formulation takes place. In the following chapter I examine the spaces for participation in the DMTDP formulation as well as citizens perceptions on the mechanisms and spaces for their participation.

Chapter 4 Spaces for Community Participation: Examining Perceptions of Official Policy and Informal Practice

This chapter attempts to provide answers to the research questions by presenting and discussing the findings from the field. It uses the results of the primary data obtained from interviews and FGDs and by making references to the relevant Acts and guidelines developed by the NDPC. The first section explores the spaces for community participation in the DMTDP formulation. The second section assesses how these spaces are operationalized in the East Mamprusi given the Acts and guidelines. The question as to who participates in these spaces is also addressed in this section. In the third section, the perceptions of community members on the decentralized mechanisms and procedural spaces for their involvement and how they perceive these mechanisms and spaces are then presented and analysed. The final section looks at the relevant constraints to participation in the DMTDP formulation.

4.1 Spaces for Community Participation in the DMTDP Formulation

This section explores the procedural spaces available for the local people to participate in the DMTDP formulation. It draws on relevant sections of the Planning Systems Act 480, pertaining to participation in Ghana's decentralized planning system. It also employs the results of interviews conducted with key representatives of the district planning in East Mamprusi to perceive their understanding on these spaces.

In the first place, the NDPC envisions the participation of citizens through the preparation of Local Action Plans (LAPs) by sub-district councils as well as communities in the districts. Section 5(2)(a) of the NDPC System Act 480 (1994) states that 'A local community in a district authorised by the District Planning Authority may prepare a sub-district or LAP in accordance with the approved district development plan'.

Secondly, another opportunity for community participation mandated in the district plan formulation process is the conduct of public hearings for all proposed plans be they the District or LAPs . In this regard, section 3(1) of the Planning System Act 480 (1994) prescribes that 'A District Planning Authority shall conduct a public hearing on any proposed district development plan and shall consider the views expressed at the hearing before the adoption of the proposed district development plan'. Sub-section (2) further states that 'A local community in a district authorised by the District Planning Authority to prepare a sub-district or LAP under section 5 of this Act shall conduct a public hearing before the adoption of the proposed sub-district or local plan'. The guidelines[15] for the preparation of the DMTDP further recognizes public hearings as an important tenet of community participation.

[15] For the period 2010-2013.

Evidence from the field revealed that for the EMD, all the interviewees, without exception, are aware of the mechanisms provided by Ghana's decentralization framework for participation in the DMTDP formulation. However, my findings revealed differing levels of knowledge in terms of the procedural spaces for participation provided by the Planning System Act and the NDPC guidelines. When asked whether they were aware of provisions that warrant community participation in the formulation of the district plans and what those provisions said, interviewees gave varied responses.

BOX 1

Knowledge of the Spaces for Participation in the DMTDP Formulation

- **'The Planning system Act for example requires participation through public hearings and formulation of Local Action Plans'. (A DPCU representative)**

- **'There is one of these Local Government Acts that talks about community participation but I cannot memorize it. One of them was mentioned in the recent review of the district plans but I cannot pinpoint it...But it says you have to get the development needs of the people from the people themselves'. (An Elected Councillor)**

- **'There is a local government law. It says before any medium-term plan is taken there must be grass root participation/consultation to involve them to know their needs'. (An Area council chairman)**

- **'I don't know about any provision. I only know that we are to meet the people to know their concerns and discuss these concerns with the councillor for him to send to the District Assembly'. (A UC chairman)**

The range of responses provided by the various interviewees some of which are shown in the Box 1 above reveal that apart from the DPCU representatives who mentioned Planning System Act and the spaces therein for community participation, all the other sub-district representatives are not informed about the Act and the NDPC guidelines nor the provisions therein for participation. This information gap may not present serious hindrance to peoples' participation in the district's development planning since, from the responses, all representatives are aware of the important principle that the people have to participate in the planning process. However, it may also act as a potentially exclusive factor. For instance, section 6 of the NDPC Act allows aggrieved persons in matters relating to the planning process to seek redress. A knowledge of this section can result in people making their way into the planning process and vice versa.

My findings further revealed that the DA, through community representatives (councillors) and the sub-district councils, invite communities to participate in the DMTDP formulation. Though laudable, 'expanding democratic engagement calls for more than invitations to participate' (Cornwall, 2004, cited in Cornwall and Coelho, 2007: 8). 'Much depends on who takes up these offers of involvement and how the boundaries of their engagement are defined' (Cornwall, 2002: 28).

4.2 How Communities are Involved in the Operationalization of the spaces

Having identified the formulation of LAPs and the holding of public hearings on proposed plans as the two spaces for communities to participate in the DMTDP formulation, this section presents how communities are involved in the operationalization of these spaces in the EMD. The section is in 3 parts; the first discusses LAPs for the district and how communities are invited to present their plans for inclusion into the district plan. This is followed by a discussion on participation in public hearings for proposed LAPs and the DMTDP. The final part answers the question as to who occupies these spaces.

4.2.1 Community Involvement in LAPs Formulation

The NDPC under article 5 of the Planning System Act 480 (1994), mandates DA to prepare or direct the preparation of LAPs for the implementation of approved district plans. The implication here is that through the formulation of LAPs the views of all communities in a district would be captured in the DMTDP.

For the EMD, the interviews with representatives of the DPCU reveal that, in the run-up to the district plan formulation, the DPCU visit communities to sensitize them on the process. This is followed by a data collection of communities' needs and their perspectives on what the district plan should contain. When asked how long it takes the DPCU to capture the views of all communities, one of the representatives interviewed responded: '*...In reality it is not every community that will be captured because most of the problems that you identify in one community tend to reflect in the other community. But the ideal thing is that all the communities are supposed to be sensitized on it (DMTDP) and their needs and aspirations are supposed to be captured*'. These rhetorical expressions of similarities in community problems and needs arising from community responses 'are not to be mistaken for the absence of distinct and perhaps conflicting interests' between these communities (Mosse, 1994:508). Besides, development needs and opinions on what the DMTDP should contain cannot be similar for all communities since 'information and knowledge produced in any community is not all of the same type' (Mosse, 1994:518).

This assertion of glossing over community differences was confirmed by one of the councillors interviewed who observed that: *'My community is only privileged to have them (...) they visit some few areas and then from there at least they would be able to get a fair view of the needs of the areas...'*. Other reasons attributed by the DPCU representatives for their inability to cover the entire district during sensitization and data collection was related to finance and logistics problems and the poor access to some communities during rainy periods.

Of the six elected councillors interviewed, only one confirmed the visit of the DPCU to his community, the remaining five noted that they are informed by the DPCU in the run-up to the plan formulation to present their Community Action Plans (CAPs) at their respective council levels for harmonization and subsequent incorporation into the district plan. These revelations were confirmed by an ex-councillor when he explained that '*...In actual fact the main channel for community involvement is through the submission of LAPs. Although the DPCU sometimes collect data on their own, it is only in some few communities*'. One issue that featured in the interviews regarding how communities are participating through the submission of LAPs to the DA was the role of NGOs in promoting participatory local development in the district. Of the six councillors interviewed, four indicated that NGOs had assisted their communities to formulate CAPs. My checks revealed that these NGOs were sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to assist communities to formulate CAPs as part of the Agencies' Community-Driven Initiatives for Food Security (CIFS) project[16] in northern Ghana.

The interviewees however stressed that though the NGOs had presented copies of these plans to the District Assembly, they did not think it served any purpose since they are yet to see a project from those plans being initiated by the DA. While members of the DPCU confirmed receipt of these NGOs-assisted CAPs and even mentioned collaborating with these NGOs, the impression I got with regard to the utilization of these plans confirms the assertion by Hansen and Askim (2008:388) when they note that although bureaucrats encourage 'involvement by establishing routines that facilitate citizens' participation', many are 'ambivalent about utilizing citizen input'. This is illustrated by the DPCU's inability to trace any of the LAPs which were presented to them by these NGOs when I asked for them.

This impression was confirmed by many of the councillors interviewed when asked how they are able to get their local development needs to be prioritized in the DMTDP. *'Make sure that you have good relations with the DCE (District Chief Executive), the DCD (District Coordinating Director) and the presiding member. You know they are the key people in the DA (...) If you go into the Assembly and you cannot work with these three key people, my brother I bet you, you would never get your projects through. Whatever you think you can send through, it would not go or it may go inside (DA) and come through the window'* (An elected Councillor). The situation where councillors need to establish personal relations with key officials of the DA for projects to be executed in their communities seems to draw upon the fact that councillors do not have copies of the DMTDP in order to track the implementation of projects contained in the plan. As a councillor rhetorically quizzed '*...how do I know if what is on the plan is being followed during implementation when I am not given a copy of the plan?*'. Moreover, my own perusal of the draft DMTDP for the 2010-2013 period revealed vague descriptions of where some projects are to be sited. For instance, under the theme 'Human Development,

[16] see http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/CIDAWEB/cpo.nsf/vWebProjByPartnerEn/372171DB349DEAD58525701900318597 Accessed 25 September 2012.

Production and Employment', the first activity, 'Construct Boreholes in 20 communities' is to be located in 'Communities without Potable water'. The failure to mention exactly which communities are involved in this case, could partly explain why councillors develop personal relationships with officials to gain favour in the siting of projects.

In light of the above, it can be concluded that community participation through the submission of LAPs in the context of the EMD proceeds in two ways; *First*, the DPCU's own data gathering of needs from communities they are able to reach; and *Second*, by the DPCU asking communities they are unable to reach to present CAPs.

4.2.2 Community Involvement in Public Hearings

Public hearings into different areas of planning have become increasingly commonplace as justification by government officials for their decisions (Kemp, 1985). According to Adams (2004:44), 'public hearings, which are usually required by law, allow citizens to comment on a specific issue or proposal before a governmental entity makes a decision'. Scholars have argued that under the right conditions such as meetings held at a convenient time and advertised extensively, public hearings can be effective at influencing policy and attracting a representative sample of the citizenry (McComas, 2001b; Adams, 2004).

In respect of district planning in Ghana, the NDPC mandates district planning authorities to conduct at least two major public hearings in the DMTDP formulation process for citizens to make inputs into the plans before adoption. The first, after the data collection of views and proposals on the development needs of communities have been collected and analyzed. The second hearing is for the discussion of the draft DMTDP the outcome of which should conclude the formulation of the plan. Additionally, the DA is required to submit a list of all participants at this second and final hearing as well as a public hearing report in addition to the final/adopted DMTDP.

Furthermore, the commission specifies in its guidelines that public hearings should be thoroughly advertised with notices served to the general public at least 14 days prior to the day of the hearing, be it at the sub-district or the district level. Regarding participation in public hearings, the commission envisages the invitation and subsequent attendance of voluntary and youth associations, women groups and all interested persons. However, members of the sub-district councils, UCs as well as Councillors are mandated to attend.

The interviews conducted with key representatives in the DMTDP formulation shed some light on public hearings in East Mamprusi. When asked how development needs are prioritised and how it is ensured that these needs are representative of the views of the communities, with the exception of the UC chairmen interviewed who did not mention public hearings, both the members of the DPCU as well as the sub-district council chairmen alluded to public hearings as a key process of obtaining citizens' views and input. While this assertion is in line with the broad vision of the NDPC, my findings reveal however that public hearings for the district do not follow the guidelines for their conduct as provided by the NDPC.

In the first instance, public hearings both at the sub-district and district levels were found not to be open to all citizens. On public hearings after the

DPCU's data collection, a representative claimed that '*...after we have captured the needs and aspirations of the community we gather the opinion leaders (...) they have to in a way validate the plans that they have spoken to us...*'. The assertion of conducting public hearings of this nature to validate development needs was also shared by the two area council chairmen interviewed. An area council chairman noted, *'It is better you select and invite those who you know they can at least give you proper and nice ideas*'. A similar revelation was made in the case of the final public hearing for the draft DMTDP in which my findings reveal that notices are not extended to the general public. A DPCU official intimated, '*We invite all heads of decentralized departments, NGOs working in the district and those from outside the district who are development partners to the DA, area council chairmen and councillors*'. Of the mandatory requirement for the presence of the sub-district council members, district councillors and UC members at this hearing, UCs were not mentioned in the list of invitees. None of the six UC chairmen interviewed indicated ever being present at the hearing. The list of participants for the final public hearing and the final hearing report for the draft DMTDP could however not be obtained. A DPCU representative explained that these documents were lost through a computer system problem the secretariat suffered from.

Public hearings in district plans formulation for the EMD, therefore, seem to point to scholars' criticism of public hearings for attracting an unrepresentative sample of the population (Heberlein, 1976; McComas, 2001a; Adams, 2004), as well as a means to allow officials to deflect criticism and proceed with decisions that have already been made (Kemp, 1985; Adams, 2004).

Secondly, 'hearing notices are usually obscure' (Heberlein, 1976:201). When asked how notices for participation are sent across to the major stakeholders, all the representatives of the DPCU interviewed indicated that notices are sent by means invitation letters and/or by the use of emissaries. These modes of invitation may not lead to hearings being 'advertised extensively' (Adams, 2004:44), and thus can lead to exclusion. In a rural district like East Mamprusi, the use of Information Services Department vans which are also used for public health campaigns would be a better means of invitation with far-reaching effects for citizens participation. With regard to the NDPC guideline recommendation of a 14 days prior notice to the general public before a hearing day, I could not adduce any evidence from the interviews conducted to the effect that this recommendation happens in practice.

While Blair (2000) reports of the success of public hearings in informing people about decentralization in Mali, it is clear that public hearings in Ghana point to scholars criticism as being 'mere democratic rituals that provide a false sense of legitimacy'(Adams, 2004:44), since in the case of Ghana public hearings contradict 'the common characteristic of being open to any member of the public' (McComas, 2001b:37) to make meaningful comments into proposed DMTDP before they are adopted as working documents.

4.2.3 Who Occupies the Spaces in the DMTDP Formulation?

As established in the previous part of this section (4.2.1 above), the DPCU involves communities in the DMTDP formulation through a data collection exercise that captures the needs and aspirations of some communities in the

district while inviting CAPs from a host of other communities they are unable to reach. In order to gain an understanding of the voices behind these community needs and aspirations, I sought to find out who are invited to participate in these deliberations and how community needs are elicited, since 'being involved in a process is not equivalent to having a voice' (Cornwall, 2008:278).

All the representatives of the DPCU interviewed indicated that formal invitations on the data collection of needs are sent to community chiefs and elected councillors. The chiefs in turn organize durbars[17] for the exercise. When asked about the composition and diversity in terms of attendance at these durbars and how responses are elicited, a representative intimated: '*When we go to the communities we insist that everybody should attend. Men, women, even the children and other minority tribes like the 'Fulanis' and the rest, if they are within the community then they must all be part of the meeting. And we make sure sometimes when we realize that women are not talking or in some communities they don't allow children to talk, then we do focus group discussions to make sure they all talk...*'. This was confirmed by another DPCU interviewee who also noted that '*...the interest of children is different from that of women likewise that of men so we try to group these sub-interest groups and then we elicit their interests*'. Although there is a lack of an agreed-upon set of criteria for successful citizen participation (McComas, 2001b), isolating particular interest groups within broader categories offers operational advantages, as they can be focused on as 'target groups' to enhance their confidence, capabilities and access to benefits (Cornwall, 2008).

Participation was however found to be different in situations where communities were asked by the DPCU to present CAPs. The study found, from most of the councillors and UC chairmen interviewed, that participation in such cases were mostly limited to chiefs, the clergy and other influential members in the communities. This is well illustrated by an elected councillor when he responded: *'We invite some opinion leaders, people who we feel can at least contribute in a positive way, ...some heads or do I say big men in town, and others*. And when asked who the references to positive contributors and 'others' meant, the respondent mentioned chiefs and sub-chiefs, Pastors, Imams, members of some dominant families, and in the respondents own words '*...you know there are some they are not opinion leaders but from the way we see them they are people who can at least give proper contribution as far as development is concerned* '. Another interviewee in reference to a question as to who is involved in the prioritization of development needs noted: it is the Assembly person, the UC for the community, some opinion leaders and the chief's representatives. The persistent mention of chiefs and their representatives during the interviews prompted me to ask why it was so. A respondent stated in response that '*Most of these development projects you can't just do them, because they involve the acquisition of land and other things, so without them you cannot execute any plan*'. Chiefs in Ghanaian communities and indeed most African communities are the custodians of lands, and therefore have critical role to play in matters of land use management, including natural resources like forests and water systems (Taabazuing, 2010).

[17] A formal gathering of community members at the invitation of the chief.

Therefore, where communities are invited to present CAPs, these findings confirm those made by scholars that: information arising from community representatives 'such as statements of community needs and priorities, is likely to be problematic because they are produced in a social context where the influence of power and authority are enormous' (Mosse, 1994:520). Claims to have 'involved the public' boil down to having a few conversations with a couple of community leaders or calling people to a public meeting, which only the most active members of a community attend (Cornwall, 2008:280). Besides, the effective devolution of power to the lowest levels in Ghana cannot be achieved through the chieftaincy institution. Scholars have observed that chieftaincy in Ghana is noted for conflicts and land disputes (Aryee, 2007; Paolo and Abotsi, 2011). Moreover, disputes over chieftaincy positions have created factions at the local level, where a concerted effort is needed for development (Aryee, 2007). Furthermore, chieftaincy excludes those who are not within an ethnic group (Paolo and Abotsi, 2011), and since people reside in areas subject to the jurisdiction of chiefs they may not recognize, effective devolution of power may be hindered.

4.3 Citizens Perceptions on the Mechanisms and the Spaces for Participation in the DMTDP Formulation

This section employs the results of the FGDs held with community members to explore residents perceptions on the decentralized mechanisms as well as the procedural spaces available for communities to participate in the DMTDP formulation. The section is in three parts. The first part discusses the general understanding of the local people on these mechanisms and spaces. The second part looks at the views of citizens on the operational functioning of these mechanisms and spaces for community participation. A brief discussion on how citizens perceive their involvement in the DMTDP formulation is presented in the final part.

4.3.1 Citizens Knowledge of the Mechanisms and the Spaces for Participation in the DMTDP Formulation

To assess how citizens perceive participatory mechanisms and the procedural spaces available for their communities to get involved in the formulation of the DMTDP, I determined the general level of citizen awareness and understanding of these mechanisms and spaces. To this end, all the FGDs held for this research started out with a discussion on this knowledge assessment.

When I introduced the discussion on the decentralized mechanisms for community participation in local development, participants in the FGD generally demonstrated a fair knowledge of these participatory mechanisms. Many of the participants noted that '*When we have development concerns we discuss them with our councillors. We then expect them to send the concerns we express to the DA and bring us feedback . Even where we have not expressed development concerns, we expect our councillors to organize meetings to brief us on DA deliberations regarding our communities development* '. In almost all the discussions held, participants showed a

high level of awareness of the representative roles of their councillors as agents of development for their communities.

However, little mention was made of the UCs and the sub-district councils in the discussions. When I prompted discussants to this, it emerged that although all residents in the FGDs had a fair knowledge of the role of the UCs as a structural mechanism for promoting development in their communities, many of the discussants did not know their UC members. The sub-district councils are the least known. It was clear that majority of the participants, particularly women representatives, did not know the functions of their councils nor where their offices were located.

Notwithstanding the generally fair knowledge on the structural mechanisms as explained above, participants' understanding on the procedural spaces available for their participation in the DMTDP formulation appeared to be very scanty across the various focus groups. This was illustrated by the fact that an overwhelming majority of the participants in the discussions held were neither aware of the DMTDP nor how to participate in the plan development process. This was well illustrated by a woman in one of the discussions when she noted: '*We have not been told by anybody that there is a document that shows the direction of our district's development, although we sometimes see the DA carrying out development projects*'. Another participant from the discussion held with Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) notes: '*We only heard about this DMTDP when an advocacy NGO, Send Ghana, came from the regional capital and organized a meeting with us at the premises of the DA. It was at this meeting that executed projects from the DMTDP was mentioned by a representative of the DA. It was new to us and our needs were not contained in this document*'.

It stands to reason from the above that while the local people are aware of, and generally possess a fair understanding of the decentralized mechanisms for their participation in the local governance system, there is a deficit of knowledge on the procedural spaces for community participation in the DMTDP formulation. This knowledge gap, however, did not come as a surprise to me since my initial findings from councillors and members of the sub-district councils revealed a similar knowledge deficit.

4.3.2 Citizens Perceptions on the Functioning of the Mechanisms and the Spaces for Participation

During the discussions, there was a general expression of dissatisfaction with the performance of the structural mechanisms for citizen participation. Participants generally attributed their lack of information on the workings of the DA and on pertinent matters of local development to the dysfunction of these structures.

Dissatisfaction with the functioning of the sub-district structures was implied in the different ways participants explained how their communities get their development concerns across to district authorities to be resolved.

> *'...as for the UC if you have a problem and you rely on them your problem will remain unsolved. They don't organize development meetings. And when you sent a development issue to any of them, they only say they have heard. But they are not able to do anything about the issue.*
> *(A woman discussant)*

Although majority relied on their councillors to convey their development concerns to the district authorities for solutions, a good number of residents have resorted to what they call 'better alternatives' to getting their development concerns addressed since the sub-district structures, in their words, 'have failed' in being effective agents to addressing their development concerns. Many participants across the focus groups mentioned that they rely on ruling party leaders, chiefs and opinion leaders[18] to push their development concerns through to the district authorities for resolution. A youth participant in one of the discussions noted that: '*We discuss our development concerns with the chairperson of the ruling party, the councillor and some opinion leaders in our area so that they can in turn see the district authorities on our behalf*'. A woman participant, in reference to an opinion leader she pointed to me, also noted: '*He was the person who was able to help us by negotiating for a borehole on behalf of our community when we needed potable water*'. Ribot (2003) reported similar findings in Burkina Faso and Senegal where local people went to chiefs and merchants to resolve local problems in their communities rather than elected village presidents because these individuals had the power to respond.

No mention was made of the sub-district councils and UCs in efforts at solving problems at the local level which they are supposed to spearhead, by enabling 'a better mobilisation and more efficient allocation of resources at the local level' (Bergh, 2004:781). Some meaning was further given to the sentiments expressed above by complaints I often heard during the discussions such as, '*We have never been part of any meeting*', '*They do not organize meetings*', and '*We don't even know some of them*'. The failure of the sub-district structures to function in discussions of local development concerns, confirms an earlier observation by Aryee and Amponsah (2003:72) when they noted on Ghana's decentralization that 'the sub-district structures are facing legitimacy crisis'. Robino (2009) also reported a similar perception of non-functional ward committees expressed by civil society organizations in the integrated development planning process of South Africa. The malfunctioning of these structures render the spaces for community participation 'rather closed and invisible to the affected masses' (Wumbla and Otten, 2009:151) in the district.

With specific reference to the procedural spaces for participation in the DMTDP formulation, residents in the discussions perceived the formulation processes to be obscure to the masses. Consequently, participants across the focus groups did not allude to having been involved in public hearings nor the formulation of LAPs.

However, an opinion leader in reference to a picture of a classroom block among the pictures of DACF-sponsored projects presented at the FGDs, noted that he was part of a meeting organized at the council level where the construction of the classroom block was included as a development

> *'It was at an area council meeting that we decided to include this school building in the council plan for our area because classes were held in dilapidated structures (...) I must admit that not many were invited'.*
>
> *(An opinion leader)*

[18] Opinion leaders are elders in the community characterized by the fact that people turn to them for advice and views.

concern in the council plan for his area. The discussions also pointed to some skepticism as to whether the DMTDP (and the projects therein) is indeed a genuine policy document for the district's development devoid of partisan political influences. This was particularly expressed amongst the youth participants. A youth participant illustrated this doubt with a story. According to him:

'They (DA) came and built a school in this community some few years ago and ever since, not even a single teacher has been posted to the school to date. They have not even bothered to inaugurate the building. In our efforts to solve this problem we have gone to them several times but the problem is still the same as I speak (...) I personally met the educational circuit supervisor for our administrative council on this issue only to be told that there was no approval for the construction of the school building and therefore the government is officially not aware of the school. When I asked him why the government would invest a lot of money into constructing the building only to turn around and say it is not aware of it?. He replied that he suspects the school was constructed for political gains'.

This revelation not only points to political influences in projects selection and implementation for the DMTDP, but also, it has wider implications for the notion of Ghana's non-partisan DAs system discussed in chapter three, and thus lends credence to the observation that 'in actual practice Ghana's DAs are not free from partisan politics' (Aryee and Amponsah, 2003:76). Indeed, while there has been a lot of emphasis on the technical aspects of decentralization, scholars have reported that 'decentralization is inherently a political process' (Bergh, 2004:780).

4.3.3 Citizens Perceptions of their Involvement in the DMTDP Formulation

The FGDs highlighted the views of participants on this topic. Generally, discussants across the focus groups did not see themselves as active participants in the district planning process. However, a majority also indicated that communities have benefitted from one project or another from the DA particularly in reference to the pictures provided at the FGDs. As some women discussants pointed out: '*We have not been involved at any point in the district's development process, but they (DA) have carried out projects in our community*'. This notwithstanding, participants indicated their willingness to participate in the DMTDP formulation process.

The various opinions and some frustrations which typify the various responses of the focus groups on this topic are shown in the Box 2 below.

Box 2

Citizens Perceptions of their Involvement in the DMTDP Formulation

- 'They see us as disabled people and thus consider our views not worthy of inclusion in the planning process... We chose a colleague to represent our interest at the DA, but the DA rejected him for no reason and rather decided for us the person they want just because they have the power'. (A person with disability)

- 'Nobody has mentioned or involved us in the process. It would be good to be part of the process so that we can also benefit from development projects by telling officials what we need'. (A woman participant)

- 'We have been doing our best... When we mobilize ourselves to go and merely ask questions at the DA, we are told by our own people to stop and that it is not a proper behaviour ... But if we participate our community would not be left out of development'. (A youth participant)

- 'I have no problem if I am not invited in so far as the contributions of those who are invited to the process benefit all of us'. (An elderly participant)

- 'Even though I have been involved a couple of times in the planning process, I think the DA needs to involve more people'. (An opinion leader)

4.4 Constraints to Community Participation in the DMTDP Formulation

The intentions Ghana's decentralized planning policy, through the planning system Act 480 and the NDPC guidelines, to fully involve local community people including the poor and excluded in district planning is not without challenges. In this section I discuss the obstacles to community participation in the DMTDP formulation for the EMD based on the barriers to participatory development observed by Gaventa and Valderrama (1999) and Botes and van Rensburg (2000) as presented in section 2.5 of chapter 2.

4.4.1 Financial Constraints

Both members of the sub-district structures and the DPCU representatives interviewed cited finance and logistics constraints as the major impediment to involving communities in the district plans formulation. Members of the sub-district structures cited financial constraints as the reason behind their inability to involve a cross-section of interest groups in the formulation of LAPs. A council chairman notes: '*Because we are not financially supported, organizing meetings to*

involve various interest groups is something that we are not able to do. Moreover, the DA is not ready to release funds for these purposes'. The DPCU representatives also attributed their inability to involve all communities in the data collection of needs to similar constraint. On the initial findings that the DA is not committed to participation by its refusal to release funds, a member of the DPCU answered that: '*The DA does not have enough funds to sponsor all the sub-district structures to promote participation even though we know participation is important for sustainability of projects. Even projects are delayed because of delays in the release of the DACF*'. These findings confirm an observation by Wunsch (2001) when he concluded that the failure of decentralization in Africa is, among others, the prevention of resources from reaching local governments by either central or local actors and the weak revenue base of local governments.

4.4.2 Level of Citizens Organization

Strong grassroots organizations are essential to mobilise people to take part in consultative arenas, and to engage in public protest over the quality of public services (Robinson, 2007). The existence of popular organizations with a certain presence at the local level seem to be one of the fundamental conditions under which citizens can influence decisions at the local level from the experiences of Latin American countries (Gaventa and Valderrama, 1999).

The interviews and FGDs held revealed a low level of organization in East Mamprusi. Members of the sub-district structures as well as participants in the FGDs intimated that there are no Civil Society Organizations nor functional Community-Based Organizations that assist citizens in pursuing their interests at the DA and in informing citizens on matters of local governance, apart from the few external NGOs that periodically assisted them in poverty alleviation. This was evident considering the general lack of knowledge on the DMTDP formulation on the part of participants. The importance of grassroots organization to decentralized planning is echoed by Chaudhuri and Heller (2002) who report that in the Indian state of Kerala which is noted for its success in decentralized planning, a social movement - Kerala Sastra Shitya Parishad - played an important role in shaping and implementing the People's Campaign for Decentralized Planning.

4.4.3 Selective Participation

As gathered from the interviews and FGDs, there is evidence of selective participation in the DMTDP formulation in favour of the more powerful and visible in the district. Consequently, the views of the majority of the ordinary local people are not heard and incorporated in the district's planning process. This finding corroborates an earlier finding by Njoh (2002:242) when he reported for the Mutengene self-help water project in Cameroon that 'The challenge for development planners is therefore, to encourage the involvement of members of the 'silent camp' in the development process'.

4.4.4 Lack of Interest in Participation

The allegation of lack of interest in participation was cited by members of the sub-district structures interviewed. As succinctly expressed by a UC chairman: '*... when meetings are called people don't attend and they would ask others not to attend*

because they say they have attended several meetings and yet their problems are not solved'. I found this point interesting since it tied-in to an initial finding in this research that pointed to the fact that the sub-district structures are non-functional leaving the local people turning to political party functionaries, chiefs and opinion leaders to resolve their local problems. While the functionality of the sub-district structures may be in question, the quote above depicts that the problem with the sub-district structures goes beyond just organizing local development meetings.

Golooba-Mutebi (2004) reported a similar waning of interest in the participation of community members in local council meetings in Uganda owing to participation fatigue and doubts about the practical use of such participation. This is consistent also with the observation that unwillingness to participate may result from past experiences of involvement where expectations are not fulfilled (Botes and van Rensburg, 2000). Indeed, Bratton (2010) reports that people in Africa judge the quality of local government in terms of delivery. Thus the problem with the sub-district structures in the EMD relates more to their lack of 'power to respond' to local development problems (Ribot, 2003), resulting in the dwindled participation.

Conclusion

The chapter answered the research questions by examining community participation in the DMTDP formulation for the EMD. Discussions in this chapter generally pointed to limited involvement of citizens in the district's plan formulation. Moreover, citizens perceive the decentralized mechanisms for participatory local development as not functioning and consequently did not see themselves as active participants in the DMTDP formulation. The relevant constraints to participation are also noted in the chapter. In the chapter that follows I analyze the practice of community participation in the DMTDP formulation using the frameworks presented and discussed in chapter 2.

Chapter 5 Theory and Practice: Power Relations and Community Participation in District Planning

This chapter draws connections between conceptual and theoretical understanding of participation, and the practice of community participation in the District Medium-Term Development Plan (DMTDP) formulation in the East Mamprusi District (EMD). To do this, the frameworks outlined in chapter 2 are applied to the findings for the case of planning in East Mamprusi. The chapter is in two sections: the first section reviews and presents the application of Gaventa's power cube. The second section then reviews White's framework on participation in light of planning at the EMD.

5.1 Spaces and Powers in Participation in the DMTDP Formulation

Gaventa's framework provides an insight into the spaces and levels of citizens participation and a conceptual understanding of the dynamics of power in these spaces and levels. Gaventa (2005) notes that the way in which the dimensions of the framework are reflected, and the spaces filled, vary across settings in which it is used. As mentioned in chapter 2, the application of this framework in the context of this research is limited in the 'place' of engagement to the local level.

In terms of the spaces for participation and their application in the district planning process, two of the three spaces of engagement outlined in the framework were noticed in the case of EMD: *invited* and *closed* spaces.

The district planning process of the East Mamprusi, has no spaces that have emerged more organically out of sets of common concerns or identification which has come into being as a result of popular mobilization, such as around identity or issue-based concerns, or of which like-minded people join together in common pursuit (Cornwall, 2002). In other words, there are no *created/claimed spaces* in the planning process. This was evidenced by the fact that although community members expressed their exclusion from the district's planning process and their willingness to participate in the process, there was nothing to show that citizens have managed to create deliberative spaces on their own based on these concerns, to get their interests included in the planning process.

Invited spaces were more pronounced. As Cornwall (2002) explains: the main characteristic of invited spaces is that resource-bearing agents bring them into being and provide a frame for participation within them. In the context of East Mamprusi therefore, the data collection process by the District Planning and Coordinating Unit (DPCU), the authorization of communities and the district sub-structures to present LAPs, as well as the conduct of public hearings on proposed plans all bear semblance of invited spaces. In all these cases, it is the DPCU that gives expressions to the communities or citizens occupying these spaces. However, the findings revealed that these spaces were

mostly occupied by chiefs or traditional leaders, members of some dominant families and influential and vocal persons in the communities. These spatial occupation dynamics has given rise to *closed* spaces in the DMTDP formulation.

The interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) revealed that the formulation of LAPs was controlled by community representatives who invited influential members of their communities to decide on community needs, excluding the majority of ordinary community members. Public hearings on proposed plans are also exclusive. None of the participants in the FGDs held alluded to having been involved in any public hearing. In effect therefore, the spaces available for participation in the formulation of the DMTDP are closed to the majority of ordinary community members. On closed spaces, Gaventa (2006) notes that many civil society efforts focus on opening up these spaces through greater citizens involvement and accountability. Indeed, Devas et al. (2001, cited in Devas and Grant, 2003) observe that civil society is often identified as the institutional solution to people-centred, participatory and inclusive development. Nonetheless, in the EMD, there are no Civil Society Organizations, a signal that these closed spaces may go a long way.

The spaces for community participation in the planning process described above was found to be shaped by how visible and invisible agendas operated in the DMTDP formulation process. All the three expressions of power which act to place boundaries on spaces for participation, as noted by Gaventa and discussed in chapter 2, were identified in the planning process.

Visible forms of power entail the structures and procedures of decision making in the planning process (Gaventa, 2006). In this regard, visible power resided with the DPCU and the District Assembly (DA). The FGDs revealed visible power in the exercise of the NDPC guidelines. The application of the guidelines by the DPCU particularly in relation to public hearings discriminated against ordinary community members. It emerged from the interviews and FGDs that hearings were not open to the public as provided in the guidelines.

Hidden power in the DMTDP formulation was found to be exercised by both members of the sub-district structures as well as the DPCU. Members of the sub-district structures used their power and positions to determine and control who took part in the formulation of LAPs. Together with these individuals (chiefs, members of some dominant families and influential and vocal persons) who are also power holders, they determined the needs of their communities. The DPCU on the other hand, decided who got the opportunity to partake in the public hearing for the proposed DMTDP. The interviews revealed that public hearing for the draft DMTDP is open only to the heads of decentralized departments, NGOs who are development partners to the DA, area council chairmen and councillors.

The FGD with the youth also revealed some level of invisible power within community members. Some youth participants alluded to how their community people prevented them anytime they wanted to ask questions concerning their community's development at the DA, with the reason that it was not a proper behaviour to confront authorities. This reveals a psychological dimension to how these community members think about

participation. Gaventa (2006:29) observes that invisible power 'shapes people's beliefs, sense of self and acceptance of the status quo... Processes of socialization, culture and ideology perpetuate exclusion and inequality by defining what is normal, acceptable and safe'.

5.2 Levels and Interests in Participation in the DMTDP Formulation

White (1996) aims to draw out the diversity of form, function, and interests within the term 'participation' by distinguishing four major forms/levels of participation, and the characteristics of each, as noted in chapter 2.

According to White (1996:8), a nominal level of participation exists only in name with government departments interested in 'doing something' and showing they have a 'popular base', while this level of participation serves the interest of community members in getting some potential benefits on offer.

In the EMD, participation on the part of community members in the DMTDP formulation can best be described as nominal. Although ordinary community members are actively not involved in the plan formulation process, many participants admitted to their communities benefitting from DA projects and expressed a nominal interest in participating in the DMTDP formulation.

The instrumental level of participation which serves as a cost-reduction mechanism for government agencies on the one hand, and the cost of time spent on labour by community members on the other hand (Cornwall, 2000), was not very evident in the district's planning process. Although it emerged from the interviews with the DPCU representatives that the DA readily completed projects initiated by communities' efforts and funds, DPCU representatives explained that there were few community-initiated projects in the district. Indeed, a perusal of the DMTDP for the 2010-2013 period indicate that five projects initiated by communities were billed to be supported annually for the period out of a total of 135 projects planned to be implemented under the theme 'Human Development, Production and Employment'. There was however no evidence of instrumental interest on the part of participants in the FGDs.

The representative level of participation was found to be the form of participation of interest to both representatives of the DPCU as well as those of the sub-district structures in the DMTDP formulation. Almost all of these representatives interviewed made either explicit or implicit allusions to reasons of sustainability for community participation in the planning process. This interest in sustainability however, was not commensurate with the actual level of involvement of community members judging from the fact that a majority of community members are not involved in the planning process. This confirms the observation of some scholars that 'The level of commitment by many governments to community participation has often been dubious or extremely limited' (Botes and van Rensburg, 2000:45).

Finally, there is no evidence of the transformative level of community participation in district planning for East Mamprusi. As noted in chapter 2, transformative participation should change power relations between development agencies and beneficiaries. Analysis of the different expressions

of power in the case of the DMTDP formulation for the EMD presented in section 5.1 above reveal that power is very much vested with the DPCU. There is no indication of citizen power in the planning process.

Conclusion

Insights from the analysis in this chapter reveal that the spaces for participation in the DMTDP formulation are closed to the majority of citizens in EMD due to different expressions of power acting to place boundaries on citizens participation. The analysis also shows that community participation in the DMTDP formulation is at a nominal level. The next chapter provides general conclusions and policy recommendations for this research.

Chapter 6 Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

This research has sought to ascertain the extent of community participation in the DMTDP formulation for the East Mamprusi District (EMD). In doing so, the spaces for participation as provided for by the Planning system Act 480 and the NDPC guidelines for community participation in the DMTDP formulation were investigated for the district. The perceptions of community members on these participatory spaces and the decentralized mechanisms which function within these spaces were also explored. The study then employed a theoretical framework on spaces and powers in participation as well as a framework on levels of citizens participation to analyze the extent to which communities are involved in the district's plan formulation.

It emerged after interviews with key DPCU representatives, members of the sub-district structures and councillors; as well as from FGDs with community members, that participation on the part of community members in the DMTDP formulation in the EMD is at a nominal level although some community members were consulted in the plan formulation process. The research found that this nominal involvement of community members in the planning process is true both for the operationalization of the procedural spaces for participation in the DMTDP formulation, namely the preparation of Local Action Plans (LAPs) and public hearings on proposed plans, as well as to factors related to the performance of the district's decentralized mechanisms for participatory local development.

On LAPs, while the DPCU obtained the priorities of some communities for inclusion into the district plan through participatory processes involving various community members, it did not do so for the majority of communities in the district. The majority of communities were invited to present LAPs containing their priority needs and aspirations through their representatives for inclusion into the district's plan. However, as this research shows, the submission of these LAPs by community representatives for inclusion into the DMTDP could not be equated to mean that these communities are involved in the planning process. The study found that LAPs presented by community representatives reflected the needs of powerful and influential members in the communities. Moreover, the study points to the influence of personal relations between key DA officials and councillors in the prioritization of development needs in the DMTDP and the subsequent execution of projects in the plan.

While public hearings on proposed plans were found to be conducted in the district's planning process, they were held in a manner that could hardly be described as participatory. The evidence from this research shows that invitations to public hearings at both the sub-district and district levels were not made open to different segments of the citizenry. In addition, the modes of invitations employed for public hearings in the district could not result in hearings attracting representative samples of community members. Scholars have underscored the importance of widespread advertisements if public hearings are to attract representative sample of the citizenry and positively impact policy (Adams, 2004; McComes, 2001b).

The mechanisms established by Ghana's decentralization system to promote participatory local development, from the perspective of community people in the EMD, do not function as they are supposed to according to official policy. Community members regard both their sub-district councils and the Unit Committees (UCs) as not delivering in terms of their core mandate of mobilizing the development concerns of citizens at the local level for inclusion into the DMTDP. Indeed, an overwhelming majority of community members involved in the focus group discussions for this research perceive their councils and UCs as dormant and incapable of acting on their development concerns. Consequently, they did not see themselves as being involved in the spaces for participation in the DMTDP formulation. One reason that also accounts for the lack of involvement is attributable to the lack of knowledge of the procedural spaces for participation in the plan formulation and on the process of plan formulation in general. As this research shows, many community members neither know about the procedural spaces available for them to participate in the plan formulation nor are informed about the DMTDP in general. This situation is similar for majority of the members of the sub-district structures and councillors who were also not informed about these spaces in the Act and guidelines of the NDPC and what the procedural spaces required of them. Councillors and members of the sub-district structures depended on the invitations and information shared to them by the DPCU in the plan formulation process. As participation is about power relations, knowledge of how and where to participate is important since 'sharing through participation does not necessarily mean sharing in power' (White, 1996).

The research has also identified and discussed some major constraints to community participation in the DMTDP formulation which include financial constraints, weak level of citizens organization, selective participation, and lack of interest in participation.

The insights from this research point to a number of policy recommendations. These include equipping both the DPCU and the sub-district structures financially and logistically to be able to carry out district planning in a more participatory manner, capacity building for the sub-district structures on participatory planning, strengthening monitoring and supervision of the DPCUs to ensure compliance with guidelines in regard to community participation in the district planning process, and informing and educating the general public on the DMTDP and how citizens can participate in its formulation.

With the seemingly plausible participatory mechanisms put in place by Ghana's decentralization system through various Acts and legislations, this study suggests a careful assessment of these mechanisms and on how they can be made more capable of enhancing participation since these mechanisms are the closest to the people. In addition, assessments of completed projects in light of community needs and priorities are important in order to ensure that projects are in line with the expectations of community members. However, these are areas for future research.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Guidelines used for Primary Data Collection

1A Questionnaire for Councillors/Members of the Sub-district Structures

1. Are you aware of any provisions regarding community participation in the DMTDP formulation? Yes/No
2. If Yes, which provisions are these and what is your role in the plan formulation?
3. How does the District Assembly involve your community/area in the plan formulation?
4. How does your community/area formulate its LAP?
5. Who are invited to make inputs into the formulation process? Why?
6. Are there constraints to participation in your LAP formulation? Yes/No
7. If yes, please explain
8. How do you determine priority needs among the numerous development needs of your community/area?
9. Do you conduct public hearings?
10. How are they conducted and who is invited?
11. Are there grassroots organisations that support your community/area to pursue your interests at the District Assembly? Yes/No
12. If yes, please explain
13. Have development needs of your community/area been included in the DMTDP? Yes/No. Give example(s).
14. How do you influence the selection and execution of your community/area projects to be prioritized in the DMTDP?
15. Do projects earmarked for execution in the DMTDP followed when it comes to the actual implementation? Yes/No? Please explain.

Thank you

1B Questionnaire for DPCU Representatives/Executive Committee Member

1. Are there provisions regarding community participation in the DMTDP formulation? Yes/No?
2. If Yes, which are these and what is your role in the DMTDP formulation?
3. Which major stakeholders are involved in the plan formulation?
4. Are there cases where other personalities or groups apart from the major stakeholders mentioned consulted in the formulation process? In which cases? and Why?
5. How do you involve communities in the plan formulation?
6. How do you factor local action plans into the DMTDP?
7. Do you directly meet the local citizens to discuss their local action plans?
8. How are public hearings conducted for the DMTDP formulation process?

9. How many hearings are conducted in the plan formulation for the district?
10. What are the composition of hearings in terms of attendance and diversity?
11. How and when are the invitations sent across?
12. Are there NGOs or civil society organizations resident in the district who contribute to the plan formulation?
13. If yes, can you mention some of these organisations?
14. How do you determine priority needs among the numerous development needs of the various communities to arrive at the DMTDP?
15. Are you able to follow the prioritized projects on the DMTDP when it comes to execution? Yes/No. If not why not?
16. Which constraints do you face in involving communities in the DMTDP formulation?

Thank you

1C Guide used for the Focus Group Discussions with Community Members

1. Which mechanisms are available to you through which local development problems can be addressed? Share your experiences and impressions on the functioning of these mechanisms?
2. How does your community ensures that your development concerns are heard by the district authorities? Can you give examples of your experiences?
3. How have you been involved in the formulation of LAPs? How was it organized and by who?
4. What are your experiences on the DMTDP formulation for the district? Have you taken part in any of its public hearings? How would you describe your involvement in the plan formulation?
5. Have you taken part in any deliberation at the district assembly in relation to your community development or the district at large? How interested would you be when afforded the opportunity?

Thank you

Appendix 2 Picture of an Abandoned Market at Nalerigu in the Study Area