

# Stakeholders and community radio: Promoting participatory governance in Ghana

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## Abstract

This study presents what can be described as a how-to-text on how community radio (CR) can be creatively used to address low civic involvement in policy-making in Ghana's local governance units. The study employed a qualitative research approach. In-depth interviews were used to collect data from representatives of some key stakeholder institutions in Ghana's local governance system, CR as well as from a community media expert. The study found that CR in Ghana can serve as effective tools for mobilising people to participate in policy-making in local governance through creative programming. Another finding is that the ability of villagers to contribute to radio content, and to participate in policy-related debates via phone-ins, could be limited by their inability to buy telephone credit due to their poverty status. The study unearthed weak linguistic proficiency on the part of the CR workers, which thwarts their ability to handle local government policies,

which are technical in nature. The study concludes that the little evidence on innovative use of CR to promote citizens' involvement in local governance policy-making processes is an issue, which needs to be addressed to unleash the potentials of CR in local governance. The study recommends that a potential instrument for easing the financial sustainability challenges of CR in Ghana is to ensure that the up-coming broadcasting law provides public funding for community media as pertains in Denmark, France and South Africa. The Ghana Community Radio Broadcast Network (GCRN) needs to institute indigenous languages training sessions in collaboration with local language experts to equip CR workers with language proficiency.

**Keywords:** Community Radio, Local Governance, Participatory Governance, Linguistic inadequacies, creative programming

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## Introduction

People's ability to communicate their concerns about development issues and to obtain attention from stakeholders can build the needed impetus for local development. Scholars such as Gumucio-Dagron (2001) and Sparks (2007) blame persistent poverty and deprivation in the developing world, particularly Africa, on bad governance and the inability to effectively apply communication to address the challenges of governance for development. The centralization factor can be seen in governance and development pursued by colonial powers and post-independent leaders of nation states of Asia, Latin America, and Africa, which had been characterized by centralization (White, 2008). Following the modernization paradigm, virtually all decision-making on development was controlled by a few colonial government functionaries. Communication was viewed as vital, but it assumed top-down information dissemination approaches geared towards persuading people to accept development interventions passively (Melkote & Steeves, 2001, 2015). In many African countries, the ruling governments implementing the modernization paradigm of development viewed the state-owned media as the agents of diffusion of modern culture (Waisbord, 2001).

From the 1990s, many developing countries began to steer away from centralized governance of colonial and post-colonial periods to embrace decentralization as an important aspect of good governance. *The Aberdeen Agenda on the Commonwealth principles on good practice for local democracy of and good governance* of 2005 describes good local governance as characterized by effective citizen involvement in decision-making processes on development. Decentralization was viewed as a path to create local governance (LG), where the rights of ordinary people to participate in policy decisions are legally guaranteed (Crook & Manor, 1999). Participation in local governance aims to link citizens to institutions and structures of local government systems and so that low-status people can contribute their capacities in deliberative decision-making about how economic and social factors affect their existence.

A most widely applied methodology in citizens' participation in local policy formulation is participatory planning (PP) and participatory budgeting (PB) (Gaventa, 2002). Ahwoi (2017) describes PP and PB as processes whereby stakeholders, including elected representatives of local people, government officials and civil society organizations (CSOs) are involved in the design of the development components of the local government units. These processes can present an effective strategy for promoting bottom-up development in which government initiatives emerge as a result of communities spelling out what they want. Sparks (2007) sees this participatory principle as the negotiated variant, due to its consultative and participatory involvement of the various stakeholders.

Communication is catalytic in facilitating people's participation in the definition of development problems and strategies for solution (Srampickal, 2006). Manyozo (2012) and Quarry and Ramire (2009) suggest that strategic application of communication approaches can enlist the abilities and knowledge of all vital publics to enable them make inputs in deciding what development should mean for their lives. According to Servaes

(2009), in local governance, communication is crucial in enhancing the ability of civic groups to influence the delivery of services to local citizens as well as the management of the most pressing questions of local development. Ahwoi (2017) posits that a key condition for effective local governance development planning relates to the availability of appropriate and accessible channels of communication that promote negotiations amongst various stakeholders and open up fora for public debates and discussions. These deliberative processes are vital in ensuring that public priorities are correctly reflected in the policies and the decisions or public opinion are binding on local governments. Scholars such as Servaes (2009) and Manyozo (2012) have singled out robust and independent media systems for their ability to take up a central role in facilitating effective consultative processes among government and civil society actors for improved governance for national development. The media can play an even greater role in the development of local governance than at national level ones because the local is much smaller and more specific, and independent local media can more easily mobilize local communities for pushing for good governance agenda than national media (Julius-Adeoye, 2013).

However, a major weakness of developing countries local governance relates to communication. In his reviews of major works on multi-country studies of decentralization across Sub-Saharan Africa, White (2008) observed a lack of viable platforms for citizens – local authorities’ engagement on development issues and for promoting and facilitating dialogue. Santi (2012) has bemoaned a developing country-wide weakness in the role of the media in promoting effective decentralization, noting that the media have accorded minimal attention to local governance issues as compared to their efforts to make central governments more accountable.

Media’s involvement in local governance can be interrogated within a broader discourse of factors that influence the media’s governance functions. A major enabling factor

is constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression and media independence from political and economic interests, influences and controls (McQuail, 2012). Two analysts on media governance role – Norris (2006) and Odugbemi and Norris (2010) – draw a general conclusion that politically and economically dependent media cannot be relied upon to provide neutral platforms for policy debates. Unfortunately, that appears to be a prevalent phenomenon in developing countries including Ghana. Although public service media have been insulated from governmental controls by national constitutions, they are still tied to the national governments due to their heavy financial dependence on the governments (Price & Raboy, 2002). To Buckley et al. (2007) apart from the commercial imperatives of commercial media, particularly the broadcasting systems most of them assume politically partisan postures that often overshadow their public interest roles.

This study explores the possibility of using CR for community mobilization and engagement on local government policy-making processes. Specifically, it elicits innovative ideas from stakeholders in local government and CR on how community stations in Ghana can be used to influence the PP and PB processes at local government units – the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs).

## **Participatory Local Governance and Relevance of Community Radio**

Ghana's decentralization provides for a viable institutional framework for the promotion of good local governance for accelerated development. It is geared towards enabling greater civic participation in the policy-making processes at the local governance units known as MMDAs. Legal provisions have been put in place to create genuine spaces for participation. Chapter 20, Article (2e) of the Constitution defines the role of ordinary people, civil society organizations (CSOs), community-based

organizations (CBOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as follows: "... people in particular local government areas shall, as far as practicable, be afforded the opportunity to participate effectively in their governance". Specific areas of participation are planning and budgeting as well as the elections of the Assembly persons. The National Development Planning System Act 480 of 1994, section 3, provides for decentralized participatory planning and budgeting that is to see to the active involvement of local communities and CSOs and other interest groups inputs into the draft district development planning and budgeting framework. These provisions seek to empower the Assemblies to develop district plans based on development priorities generated from the communities.

However, the reality on the ground points to widespread dissatisfaction with the state of civil society involvement in decision making at the Assemblies. Several studies have called attention to the weakness in community participation in local governance in Ghana as a significant factor, limiting the effective operations of the country's local government system (Akudugu et al., 2012). In Akudugu et al. (2012) study of a decentralized system as a framework for promoting participatory and bottom-up democracy in Bawku District of the Upper East Region, most people complained they did not participate in decision-making in their communities. The study found about 84% of respondents saying they had never participated in making decisions regarding the kinds of development projects that were needed in their respective communities. The respondents claimed that their assembly members were not effective in representing them.

Sustainable Enterprise Development of Ghana (SEND-Ghana, 2019) has highlighted concerns about lack of participation in a multi-district study. The study shows citizens' dissatisfaction with their level of participation in decisions regarding the use of the District Assembly Common Fund (DACF) in 48 MMDAs in the Northern, Upper East, Upper West and Greater Accra Regions. According to the study findings, about 80% of the

respondents reported that they had not been involved in such decisions, culminating in their poor knowledge of approved projects, budget information and public hearings among other barriers.

This study argues that the weaknesses of participation in Ghana's local governance is linked to poor flow of communication and lack of a genuine voice for the least voiced. Elected Assembly members to the MMDAs are mandated to serve as vital communication links between the Assemblies and the communities. Article 16(1) (a) stipulates that an assembly member shall maintain close contact with his/her electoral area to consult his/her people on issues to be discussed in the Assembly and to report back to the electorates the Assembly decisions. They are to collate the views, opinions, and proposals of their communities and present them to the Assemblies for planning and budgeting purposes to ensure that Annual Plans and Budgets of the MMDAs embody the priority development needs and aspirations of the local communities.

If these provisions were followed to the letter by the assembly members, there would no doubt have been free flow of information between local people and the MMDAs, thereby engendering effective participation. But there are gaps in effective communication as the assembly members are unable to maintain such regular contacts due to logistical reasons. Consequently, there is very little community communication on local governance issues, a situation that leaves many rural people in the dark.

Another dimension of the communication problem is linked to the weak role the media play in the country's local governance. Ghanaian media is endowed with enormous potentials to champion governance improvement agenda at both national local levels. Article 162(5) states "All agencies of the mass media shall, at all times, be free to uphold the principles, provisions and objectives of this Constitution, and shall uphold

the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people of Ghana”.

This notwithstanding, the public media are often susceptible to governmental controls. Private commercial media particularly broadcasting seem to lean towards pursuing economic and political interests at the expense of the public good (Karikari, 2013). This compromises their ability to pursue public interest issues, including the promoting of local governance. For instance, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) has lamented the state of the media’s inattentiveness to pursue local governance agenda. In a 2014 study, MFWA showed that reportage, advocacy and programming on local governance issues on radio were very low in both quantity and quality. Majority of studied radio stations had no specific programmes that focused on local governance issues. These findings point to the need to examine whether CR contribution can make a difference in local governance in Ghana.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a qualitative research approach. Purposive sampling method was used to select participants from key stakeholders in Ghana’s local governance and the CR systems. These institutions are the Ministry of Local Governance and Rural Development (MLGRD), GCRN and the Chieftaincy Institution. Although the 1992 Constitution places statutory limitations on traditional authorities, the chieftaincy institution remains a key collaborator with the MMDAs in local development (Arthur & Dauda, 2015). In their research, Arthur and Dawda (2015) found that chiefs played advocacy roles such as enlightening the local citizenry in the area on payment of rates and taxes, actively engaging in elections and overseeing state properties in the communities of the district.

From each institution, one participant was purposively selected based on his/her specialized knowledge in local governance or CR issues. From the MLGDR, the Head of the



Planning Division was selected because of his oversight role in the policy development of the MMDAs. From the GCRN, the Lead Training Officer was selected because he was expected to have considerable knowledge on CR. A chief knowledgeable in local governance issues was selected from the Wenchi Traditional Council where ROYALS FM is located. Royals FM was selected as a model among CR in Ghana in the promotion of good local governance (Naaikuur and Diedong, 2021).

The researchers contacted a Ghanaian Communication Expert to provide his perspectives on the role of CR in local governance. The main instrument used for data collection was in-depth interviews. The interviews, which were audio recorded, were transcribed for analysis. Questions in the interview guide formed the basis for primary coding of themes. Each of the themes was reread and further coded for understanding trends and patterns seen in the responses.

### **Media Role in Promoting Participatory Governance**

In conceptualizing the role of the media in governance, Norris (2006, 2010) and Dzisah (2020) note that the media serves as a watchdog over the powerful, promoting accountability, transparency, and public scrutiny; as a civic forum for political debate to form public opinion; and as an agenda-setter for policy makers, strengthening government responsiveness to social problems. This study contributes some insights to the civic forum theoretical analysis of Norris, namely that the media provides civic-fora for public debates on those issues that lead to the formation of opinion that can in turn influence government policies.

Odugemi and Norris (2010) posit that the media agenda-setting and civic-forum roles are by far one of the most viable vehicles of strengthening public participation in governance decision-making processes. Hudock (2003) has documented the critical role of the media in ensuring the success of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) of the United Nations

Development Programme (UNDP). Hudock explains that through the civic forum and agenda-setting functions, the media can promote widespread and effective public participation in policy discussions and dialogues by providing timely, clear and relevant policy information to citizens. The information equips the citizens and their representatives with knowledge and understanding and frames the issues for public discussions to generate diverse views that can go a long way to influence the policies.

Radio has long been recognized as an effective tool for citizen-governance engagements. Dzisah (2020) affirms the pride place of radio in Ghana's socio-economic development and argues that "radio's intrusiveness as a mass mobilizing tool and educator has seen it take a vanguard role in Ghana's development" (p. 134). Again, Okigbo and Eribo (2004) underline the power of the broadcasting media to mobilize ordinary people in Africa for inclusive decision-making. Using the media agenda-setting function, Okigbo and Eribo noted that the media could mount a regular surveillance of development in citizens' welfare, with continuous identification of key issues of concern to rural residents. Serving as a civic-forum, broadcasting could establish dialogue between power holders and the citizenry, providing platforms for rural parties and their organized groups to have input in policy-making. Manyozo (2012) examines the role of radio broadcasting in development within the framework of community engagement and empowerment to underscore the ability of radio to foster participatory processes and the engagement of community groups in interactive dialogues on local development. Manyozo advocates for a deliberate and strategic use of radio in Africa for the facilitation of participatory problem identification and debates that can produce sustainable social change policies. Manyozo cites an example of how radio was used in a participatory approach in mobilizing community groups in Zimbabwe to participate in development policy and

training the participants in development journalism using a concept known as ‘Development Through Radio’ (DTR).

Available but scanty empirical data point to the potential of radio to influence policy at the grassroots level in Ghana. For instance, Kubuga (2013) conducted a survey on the impact of the convergence of radio and mobile telephony on rural Northern Ghana with a special focus on rural women’s contributions to radio content. One of the study objectives related to whether the participants believed “the things you say on radio can influence policy.” The data was obtained from focus group discussions in the Kassena Nankana East and Kasena Nankana West Districts in the Upper East Region involving over 76 women groups. Forty-three women (57%) said they believed in the ability of radio to influence policy. The report quotes one of the responses: “If we can occasionally collate views from listeners and the studio panelists and give these views to the policy makers, radio will play an even more crucial role in our lives” (Kubuga, 2013, p. 116).

### **Findings**

The main objective of the study was to examine innovative ideas from the study participants on how to use CR to mobilize community members to make inputs into the planning and budgeting processes of the MMDAs. The interviews unearthed programming strategies that could serve as blueprint formats for CR. Each of the respondents (the Chief, the Communication Expert, the Head of the Planning Unit at MLGRD and the Lead Training Facilitator of the GCRN) expressed a view.

The first respondent, a Chief from the Wenchi Traditional Council, proffered an approach summarized as follows: A central strategy would involve the facilitation of community mobilization within the broadcast areas of CRs prior to the annual budgeting and planning sessions of the Assemblies. The mobilization could be based on the Electoral Area system that is used for the election of the assembly members, to bring together stakeholders of the local governance system in each area.

Representatives from the MMDAs will be the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Chief Executives (MMDCEs), District Planning Officers, District Coordinating Directors, Assembly Members and Unit Committee Members. The communities will be represented by Traditional Authorities and CBOs. On a day dubbed “District Assembly Days,” there will be annual interfaces where the assembly members, chiefs and representatives of the CBOs within the Electoral Area, would present what the chief termed the “State of the Communities Reports” that would detail the community development needs and challenges. In the view of the interviewee (Traditional Chief), the reports would form subjects for public debates by the participants of the fora to form public opinion at community levels “so that what would be sent to the Assemblies would constitute aggregated community generated inputs towards the planning and budgeting processes.” According to the interviewee (Traditional Chief), the main role of the CR would be facilitative, providing information on the processes and broadcasting the reports and the community level debates. The discussions and debates on each of the interfaces will be broadcast to ignite district-wide debates, generating more inputs for the final plans and budgets. The interview noted:

It will be an interesting and a serious thing to involve every sector of a district to know the state of development of their districts and each particular sector of the community. Everyone can be involved in a lot of talk about what is going on in the district. The Assembly will begin to take their communities more seriously because they know that now, everyone is involved, they can't joke with the implementation of the communities' plans.

The Communication Expert Interviewee suggested an approach that CR can adopt to facilitate meaningful people's engagement in policy issues at the local level. They can do that by steering on-air public debates that conscientiously focus on the

major developmental issues in their districts. The on-air debates will be based on reports brought in by the stations' reporters on the state of development in the districts and communities. A mechanism can be put in place to persuade the local authorities to follow these debates with the goal of picking out the major themes and issues to factor into the development plans and budgets. To him, the multiple voices on local policies would ensure that

the plans and budgets of MMDAs have heavy doses of public inputs that capture the local priorities ... this will mark the real beginning of good local governance...it will make local governance not only really participatory, but also accountable and responsive to the people.

The Communication Expert Interviewee gave general advice on how CRs in Ghana can play meaningful roles in local governance. He indicated that the common developmental agenda of both a CR and the Assemblies presents CR as the ideal communication system for community engagement and empowerment for improving citizens' participation in Ghana's local governance:

A station that is owned by the community will be dedicated to community development of the community. The attitude of that radio should be driven by a deliberate policy (Interview with Communication Expert).

In his view, a CR station that does not prioritize local governance issues in its operational policies, will be missing an enviable opportunity of using a public communication system to accelerate its development. The Expert Interviewee further explained that the broad policy guidelines on how CR can pursue a local governance agenda can be operationalized into specific programming guidelines.

The Head of Planning Division of the MLGRD proposed an approach in which the drafts of the plans and budgets of the Assemblies could be presented on the CR stations by the technocrats at the MMDAs with the facilitation of the CR station's programme producers. Key elements of the plans and budgets could be explained in local languages to the public. This process could make it possible for the public to make inputs and contribute to modifications and finalization of the policies through phone-ins. He indicated further that since most of the local citizens do not have direct opportunities to participate in the planning and budgeting, the radio programmes could provide major avenues for the public to comment on the Assemblies' plans and budgets through which the priority needs of the local people could be captured into the plans and budgets.

The interviewee recommended that for CR to effectively involve local people in the policy-making processes, the stations must stick to their dedicated use of their local language broadcast. To him, this could break down what he termed the technical language in which the policies are couched and to make them more accessible to the masses of illiterate community members and reduce the elite monopoly in such issues.

It will be unprecedented in our experiences on our community stations for villagers to hear in their own dialects issues of plans and budgets on their Assemblies on their own radio station. Can you imagine what excitement ...? the airwaves will be jammed during phone-ins and the debates will be very hot (Interview with Head of Planning Division, MLGRD).

The GCRN's Training Facilitator confirmed the dominant use of indigenous languages for CR broadcast as one of its strongest advantages in the media's local governance agenda (see Magak et al., 2013):

The fact that a community radio station is using the local language to communicate, if the radio uses the

term “broom” to symbolize participation, all people know it is a call to be involved... for our people in the rural areas, communication is the ability to understand codes and ability to decode symbols (Interview with GCRN’s Lead Training Facilitator).

### **Discussion**

The approaches proffered by each of the interviewee, encapsulate elements of the stance that CR serves as an agenda-setter, which highlights development challenges as well as being a platform for facilitating debates on pressing needs that crystalize as communities’ inputs into the planning and budgeting processes of district assemblies. As a resounding theme, CR has emerged as a potential platform for community engagement on local governance policy-making processes in Ghana. CR can foster innovative strategies for promoting bottom-up development to produce what Quarry and Ramire (2009) term as processes in which government initiatives emerge as a result of communities spelling out what they want, making development responsive to the peculiar needs of the most marginalized in particular.

Specific elements, which deserve deeper analysis include the Communication Expert’s proposal to make local governance issues dominant in the community station’s policies, CR’s non-profit orientation, and CR local governance role. Others are the role of CBOs in community mobilization towards policy engagements, the potential use of telephony to enhance debates on policies as well as critical issues about local language usage in local governance policy discourses. The ownership and policy question raised by the Communication Expert Interviewee can be grounded in the larger discourse on media ownership and policy. Scholars such as McQuail (2010) see ownership as the main determinant on how media policies and objectives translate into content while Dzisah (2020, p. 42) avers that “freedom of communication is directly related to its ownership paradigm”.

Therefore, ownership largely determines the attitude of any media sector towards issues such as the pursuit of a

governance improvements agenda. In contrast with other media, CR stations being community communication systems that are established by members of particular communities to cater for their communication needs, the ownership principle should empower community members to determine their station's agenda (Bosch, 2014). Since local governance is the locus of community development, the call for local governance issues to be an integral part of CR policies is relevant. However, the effectiveness of CR policies to maximize its impact on local governance largely rests on the board of directors. It requires a board of directors that is truly representative of the vital publics of a community to constitute a system of participatory needs assessment for identifying local development problems that a station's policies will drive. Such a board should be capable of formulating policies for programming that can effectively influence policies at the Assemblies. This calls for an authentic CR system in a country that adheres to its core principles. The most relevant principle in this context is the democratic management of CR that is embedded in the communal ownership spirit. A cardinal indicator of the community-ownership of CR is its democratic management ethos, which implies that at the minimum level, the community should elect the board of management of a CR that should be representative of the community's key constituencies (FairChild, 2003). At the least, a democratically elected board of directors will be indicative of true ownership and participation that ensures that the community owns the policies put in place by their representatives that enhance the quality of local governance agenda.

The influence of another core principle that is implied in the interviewees' suggestions related to the agenda-setting function of CR is its non-profit orientation. It is a key distinguishing feature between CR and commercial broadcasting that reiterates its dedication to community service devoid of profit-making imperatives (Buckley et al., 2007). At the heart of the non-profit status is that there are no individual owners or shareholders to



share profits, and community members collectively decide on how to use its excess resources. As a norm, profits are usually ploughed back into strengthening key operational areas such as programming (Fraser & Estrada, 2001). The surplus income re-investment provides the basis for what is termed civic journalism, a kind of journalism that emphasizes service to the community. The main strategy is to identify and highlight important social issues through broadcasts, and to frame news in a way which facilitates collective efforts to find solutions (Bosch, 2014). The profit re-investment principle will ensure resource availability for outreach reportage by CR reporters to highlight challenges of various communities and could form subjects for public debates that can influence pro-poor policies.

The role of CBOs in the community mobilization and engagement in the Chief Interviewee's proposal deserves special highlighting. CBOs are made up of grassroots organizations and networks formed by people living in rural and urban areas, especially the poor and the marginalized, which the members often depend on to meet a wide range of needs (Narayan et al., 2000). CBOs are ubiquitous in Ghana especially in the rural areas. Their primary objectives include satisfying the interests of their members but their collective activities and those of the individual members often inure to the good of their communities and the country at large (Opare, 2007). Therefore, it can be asserted that there are sufficiently organized grassroots citizen groups, which are potential viable entities for community mobilization and engagements processes in the local governance policy-making strategies under discussion. As an additional strategy to the Chief's proposal, a strategy for broadening the potentials of CBOs as alleys of community mobilization is for community stations to create a system of radio programs for local organizations and make their leaders the producers of the programs. The CR stations can become outlets for community organization and their primary role is to facilitate the spontaneous participation of these organizations.

These programs of local organizations can serve as sources of information on development and facilitators of debates that hammer on the local problems. This would be enough to affect local government policy.

Notwithstanding the attractiveness of these innovative views, certain issues related to their applicability need interrogation. One is the technical and economic dimensions of using CRs for on-air debates and interactions in ways that can ensure the active engagement of the most marginalized sectors of their communities. On the technical question, literature on the impact of the convergence between radio and the telephone in Africa (Adelabu, 2013; Kubuga, 2013) shows its enormous potential to make possible the application of the proposed strategies. In Ghana, broadcasting has harnessed the telephone to a great advantage to energize the public sphere, enabling people to participate through call-in programs like talk-shows and vox pops (Gadzekpo, 2008). In a similar vein, literature on the convergence between CR and mobile telephony further underlines the potential of CR to extraordinarily impact on-air participatory deliberations.

Thus, the proliferation of mobile telephony has increased possibilities for grassroots people to participate in the public sphere and to make local government truly participatory. It provides a voice to local citizens on important policy issues (Bosch, 2014). However, this study calls attention to a need to balance the potential impact of the telephony on radio broadcasting with the lived realities of significant portions of rural populations in many developing countries, whose access to telephone service is limited by their economic marginalization. For many ordinary people in the villages, the cost of regular calls is beyond their financial means. For example, although Kubuga's (2013) study revealed Northern Ghana's women's positive views on the potential use of radio to influence policies, little evidence was found on rural women contributing to radio content. In interacting with the women and radio stations in

the study area, we concluded that the state of affairs could be attributed to prohibitive phone talk costs. Indeed, currently, when one monitors phone-in programs on radio stations located in rural and semi-rural areas, one discovers that they are dominated by the relatively affluent audience. Therefore, for CR to be truly participatory and be the voice to the voiceless, it is imperative to add other creative ways of involving the socially disadvantaged people in villages in radio content creation through telephone. A strategic approach to addressing the issue lies in the Chief Interviewee's proposal on the community level face-to-face debates. By passing the microphone to ordinary people in their own setting to define their needs, CR can set the agenda, and by engendering the debates around the identified needs.

The economic dimension of the challenges calls attention to the precarious financial situation of CR in Ghana. In virtually all the studies carried out on CR in Ghana, a constant refrain by the stations is that insufficient money constrains their full potentials in the service of their communities. The issue is linked to the non-profit status of community broadcasting. The GCRN enjoins its member stations to adhere to the non-profit principle through what is termed the GCRN Revenue Generation Code. It states:

... a CR station shall not retain any surplus for the benefit of any individual or group. Excess of revenue over expenditure, if any, shall be ploughed back towards enhancing the capacity of the station to serve its community (GCRN's Revenue Code, 2006, p. 5).

The non-profit status of CR has also proven to be a major source of what is termed financial sustainability challenge (Galadima et al., 2013). Financial sustainability requires that a station makes enough money to meet its core expenditure areas such as honoraria, repair and office equipment and infrastructure, and programming needs (Fairbairn, 2009). The argument goes that because CR stations are located in

economically marginalized areas, they are unable to generate sufficient advertising income, one of its major income sources. It is further argued that even though community stations should be self-financing with contributions from their communities, these contributions constitute an insignificant source of their income because of the economic marginalization of their communities, (Myers, 2008).

Some studies on CR in Ghana found financial inadequacy as a significant limiting factor to their ability to pursue their local governance roles to the fullest. A common approach to this agenda-setting function is the community stations deploying reporters to report on community problems to draw local authorities' attention for solutions (Naaikuur, 2020; Naaikuur and Diedong 2021). But Naaikuur's study (2020) found that although the stations were producing palpable results of local government responsiveness, field reporting was limited to areas in close proximity with the location of the stations. This was mainly due to the financial difficulties such as fueling motorbikes of the reporters for their outreach programs at the more distant areas.

Another angle of the potential bottlenecks relates to indigenous language usage. Characteristically, CRs adopt exclusive use of the predominant languages of their listening communities since their targets are marginalized illiterates. The dedicated use of indigenous languages, according to the Head of Planning Division Interviewee from the MLGRD, presents CR an enormous advantage in its local governance role. To ensure this, the GCRN Secretariat has put a policy in a place on the exclusive use of local languages by its member stations:

As a key policy issue, programming at a CR station shall be predominantly in the language/s of its listening community and shall be used as a platform to further develop the usage and the richness of the language/s of its listening community (GCRN's Programming Code, 2005, p. 5).

Ironically, the professed exclusive use of local languages by CR received complaints related to linguistic incompetence raised against the broadcasters. The Communication Expert Interviewee, who said he had taken special interest in monitoring local language broadcast in the country, expressed concerns about what he termed the inadequacies in authentic use of local languages across community stations. The Chief Interviewee supporting the Communication Expert's assertion expressed indignation about what he described as the regular intermingling of English and indigenous languages on air. The Communication Expert noted "widespread linguistic violations on CR stations in Ghana which he had expected to champion quality local language broadcast in the country".

Naaikuur's (2020) study confirmed the fears of the Communication Expert. In Naaikuur's study, there was no evidence on programming that focused on the Assembly plans and budgets. In admitting that local governance policy had not been a focus of CR programming, the GCRN Lead Training Facilitator blamed the situation on inadequate knowledge on local governance policy issues on the part of CR workers. But interactions with program producers of ROYALS FM revealed that a large part of the state of affairs related to linguistic weaknesses on the part of the workers. They perceived issues of the Assembly's budgets and plans as highly technical that required specialized linguistic competence for effective Programming; competences that they admitted were lacking. The GCRN Lead Facilitator attributed the linguistic challenges to a general cultural apathy in the Ghanaian society, which has seen the youth demonstrate more interest in speaking foreign languages than their native language.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study set out to elicit creative and innovative ideas from the stakeholders of local government and CRs on how CRs in Ghana can be used for community mobilization and

engagement on local government policy-making processes. CRs can serve as potential platforms for community engagement on local governance policy-making processes if the stations can be innovative in their programming.

The findings revealed a mix of bottlenecks related to the feasibility of the implementation and sustainability of creative ideas on local governance programming. CRs in Ghana have wallowed in financial sustainability challenges, a situation which constrains their ability to spread their outreach activities to include the remotest parts of their communities. The study found evidence of technical potentials to leverage on the radio-telephony convergence, that has enhanced the participatory nature of radio to promote on-air debates to influence local governance policies. However, it calls attention to the economic marginalization of rural people in Ghana, which tends to constrain many of them from regular participation in the creation of radio content through phone-in programs (Kubuga's 2013). This implies that a concentration on the use of telephones for on-air debates on the MMDAs development plans and budgets will limit inputs from the poor sectors of the communities who cannot afford the cost of regular phone-in calls. Another limitation relates to local language use. Though governance programs in the local language can enlist illiterates into policy-making discourses, widespread linguistic inadequacies on the part of CR workers have been pointed out as a potential limiter in the ability of the radio stations to handle the technical nature of local government policies such as the development plans and budgets of the MMDAs. To address the above challenges, the study recommends as follows:

1. Considering the financial challenges that limit the participation of people in most marginalized villages in radio content creation through phone-ins, it is recommended that CR operators, local communities, local policy-makers and advocates appeal to mobile telephone network companies to supply toll free lines to deprived communities.

2. Easing the financial sustainability challenges confronting community broadcasters in Ghana requires deepening of the communal ownership and its attendant democratic participatory spirit of CR, which can attract voluntary community financial contributions for their sustenance. A potential instrument for easing the financial sustainability challenges of CR in Ghana is to ensure that the up-coming broadcasting law provides public funding for community media as pertains in Denmark, France and South Africa (Buckley et al., 2005).
3. On the linguistic weaknesses, the study highlights the need for the GCRN to institute training sessions aimed at addressing the challenge. It should aim to enhance the workers' knowledge on local governance and equip them with skills on strategic programming.

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