Examining Youth Participation in Local Governance: The Case of Selected Districts in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The participation of Ghana's youth in its democratic governance in recent times cannot be overemphasised. The youth have non-restrictive opportunities to be elected, exercise their franchise and subsequently involve in local and national development activities. The Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) have a stake in the development, implementation and coordination of local and national policies that inure to youth activities and development. The study examines youth participation in governance among three districts in Ghana adopting a mixed research method by combining qualitative and quantitative methods. It used survey questionnaires, focus group discussion and interview for its primary data collection. The research was conducted in three assemblies namely Yilo Krobo Municipal Assembly, Awutu Senya District Assembly and Ashaiman Municipal Assembly. In all, 220 persons were targeted as respondents for the quantitative data and 24 for the qualitative data. A total of 220 questionnaires were administered out of which 140 were completed and returned by respondents while the qualitative interviews were administered to all the 24 respondents. On development activities, 70 percent of the respondents do not know of any development activities for the youth in the districts. None of the three MMDAs has a tailor-made local policy and programmes on youth development. Consequently, the youth is challenged in relating with the assembly and do not contribute to the decision making and execution of local development plans. There is no specific unit or sub-committee in any of the districts that has the responsibility of overseeing youth development. District Assemblies should develop district specific youth policies or localize national youth policies in order to meet the orientation, aspiration, culture and the world view of the youth in their localities.

Keywords: Youth, Participation, Local Governance, Yilo Krobo Municipal, Ashaiman Municipal, Awutu Senya District

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I. INTRODUCTION

The youth is recognized as critical mass for development and transformation of conflict situations and this potential should be harnessed for national development (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2021). Young people aged between 15 and 24 years constitute 19.4 percent of total population in Africa (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2017). Africa's blueprint and master plan of Agenda 2063 that seek to transform Africa into the global powerhouse of the future recognizes the youth as critical resource and tool. This agenda is reinforced by the Africa Youth Charter (AYC), adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Governments in Banjul, The Gambia, in 2006 crystallizing the recognition of youth in Africa's development by providing a continental framework with provisions on youth rights, duties and freedoms; active participation in the continent's development at all levels; guidelines and responsibilities of Member States to promote empowerment; and responsibilities to contribute to national, regional and continental development (African Union, 2006). The United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development in a 2012 survey concluded that limited opportunities for effective and efficient participation in decision making is one of the critical challenges facing the youth worldwide (United Nations, 2012). The World Program of Action for Youth has recognized that the active engagement of youth in decision-making is central to development and has affirmed the full participation of the youth in decision-making as one of its ten (10) core priority areas for immediate action.

The age structure of Ghana's population has moved from one dominated by children (0-14 years) to a dominated one by the youth (15-35 years). There is a percentage decrease of children from 41.3 percent in 2000 to 35.3 percent in 2021, while that of the youth increased from 34.6 percent in 2000 to 38.2 percent in 2021(Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). However, this is yet to reflect on critical steps in harnessing opportunities associated with this indicator. Despite

constitutional, legal and policy frameworks, Ghana is still challenged in promoting youth participation in governance. Challenges such as funding constraints and limited capacity of local mandated institutions on how to meaningfully engage the youth. There is also the challenge of politicized youth development structures. The use of English in meetings and official documents excludes portions of the youth especially the less educated ones in local participation in governance and development issues (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2021).
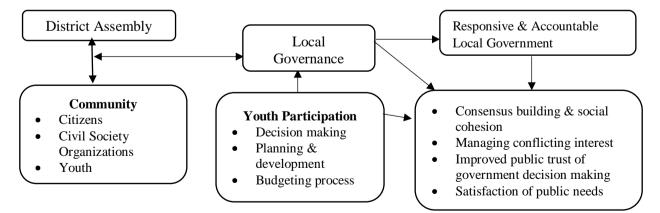
1.1 Objectives of the study
The objectives of the study were to:
  (i)   Ascertain the extent and level of youth participation in local governance in Ghana.
  (ii)   Identify the challenges and opportunities associated with youth participation in local governance.
  (iii) Ascertain the challenges by MMDAs in involving the youth in decision making at the local level and
  (iv)   Make recommendations for improving youth advocacy, empowerment and development in local governance process in Ghana.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual and Theoretical Perspectives
The definitions of concepts and theories guiding the study will be explained. The Pluralist Theory (1968) constitutes the conceptual framework of the study. The origins of the concept of pluralism can be traced to Aristotle in 350 BCE (Wollenberg et. al., 2005). The pluralist claims that policymaking in liberal democracies should be determined by a plurality of groups, which effectively mirrors the interests of society through the interplay of the different interest groups and organisations (Wollenberg et. al., 2005). In addition to participating in elections, ordinary citizens are expected to participate by involving themselves in organisations/groups that represent their interests in the political space. Thus, the local governance system of Ghana, incorporates institutions, mechanisms and processes through which citizens and their groups can articulate their interests at the local level (Jengre & Kpnpuo, 2019). Evidently, the bulging youth at the local level who are a very important interest group are left out in the decision-making process. The pluralist theory and local governance entails inclusion of stakeholders including youth in decision making, planning and budgeting. The ultimate aim is to have responsive and accountable local governments. The participation of the youth and other stakeholders in local governance will promote consensus building, improve public trust of government decision making and satisfaction of public needs. Also, those affected by decision-making will be able to take part in and influence decisions. The central criterion for public participation therefore, is to ensure that all legitimate interests have been given the opportunity to articulate their concerns and not being excluded. A fundamental challenge in participation is ensuring that various interests are engaged in the process, including those normally excluded from decision making by institutionalized inequities (Quick & Bryson, 2016). Bringing stakeholders including the youth around one table through local forum, helps to build trust, encourages innovation and promotes the creation of social networks, fosters consensus and social cohesion, satisfaction of public needs and managing conflict (Mahama, 2009) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework Showing the Relationship between Youth Participation and Local Governance

2.2 Youth participation in Governance

Participation is one of the main pillars of good governance. Public participation in governance is the direct or indirect involvement of citizens through representatives concerned in decision making process about programmes, policies and plans. It is appropriate that when developmental or governance decisions are being taken, the prospective beneficiaries should be involved in the process (Freeman, 2010). Peace, stability and development in Ghana may not only relay on the choices of the youth today and in the future but the perception of society and how their needs are addressed (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2021). According to Jengre and Kpinpuo (2019), youth participation in local government is key to the local development and the country as a whole. It has however emerged that it is often unclear the procedure or strategy to engage the youth should be engaged in decentralized administration of state institutions such as in Ghana's Metropolitan Municipal and District Assemblies. The youth can be engaged in a range of governance processes including participatory governance: planning and budgeting, monitoring, research, youth parliaments and awareness campaigns. Participation in all these processes may involve information sharing, consultation and collaboration. However, meaningful participation of the youth collaboration is recommended because here the youth together with stakeholders at the local level jointly identify issues of common interest, work together to active those interest and share the benefits. The youth become active participants in decision making and not passive participants.

2.3 International Conventions, Treaties and Charter on Youth Participation in Governance

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948.art 21.3) has asserted everyone's "right to take part in the governance of its country, directly or through freely chosen representatives" (Article 21). Regarding the rights of a child, the United Nations has also affirmed various civil and political rights for all individuals above eighteen (18) years of age, including the right to participate: "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (Article 12) (United Nations, 1989).

In 1996, the UN General Assembly adopted the "World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and beyond". Priority ten (10) of this programme is concerned with the "full and effective participation of the youth in the life of society and in decision-making". The UN General Assembly further re-affirmed its commitment to youth participation with resolution A/RES/58/133 in 2003. It emphasizes the "importance of the full and effective participation of youth and youth organizations at the local, national, regional and international levels in promoting and implementing the World Programme of Action and in evaluating the progress achieved and the obstacles encountered in its implementation."

Twenty-seven (27) UN organizations concerned with youth in July 2011, signed an inter-agency statement on the occasion of the UN High-Level Meeting on Youth. On participation, the statement called for "Full and effective youth participation in society and decision-making, in both rural and urban settings, striving to include young people with disabilities, young people living with HIV, indigenous young people, young people from minorities, young migrants, young people who are stateless, internally displaced, young refugees or those affected by humanitarian situations or armed conflict" (United Nations, 2012).

The African Union passed the African Youth Charter in 2006 and Article eleven (11) specifies that every young person has the right to participate in all spheres of society. States parties agreed to "Guarantee the participation of youth in parliament and other decision-making bodies in accordance with the prescribed laws; facilitate the creation or strengthening of platforms for youth participation in decision-making at local, national, regional, and continental levels of governance; ensure equal access to young men and young women to participate in decision-making and in fulfilling civic duties; give priority to policies and programmes including youth advocacy and peer-to-peer programmes for marginalised youth, such as out of-school and out-of-work youth, to offer them opportunity and motivation to re-integrate into mainstream society."

International conventions and treaties on the youth and their participation in governance and development lend credence to the urgency and importance the international community attached to youth and the necessity to develop and consolidate customised interventions for their effectiveness and contribution to society. In Africa, these global aspirations were further translated into regional development plans such as New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP).

2.4 Situational Analysis in Ghana

Ghana is a signatory to all UN conventions, charters, treaties and regional development plans of AU-NEPAD. This status obliges the Government of Ghana to respond to the needs and aspirations of the youth by incorporating their involvement into the development agenda and governance processes of the State. It is in fulfilment of this mandate that

the Government of Ghana decided to develop the national youth policy in consonance with the UN conventions and Africa regional development plans.

Notwithstanding these developments, it is estimated that the youth in Ghana even with high levels of education, are unable to access and harness their potentials for self and society development. A critical assessment of the population structure of Ghana over the past forty years shows a predominant youthful population. The youth unemployment remains unresolved. Some of the causes of youth unemployment are: inadequacy at the planning stage to integrate the introduction of junior and senior high school students with trade, vocations and job placement; limited linkage between education and training and strategic needs of the economy; ineffective management of the divestiture process resulting in the near collapse of the country's industrial sector; reduction of public sector job opportunities together with slow private sector growth.

Against the economic and demographic backdrop, there has been a renewed global interest for youth participation in decision-making, as evidenced by the Agenda 21 post Rio Summit and the African Charter for participation in development and transformation. These apart, the youth, remain marginalized in decision making thus posing a threat to good governance and development. In Ghana, there exists specific legislations and interventions aimed at increasing the active involvement and participation of the citizenry particularly the youth in decisions that directly impact on them. Cardinal amongst them is the National Youth Policy. Key element of the policy is participation, which calls on government and interest groups to make concerted and constant efforts at involving young people in decision making (Ministry of Youth and Sports - GoG, 2022)

2.5 Legal and Policy Framework for Youth Participation in Local Governance in Ghana

The 1992 Constitution sets out the framework for local self-determination. It requires in Article 35 (1) that democracy be made 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.* This constitutional imperative to decentralize is further espoused in Article 240 (1), which states that the State shall have a system of local government and administration which shall, as far as practicable be decentralized. The main institutions for driving the decentralization agenda in the country are the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies. They have legislative, deliberative and administrative authority of their local areas and as part of their functions, have responsibility for the overall development of their districts as well as the effective mobilization and utilization of human, physical and financial resources for economic and social development.

One of the departments established under the second schedule (regulation 1B) of Local Government Legislative Instrument, LI 1961 is the Education, Youth and Sports Department. Some functions of the Department are to; assist the Assembly to formulate and implement policies on youth within the framework of the national policies and guidelines; advise the Assembly on matters relating to the youth in the district; advise the Assembly on the appointment, posting, discipline, transfer of officers and welfare of the youth in the district; advise on the establishment of District Youth Council Committees and appointment of staff; facilitate supervision, regulation and general administration of youth organizations and their activities in the district; and assist in the collection of statistical data and other information on youth in the district. In addition, the Department is to promote the formation and development of youth organizations to coordinate, develop direct and channel the talents and energies of the youth into productive activities among others. It is however not clear on how the youth can be involved in decision making at the local level and be part of the functions outlined by the Department. As per the functions outlined for the Department, activities will be done for and on behave of the youth.

In line with LI 1961, the Decentralization Policy of Ghana, 2010 captures youth issues under one of the nine areas of policy actions under social agenda. In the Policy, MMDAs are charged to create an enabling environment for the growth and development of young people. However, the Policy failed to outline strategies that MMDAs should adopt to promote the growth and development of the youth. Enabling environment is inadequate to propel growth and development of the youth. The National Decentralization Policy Framework in 2010 highlights the importance of popular participation and accountability. It recommends the involvement of all people in the decision-making process, including the youth. As part of the policy measures for policy action, capacity building is proposed for elected representatives to engage their constituents (Minstry of Local Government and Rural Development - GoG, 2010).

2.6 National Youth Policy of Ghana

Ghana as a member of the African Union signed and rectified the African Charter on the Rights of the Youth in January 2008 and October 2013 respectively. The signing and rectification of the Charter culminated in development and implementation plan of a National Youth Policy in 2010. "Youth" as defined in National Youth Policy (15-35 years) is consistent with that of the African Charter on the Rights of Youth. Ghana on annual basis has allocated a 5 percent

share of District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF) as the main source of funding for the National Youth Policy Implementation Plan (National Development Planning Commission, 2021). In August 2010, the Government of Ghana designed a national youth policy framework to serve as a policy guideline and direction on how to efficiently invest in the youth and maximise their potential and effectively engage them in the governance and development process towards the general progress of the country. The policy framework was an adaptation of the Africa Youth Charter and in consonance with all international conventions and charters relating to the youth. Its distinct feature is that it is situated within the country's overall development agenda and vision and a response to the changing conditions of young people in the 21st Century in Ghana. The theme of the policy is "Towards an empowered youth, impacting positively on national development."

The policy recognizes the central role the youth play in governance. It states among other things that, "Government will inculcate in the youth democratic values and principles for their active participation in governance. This will be achieved through education in the principles and practices of good governance and the promotion of their active participation in decision making at all levels" (Ministry of Youth and Sports - GoG, 2022). The emphasis is on the importance of the youth whether at national, regional, district or sub-district level as part of the decision- making process. A person is deemed to be a youth if he/she falls within the age group of fifteen (15) and thirty-five (35) (Ministry of Youth and Sports - GoG, 2022). This definition is premised and in line with United Nations and the Commonwealth Secretariat definition of a youth. The definition of youth may marginalize the actual youth both in space for participation and in allocation of resources to the youth.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Area

The study area comprises Yilo Krobo Municipal Assembly in the Eastern Region, Awutu Senya District Assembly in the Central Region and Ashaiman Municipal Assembly in the Greater Accra Region. The Yilo Krobo Municipal Assembly is characterised by predominantly rural areas and has Somanya as its capital. The major economic activities include agriculture, services, commerce and small-scale industrial activities. The agricultural sector alone engages 58 percent of the working population with service, trading (ccommerce), and small-scale industrial activities accounting for 18.1 percent, 12.9 percent and 7.2 percent respectively. Somanya experiences high youth unemployment because of nonexistent jobs. Its proximity to Accra makes it easier for the youth to migrate in search of jobs. With these demographic conditions, the study sought to explore the dynamics of economic and governance activities of the youth in a predominantly agricultural and rural setting.

Awutu Senya District Assembly is fast developing into an urban area. By its proximity to urban district capitals such as Winneba and Kasoa, it is experiencing major challenges that include rural-urban drift particularly among the youth, reduced land size for agricultural activities due to rapidly increasing rate of land sale and estate development, poor social amenities and development infrastructure, etc. The district is characterized by several rural dwelling areas and farming activities.

Ashaiman Municipality is a rapidly growing municipality nestled within the industrial enclave of Tema and the national capital of Accra. The Municipality serves as a spill over town from these two cities and being vigorously impacted by externalities. As a fast-growing municipality, Ashaiman is confronted with the challenges of a rapid urbanisation and huge migration, which include urban sprawl, inadequate social services and infrastructure, crime and insufficient livelihoods for the teaming youth. In 2012, the youth in the area staged a demonstration blocking all access roads to and from the municipality including the trans-ECOWAS highway in an apparent response to the seemingly unresponsiveness of the central and local government in meeting their needs. The area has several women and youth groups and organisations including the Ashaiman Youth Forum, which is recognised for its active involvement in local governance issues. The selection of the Assembly facilitated investigation into how governance relationships are structured among the various stakeholders, the processes and prospects for enhancing youth participation. The background characteristics of the respondents reveal that about two-thirds were males, which is contrary to the fact that there are more females (51%) than males (49%) in the Yilo Krobo Municipality (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). This could be that the male population were more available and willing to be interviewed than their female counterparts. A 30 percentage of male respondents means that their views could dominate in participation and governance at the local level. Moreover, in the Ghanaian socio-cultural setting, males are often the main decision-makers at both the household and community levels

3.2 Study Design

The study methodology was based on mixed method approach. Under this approach, a range of qualitative instruments with quantitative research tools as an auxiliary to answer the research problem was applied. Participants were required to use their understanding and experience to respond to the framework of questions and bring their opinion-based knowledge to bear on the findings. This approach draws strength and benefits from both research methods without being overly concentrating on a particular method. Its strength lies in using both qualitative and quantitative approaches to better understand the broader objectives and contextualise people's experiences.

3.3 Target Population and Sample Size

The target population for the study was the communities where the residents and staff of the district assemblies reside. The population of the districts comprised both rural and urban communities and residents of all groups above 15 years including males and females. In all, 220 persons were targeted as respondents for the quantitative data and 24 for the qualitative data. They included District Coordinating Directors, Planning Officers, Budget Officers, Presiding Members, and National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) Officers, Youth Groups, Community Development and Social Welfare Officers, Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Development Authority (GYEEDA) Officers, Assembly Members, Community Members and Traditional Authorities.

The study adopted simple random sampling and purposive sampling method to select eligible respondents in the districts. The random sampling method provided every adult citizen in the selected districts equal chance of being selected for the administration of questionnaires and interviews. The purposive method was applied mostly to the community interviews. The purposive sampling technique was used to identify the key informants for the study. With this method, individual respondents were carefully selected using a set of criteria including experience, familiarity with community and governance issues, and number of years residing in the locality, status and participation in local activities. A coding system was used for the qualitative data based upon which themes and sub-themes were obtained for results to be generated for analysis.

3.4 Data Collection Methods and Analysis

The study used questionnaires and key informant interview as the research instruments for gathering data. This approach provided opportunity for people to tell the story their own way and help connect to the world of the respondents. They provided information on the perception and attitude towards youth participation in governance and development in their localities. The interview guides targeted technocrats and key officials working in the district assemblies. The procedure to gather information was face-to-face interview with the respondents.

In all the three districts, focus group discussions were organised in order to bring a mix of local politicians, bureaucrats, youth groups and civil society to the same platform and to discuss critical issues affecting youth employment and participation in governance. The data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 16.0 (SPSS), Microsoft Excel and commonly cited statistics from existing secondary sources. The outputs included differentiated and aggregated results, figures and graphs. The outputs formed the basis for data interpretation, analysis and discussion.

IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Responds Rate

A total of 220 questionnaires were administered out of which 140 were completed and returned by respondents while interviews were conducted to all 24 respondents using the interview guide.

4.1.1 Citizens' Involvement in Decision-Making

This section deals with citizens' involvement and participation in decision-making to effect a change and affect local development policy formulation and implementation (Wollenberg et al., 2005).
Article 35 (6) (d) of Ghana's Constitution stipulates 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 by affording all possible opportunities to the people to participate in decision-making at every level of national life and in government". These legislative provisions make room for the active involvement of local citizens in decision-making on matters that affect their daily life at every level in the district. The survey wanted to find out the extent to which districts comply with this directive by actively involving youth and citizens' participation in decision-making.

When participants were asked whether the youth should be involved in decision-making, majority (96 %) responded that the youth should be involved in decision-making and planning process at the district level, this confirms the assumptions of the pluralist theory (1968).

> The youth have a lot of new ideas that can be tapped to develop the district. Involving them will help bring out these innovative ideas for the general development of the districts. The youth understand and know the issues on the ground and can help fashion out alternative planning options in the district. District Planning is for now and the future, hence youth involvement is crucial for accountability and transparency, sustainability and effective implementation and holistic development. It allows the youth to know what is going on in the district and become abreast with district and national developmental activities. Also, the youth must express their views as part of the general learning and sharing process. By so doing they can be well placed to impact knowledge and skills to their peers. In terms of population, the youth form the majority in the district and their voice must be heard.
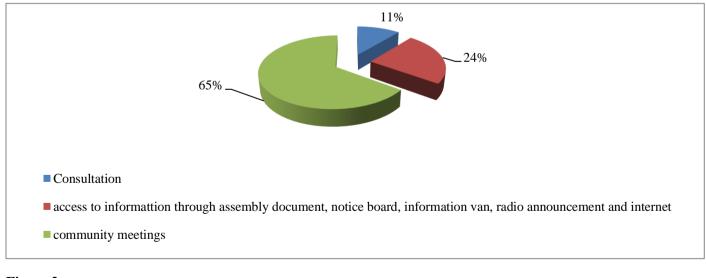
Box 1
Respondents' Reasons for Involving Youth in District Planning Activities

Even though there was a consensus on the need for youth participation in the decision making, all (100 %) of the respondents indicated that the youth were actually not involved in the decision-making process. This finding is line with Jengre & Kpinpuo (2019) who state that the youth are zero in taking part in decision making, their views have not also been considered.

Political inclination and *partisanship* make it difficult for the Assemblies to involve the youth in decision-making and planning process. This is followed by *cultural consideration* (17%) where the youth are deemed to be too young and immature and *socio-generational gap* (17%). These suggestions cut across all studied districts. Political inclination and overt partisanship raise concerns as to whether the assembly system can really be apolitical as stated in the Local Governance Act (Act 936), 2016 and other legal instruments. The findings indicate otherwise.

From Figure 2, 65 percent indicated that the Assemblies could involve the youth through community meetings while 24 percent pointed to accessibility of information and 11 percent agreed on consultation. Generally, it can be concluded that respondents in all the selected districts overwhelmingly chose community meetings as the best tool for youth involvement than the others. Community meetings are however usually informal and mostly organised under the directive of the local chief or elders. Taking advantage of the community meetings by the District Assemblies can improve youth engagement in decision-making and planning process. It is at these meetings opportunities are created for citizens including the youth to be engaged, educated and empowered to negotiate for the distribution of public resources and outline their problems, priorities and solutions (CDD-Ghana, 2013).
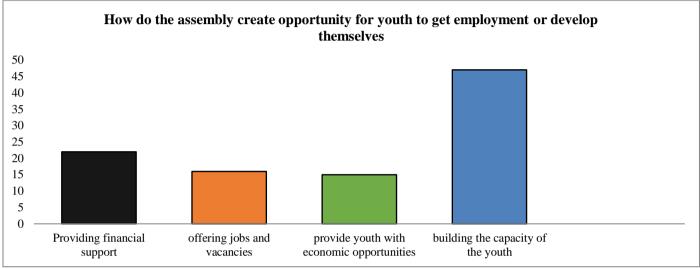

Legend:
- Consultation (11%)
- access to informattion through assembly document, notice board, information van, radio announcement and internet (24%)
- community meetings (65%)

Figure 2
Ways to Involve the Youth in District Planning Activities

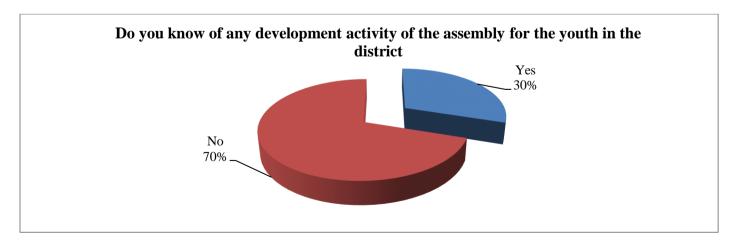## 4.1.2 Employment Opportunities and Development Activities

Regarding the role the assembly can play in providing employment opportunities to the youth, the survey indicates the following results: 45 percent of respondents prefer building the capacity of the youth, 21 percent suggest providing financial support, 15 percent pointed to offering jobs and vacancies and 13 percent providing youth with economic opportunities (See Figure 3). According to the respondents in the three districts, building the capacity of the youth will empower, better equip and qualify them to take up any demanding jobs. Capacity Building will further help them to set up their own businesses and be less dependent on the district. In line with this, Commonwealth Secretariat (2021) indicated that local governments can reduce information asymmetry through the creation of databases for youth employment opportunities. Supporting youth entrepreneurism through academic and private sector events as well as issuing microfinance loans could contribute to addressing youth employment concerns.

Figure 3
Role of the Assembly in Creating Employment Opportunities for the Youth

4.1.3 Knowledge of Youth Development Related Activities in the District

Figure 4 makes known that 70 percent of respondents do not know of any development activity of the Assemblies for the youth in the districts. This is contrasted with 30 percent who expressed awareness of development related activities for the youth. While Ashaiman has *(73%-No and 27%-Yes)* and Yilo Krobo *(83%-No and 17%-Yes)* and both recording sharp increases in *no* response, Awutu Senya West has relatively balanced feedback (56%-No and 44%-Yes). This notwithstanding, there was general concerns that local citizens are not in the known of any district development initiative for the youth. This is clear that the youth are not involved in the planning and implementation of development initiatives at the local level. This is in sharp contrast to the National Decentralisation Policy Framework (2019), which recommends the involvement of all people in the decision-making process, including the youth.

Figure 4
Knowledge of Youth Development Related Activity in the District

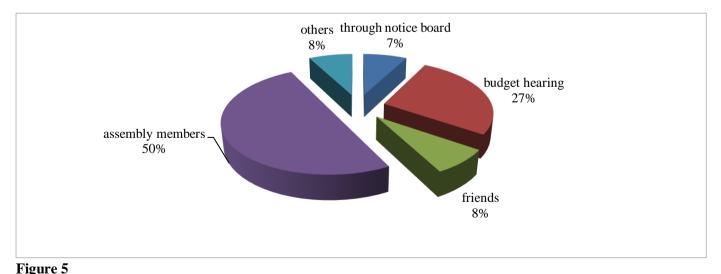### 4.1.4 Budget Structure and Preparation: Awareness and Involvement

The legal and policy frameworks that support district planning and budgeting processes allow for community and civil society participation. The processes entail stakeholder participation at public hearings in determining local budget estimates, expenditure allocation and needs prioritisation (Awoosah et al., 2004). The interest of the study at this point is to find out whether what is in the policy and legal instruments is happening on the ground.

With regards to budget awareness and knowledge, the survey sought to find out whether respondents were aware of any budget allocation that supports youth development in the Assemblies. From the study, 83 percent of respondents in the districts mentioned that they were neither aware of any budget allocation for youth development nor the youth engagement of the youth in budget preparation. Seventeen percent however indicated awareness and knowledge of the district budget allocation for youth development and attendance at local budget hearing. The main argument of most respondents was that the budget-preparation process is done with limited or no input from the youth and budget hearing and consultation is confined to assembly members who do not provide feedback to people in their electoral areas. These findings buttress the observation that "budget-making process is shrouded in secrecy and most of the budget documents are too technical and limited to the technical experts (Awoosah et al., 2004).

4.1.5 Accessibility of Information from Assembly

Figure 5 displays the sources of budget information for those who answered *yes*. Fifty percent mentioned the assembly member, 27 percent indicated budget hearing meetings and 8 percent said from friends and others. The high percentage rating for Assembly Members and budget hearing satisfies a legal requirement and constitutes two important and relevant outlets for disseminating information about the budget and its preparation to the youth. These sources can be improved to cover the large percentage of respondents who do not have information about the budget process. This will greatly improve fiscal decentralisation and accountability in the studied districts (CCD-Ghana, 2013).

The study further examined the extent to which the youth get opportunity to evaluate development projects in the districts. From the study, 95 percent of respondents in all the selected districts mentioned that they do not have opportunity to evaluate any youth or district development projects or programme. This contrasts with a marginal 5 percent who responded in the positive to the question. A breakdown of the district perspective revealed that Yilo Krobo scored (*100%*) for respondents who claimed not to have had the opportunity to evaluate district youth development programme. Ashaiman had (*88%-No* and *13%-Yes*) and Awutu Senya recorded (*94%-No* and *6%- Yes)*. This huge negative turnout can be attributed to the fact that more of the youth complained of being side-lined in the district developmental activity and not being given the opportunity to get actively involved in the district activities. These findings confirm some existing literature that local citizens are not able to evaluate the work of the District Assembly. According to Jengre &Kpinpuo (2019), the youth are marginalized in their involvement in the management of the District Assembly because of their level of educational attainment, high rate of unemployment in the country, discriminatory employment practices, inadequate resources, institutional barriers/partisan politics, and lack of capacity.

Figure 5
Ways of Getting Information on the Assembly Budget

4.1.6 District Assembly engagement of the youth in District Medium Term Development Plan and budget preparation process

In the preparation of the Medium-Term Development plans and budget, assemblies are required to as much as possible make it participatory. Views and concerns of all stakeholders are to be taken into consideration during the planning and budgeting process. Information from the three study districts reveals that the youth are always consulted in the District Medium Term Development plan and budget preparation process. It was revealed that the youth were not specifically targeted to participate in the process but were part of the stakeholders such as artisans, dressmakers, hairdressers and market women. For instance, during the focus group discussion (FGD) in Yilo Krobo Municipal, a group member said;

"During the MTDP, the community members are invited to the fora but the youth are not specifically targeted". The explanation given is that the youth are part of stakeholder groups invited. However, similar research interviewees suggested there are instances of exclusion during this process, owing to the absence of legal requirements to engage the youth. Some young research participants argued that, though some opportunities to include young people exist, the assumption that they do not have the capacity to critically examine and contribute to budget planning is still widespread (Commonwealth, 2021).

Whereas youth groups are not properly organized and coordinated in the Awutu Senya District Assembly, there exist organized youth groups in Ashaiman Municipal Assembly and Yilo Krobo Municipal Assembly. However, these youth groups are not consulted in the planning and budgeting process. A group member during the FGD in Yilo Krobo indicated that *"there is apathy on the part of the youth to get involved in decision making".* He further indicated that "*when an Assembly Member organizes community meeting and does not provide 'something' after the meeting, the youth will not come the next time"*. This is one of the reasons why the youth have not been specifically targeted and consulted in the planning and budgeting process. This can be considered as unemployment and extreme poverty amongst the youth.

There is also the case of how Assembly Members engage the youth on issues that affect them and the district at large. Some of the responses are,

"I interact with the youth during my outreach programmes and community durbars" "I organize and inform the youth about the decisions taken at General Assembly meetings and receive feedback from them back to the Assembly".

Another Assembly Member indicated that he engages the youth through meetings and one-on-one interactions. It is evident that Assembly Members also employ various strategies (including door-to-door) to engage the youth. This is in line with the Pluralist Theory, which states that policy-making in liberal democracies should be determined by a plurality of groups, which effectively mirrors the interests of society through the interplay of the different interest groups and organisations therefore the youth should not be marginalized in terms of the activities of the District Assembly. (Wollenberg et al., 2005)

4.1.7 Communication Channels Used by the Assembly to Interact With the Youth

Youth engagement in the activities of the Assemblies largely depends on the modes and channels of communication. From the responses, the use of mobile phone to interact with the youth has been ranked high. Assemblies have resorted to the use of mobile phones to interact with the youth. This may be a very useful tool for communication in that the use of mobile phone is spreading fast and well patronised by the youth. District Assemblies could also make good use of social media applications. The disadvantage is the likely high cost. Next to the use of mobile phones in that order are (i) notice boards (ii) information service vans and (iii) local radios.

In each of the Assemblies, there is a combination of the channels of communication that is adopted to interact with the youth. One of the reasons for low participation of the youth is traceable to poor information flow. This means that the channel of communication adopted by the Assemblies does not favour the youth. There are challenges associated with how information gets to them. There is therefore the need to engage youth leaders on the best way to communicate information to the youth. This is similar to the research findings of Tanle et al. (2016) which posited that poor information dissemination by District Assembly and inaccessibility of information is a cause of conflict in local governance.

4.1.8 Challenges of District Assemblies in the Promotion of Youth Participation

Though the District Assemblies are mandated to bring governance closer to the people, they are faced with some challenges. Responses from the field indicate that in their effort to promote youth participation, the District Assemblies are faced with challenges such as, general apathy on the part of the youth to participate in District Assembly activities,

majority of the youth groups are not registered with the District Assembly (a case is the Ashaiman Municipal Assembly), no clear or specific youth policy in the districts. Furthermore, poor communication between the Assemblies and the youth groups. the MMDAs do not have database of the youth to do proper analysis of the youth to know their specific needs and challenges and how to address such issues, no platform to frequently engage the youth; absence of a plan geared towards mobilizing the youth for local development, and poor resource base to implement development programmes and projects of the District Assemblies.

4.1.9 Existence of Sub-committee on Youth Development

There is no specific unit or sub-committee in any of the districts that have the responsibility for youth development. The three Assemblies rely on existing statutory sub-committees (the Social Services Sub-Committee) to handle youth issues. As pointed out by the Presiding member of Ashaiman Municipal Assembly;

Social Services Sub-Committee is responsible for general social issues such as health, education and others. They most often consider issues affecting local businesses and how employment could be created.

He mentioned that it had been a while that issues of the youth were discussed in a meeting.
Indeed, the mandate of the Social Services Sub-Committee is broad (the entire social development of the district) and not limited to youth development. There is therefore the possibility of limited attention to issues or concerns of the youth.

4.1.10 Challenges Associated with Youth Participation and Development

The challenges are as follows, unemployment is one of the major challenges of the youth. Respondents (in the youth age group) confirmed that unemployment is an overwhelming challenge they face in the district. This is a general national issue, and the three (3) target assemblies are no exception. Youth unemployment prevents them from raising funds and other resources to engage meaningfully in local level governance activities (Jengre & Kpinpuo, 2019). When people are gainfully employed, they earn income and hence, purchase goods and services to satisfy their basic human needs. Also, low access of the youth to information from the District Assembly. When the youth do not receive information or invitation to participate in the activities of the assembly, it is likely that they will not participate.

Furthermore, low education and poor understanding of issues were also identified as a challenge. Although the range of legislation and policies in Ghana have worked to encourage local participation in development issues, often English is the language used in both meetings and official documents. This results in the exclusion of a certain portion of the youth population, especially among the less educated (Commonwealth, 2021). Others are inadequate financial resource base of Assemblies hindering the organisation of platforms for participation in local governance. Participation requires some financial commitments, and the amount varies depending on the mode of participation. The Assemblies do not also have detailed information on the youth to inform their decision making. In the absence of this data, they are not able to link the aspirations of the youth to available resource and project future actions that should be taken to fully develop the youth. As the adage goes, "You can't manage what you can't measure."

4.1.11 Opportunities for Youth Participation and Development

These are opportunities for the youth to participate in local governance. They include the following: Large stretch of land exists for agriculture and irrigation in the districts except Ashaiman Municipality. This is more predominant in the Yilo Krobo Municipality where the youth were emphatic that with proper policies and incentives, they could be mobilised to go beyond agricultural activities. In addition, there is enthusiasm for youth mobilisation and creation of vibrant youth groups. The Yilo Krobo and Ashaiman Municipality have many youth associations, which is a strength towards the formation of youth networks that will lend support systems, create learning and sharing platforms and serve as a tool for youth development. It will give the youth a stronger voice in their advocacy efforts and facilitate partnership with the Assembly. As an innovative measure it will promote youth employment and participation in local governance.

Others are; some educational institutions in all the three districts. Although there are few tertiary institutions, governance issues and community service can be introduced to link the youth to their communities. Knowledge and skills programmes on governance can be introduced to whip up interest in the youth. It can serve as an entry point for youth mentorship programmes and Youth employment programmes. There are several youth employment programmes (created by the central government) in the country to promote skills and opportunities for the youth. Examples include Youth in Agriculture, Youth in Sanitation, ICT, Youth in Sports, etc. Unfortunately, these programmes are managed directly by authorities in Accra, a situation that has led to the marginalisation of the local authorities. For the programmes

to win popular participation and ownership of the local people, District Assemblies should have a bigger voice and role in managing them.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

From the findings, it can be concluded that youth participation in local governance is weak and inadequate. The District Assemblies do not have specific or deliberate measures geared towards engaging the youth in deliberations on development plans and budgets. It is only the youth who understand their challenges better and therefore proffer solutions. There is no concerted effort in any of the studied districts towards a tailor-made youth program. In effect, matters that affect the youth are seen more as a national issue to the marginalization of the source and the need for local action. A key contributory factor to the neglect of youth participation in governance is the tendency of central governments over the years to develop omnibus national policies, implement them directly from the top, and manage program resources without critical participation and ownership by the Assemblies. The youth are important stakeholders in district development matters and therefore should be actively involved in the district's governance and economic activities.

5.2 Recommendations

In view of the challenges and the need to improve youth development in Ghana, the following recommendations are proffered by the researchers:

Metropolitan Municipal and District Assemblies should improve the quality and scope of data on the youth. They should integrate youth interventions into overall district development plans and draw realistic action plans for implementation. The District Assemblies should improve communication with the youth groups. They should develop calendars for regular meetings and publish educational programs for the youth. This can be done in partnership with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Development Partners (DPs).

The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD) should create a sub-committee to be in-charge of youth issues at the district levels. Matters of the youth will be handled by this sub-committee and recommendations made to the appropriate committees to handle. Through this sub-committee, plans and budget for youth participation and activities can be developed. Assemblies should also be charged to develop Youth Development Plans. This will constitute deliberate efforts by the districts to promote and develop the youth. Such a plan will be budgeted for, and resources mobilized to fund its activities.

Also, MLGRD should establish Guidance and Counselling centres in the districts. The centres must not always wait for the youth to come to them, but they should adopt innovative publicity strategies (including outreach programmes, door-to-door, etc.) to win the patronage of the youth. The Assemblies should also create Decentralization Secretariat of the MLGRD, which should include youth participation in local governance issues as one of the indicators for District Performance Assessment Tool (DPAT).

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