

Analysis of Prospects and Challenges of Sub-District Structures under Ghana's Local Governance System

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Abstract

The research investigated into the operations and activities of the sub-district structures of local government in Ghana. Three districts in the Asante Region were studied using a cross-sectional study design. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. In addition to literature review, a sample size of 79 was used and responses from mainly the Chairmen of the sub-district structures represented the primary data. Data were analysed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Results from the analysis indicated that sub-district structures are confronted with a number of constraints that militate against the realization of their potential for inducing grassroots development. The constraints include: poor or no office accommodation, lack of commitment from district assemblies and sub-metropolitan units to provide the needed assistance to the sub-district structures. However, the Unit Committees representing the last tier of the local government structure are more effective and efficient in keeping touch with the grassroots than the Town, Area, Zonal and Urban councils. Recommendations are made to the Local Government Ministry but worthy of note among the recommendations are the urgent need to officially inaugurate all sub-district structures that have not been inaugurated and initiate a process to review the Legislative Instrument establishing Sub-district structures in Ghana.

Keywords: district assemblies, grassroots development, local governance, sub-district structures

1. Introduction

Development is a state that every society aspires to attain in order to escape poverty. However, poverty has for the last few decades been the single and biggest challenge facing the world at both micro and macro levels (Sachs, 2005). In order to promote holistic human development in both quantitative and qualitative senses, governments and the international community have developed various strategies and programmes to fight poverty. In the developing world, one popular strategy being used with the intention to induce development from the grassroots and reduce poverty is decentralised governance (Todaro & Smith, 2009; Adams, 2012). Developing nations like Thailand (Charoenmuang, 1997), India (Craig, 2003), Brazil (Souza, 1996) and in Africa (Kuusi, 2009) have all applied the concept as a development tool with varied successes (Ayee, 2000). Decentralised governance as a development tool has also been successfully applied in advanced countries including the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Germany and Italy (Todaro & Smith, 2009). Decentralisation generally connotes the idea of taking governance to the grassroots to know the needs of the local people and provide them accordingly (see Rondinelli, Nellis & Cheema, 1984).

The adoption of decentralisation as a development tool in Ghana dates back to the colonial era when decentralisation took the form of de-concentration (Kyei, 2008). Successive governments since 1966 have adopted various forms of the concept as a way of strengthening local governance and also promoting grassroots development (Kyei, 2001). However, a serious attempt to promote grassroots participation in governance using the concept of decentralisation by devolution began in 1988 (Awunyo-Vitor, Osaе & Donani, 2015; Ahwoi, 2010). The commitment by the then government was evidenced in the enactment of the Local Government Law 207, increasing of the number of districts from 65 to 110 and devolving 86 functions to the district assemblies and channeled 5% of government revenue to the districts (Songsore, 2011; Kyei, 2001). In the 21st century,

governments of Ghana have made tremendous efforts to consolidate this strategy of grassroots development by consistently taking governance closer to the people through the creation of more districts. Today there are 216 districts and 7.5% of government revenue is allocated to district assemblies (local governments). This effort to decentralised governance is supposed to better the livelihoods of citizens.

However, despite the long history of the practice of decentralisation and efforts to induce development from the grassroots, Ghana remains a poor nation. According to official government report, a significant percentage of 24.2% of its citizens are poor, and therefore, lack basic necessities of life such as adequate income, good health, proper sanitation, education and better housing (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS], 2014). Also, many suffer from gender discrimination and abuse, vulnerability, abuse of children, lack of information among others (UNICEF - Ghana Report, 2013). It is important to note that though the cause of poverty and underdevelopment in Ghana is multi-dimensional, it is more of structural than pathological (Alcock, 2006. Pp 62-69). Structural causes of poverty manifest itself in social, cultural, economic and governance failures. Social causes of poverty include injustice, isolation, exclusion, gender discrimination among others. The poverty experience by the individual in the country has contributed to the unsustainable development at the grassroots. Further, most researches and studies on decentralisation and local governance in Ghana have focused on the metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies (Oduro, 2001; Durand, 2004; Yankson, 2008; Adamtey, 2014). Governments and researchers have paid very little attention to the sub-district structures that operate at the very grassroots. There have been countless publications on the operations and activities of district assemblies in Ghana. The neglect of the sub-district structures in developmental discourses is based on the argument that they deal with trivial and mundane issues (Ayee, 2000). Further, scholars on local governance in Ghana argue that sub-district structure like the Unit committee at the last tier must be scraped (Ahwoi, 2010). These on-going debates have led to the neglect and further weakened the capacity of the sub-district structures to adequately deal with the various manifestations of the poverty of its citizens and cause the much needed development at the grassroots level. This context motivated the researchers to investigate into the challenges and potentials of the sub-district structures in inducing development from the grassroots. Specifically, the researchers sought to ascertain how effective the sub-district structures are within the entire local government structure and how functional they have been with regard to influencing development to meet the needs and aspirations of grassroots citizens. An examination of the potentials and challenges of the sub-district structures and its implications to grassroots development and poverty reduction is also made.

The paper is structured into eight parts. Part one provides background information and rationale for the study. Parts two and three review literature on governance and decentralisation from the global perspective and bring out the ensuing debates surrounding local governance and grassroots development. A brief description of the study area and methods used in gathering and analysing data for the study is presented in parts four and five respectively. Results obtained and subsequent analysis and discussion of the results are contained in parts six and seven. The last part presents the conclusion and recommendations to enhance the contribution of sub-district structures to grassroots development.

2. Local Governance and Subsidiarity: A Theoretical Review

Local governance has gained prominence in recent times as a result of the failure of central governments in meeting the needs of the local people. It is considered as a form of public administration which exists in many contexts at the lowest tier of administration within a given state (Kumssa, 2003). Local governance is used to contrast with offices at state level, which are referred to as the central government, national government, or federal government (where appropriate). Local government institutions generally act within powers delegated to them by legislation or directives of the higher level of government (Mohammed, 2015). Simply, local governance means governance at the grassroots led by local level units or agencies. Local governments are expected to be the catalyst in promoting growth and development at the local communities (Hilliard & Wissink, 2009). In broad governance perspective, local government is always part of central or national government. However, local governance thrives on the philosophy that, certain functions performed at the central or national level can better be performed at the local level by the local people. This philosophy justifies the appropriateness of the application of the theory of subsidiarity in local governance.

The theory of subsidiarity, though arose from Catholic social thoughts is useful in enhancing local governance and grassroots development. The theory argues that given the capacity and resources, social problems and concerns can better be addressed at the grassroots rather than at the national level (Chaplin, 1997). In the framework of the theory, specific responsibilities are advanced to local entities by the central authority and the entity must act and operate within the boundaries defined for them by the appointing authority. The higher entity must provide the necessary support to the lower entity to function well and once the lower entity functions well,

the higher entity cannot intervene. The theory is therefore underpinned by two conditions. Firstly, the autonomy of the lower entities must be respected and enhanced. Secondly, the higher entity must provide help when the lower entity is unable to perform its assigned duties and responsibilities. The theory of subsidiarity has extensively been applied in European politics and it has to a large extent guided the integration of European Union (see Klaus-Dieter Sohn & Czuratis, 2015).

The relevance of the theory of subsidiarity to decentralisation and local governance is rooted in the argument by Kim (2008) cited in Ryan and Woods (2015) that, the fusing of decentralisation and subsidiarity should lead to efficiency in the utilization of resources and promote the welfare of the citizenry which is the ultimate objective of decentralisation. The idea of power sharing between the higher and lower authorities protects the grassroots members from being neglected by the center and in this manner as argued by Mele' (2004) brings dignity, respect of human freedom and unity of purpose in the development of a region.

In spite of the strength of the theory with respect to decentralisation and local governance, subsidiarity is deficient in a number of ways. Bergh (1996) points out that, a major flaw of subsidiarity is that it is vague in design. The vagueness of the theory is in respect to the fact that, it fails to specify how the center must monitor the activities and operations of the sub-unit. This monitoring is necessary because subsidiarity does not completely take away the influence of the center. Further, the theory is silent on when, how and by what means the sub-unit must call for help from the center when the need arises. The absence of this clarity in the theory may threaten its effective application. However, these limitations may not manifest as long as the subunit has the capacity to perform its assigned duties and responsibilities.

Effective application of the theory in local governance therefore requires building the capacity of the local structures and periodically appraise their capacity to manage grassroots development (see Marshall, 2008). To build the capacity of grassroots structures and yield the desired results of grassroots development and poverty reduction, local governance requires effective harmonization of five pillars of governance - participation, accountability, rule of law, transparency and prudent fiscal policies (Mallya & Kessy, 2013). Any governance with one or more of these pillars lacking is bound to encounter difficulties and eventually fail. This is because, the benefits of these pillars are interlinked and when properly harmonized in local governance lead to accelerated development and the delivery of public services that are relevant in the local context. Local government is vital in the development of a nation because, it is the closest government machinery at the local level and is therefore able to integrate local issues in its rural developmental and poverty reduction agendas.

Many local government institutions in sub-Saharan Africa are making efforts to improve and strengthen their structures of governance (Hilliard & Wissink, 2000; Mallya & Kessy, 2013). These efforts are being made to make local government more visible, viable and beneficial to the grassroots citizens.

3. Local Governance and Decentralisation

In recent times, local governance has become inseparable from the concept of decentralisation. The definition of the concept of decentralisation has been a hotly contested one, because, the term defies a single definition (Ryan & Woods, 2015; Mosca, 2006). As such, Kyei (2008) described decentralisation as an omnibus word widely used by practicing politicians, administrators and academicians with many different meanings. Though the concept has been variously defined by scholars (Rondinelli et al., 1984; Maeda, 1987; Turner & Hulme, 1997), it connotes deliberate transfer of power, authority and responsibility from the central government to the sub-national levels with the intention of stimulating development from the grassroots. The structure of decentralisation brings governance closer to citizens in order to promote community participation in governance (Ayee, 2000). It requires the restructuring or reorganization of authority so that there is a system of co-responsibility between institutions of governance at the central and that at the local levels. This increases the overall quality and effectiveness of the system of governance, while increasing the authority and capacities of sub-national levels (UNDP, 1997). In effect, decentralisation as a concept is assumed to enhance responsiveness and accountability at all levels of governance to people at the grassroots for efficiency and effectiveness in development.

Decentralisation has quietly become a fashion of our time especially in Sub-Saharan Africa where there has been a campaign for a retreat of state involvement in developmental projects and initiatives (Rapley, 2002). The concept has become accepted as the most preferred strategy for grassroots development and governments with different ideologies are implementing various forms of decentralisation. Thus decentralisation is a concept neutral to every society and if properly practiced will enhance the development of rural communities and reduce poverty. But the question that has remained largely unanswered by proponents of the concept is whether decentralisation is always beneficial? It is however important to note that decentralisation does not always

guarantee grassroots development and poverty reduction. The application of the concept brings along its own drawbacks that can impede the realization of the inherent benefits. Ayee (2000) discussed two important challenges to the application of decentralisation. Firstly, the concept requires management skills which is often lacking at the grassroots level, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Secondly, the concept requires interaction among a large body of local units and the organization of services for a large population. These challenges may threaten the gains expected from the application of the concept. Notwithstanding these challenges, decentralisation can be a means for creating more transparent, responsive and effective local government that is capable of meeting the needs, aspirations and hopes of grassroots citizens. Consequently, it ensures that government interventions meet a variety of social needs in the development of rural communities and poverty reduction efforts.

Decentralisation as a tool for grassroots development can take four forms (Rondineilli, 1984). Each type is distinguished from the other based on the degree of autonomy from the center. These are:

de-concentration - mere transfer of power and authority from central government to agents at the local areas.

delegation – specific or defined functions of the central government is delegated to the local area to perform on behalf of government.

privatisation - specific functions are transferred to private organizations like non-governmental organizations to perform on behalf of government.

devolution - political, administrative and fiscal structures at the national level are replicated at the local areas. Here greater autonomy in all spheres of governance is exercised by the local area.

4. Decentralised Local Government System in Ghana

Local governance in Ghana dates back to the colonial period where chiefs were handpicked to represent their people in government (Kyei, 2008). Though this violated democratic principles, the initiative was to help the British colonial government to administer law and order. The establishment of districts in coastal towns and later in the northern territories was all efforts to bring the government machinery closer to the people (Crawford 2003).

After Ghana's independence in 1957, political instability caused mainly by the military coup, frustrated all efforts towards decentralisation until 1988, when the government showed greater commitment towards decentralizing governance (Ahwoi, 2010). This was manifested in the passing of the PNDC Law 207. The passage of the law increased the number of districts in the country from 65 to 110 (Songsore, 2011). The number of Metropolitan/Municipal/District Assemblies (MMDAs) remained 110 until 2003 when 28 more were added bringing the total number of the administrative districts to 138. Again, in 2007, 32 more MMDAs were added to further increase the number to 170. Today (2015) the number of MMDAs has increased to 216 with a possibility of further increasing the number. The successive increment in administrative districts which are the focal points of local development shows the level of the governments' commitment to promote local participation for grassroots poverty reduction and development. The increase in the number of MMDAs automatically caused an increase in the number of sub-district structures.

To strengthen local participation in governance and to remove all ambiguity, a structure for local governance has been put in place (figure 1) with the Regional Coordinating Council (RCC) at the apex and also act as a coordinating body within the ten regions of Ghana.

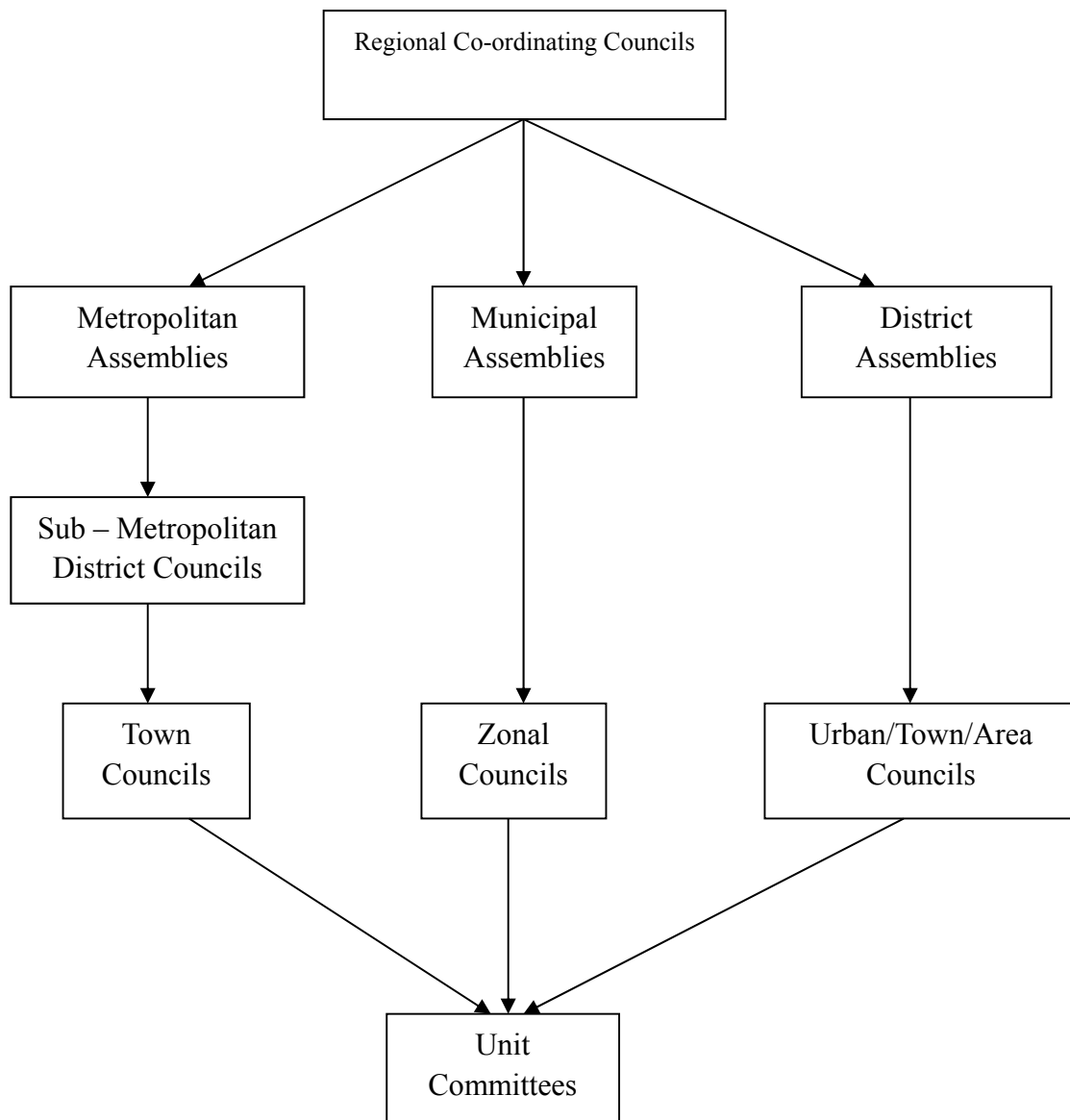


Figure 1. Structure of Local Government in Ghana

Beneath the RCC are the MMDAs and the sub-district structures which are the Sub metropolitan, Urban, Town, Area and Zonal Councils and Unit committees. These sub-district structures are to serve as subordinate bodies to the MMDA's in ensuring effectiveness of developmental initiatives and poverty reduction in their respective areas of jurisdiction.

As enshrined in the Legislative Instrument (L.I. 1589, 1994) that established the Sub-district structures (SDSs), they are not supposed to initiate development projects but to represent the voice of the masses at the grassroots by channelling their hopes and aspirations to the MMDAs for redress and also disseminate information from the MMDAs (Ayee, 2000). They are therefore not allocated budget from the central government or the MMDAs but are required to mobilize revenue either through taxes or voluntary contributions and also initiate self-helped projects and programmes to the benefits of the grassroots. SDSs are therefore important partners in inducing development from the grassroots. But the realization of this potential has been partial as good governance at the grassroots level remains a critical challenge (Akudugu, Fielmua & Akugri, 2012).

By cursory observation, an impression is formed that the SDSs are unable to perform their functions effectively as enshrined in the Local Government Act, 1993. Their capability to provide a platform for community development needs and aspirations to be discussed, resolved and pursued is barely in existence. The struggles of

the SDS can be traced to global forces of neo-colonialism, foreign debt and structural adjustment policies. As argued by Chant and McIlwaine (2009), the implementation of structural adjustment programme in Ghana in the 1980s through the early part of the 1990s had negative impact on the socio-economic structures of the country. Subsequently, the 1980s in Ghana has been described by development experts as the ‘lost decade of development’ (Songsore, 2011; Sowa, 2002). Again, foreign financial and technical support for developmental projects and programmes targets national and district levels with the belief that such assistance would trickle down to the SDSs. Further, researches and studies on sub-district structures are not pursued vigorously compared to that of the MMDAs on the grounds that sub-district structures deal with trivial and mundane issues (Aye, 2000). Their representative and participatory role for local level development is hardly guaranteed in the localities. It is against this backdrop that the study makes an inquiry into the possible challenges faced by the SDSs in their quest for local level development in Ghana as well as the potentials that can be harnessed to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of these SDSs.

5. Study Context

The study was undertaken in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. Two reasons informed the choice of the region for the study. Firstly, it is the most populous region and therefore has the highest number of districts and sub-district structures (G.S.S., 2012). Secondly, it has the three categories of districts (Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assembly). The three districts studied were – the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly, the Offinso South Municipal Assembly and the Adanse North District Assembly (figure 2). The rationale for the choice of the districts was to ensure a representation of the three administrative levels of local governance in Ghana as shown in figure 1. Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies also exhibit variations with regard to population and resource allocation from the central government. The selection of the study areas was also to reflect such variations.

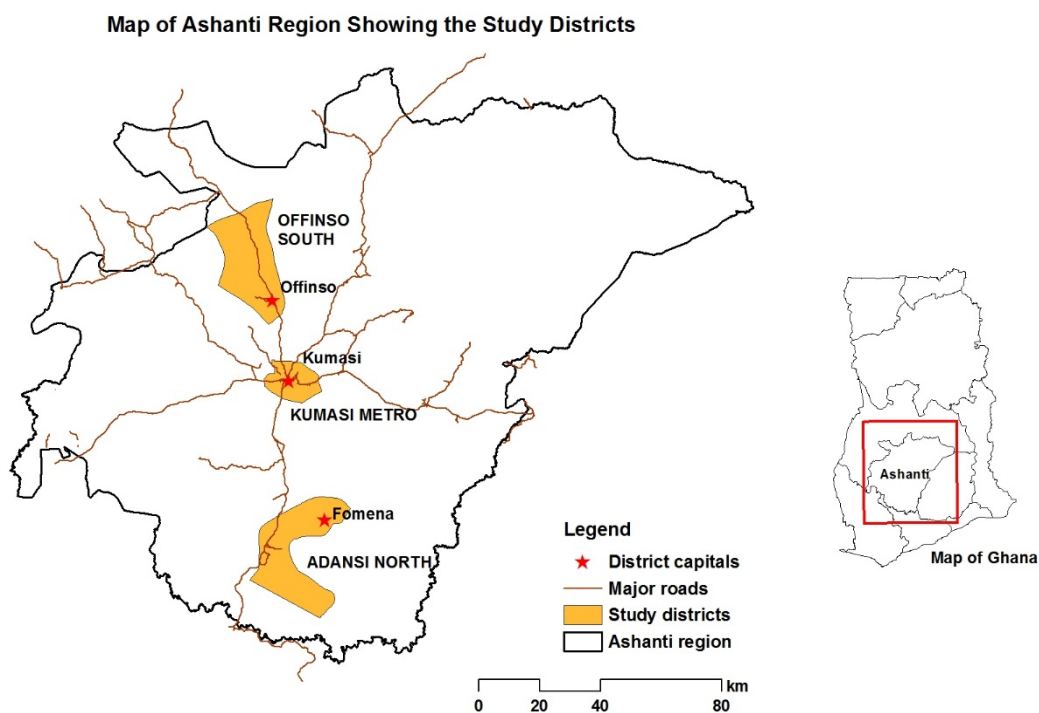


Figure 2. Map of study districts

The Kumasi metropolis is the second order city in Ghana. It gained a metropolitan status in 1987. The metropolis is located on latitude $6^{\circ}.35'-6^{\circ}.40'N$ and longitude $1^{\circ}.30'-1^{\circ}.35'W$ and covers a land area of 254 square kilometers (Adarkwa, 2011). Its population stands at a little over two million (G.S.S., 2010). The city is divided into nine sub-metropolitan areas, five of which were selected for this study. These are Suame in the north, Asokwa in the south, Subin in the central, Oforikrom in the East and Kwadaso in the West parts of the metropolis.

The Offinso South Municipality was established by legislative instrument (LI 1990) in 2007. The municipality lies within latitude 7° 15'N and 6° 05'S and longitude 1° 35'E and 1° 50'W. It comprises of 22 suburbs with a total land area of about 600 Square Kilometers. The municipality is divided into four Zonal Councils and thirty Unit committees. It has a population of approximately 76,500 (G.S.S., 2010).

The Adansi North District was created by legislative Instrument 1758 in 2004 and located on latitude 6° 30'N and longitude 1° 50'W. The district covers an area of 1,140 square kilometers and it is divided into seven Area Councils with forty-three Unit committees. Its population stands at 107,091 (G.S.S., 2010).

6. Methods

The research adopted the cross-sectional design. This research design study a cross-section of some phenomena at a particular time (Kumar, 2005). The cross-sectional design was necessary for this research as it provided an opportunity for the researchers to gain insight into the nature and dynamics of the SDSs. The approach was important for the study because of its intensive probing and its ability to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being investigated.

Primary data and secondary information were collected and analyzed. Secondary information was obtained from journal articles and books. The responses from the sampled population constituted the primary sources of data. The study adopted a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques in obtaining, processing and analyzing data. To this end, a mixer of open and closed ended questionnaires, face-to-face interview and observations were used to collect the primary data. Issues ranging from establishment, operations, sources and disbursement of funds, participation, accountability and transparency, among others were obtained from the Chairmen of the Town, Zonal or Area Councils and Unit Committee Chairmen. Data from these sources were obtained using open and closed ended questions. In-depth face-to-face interviews (semi-structured) were conducted to elicit information from the offices of the District Coordinating Directors and/or Sub-metropolitan Administrators. The interviews were conducted to cross-check information provided by the Chairmen of the SDSs.

Combination of purposive and simple random sampling methods was used. To ensure clarity in the analysis, the Urban, Town, Zonal and Area Councils were classified as category 'A' SDS while the Unit Committees were classified as category 'B' SDS (table 1). In each of the three selected district assemblies, Category 'A' SDSs were purposely selected. The selection was made to ensure a fair representation of the district. In Offinso Municipal and Adansi North District Assemblies, four each of the category 'A' SDSs formed part of the sample. However, in the case of the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly, five out of the nine Sub-Metropolitan Assemblies were purposively sampled. The selection was made to ensure a spatial representation of the assemblies. In each of the five selected Sub-Metropolitan Assembly, two of the Category 'A' SDS were selected as part of the sample. In obtaining the sample for category 'B' SDSs, three Unit Committees in each of the selected Category 'A' SDSs were randomly selected using the lottery system. In the lottery system, the unit committees under each of the selected category A were put in a bowl and the first researcher picked three out, one after the other until the three were selected (Kumar, 2005).

The main respondents were the Chairmen of the sub-district structures in the study communities and to ensure triangulation, the Coordinating Directors (CDs) and/ or Sub-Metropolitan Administrators (SMAs) formed part of the sample. A total sample size of seventy-nine was used in the study. This was made up of seventy-two Chairmen of the Town/Zonal/Area councils (table 1) plus seven CDs and/or Administrators of Sub – Metropolitan Assemblies (table 2). The open and closed-ended questionnaire methods were used to collect data from respondents in table one while the face-to-face interview technique was used to elicit information from respondents in table two.

Table 1. Sampled sub-district structures

Districts	CATEGORY A (Town/Zonal/Area Council)	CATEGORY B (Unit Committees)
Kumasi Metropolitan Area	10	30
Offinso Municipal Assembly	4	12
Adansi North District	4	12
TOTAL	18	54

Table 2. Sampled CDs and SMAs interviewed

District	Coordinating Director (CD)	Sub-Metropolitan Administrators (SMAs)
Adansi North	1	
Offinso Municipal	1	
Kwadaso Sub-metropolis		1
Oforikrom sub-metropolis		1
Suame sub-metropolis		1
Subin sub-metropolis		1
Asokwa sub-metropolis		1

Data obtained were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The quantitative data obtained from the administration of questionnaire were processed into frequency tables using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). Analysis of the quantitative data was therefore based on the descriptive statistics generated from the SPSS. The thematic technique was adopted to analyze qualitative data obtained from the interviews and open-ended questions contained in the questionnaire. The qualitative data were necessary in order to establish similarities, differences and convergences.

Specific variables of development analysed were social facilities or infrastructure, human resource, funds, participation, accountability and transparency. Indicators used to measure each of the specific variables are indicated below:

Social facilities or infrastructure

- availability of office space and logistics for the smooth operations of the SDSs
- provision of facilities that satisfy the social needs of residents such as clean water, toilet facilities, planting of trees, clean-up exercises, markets among others.

Human resource

- availability and quality of staff at the offices of the SDSs
- motivation for the staff in terms of remuneration and logistics for operations

Funds

- data on rateable persons and properties.
- existence of mechanism for the mobilization of funds
- maintenance of bank accounts

Participation

- consulting beneficiaries about the intends of projects before implementation.
- soliciting and incorporating the views of citizens in the design and planning of projects

Accountability and Transparency

- existence of platforms for SDSs to periodically account for their actions or stewardship to residents of their areas of jurisdiction.
- Existence of platforms for SDSs to respond to enquiries from citizens in their areas of operation.

These indicators were selected from the statutory duties of SDSs as enshrined in Legislative Instrument 1589, 1994 (Ayee, 2000. Pp152-154).

7. Findings

7.1 Category A Sub-District Structures

Out of the Eighteen SDSs in this category, only five had been inaugurated; four in the Kumasi metropolis and the other in the Adansi North. They were inaugurated between 2002 and 2012. None of the sub-district structures in the Offinso municipality had been inaugurated though they are operating. Fourteen of the SDSs had an office accommodation owned by them while in the Kumasi metropolis, two rented their office spaces. These councils have secretaries employed by the DAs that manage the day-to-day affairs of the offices. Two of the councils (one

each in Kumasi and Offinso) had no office accommodation either rented or owned. SDSs in this category consider local development and revenue mobilization as their main functions. The major sources of funding were licenses of shops, permits to operate businesses, permit to block roads to organize funerals and weddings, rates for renewal of permits and market tolls. SDSs in this category understand development to mean engaging the local residents in periodic clean up exercises and maintaining good sanitation practices in the communities. It was established that communities are not involved in planning for such clean up exercises. No platform also existed for regular interactions with grassroots citizens to seek their opinions on issues of interest to them and also respond to their enquiries on issues or activities of the SDSs that affect them. Participation, accountability and transparency were not high in the operations and activities of the SDSs in this category. Majority of respondents described assistance in terms of office space, logistics, human resources and funding from DAs and Sub-metropolitan units as inadequate (table 2).

Table 3. Council support from DAs/SMUs

Description	Adequate	Moderate	Inadequate	Total
Office Space	5	1	12	18
Logistics	-	4	14	18
Staff	1	1	16	18
Funding	-	-	18	18

With exception of SDSs in the Kumasi metropolis, the others did not have a database for tax payers or rateable persons in their areas of jurisdiction. Only three councils in the Kumasi metropolis operated a bank account. All the SDSs in this category rated their internally generated funds as poor and inadequate for their operations though they were able to identify sources like markets and other commercial entities from where they could raise funds. Seven of the respondents in this category had tertiary education while the remaining had secondary education. Also, none of the council Chairmen was remunerated for leading the sub-districts. Challenges they encountered were financial, logistics, sanitation and inadequate information from the sub-metropolitan and district assemblies.

7.2 Category B Sub-District Structure

All the Chairmen in this category had basic education (primary education) as their highest qualification. Contrary to SDSs in category A, the entire 54 sub national unit in this category had been inaugurated between 2008 and 2012. None of the unit committees had an office accommodation except one in the Kumasi metropolis that was accommodated in a wooden structure (Kiosk). The others had their meetings in basic schools (either public or private) within their areas of jurisdiction. The Unit Committees involved the grassroots population in the identification and implementation of projects or programmes in the communities. Some of such projects and programmes are siting of boreholes, streetlight and management of public urinary and toilet facilities. However, twenty-eight out of the SDSs in this category rated as moderate the willingness of grassroots population to involve themselves in project identification and implementation.

Participation, accountability and transparency in this category were found to be higher compared to category 'A' SDSs. Some of the projects initiated or facilitated by the SDSs were installation of street light, establishment of markets, community policing, organizing clean – up exercises, monitoring the construction of public toilets and bathhouses and constructing boreholes. None of the SDSs in this category organize pay levy campaigns in their areas of jurisdiction to boost their Internally Generated Funds (IGF) though thirty-five of the SDSs revealed that they keep records of rateable persons/ businesses. They described IGF as poor and as such only twelve out of the fifty-four in this category operated bank account. SDSs in this category rated as inadequate assistance in terms of logistics from SDSs in category A and DAs. They estimated their recurrent expenditure to range between \$20 to \$29 per month and it is spent on replacing street light bulbs, maintenance of boreholes and markets and donations mainly during funeral of prominent members of their localities. On poverty reduction, they admitted that they had not done much to reduce poverty at the grassroots. They attributed the failure to the challenge they are confronted with especially in terms of financial and material resources. Other specific challenges of SDSs in this category were sanitation, armed robbery, squatter settlements and logistics for clean-up exercises.

8. Discussion

In order to measure the level of performance of the sub-district structures, adequate information were obtained from the SDSs (TC, ZC, AC and UC). The operations of the SDSs were found to be in consonance with the theory of subsidiarity. The Ghana Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462), gives the SDS powers to bring the development needs of its residence to the attention of the center and initiate some developmental programmes. However, given the over two decades of the practice of local governance, it was the expectation of the researchers that the SDSs would be effective at the grassroots in fulfilling their potential of initiating development from the grassroots. The expectations of the researchers became an illusion especially with respect to SDSs in category A. The results as shown above indicate that a lot need to be done to ensure effective, efficient and sustainable operations of the SDSs in fulfilling their core mandate of ensuring grassroots development. Though the structure for local governance existed, the commitment by DAs to make the structure functional was elusive.

Technically, the operations of the SDSs that have not been inaugurated are illegal (Ghana Local Government Act 1993, Act 462). This illegality thwarts the effective functioning of the SDSs and erodes the SDSs potential in inducing grassroots development. Further, those SDSs that have been inaugurated have been inserted on the framework of local governance rather than demonstrated and hence does not have significant impact on the lives of the local people. In other words, the DAs or sub-metropolitan units that are mandated to facilitate the operations of the SDSs pay lip services to their needs as such grassroots participation is not strong and defeats the purpose of establishing the SDSs. The framework for the operation of the SDSs as discussed in the literature does not specify the pathways by which such SDSs could petition the center (DAs and Sub-metropolitan units) to provide specific assistance. The weak backward linkages between the SDSs and the DAs or the Sub-metropolitan assemblies explain why many of the SDSs are not visible at the grassroots. The structure has forced the SDSs to accept and make use of what they have or have been provided by the center. In response to the performance of SDSs, the Chairman of Adum Town Council stated:

“Currently we are non-operational. We just exist in name. We are now trying to put up a structure to enable us to perform our function as a council”.

Most of the respondents saw revenue mobilization and organizing clean up exercises as their main responsibility but in actual fact they were doing very little in that regard basically due to logistical inadequacies. This situation undermines their efforts to perform their functions effectively.

It is worthy to note also that absence of office accommodation for the SDSs makes them invisible to the local people and de-motivates council members to meaningfully contribute to the effective functioning of the structure. Additionally, it does not permit accountability and promote participation since the SDS itself cannot be identified by the citizens. Indeed, the operations of the SDSs as revealed by the results of this research are basically to maintain the structure of local governance rather than impacting on the lives of the local residents. It is important to note however, that compared to category ‘A’ SDSs, Unit committees (category ‘B’) were more visible to local residents, effective in their operations and in meeting the aspirations of the local people. Many of them had initiated projects to satisfy the social needs of the local people. In other words, the Unit Committees perform better than the Area, Urban and Zonal councils. This finding is in contradiction with popular assertion that the unit committee at the grassroots of local governance should be scraped (Ahwoi, 2010). The low level of education of the Chairmen of the Unit Committees compared to that in category ‘A’ suggests that the educational level of development agents have little influence on grassroots development. What matters is the ability of the agents to create the enabling process for the grassroots citizens involved in deciding and implementing projects. It must also be stressed that the SDSs in the Kumasi metropolis were better off compared to those in the other study areas. This was evident in the area of office space, records keeping, finances and logistics for operations.

Participation, accountability and transparency were not high in the operations of the SDSs. This was however not a surprise because, these and the other pillars of local governance are not central to the core functions that the law establishing SDSs states (Ahwoi, 2010 pp 104). Moreover, the lack of office accommodation does not encourage effective participation of community and council members because they have no office structure to permit their meetings, discuss and take inputs from residents within their area of jurisdiction. It further affects their effort to address the challenges within their respective jurisdiction, especially in relation to poverty reduction. The invisibility of the SDSs makes residents especially the poor to struggle daily to make their voices heard on what they require to expand their opportunities and lift them out of poverty.

The myriad of challenges that confront the SDSs are primary and emanate from institutional failure and neglect by the DAs and Sub-metropolitan Units. A chairman of an Area council in a response to a question wrote:

“These challenges have paralyzed the SDSs and the inherent potential of the structure causing development from the grassroots and alleviating extreme poverty is being faded away”.

The challenges have demoralized SDSs council members. One Chairman of a Unit Committee stated:

“we ourselves are in poverty, so how can we solve the poverty in our communities. We don't take salaries”

Despite the challenges that they are confronted with, SDSs still possess the potential in grassroots development. As earlier noted, the Unit Committees at the lower end of the framework for grassroots development show more commitment in helping communities meet their needs. The potential of the SDSs in developing localities depends on the provision of logistics and material needs to the SDSs by the DAs or the sub-metropolitan units. Also as argued by Marshall (2008), the capacity of the SDSs needs to be periodically appraised by the center to enhance their capacity in the execution of their core mandate.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

This article has analysed Ghana's framework for grassroots participation and initiating development from bottom-up. The results show that SDSs are not yielding the desired results mainly due to challenges confronting them. The challenges have made the SDSs weak, dependent, powerless and nominal. The myriad of challenges had eroded the potential of the SDSs in inducing grassroots development a mirage. Sub-district structures within the framework of local government in Ghana need to be re-organized and their capacity enhanced. Currently the operations of the SDSs are geared towards developing nothing; not even things. They are not independent in activity, finance and human resource and logistics. Their survival and efficiency depend so much on the district assemblies and this defeats the very essence of their existence.

Based on the findings, the researchers recommend that the local government ministry should as a matter of urgency make appropriate arrangements to inaugurate all SDSs to pave way for them to function legally and effectively. The ministry must again initiate a process to review the Legislative Instrument (L.I. 1589, 1994) establishing the SDSs to increase the autonomy of the SDSs. In addition, officers at the SDSs should be educated by the local government ministry so that their responsibilities at that level of governance go beyond organizing clean up exercises and collecting revenues. They must be close to the grassroots and create the platform to hear their voices and relay their needs and aspirations to the Sub-metropolitan Assemblies or the District Assemblies. District assemblies must give much attention to the Unit Committees because they have the tendency of keeping in touch with the grassroots compared to the other urban, town, zonal and area councils.

These initiatives would place the SDSs in a position to take advantage of their potential and ensure the realization and sustainability of development from below

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