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## CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION IN THE DECENTRALIZATION PROCESS IN GHANA

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**ABSTRACT:** *Participation in decision-making is the root of democratization, as democratization is widely believed to be rooted in decentralization. As such, citizens' participation in the decentralization process will bring governance closer to the people. The focus of the study was to explore the views and understandings of citizens about Ghana's decentralization process. The researcher used the case study design for the study. Both questionnaire and interview protocol were used for data gathering. One hundred and six people in the area were conveniently sampled to become respondents in the study. For the method of data analysis, the researcher used tables and percentages. The study found out that nearly 25% of the citizens have no or very little understanding of the decentralization process. Even though majority of the citizens took part in local elections, the citizens were not part of the decision making process, planning of developmental projects and paying taxes/levies to the district assembly. The non-performance of Unit Committee Members were found to be the cause of citizens' non-participation in the decentralization programme even though there were other factors that generally affected the programme in the North Tongu District. The study recommended that the need for some more education in the Decentralization Process for all citizens.*

**KEYWORDS:** Citizen, Participation, Stakeholders, decentralization, Ghana

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### INTRODUCTION

The last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the emergence of decentralization as the major public administration system in most Third World Countries (Gibson, Lacy & Dougherty, 2004). Decentralization became an important policy objective during the 1970s and 1980s in developing countries. Political leaders from the Latin American states through the Asian countries to the African states adopted decentralization. The decentralization process was intended to make local government more efficient, accessible, beneficial and participatory. Decentralization is believed to integrate local knowledge into local administration. Participation and decentralization have a symbiotic relationship in bringing governance closer to the people, making them to participate in the administration of the locality. Successful decentralization requires some degree of local participation (World Bank Report, n.d.) and citizen participation is an essential part of successful decentralization. At the heart of any decentralization process is citizen participation either as a "token involvement of people" or "autonomous decision making".

Whatever the conception, decentralization is not new to Ghana. Ghana's decentralization process started with the introduction of Native Authorities by the Colonial Government in 1878 (Institute of Local Government Studies (ILGS), 2006). Between 1957 and 1988, efforts were made by

successive Ghanaian governments to decentralize authority to the local level. These took the form of regional devolution and district focused public administration with some form of the citizens' participation and involvement in the decision-making process.

Ghana's current decentralization process, which started in 1988, with the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC), PNDC Law 207, established the District Assemblies and assigned functions to them. In furtherance of achieving the goal and objectives of the decentralization process, the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana and various legislations on decentralization articulate explicit objectives of decentralization such as empowerment, participation, accountability, effectiveness, efficiency, responsiveness, decongestion of the national capital and the stemming of the rural-urban drift (Module A: Decentralization Policies and Practices, 2003).

Since Ghana started decentralization, there have been calls from individuals, corporate bodies and political parties to review the provisions of the 1988 Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC)'s decentralization policy of Ghana. Several governments of Ghana since the coming into effect of the policy have tried to make it more practicable to the people. Ghana Web (August 7, 2009. Article 166578) reported: The government (Atta Mills' administration) has decided to review the decentralization process after 20 years of its implementation to enhance local participation in governance and decision-making. The Vice-President, H.E. Mr. John Dramani Mahama stated "after 20 years of decentralization, we believe it is about time we re-examined the process in order to chart a way forward in enhancing local participation in governance and decision-making".

In view of the emerging concerns about the decentralization process in Ghana, the current trends seek to suggest two possibilities. Firstly, that the whole design of the decentralization process is somehow problematic and needs review. One critical element of the decentralization process is citizen participation. Secondly, that there are elements in the decentralization process design that are defective and need correction. However, there is very little study to inform the Ghanaian society about the extent of citizen participation in the decentralization process. There is therefore a need for a systematic study to understand the process with particular focus on citizen participation in it. The research seeks to discover the citizens' views or opinions on the decentralization process and their level of participation in the decentralization process (men and women of 18 years and above who qualify to vote in public elections in Ghana) in the North Tongu District of Ghana. Therefore, at the heart of this case study is an examination of the relationship between citizens, elected and public officials in participating in decision-making of the decentralization process in the North Tongu District of Volta Region of Ghana. This research is designed to conduct a discourse analysis of citizen participation in the decentralization process in the North Tongu District of Ghana.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Two related concepts, the concept of subsidiary, which holds that decisions should be taken at the most appropriate level of government and establishes a presumption that this level will be the lowest available and Global Development, Agenda 21, of the United Nations' action programme for sustainable development have been employed in this study (Ayee, 2002). The Agenda 21

places particular emphasis on consultation, cooperation, transparency, accountability, capacity building and empowerment of citizens through the delegation of authority, accountability and resources (UNCED, 1992). Whereas other conceptual frameworks were employed such as the general views held by many that: Decentralization is a means to local democratization through bringing government closer to the people, with increased political participation and more accountable and responsive local government (Crawford, 2009; Crook, 2003; Ahwoi, 2006; Boateng, 1996). Indeed, the theoretical underpinnings of the establishment of the local government system in Ghana, the District Assemblies (DAs) and the Unit Committees (UCs) can be gauged by the tenets of the landmark in the global development that is Agenda 21, the United Nations' action programme for sustainable development. In practice, this means that local people (citizens) themselves generate, share, analyze, prioritize, and contribute to, or control, decision-making (Aye & Amponsah, 2002). In addition, that it enhances local democracy and leads to government that is more responsive were used to investigate citizen participation in the decentralization process in Ghana with attention to the North Tongu district of the Volta Region.

### **Defining Decentralization**

As Crook (2003) noted, decentralization is a complex political and institutional process. There are varied definitions of decentralization as assigned by the experts. Smith, (1985:1) observes the concept of decentralization means, "reversing the concentration of administration at a single Centre and conferring powers on local government". Rondinelli, (1981) states decentralization is the "transfer of authority to plan, make decisions, and manage public functions from a higher level of government to any individual, organization or any agency at a lower level". Ahwoi, (2006) looks at it as a tool of public administration reform that involves the transfer of functions, powers, means, resources, skills, and competence to lower levels of governance, normally, structures of local government. In its most basic definition, decentralization is the transfer of part of the powers of the central government to regional, district or local authorities. A more comprehensive definition of decentralization as a concept is the general view held by experts, as the transfer of responsibility (authority), resources (human and financial), and accountability from central government to local self-governing entity.

Scholars generally identified three forms of decentralization (Rondinelli, 1981; Rondinelli, et al., 1989; Prud'homme, 1995). To them this involves a long process of political, fiscal and administrative decentralization. When only responsibility or authority is transferred but not resources-, there is deconcentration. When responsibility and resources are transferred, there is delegation. When there is the transfer of responsibility, resources and accountability (partially or completely) there is the devolution or democratic decentralization (Rondinelli, 1981; Rondinelli, et al., 1989; Prud'homme, 1995; Conyers, 1985; Smith, 1985; Mawhood, 1993) (Cited by Aye, 2002).

Others further explain that decentralization is a means to local democratization through bringing government closer to the people, with increased political participation and more accountable and responsive local government (Crawford, 2009; Crook, 2003; Ahwoi, 2006; Boateng, 1996). Ahwoi (2000) alleges that the academic and other writers on decentralization very often confuse the term decentralization with other concepts that look like decentralization but could at best be described as variants of administrative decentralization. He maintains that deconcentration,

devolution, delegation are alternative to decentralization. However, decentralization is upheld to be a local knowledge and interest brought to bear more freely upon local administration, which aim at bringing governance closer to the people and making them more participatory in the administration of the locality. It enhances local democracy and leads to government that is more responsive. Therefore, decentralization processes are partly or complete efforts and actions that are directed to involve the local people in administering their locality.

### **Types of Decentralization**

The Center for Democracy and Governance: United States Agency for International Development (USAID, 2000) and Ayee, (2003) recognize three types of decentralization: devolution, deconcentration, and delegation. Devolution is the creation or increased reliance upon sub national levels of government, with some degrees of political autonomy, that are substantially outside direct central government control yet subject to general policies and laws, such as those regarding civil rights and rule of law. Delegation is the transfer of managerial responsibility for a specific defined function outside the usual central government structure. However, Ahwoi, (2003:9) contends this position stating “rather, those concepts, Devolution, Deconcentration and Delegation are alternative attempts at achieving an efficient and effective public administration system; they are not forms/types of decentralization”, he concluded.

### **Historical Background of Decentralization in Ghana**

Local government in Ghana started with the introduction of Native Authorities by the Colonial Government in 1878 (Institute of Local Government Studies, ILGS). The then traditional rulers served as central figures in the local government. Several, forms of Local Governments were practised over the years in Ghana. Between 1950 and 1957; the two-tier local government system (ILGS, 2006), Local Government (Amendment) Act 359(1971) amended in 1974, the National Redemption Council Decree (NRC) 258, the District Council (DC), (ILGS, 2006) and the current District Assembly (PNDC LAW 207) 1988 (Model A, Decentralization, Policies and Practices, 2003).

In 1952, a new form of decentralized authority based on the recommendations of the Watson Commission (1948) and the Coussey Committee (1949) was introduced. The local government councils were composed of with two-third elected membership and one-third chiefs with paramount chiefs as presidents of the councils (Ayee and Amponsah, 2002). In 1974, another attempt at reform of decentralization resulted in the establishment of 65 district councils. Membership of the council remained same as at the 1952 reforms. In 1978, another attempt was made by the then General Akuffo’s Supreme Military Council (SMC) government to further decentralize the public administration in Ghana by holding a district council election throughout Ghana. However, the decentralization process was touted and short-lived because of a coup d’état that overthrew the SMC government in 1979 led by Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings.

### **The 1992 Constitution of Ghana and the Decentralization Programme**

The main features of Ghana’s decentralization programme were enshrined in the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, the Local Government Act of 1993, the Civil Service Law of 1993, the National Development Planning Act of 1994, and the District Assemblies Common Fund Act of 1993 (Kumi-Kyereme, Yankson and Thomi, 2006).

Crawford, (2009) opines that the principles of decentralization and participation in government were strongly endorsed in the 1992 Constitution by this prescription that

The State shall take appropriate measures to make democracy a reality by decentralizing the administrative and financial machinery of government to the regions and districts and by affording all possible opportunities to the people to participate in decision-making at every level in national life and in government. [Article 35(6) d]

The decentralization process in Ghana has two key levels, those of central government and local government at the district level. The local government system is made up of a Regional Coordinating Council (RCC), a four-tier Metropolitan, and three-tier Municipal/District Assembly structures (MLGRD, 1996).

### **Meaning of Citizen Participation**

Citizen participation theory asserts citizen participation as a process which provides private individual an opportunity to influence public decisions and has long been a component of the democratic decision-making process (Parker, 2002). Within that conception, citizen participation can be approached or defined in many ways. A citizen participates in community affairs when one pays taxes, obeys the law or takes part in community elections. Connecting the idea of citizen to participation follows a conception of citizenship that takes the idea beyond the political science conception to where it is connected to participation and process. It challenges notions of citizenship by Simonsen (2017) as a purely formal matter of having a certain objective status - the officially sanctioned mark of one's membership of a political community, of a state. The works of social studies professionals such as Adzahlie-Mensah and Gyamfuaa-Abrefa (2017) explained that citizenship is based around participation and 'process' than legal status. For them citizenship requires the possession of a range of knowledge, skills and dispositions. To be effective, includes that the individual possesses citizenship *skills*: investigating, communicating, participating, negotiating, taking responsible action; as well as enough knowledge and confidence to take part effectively. Dagnino (2007) made the same point in arguing that citizenship depended on citizens being active social subjects, defining their rights, and struggling for these rights to be recognised. In a similar discourse Berner, (2001) states effective method in involving citizens in public discussion include public hearings, special open meetings (town meetings), opportunities to speak at regular meetings, citizen advisory boards, mails in coupons, coffee-house conversations, surveys, web-sites/e-mail, visits to local civic groups, visits to neighbourhood associations and contact initiated by citizens.

### **Statement of the Problem**

An informed, concerned and participatory citizenry is the cornerstone of democracy. Ghana's political history since her independence in 1957 reflects an alternation between civilian governments and military regimes. These governments practised various forms of Public Administration: de-concentration, devolution, delegation, and decentralization, over the past half a century of Ghana's nationhood as a state.

The 1992 Constitution of Ghana provides in Article 240 (1) (d) and (e) that (d)

As far as practicable, persons in the service of local government shall be subject to the effective control of local authorities, and



(e) To ensure the accountability of local government authorities, people in particular local government areas shall, as far as practicable, be afforded the opportunity to participate effectively in their governance.

The Local Government structure with Urban, Zonal and Town Councils and Unit Committees established by Legislative Instrument (1589, 1994) provides under the Fifth Schedule (9) that unit committees were to “provide a focal point for the discussion of local problems and take remedial action where necessary or make recommendations to the assembly where appropriate, through the relevant Urban, Zonal or Town Council”. One other specific objective of Ghana’s decentralization process is to promote and sustain community participation including decision-making for development benefit. These provisions have made the individual a major player in the decentralization process. However, there is a question of the individual’s participation in the decentralization process. The lack of awareness of the citizens of their roles and responsibilities in the decentralization process may not augur well in the process of nation building.

There have been several calls to empower the citizens at the local levels to be more participatory in the decentralization process (*Daily Graphic*, August 8, 2009, Nov.23, 2006, April 24 & 25, 2006, Oct.14, 2002). Despite the fact that the individuals are aware that they are to vote during elections in selecting representatives to various levels of the local government system, the seeming ignorance of citizens about their ownership of those institutions suggest that they have little knowledge about their roles as stakeholders in the implementation of the decentralization process. After elections, most citizens play very little role in the decentralization process. It is also becoming clear that most Ghanaians (individuals) do not really understand the policy frameworks of governments, the decentralization process notwithstanding. Considering the sensitive nature of our young democracy, the researchers are taking a critical look at the citizens’ views/opinions of the decentralization process in connection to the citizens (individuals) participation in the decentralization process to consider how this potentially powerful tool can be utilized for the benefit of all.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to explore citizen’s views and understandings of Ghana’s decentralization process, how the citizens are involved in the decentralization process and examine key factors that affect the implementation of the decentralization process in the North Tongu District.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions are:

1. What are the views of citizens about the decentralization process in the North Tongu District?
2. To what extent are the citizens in the North Tongu District participating in the decentralization process (Local Government System) in Ghana?

### **Significance of the Study**

This micro level study sought to provide insights that will be useful to political administrators, civil society and theorists on ways to enhance the decentralization process. The

study highlighted views from the field about the citizens' experiences with the decentralization process. It therefore produced knowledge that is useful for future planning and any future reorganization of the decentralization process. It tried to generate knowledge at a micro level that provides a basis for large-scale studies to unearth challenges that underlie the decentralization process. The study headlined challenges faced by citizens as they attempt to perform their roles under the 1992 Constitution and how they are negotiating such challenges. The results may serve useful information that might be the basis for national policy options on citizens' participation in the decentralization process. The entire research product provides useful information that adds to the store of knowledge on the North Tongu District. It is useful as a working manual in enhancing citizens' participation in local governance.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The research design is a case study. Case study design as observed by Merriam (1998) is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than the outcome, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation; insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice and future research.

### **The Study Population**

The population for the research was residents of the North Tongu District in the Volta region of Ghana, especially the voter population in the district. The target population was categorized into three groups: government officials, the people's representatives (MPs, AMs & UCMs) and the citizens whose opinions were to confirm or deny data from the government officials and the elected representatives.

### **Sample and Sampling Techniques**

Generally, the purposive sampling procedure was employed. The purposive sampling procedure was the best option for all the target population. However, in cases where the researchers had to choose instead of targeting a whole population (e.g. 4 assembly members from 42) the convenient method was employed in the selection of the respondents. In all, a total sample of 115 respondents was targeted for the research, 15 respondents for interview and 100 respondents for questionnaire.

### **Data collection and analysis**

The main instruments used in gathering data for the research were interview protocol and questionnaire. The questionnaire and the interview protocol were self-designed instruments. The collection of the data for the research was done in two phases. The first phase was interviewing public and civil stakeholders and some of the assembly members and unit committee members in the decentralization process in the district over a six- week period. The second phase was the administration of questionnaire to residents in the North Tongu District. The qualitative data from interviews conducted were analyzed manually by making summaries of the views of the respondents and supporting these relevant quotations that spelt out the views of the respondents. A simple percentage was used to analyze the quantitative data obtained.

## RESULTS

### Research Question One: What are the views of citizens about the decentralization process in the North Tongu District?

This research question has been answered under three sub-sections: citizen perspectives on the decentralization process; perspectives on the unit committee system; and perspectives on their Assembly Members and decentralization process. The responses are presented in tables and the analysis is supported by critical statements from interviews which shed more light on the questionnaire response.

#### Citizens Perspectives on the Decentralization Process

**Table 1: Citizen Perspectives on the Decentralization Process**

ITEMS	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	TOTAL (%)
1. The decentralization process is relevant to me (local government system)	39(42.2)	39(42.2)	11(12.0)	3(3.3)	0(0.0)	92(100.0)
2. I understand the decentralization process	26(28.3)	41(44.6)	11(12.0)	11(12.0)	3(3.3)	92(100.0)
3. The decentralization process has achieved its goals.	1(1.1)	15(16.3)	41(44.6)	23(25.0)	12(13.0)	92(100.0)
4. The decentralization process is for the selected few in the community.	2(2.2)	8(8.7)	16(17.4)	32(34.8)	34(37.0)	92(100.0)
5. The decentralization process has positive impact on the local people	6(6.5)	24(26.1)	33(35.9)	17(18.5)	12(13.0)	92(100.0)

Item 1 shows that 78 respondents representing 84.8% agreed that the decentralization process is relevant to them. Out of that number 39 (42.4%) strongly agree that the decentralization process is relevant. The data also shows that 3 (3.3%) respondents disagree with the view that the decentralization process is relevant. The Item shows, 11 respondents representing as much as 12% were uncertain about the relevance of the decentralization process.

Item 2 shows responses to the statement, I understand the decentralization process. As the responses Item 2 shows 67 (72.9%) respondents agreed that they understand what the decentralization process is about, whereas 14 (15%) indicated they do not understand the decentralization process. Item 2 also shows that 11 respondents representing 12% of the sampled population were uncertain whether they understand the decentralization process or not. Interviews with participants indicated that they understood the concept of decentralization. The interviewees were asked how the decentralization process (local government system) worked. One respondent said, 'In short the aim of the decentralization concept is to bring power, governance and accountability near the grassroots'. Another respondent commented that, 'the decentralization process means that the administration of the country should be extended to the grassroots, that the grassroots should have a say in the planning of the development of the nation.' One thing that was clear in the interview responses was the articulation of the idea that the decentralization process is supposed to eulogize a 'button-up' approach to development. One



respondent who gave a more explicit response explained the decentralization process in Ghana as follows:

*The decentralization process is a way of getting decision making to the grassroots within the communities; from the grassroots right up to the national level. We have the Unit Committees(UCs), Area Councils, Town Councils or Zonal Councils, District Assemblies, Regional Coordinating Councils (RCC) and National. The unit committees are within the communities, the town councils and area councils that form the larger councils then we have the general assembly at the district assembly, the RCC at the region and the Local Government Ministry at the national level. The UCs mobilize the people within the communities; whatever concerns, challenges and grievances they have, they channeled them through the Town /Area Councils (their chairmen and secretaries) and forwarded them through the Assembly Members to the District Assembly.*

This goes to confirm the findings of the questionnaire data that majority of the citizens in the North Tongu District understand the decentralization concept. Item 3 shows that only 16 (17%) of the citizens agreed the decentralization process has achieved its goals in the North Tongu District. The data shows that 34(38%) of the citizens disagreed that decentralization process achieved its goals. As the Table shows 41(45%) of respondents were uncertain about whether the decentralization process in North Tongu District has achieved its goals. Table 7 also shows that 23 (25%) of respondents disagree with the view that the decentralization process has achieved its goals in the North Tongu District while another 13% strongly disagree.

The results from the interviews on whether the decentralization process has achieved its goal and objectives are not different from the results from the questionnaire data. Out of the 14 interviewees, only one argued that the decentralization process has achieved its goals in the District. The interviewee explained that:

*In the instance, that awareness has been created at the local level that there is the need for people to participate in local governance and the people's ideas, because it is the people's needs and lots that must be improved. So, now that they are aware they have the assembly and their representatives are there and the unit committees.*

Those who disagreed are of the view that the major problem is with the ineffectiveness of the 'bottom-up' value of the decentralization process. In their view, the Unit Committee level is the basis of the decentralization process. However, they argued that there is little evidence of any effectiveness at the Unit Committee level. One informant explained that,

*If you look at the Unit level that is unit committee, because I, I always have the understandings and perception that the action spot is the unit level. That is where the people reside, where the action takes place. However, the unit committees unfortunately have no provision for their remuneration, so it is less or more a sacrificial work. Therefore, with the situation where the economy is not buoyant and people not having the way they want because of the economic hardship, people tend to leave what it is for society, that communal spirit, apparently you must survive first before to be able to put your talent at the disposal of society. Because we realize the participation of unit committee is lacking except certain few people who are committed.*

These concerns relate closely to the question of election and how those elected turn to act. Therefore, we turn to explore views on how people view the decentralization process from the perspective of having to elect representatives. The views are presented in Item 4. The result indicates that only 10(11%) of respondents thought that the elected representatives are accountable to the citizens during elections. The majority 68(72%) of respondents disagreed that the representatives were accountable to the people. They thought that the decentralization process is for the elected few and some staff in the District Assembly. Item 4 also shows that 16(17%) respondents were uncertain whether the decentralization concept is for the privileged in the district.

Item 5 presents the views of respondents on whether the decentralization process has had a positive impact on the actions and activities of the local people. The table reveals a rather interesting finding. The data shows 30(33%) of respondents agreed that decentralization has imparted positively on the local people while 29(31%) disagreed. Interestingly, 33(36%) of respondents were uncertain.

### **The Unit Committee Members and Decentralization Process**

Under subsection, Unit Committee Members and Decentralization process, we turn to look at the respondents' assessment of the work of decentralization process based on the work of the Unit Committee Members (UCMs) in the North Tongu District. The first analysis in Table 2 shows the respondents' perspective on whether they think the Unit Committees are functional: the members are active and work in an organized manner.

**Table 2: Views on the functionality of Unit Committee Members (UCM)**

ITEMS	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	TOTAL (%)
6. organized manner.	3(3.3)	11(12.0)	12(13.0)	46(50.0)	20(21.7)	92(100.0)
7. developmental projects	4(4.3)	8(8.7)	16(17.4)	47(51.1)	17(18.5)	92(100.0)
8. problem affecting the community.	4(4.3)	11(12.0)	14(15.2)	48(52.2)	5(16.3)	92(100.0)
9. the people for development projects	5(5.4)	11(12.0)	14(15.2)	40(43.5)	22(23.9)	92(100.0)
10. on their roles and responsibilities.	5(5.4)	9(9.8)	14(15.2)	37(40.2)	27(29.)	92(100.0)
11. in decision-making.	5(5.4)	7(7.6)	16(17.4)	37(40.2)	26(28.6)	92(100.0)

The responses in Table 2 show that only 14 representing 15% of the respondents agreed that the members of the Unit Committees are active and work in an organized manner. The majority of respondents (66) representing 72% of the respondents disagreed. Item 6 shows that another 12(13%) of the respondents were uncertain. Things were not essentially different when it comes to the question of the relevance of the Unit Committees in contributing to local development (see Table 2).

Item 7 in Table 2 shows that 12 (13%) of the respondents agree that the work of the Unit Committee Members was contributing to local development. The majority (64) representing 70% of the respondents disagreed and 16(17%) were uncertain. One participant interviewed observed, “The UCMs are supposed to be the first organ to be identified within the community or the electoral area, they are headed by the AM but it seems they lack that focus. They are only there in name; they really do not know their work”. Another interviewee said the UCMs are there in principle.

Item 8 shows respondents’ views on how prompt the unit committee members address problems affecting the communities in the North Tongu District. As table 8 shows, 15 (16%) of the respondents agree the unit committee members promptly address problems affecting the communities. However, the majority of the respondents, 63 representing 69% disagree that the unit committee members are prompt to address communal concerns about development. The other 14 (15%) respondents were uncertain. This pattern is also reflected in Item 9, which shows the respondents’ views on whether the UCMs organize the people for development.

Item 9 shows that 16 (17%) of respondents agreed UCMs mobilize members of their communities (Units) for the implementation of self-help and development projects. However, item 9 also shows that 62 (77%) respondents disagree while 14 (15%) of the respondents were uncertain. As the Unit Committee Members are expected to educate the people in the unit on their rights, privileges, obligations, and responsibilities (ILGS, 2006) I sought the respondents view on the subject. The result is presented in item 10.

Table 2 presents the responses of the respondents which show that 14(15%) agreed that UCMs have been educating their communities on their rights, roles and responsibilities. Again, Item 10 also shows that 64 (70%) of respondents disagree while the other 14 representing (15%) were uncertain. A similar picture was evident in Item 11, which presents findings from respondents’ views on whether UCMs involve citizens in decision-making. Item 11 indicates that 12 (14%) respondents agreed that the UCMs members actively engage with the community members to make decisions about the proposals that should be submitted to the Area or Town councils on behalf of the community. As the table shows, 63(69%) disagree while 16 (17%) were uncertain.

### **Assembly Members (AMs) and Decentralization Process**

This subsection presents data on the respondents’ views on work of Assembly Members in the decentralization process. Tables 3 presents the data gathered on the respondents’ views on the decentralization process in relation to the work of the Assembly Members in the North Tongu District of Volta Region.

**Table 3: The Assembly Member (AM) and Decentralization Process**

ITEMS	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	TOTAL (%)
12. The AM works in collaboration with UCMs, TAs and citizens	9(9.8)	40(43.5)	21(22.8)	5(16.3)	7(7.6)	92(100.0)
13. The AM is prompt to address problems affecting the community.	14(15.2)	33(5.9)	11(12.0)	2(23.9)	12(13.0)	92(100.0)
14. The AM maintains a clear focus on the development of the community.	3(14.1)	32(34.8)	16(17.4)	20(21.7)	9(9.8)	92(100.0)
15. The AM involves the community members in decision-making	17(18.5)	31(33.7)	16(17.4)	20(21.7)	6(6.5)	92(100.0)
16. The AM holds regular meetings with the people in the community	12(13.0)	29(31.5)	17(18.5)	28(30.4)	6(6.5)	92(100.0)
17. The AM discusses the assembly's agenda with the people in the community	5(5.4)	17(18.5)	30(32.6)	30(32.6)	10(10.6)	92(100.0)
18. The AM evaluates the district and the community's issues with the peoples	3(3.3)	17(18.5)	35(38.0)	28(30.4)	9(9.8)	92(100.0)

Table 3 shows that 49 respondents representing 53% agreed that Assembly Members work in collaboration with other stakeholders such as traditional leaders and citizens. However, 22 respondents representing 24% disagreed while 15 responses representing 16% were uncertain. As a result, the next item (Item 13) presents views on whether Assembly Members promptly discuss issues with the community as and when they arise. Item 13 shows that 47(51%) respondents agreed that Assembly Members promptly discuss issues with their constituents while 33(37%) disagreed. The data also shows that 11 (12%) were uncertain that their Assembly Members discuss issues promptly with constituents. Another duty of the AM in the decentralization process, the local government system is to take part in communal and development activities in the district precisely within his electoral area. Analysis of result in Table 3 shows 45 respondents representing 48.9% agreed, (29, 31.5%) and (16,17.4%) responses disagreed and uncertain respectively. The trend as shown in the responses is rather an interesting one. Half the respondents were either uncertain or disagreed. The question to be asked is, is there no existence of any development projects in those communities? Could it be that the respondents who disagreed or uncertain have not seen any developmental projects carried out by the district assembly since the inception of the decentralization programme in their community or otherwise. However, the result indicates majority agreed AMs maintain a clear focus on the development of the communities in the North Tongu District.

The AM has the duty to meet his electorate before each meeting of the assembly, consult his people on issues to be discussed in the district assembly and collate their views, opinion, and proposals thus involve the electorate in the decision making process. Item 15 reveals that 48 responses representing 52.2% agreed that AMs involve the community members in decision-making, while (16, 17.4%) and 26 responses representing 28.2% were uncertain and disagreed respectively. Even though a majority of the citizens agreed AMs engage the citizens in the decision-making process, there are also varied views as indicated in the summary shown above. One duty the AM must undertake is to consult his people on issues to be discussed in the district assembly and collate their views, opinion, and proposals; present the views, opinions and

proposals to the district assembly. Consultation may take several forms. One common form of consultation in Ghana is to hold meeting with the parties that matters. Table 3 reveals that AMs in the North Tongu District partly hold regular meetings with the electorates. 41 respondents representing 44.5% agreed AMs hold regular meetings in their electoral areas, 34 respondents disagreed and 17, (18.5%) of the respondents questioned were uncertain. Details of the result of the AMs discussing the assembly's agenda with the people in the community are presented in Item 17, 22 respondents representing 23.9% of the targeted population questioned agreed, (40, 43.2%) disagreed while 30 responses representing 32.6 percentage were uncertain.

From Table 3 it is observed that 20 respondents representing 21.8% indicated that AMs do evaluate the district and the community's issues with the people, 37 or 40.2% of them disagreed yet 28 respondents representing 30.4% of the respondents were uncertain the AMs evaluate the district and communities with the peoples. The result shows majority of the respondents disagree AMs evaluate district and community issues with the electorates.

### Citizen's participation in the decentralization process

In this section, the findings of the study in relation with the second research question are presented.

#### Research Question Two

To what extent are the citizens in the North Tongu District participating in the decentralization process (Local Government System) in Ghana?

The research question has been answered under three sub-sections: Citizens, involvement in decentralization process; Relevance of issues/matters at community meetings and Decentralization and stakeholders.

**Table 4: Citizens' Participation (Involvement) in the Decentralization Process**

ITEMS	A (%)	O (%)	S (%)	N (%)	Total (%)
19. Do Unit Committee members organize meetings in your community?	1(1.1)	22(23.9)	13(14.1)	56(60.9)	92(100.0)
20. Do you often participate in those organized meetings?	7(7.8)	15(16.7)	7(7.8)	60(66.7)	92(100.0)
21. Do you see yourself participating in the decision-making process?	9(9.8)	19(20.7)	6(6.5)	58(63.1)	92(100.0)
22. I take part in the decision making process in the community	11(12.0)	26(28.3)	19(20.7)	36(39.1)	92(100.0)
23. I attend meetings organized by UCM in my community	10(10.9)	18(19.6)	9(9.8)	53(57.6)	92(100.0)
24. I have taken part in local elections since the beginning of the DA concept	46(50.0)	23(25.0)	5(5.4)	18(19.8)	92(100.0)
25. I take part in making decisions on community development projects	18(19.6)	34(37.0)	13(14.1)	26(28.3)	92(100.0)
26. I attend communal works organized for developmental project in my locality	37(40.2)	36(39.1)	8(8.7)	11(12.0)	92(100.0)
27. I pay my taxes and other levies to the District Assembly	34(37.0)	16(17.4)	13(14.1)	29(31.5)	92(100.0)
28. I am part of the development planning in my community	22(23.9)	25(27.2)	11(12.0)	33(35.9)	92(100.0)



Table 4 presents the findings on the extent to which unit committee members organize meetings to enable citizens to participate in the decentralization process through meeting attendance. Item 19 reveals 23 respondents representing 25% agreed UCMs organize community meetings while the majority of the respondents (69 or 75%) disagreed. This is a confirmation of earlier findings of UCMs non-functioning in the North Tongu District. Item 20 finds out whether the citizens participate in such meetings if they are organized. The data in Table 4 depict that majority of the citizens who responded to the questionnaire disagreed that they often participate in meetings organized by UCMs in their unit. Out of the 92 responses 7(7.8%) responded always, 15(16.7%) occasionally, 7 (7.8%) seldom and 60(66.7%) not at all.

Item 21 revealed that majority of the citizens that responded to the questionnaire disagreed they are part of the decision making process in their various units for that matter the district as a whole. 9 responses representing 9.8% stated always, 19(20.7%) stated occasionally while 6 respondents representing 6.5% seldom and 58(63.1%) not at all.

The results confirmed what one of the Heads of the decentralized department said; “the citizens are partially participating in the decentralization process. Partially, because assembly members are not doing their work to the satisfaction of the concept, you go to an assembly member, ask him how long you have met your people, he will say for some times now I have not met them. When the assembly members meet at the assembly meeting they do not go back to discuss the issues with their people.”

Item 22 asked a specific question whether the citizens take part in the decision-making in their community. Table 4 shows that out of the 92 responses 11(12.0%) indicated always, 26 (28.3%) occasionally, 19 (20.7%) seldom and 36 (39.1%) not at all. From the data there are varied views expressed by the respondents. The findings from the interview are not different from that of the questionnaire. One respondent stated:

They are involved in one way or the other, because any decision that is carried out by the assembly is embraced by all and sundry, so to some extent they are involved in decision-making. Normally, before assembly members come to session or meetings they gather the views of the citizens in the community and when they come to the floor of the house they factor those views into the decisions taken.

Yet, another has this to say:

You cannot see any meaningful participation of those at the grassroots. In addition, when you come to the area councils and town councils, it is almost the same and it depends on three key issues, resources, the capacity of the people to participate; and how much awareness has gone to the people to enable them participate in decision-making and governance. If you look at all the three dimensions not much has been done to bring decentralization to the doorsteps of the people.

Item 23 is a replica of Item 19 to determine the consistency of the respondents' answer. The results shows 10(10.9%) respondents said they attend always meetings organized by UCMs, 18(19.6%) occasionally, 9(9.8%) seldom and 53(57.6%) not at all respectively. The finding is an

indication that the citizens disagreed that they attend meetings organized by UCMs in their communities.

Article 42 of the 1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana gives the right to vote to all citizens of voting age in Ghana. 'Every citizen of Ghana of eighteen years of age or above and of sound mind has the right to vote and is entitled to be registered as a voter for the purposes of public elections and referenda' (Constitution of Ghana, 1992). From Table 4 it is observed that majority of the respondents indicated they have taken part in local elections in the North Tongu District. 69(75.0%) out of the 92 respondents agreed while 23 respondents representing 25% either part took in local elections seldom or not at all respectively.

One interview participant said what confirms the outcome of the findings,

*Right now, the involvement of the citizens in the decentralization process is seen just in voting. They vote to elect assembly members and unit committee members and they think that is all.*

When asked whether they are part of the decision-making body that decides on projects in the community, 52 respondents representing 56.6% agreed while (39, 42.4%) of the respondents disagreed. However, majority of the respondents agreed they attend communal works that execute developmental projects. 73(80%) agreed as against 20% that disagreed. The analysis item 27 relating to participation in the payment of taxes and other levies to the district assembly shows 50 respondents representing 54.4% out of the 92 responses stated; they always or occasionally pay their taxes and levies against 42 respondents representing 45.6% who stated they pay seldom or not at all. The finding implies almost 50% of the targeted sample population in the North Tongu district do not pay any tax or levies to the district assembly.

The next item 28 as presented in Table 4 asked citizens to indicate whether they are part of the development planning in their units. From the data given, 47(51.1%) indicated they participate always or occasionally while 44(47.9%) of respondents indicated seldom or not at all. The result is an indication that majority of the citizens are not part of the development planning process in their units in the North Tongu District of Volta Region of Ghana.

The findings from the interview protocol on citizen participation in the decentralization process in the North Tongu District were significant. Out of the 14 interviewees 7 participants representing 50% stated the citizens are involved in one form or the other, 4 participants representing 28.5% stated the citizens are partially involved in the decentralization process while 3 others representing 21.4% stated the citizens are not involved in the decentralization process.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

Generally, the study reveals that approximately 75% of the residents of North Tongu District (NTD) have a fair understanding of the decentralization process. However, the other 25% have little understanding of the decentralization process. It was identified that decentralization eulogizes the need to involve all local stakeholders including the 'ordinary' citizens who must be actively involved in decision-making.

The results show that most citizens (residents) were of the view that the decentralization process is not responsive enough to the needs and aspirations of the local people. The respondents

believe the decentralization process has not achieved its goal and objectives in the district. Respondents were of the view that Unit Committees Members (UCMs) are non-performing, dysfunctional and lack focus. The UCMs neither organized the citizens in the units nor educate them on any aspect of the decentralization process. In contrast to the view held about the UCs, the study reveals that Assembly Members (AMs) in spite of the challenges they face were more responsive to the needs of the citizens. Although they do not discuss the outcomes of Assembly meetings with their electorates, they were perceived to be more accountable than the DCEs and UCs.

The study examined citizens' participation in four main areas, namely: citizen participation in decision-making, local elections, communal works and paying taxes/levies. Respondents do not feel that they participate in the decision-making. The Unit Committee members who must create the avenue for the citizens to participate in decision-making do not organize public meetings in the units. As such, the Unit Committee Members become embittered and frustrated, because the unit committee work is sacrificial and voluntary.

The study reveals that respondents participate in voting during local elections to elect AMs and UCMs. However, respondents were not participating in deciding on developmental projects for the communities, except to support communal labour by attending communal works. They do not attend community meetings because the meetings are neither not organized or do not address developmental issues that are of interest to them. The study found that half of the respondents honour their tax obligations. However, interview results show citizens do not pay their taxes and levies in the district.

### **Recommendations**

From the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. There is the need for some more education in the decentralization process for all citizenry.
2. District Assembly Staff, Assembly Members and Unit Committee Members should be given education on ways to effectively involve their constituents in the decentralization process.
3. The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development should establish monitoring mechanisms to assess the extent citizens' engagement/participation in the decentralization process in the North Tongu District and beyond.
4. There is need for some re-organization of the Unit Committees. Re-organized Unit Committees should be supported with small Grant Schemes to help them coordinate governance in the local units.
5. There should be a system of selecting DCEs, which references accountability to the local area.
6. Create a fund, Assembly Member Common Fund (AMCF) or Electoral Area Common Fund (EACF) parallel to Member of Parliament Common Fund (MPCF) to speed up developments in the units.

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