

LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION

A paper to be presented at the Cornell/ISSER/World Bank International
Conference, In Accra, Ghana

On

SHARED GROWTH IN AFRICA

By

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July 21 – 22, 2005

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ABSTRACT

An important function of District Assemblies in Ghana is to ensure that the benefits of growth are shared equitably and fairly. One way of achieving this is to promote efficiency in resource allocation at both individual and community levels. This paper utilizes the case study approach to assess efficiency of resource distribution in four Districts in the Northern and Upper East regions of Ghana with emphasis on infrastructure, micro-credit, human and information resources. The conclusion is that the Medium Term Development plan prepared within the framework of the themes of the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) is an important guiding document in resource allocation. The allocation of community facilities such as schools, health and administrative infrastructure have been found generally to conform to the plan in spite of occasional erratic influences and decisions of some personalities. However, in terms of resources that are allocated to individuals such as the Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF) the guidelines are often circumvented. It is recommended that Government policy of zero tolerance for corruption needs to be demonstrated at the local level in terms of the disbursement of the PAF. Priority must be given to development considerations instead of partisan party loyalty in appointing DCEs in order to check politicisation of resource allocation. A serious consideration must be given to the full implementation of the sub-district structures to facilitate information dissemination. For the people to “feel the growth in their pockets” resource allocation at the local level needs to be closely monitored to ensure compliance with guidelines.

1. Introduction

During the early 1980s, Ghana moved towards a decentralization scheme and this led to the creation of District Assemblies (DAs) at the local government level. An important reason for establishing District Assemblies is to improve efficiency and responsiveness to community development. The District Assembly is the basic unit of local government and it is supposed to be the highest political authority in the district with deliberative, legislative, executive and administrative powers. They are responsible for involving local people and other partners at the local level in decision making and ensuring that community views are taken into account through participatory democracy. More so, District Assemblies are to ensure that the productive resources and gains of economic growth are distributed equitably and fairly.

It has been argued that one optimistic approach to the problem of realizing development is the improvement in equitable resource distribution. Apart from impacting directly on living standards, equitable resource distribution also tends to enhance growth (Tsekpo and Jebuni, 2004). According to Kithakye (1999), a system in which resources are not equitably allocated is simply inefficient. Inefficiency in turn leads to price distortions, corruption and reduces peoples' confidence in those who are in charge of promoting rural development.

District Assemblies are suppose to be implementing projects and programmes based on bottom-up approaches. However, the local governance process appears to be a combination of both the 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches to the decentralization framework. Further, the assemblies embody local representatives on

the one hand and bureaucrats and national political echelons who are involved in a chain of command structure on the other hand. Thus, the success of the DA can be judged by the degree of its responsiveness to the expectations of the higher political echelons, the operational efficiency of the bureaucratic agents and the participation of the grassroots people. In broad terms, therefore, these changes have been perceived by many as changes to formal structures and processes whereas ignoring the informal interactive ones.

The experience of Ghana indicates that poverty is well pronounced in the rural areas where over 60% of the population lives. It is against this background that the government of Ghana has for the past two decades implemented several pro-poor policies, including the Programme of Action to Mitigate the Social Costs of Adjustment (PAMSCAD), introduction of social investment fund (SIF) and the current Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) policy. The long term sustainability of such policies requires ownership by a broad range of stakeholders all who are concerned about and committed to fighting poverty towards lasting results (Korkor, 2001). The assemblies play significant role in not only the planning of pro-poor policies but also the implementation and monitoring of those programmes and projects. DAs aim at utilizing the wide range of resources available within the district to improve living standards as well as meeting central government expectations. In this regard, participation of the poor in policy consultations and dialogue is germane.

Nevertheless, critics of the policy remain skeptical about the ability of the assemblies to ensure equitable and fair resource distribution. Thus, in spite of the inroads, the challenges remain enormous especially in the area of equity and fairness in the

distribution of resources to reduce poverty within the respective districts or local government areas. With Ghana's potential for accelerated growth, it will not be sufficient for poverty reduction unless it is sustained over time and broadly shared (Nankani, 2004). Shared growth, however, is said to be highly influenced by the level of resource allocation defined as the division of authorized resources among various units (communities, individuals and group of individuals) under the command of District Assemblies.

Thus, the objective of shared growth, particularly, at the local government level cannot be achieved unless efforts are made to ensure that resources (physical, financial, human and information) are judiciously and equitably allocated. This paper examines the equity and fairness in allocating resources at the local level in Ghana with evidence from four (4) local government areas, namely Bongo District and Bolgatanga Municipality in the Upper East Region, and West Mamprusi District and Tamale Metropolitan Assembly in the Northern Region. The paper is structured in five main sections. Section II briefly reviews the system of local governance in Ghana from the colonial period to the current state. Section III outlines the methodology. In section IV we assess the equity in resource allocation in the forms of infrastructure facilities, micro credit, human resources and information. Section V presents the conclusions and recommendations.

2. Local governance in Ghana

Since the beginning of colonial rule various attempts have been made to develop a local government system in Ghana. Events during this period indicate that chiefs and their kinsmen carried out local government functions through the Native Authority System (Owusu-Ansah, 1975).

As it were, the statutory basis for the establishment of the Native Authorities was embedded in the indirect rule policy instituted by the colonial administration where traditional chiefs carried out government directives through these authorities. In fact the Native Authorities were merely an extension of the central government where chiefs at the local level were used as instruments to enhance the political interest of the colonial government. They were not a meaningful way of making local people participate effectively in governance.

By 1859, Ghana was already experiencing some form of secular local government whereby town and municipal councils were established in certain parts of the country with some powers and functions conferred on them. However, these councils were not elective until 1943. In general, the administration of the country was in the hands of bureaucrats who never had grips with the political, economic and social realities of the people. The system of local government was not only abused but also unrepresentative and inefficient.

The Greenwood Commission report was constituted into the Local Government act of 1961, which consolidated the whole local government structure from the two-tier system to a single tier system. The councils were rather classified into four main

types; City, Municipal, Urban and Local. Functionally, however, these four operated as two types of local authorities (i.e. city/municipal councils and local/urban council) with its members democratically elected. Unlike the 1951 Local Government ordinance, however, the act gave parliamentary approach to the removal of traditional rulers from the councils. Indeed, the chiefs had long seized to be members of the local councils since 1959 and the 1961 act only endorsed this position.

These changes, welcome, as they were, raised concerns for overhauling the local government system again. Still the maintenance of two different machineries for the administration of the councils resulted in excessive duplication of functions between the councils and central government agencies in the districts. To develop this problem further, the early experience with the act suggested conflicting outcome of this central-local relationships. On the one hand the local authorities were not equipped to train, recruit and hold on to a class of technical staff like the central government agencies and therefore had to contend themselves with lesser qualified personnel. Meanwhile, the central government agencies possessed all the advantages in terms of management skills and expertise, which enabled them to encroach on the areas of the local authorities. On the other hand, there was evidence that apart from ignoring local authorities when it comes to development planning, central government field agencies also referred matters of significance, which required expeditious action to the national capital for decisions. This created unduly long delays. The picture this dichotomy presented was a system of governance that produced duplication and inefficiency.

From 1966 onwards until the mid 1980s, local government in the country was conceived more in terms of the efficient administration of services in the localities than in terms of affording local people an opportunity to exercise their democratic right to govern themselves. Among the first actions of the National Liberation Council (NLC) government which took over from the CPP government was the removal of all the 183 urban and local councils and the reduction of the districts from 160 to 47. Instead of the District Commissioner, the district councils were now placed under the control of the District Administration Officer (DAO) who was a generalist drawn from the administrative class of the civil service.

The National Redemption Council (NRC), which took over power from the Progress Party government, brought the districts under the control of management committees. However, in 1974 the local administration (amendments) decree 1974, which was largely a reproduction of the Local Administration Act of 1971, was passed. It established a four-tier structure of local government comprising of Regional Councils, District Councils, and Municipal or Local councils and Town/Village development committees. This model which was described as the “Single Hierarchy Model” sought to abolish the distinction between central and local government administration at the local level and create one common monolithic structure. At best the implementation of the decentralization programme lacked enthusiasm. In the attempt to decentralize, the regions were rather made more powerful than the districts. The district authorities were not provided with any authority over decision-making or with the necessary financial performance.

The 1979 third republican constitution on its part responded in a way to the need to make services sensitive to local demand by assigning to local councils a range of services and revenue resources best handled by them.

When the PNDC took over the reins of government in 1982, it committed itself to grassroots participation in government. To ensure the realization of this goal the government embarked upon a decentralization programme, which involved ministerial restructuring. Meanwhile the government dissolved the existing district councils and set up Interim Management Committees (IMCs). Membership of these committees was largely Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (i.e. CDRs). As it were, CDRs were agencies introduced by the PNDC government to foster its philosophy of grassroots participation. It was believed that this would ensure a democratic form of government where decision-making springs from bottom to the top. Additionally, the PNDC government appointed District Secretaries to run the affairs of the IMCs.

Considering the present district administration framework, it should be noted that its major actors constitute democratically elected representatives, government nominated members and career civil service personnel who are all involved in a sort of mixed relationships. Clearly, mechanisms put in place for administration at the district level are designed to facilitate grassroots participation in decision-making and development planning. This way it is believed the efficiency of the DAs would improve thereby making it more responsive to the desires and needs of the local residents.

Basically, management is concerned with planning, organizing, command, coordination and control with an emphasis on formal authority (Fayol, 1949). Thus, DAs perform the following major functions.

a. Planning

Planning is a vital component of the current system of district administration. Act 480 of the 1992 constitution offers the legal basis for every DA to develop a focused plan that outlines strategic approaches to meet the development needs of the entire district. Under the administrative framework of each DA, a District Planning Coordinating Unit (DPCU) is supposed to be established to plan and implement the Assembly's own plans within the framework of the national plan. Planning is done at all the various levels of the district assembly concept. At the grassroots level it starts with community involvement where individuals assume responsibility and develop the capacity to contribute to their own development through assembly members and sub-district structures. These initiatives are harnessed into the District Plan, which is directed into national strategic planning by the National Development Planning Commission. The act also empowers specific institutions and departments with planning powers and provides the procedures by which they can carry out their planning functions.

Thus the DPCU coordinates the development planning activities of all sectorial departments including the various units of the assembly itself. Above all, it is responsible for formulating and updating the components of the district's development plan and performs any other planning function as may be required by the NDPC. Hence, the DPCU is the nerve center of all development planning in the

district (Yankson, 2000). It determines where the assembly is going and how it should get there.

b. Organizing

Organizing both material and human resource is an important managerial function of a DA. The current district administration framework makes it difficult if not impossible though to employ only formal organizing process in its programmes. In the DAs, organizing involves the use of channels, which require grassroots involvement in setting priorities, and establishing development plans. In the end, these plans are passed upward and integrated into regional and national development plans. Thus, at all these levels, individuals and departments are engaged in evaluating the current stage of development, examining prospective development, making strategic choices, allocating resources and providing the basis for monitoring future performance. In other words, organizing takes place when work is divided among departments and in turn among individuals.

However, this process in most cases is flouted. Despite the shift from the line management system to that of coordinating at the district level, national authorities sometimes interrupt by using top-down approach to select priorities and determine what should be done at the local level. It may be hard to see why those at the center would want to substitute local priorities for their own interest. But as long as DAs do not always have access to resources necessary for organizing, then their authority will remain eroded. Nearly all the DAs have not been able to secure reliable systems of information gathering, empowered priority setting and adequate budgeting capacities to be able to organize effectively. Meanwhile, local elites and party affiliates use their

positions to influence and manipulate the distribution of the few resources meant for organizing to suite their selfish ends.

c. Coordinating

In order to achieve their primary objectives, DAs are charged with coordinating the efforts of the appropriate service institutions and organizations. These often involve identifying opportunities for cooperation and collaboration among actors within the DA itself as well as important institutions outside it. This may not necessarily involve the allocation of funds by the DA but rather to serve as brokers for institutions and organizations to enable them access existing funding more effectively and efficiently.

In performing its duties, therefore, the DA coordinates the process of planning, budgeting, financing and the implementation of all its development programmes. Thus, when coordinating it monitors all activities that has to be executed to ensure that the different units work correctly and smoothly to achieve organizational goals. However, the thrust of this responsibility lies on the DCE and the DCD. Executive action authorized by the Executive Committee is carried out by the bureaucratic machinery of the assembly headed by the DCD. Responsibility for the financial aspect of projects are based on the authority of DCD. In this scenario, the managerial function shifts between the DCD and the DCE. In the case of the DCE he acts as the chairman and implementer of the Executive Committee's decisions, which makes him coordinator of programmes and projects. To further facilitate coordination, all the decentralized departments are expected to submit quarterly reports to the Executive Committee through the office of the DCD. These moves are meant to ensure the integration of matters over which the DA exercises jurisdiction.

Related to coordination is the issue of controlling. The DA controls by monitoring and evaluating all development programmes in the district. Essentially, controlling ensures that corrective measures are taken. Because, it is through controls that weaknesses and errors are detected. When development objectives are not accomplished, there is the need to examine the standards that were set, then the results of activities are measured with the set standards before taking the necessary corrective actions. In the DAs, Executive Committees need control reports from the subsidiary committees and various departments to make sure that goals it set are achieved. However, DAs face special problems. Since their organizational objectives are set by legislation they are not tangibly stated like those of business objectives. Hence most of their controls and corrective measures are seen in the area of manpower training, posting and transfer of staff and the review of job descriptions and scheme of service (Baba, 2004).

d. Allocating Resources

Linked to planning and coordination is the issue of allocating resources from both government and non-government sources. In the current DA system, the power to allocate resources transfers an important responsibility to grassroots participation to ensure equity. However, these issues are best thought about in practical terms. Funds from the central government for example may be categorized whilst those from non-government sources may not be categorized. Take for instance a development project to be implemented by a DA in which the central government is involved. In this project, the central government might have detailed the funding and even established performance standards. Therefore the DA upon its understanding of the district

though, only has to transfer the whole package to sub-district structures of the target community for implementation. But the question is who actually directs and coordinates this state funded project? Of course the project team might have put together a plan of action. Nevertheless, it still means that the DA lacked the exercise of autonomy in the citing of the project.

Thus, a shortcoming of most government-supported projects to DAs is that it provides little opportunity for local autonomy in the way funds are spent. In most cases, funds sent down to the DAs from the central government are tied. This suggests that the system has not worked well in the transfer of resources to localities. Even with the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF), it is believed the processes are frequently flawed.

3. Methodology

Case studies

The study utilized the case study approach to achieve its objective. Four (4) districts (Bongo, Bolgatanga, West Mamprusi and Tamale) were purposively selected from the Northern and Upper East regions of Ghana. Bolgatanga and Bongo districts were visited in the Upper East whereas West Mamprusi and Tamale districts were drawn from the Northern region. The regions were selected because of high rates of poverty that characterizes them. The selection of the districts was also influenced by the need to blend features of ruralism and urbanism. Thus, Bongo and West Mamprusi districts represented rural districts whereas Bolgatanga and Tamale districts represented urban districts.

As part of the approach, the study classifies resource allocation into two. The first is the allocation of resources to individuals aimed at reducing poverty and improving living conditions. Under this, the main packages of micro credit administered by District Assemblies and development information have been used in the assessment. The second category is the resources allocated to communities such as infrastructure facilities and human resources for service delivery to communities.

Data

Data were collected at two levels: the district and community levels. With the former, data were obtained through desk review of documents from the offices of the District Assemblies as well as interviewing key informants (District Co-ordinating Directors, District Planning Officers and Assembly persons). Focus group discussions were used to collect data at the community level. This involved the organization of focused groups for community members in order to solicit their views on efficiency of resource allocation in the districts. The advantage of the focused group discussions is that it enabled us to obtain beneficiaries' own assessment (responses) of issues pertaining to resource allocation and these were used to compare with desk reports and responses from key informants.

4. Results

Micro-Credit Allocation

All the 4 districts under study revealed that the Poverty Alleviation Fund financed by 20% of the District assemblies Common Fund (DACF) is their main credit allocation programme. The Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF) is a fund set aside from the Assembly's share of the DACF for credit to people in any viable economic activities.

This fund has been found to operate under serious controversies. Some of the bureaucrats of the Assemblies observe that the PAF's guidelines are too general. This subjects the fund to various forms of abuses. The PAF is also supposed to be a revolving fund. However, the major problem faced by all the 4 District Assemblies has been low recovery of the funds loaned out to beneficiaries. Thus, the fairness principle has been infringed since earlier beneficiaries deprive potential beneficiaries from accessing the fund.

Table 1: West Mamprusi District Assembly Poverty Alleviation Fund Disbursement and Recovery (1999-2002)

Year	No. of Groups	Amount Granted (₦)	Amount Repaid (₦)	Balance (₦)
1999/2000	134	227,050,000	31,860,000	195,190,000
2002	170	489,500,000	77,180,000	412,320,000
Total	304	716,550,000	109,040,000	607,510,000

Source:

The figures in Table 1 indicate that the West Mamprusi District Assembly for instance, disbursed a total of ₦716.55 million for the period 1999/2000 and 2002 but could only recover ₦109.04 million, representing 15% of total disbursements for this period. This implies that recovery rate at the district level is lower compared to over 90% recovery rate for non-governmental organizations.

Although figures were not easily accessible for the other districts, the information suggests similar problems of low recovery. An assembly member of one of the districts is reported to have remarked. *“I do not know that the PAF loan is repayable”*. This was in reaction to a demand by a project officer of the

administering bank of the PAF that he pays back the loan. Apart from low recovery of the loan, results of the focused group discussions show that spatial fairness has also been inadequate. This was the concern of most community members but the bureaucrats maintain that it might be due to the requirements of the loan. Since the administering bodies look for viable groups that operate bank accounts, the rural dwellers are often disadvantaged because of inadequate information, illiteracy and distance from the centre where the PAF allocation is carried out.

In the West Mamprusi District for instance, the spatial considerations were said to be almost ignored in the past except in the year 2003/2004 when conscious efforts were made to disburse the PAF to cover beneficiaries for at least each area council. Even with that, the disparities are still glaring Table 2).

Table 2: PAF Disbursement (2003/04)

Area Council	No. of Groups	Amount Granted (Million Cedis)
Walewale	15	62
Kubori	9	55
Yagaba	9	56
Kparigu	8	38
Wungu	9	45.5
Tinguri	6	41
Janga	7	35
Wulugu	2	14
Kpasenkpe	4	30
Yezesi	3	11
Kunkwa	1	5
Total	73	392.5

Source:

Comparing the amount disbursed to Kunkwa and Yezesi to Walewale, the disparities are clear. This raises the question of how funds are actually disbursed. Bureaucrats of all districts indicate that an independent and objective credit allocation committee chaired by the Presiding Member (PM) of the Assembly does the allocation. It is

obvious that as a human institution these committees are influenced by personalities and statuses. The closer the personalities are to the centre, the more likely their success.

A women's group in Tamale Metropolitan Assembly remarked that they do not think it is possible for them to access the loan because they have tried over the past four or more years without success. They believe their applications are not successful because they do not have any body to influence the committee.

All the disparities discussed have been mostly blamed on partisan political considerations and nepotism. It is the perception of many people that the structures in place for the disbursement of the PAF exist in theory but that it is the District Chief Executives (DCEs) who direct the allocation most often ignoring the objective criteria advertised by the committee. In this regard, about 86% of the beneficiaries argued that partisan and nepotism considerations are paramount in matters concerning credit disbursement. They explained that opposition party strongholds are often ignored and relatives of political authorities given undue favours in credit disbursement. The bureaucrats on the other hand stated that it might be that some Assembly members are not in touch with their constituents and so create information gaps that deprive some communities from such benefits or opportunities.

Nevertheless, the gender dimensions of the allocation of PAF have been commendable. In line with the popular notion that households tend to benefit more from micro credit when it is passed through women all the districts give more priority

to women. About 70% of loan beneficiaries in each of the districts are said to be women. People with disabilities are also treated with special consideration.

Infrastructure facilities allocation

Respondents at the District Assemblies revealed that they have actively provided or supervised and collaborated the provision of educational, health, water and sanitation, electricity, roads and general administrative infrastructure. Educational facilities provided include school buildings, teachers' quarters, hostels for students and furnishing of school buildings whereas clinics, wards at hospitals, nutrition centres, quarters for health staff and equipment/furniture for clinics and hospitals constitute major health facilities. Water and sanitation facilities include pipe borne water, dams and dugouts, boreholes, wells, toilets, drainage and waste disposal facilities. Finally, the District Assemblies in collaboration with the Ministry of Energy has been involved in extension of electricity to rural areas as well as provision of solar energy where the National Grid is found to be inaccessible for now. Feeder roads and some town roads have also engaged the attention of the Assemblies. At the headquarters of the Assemblies and Area/Town Councils, administration blocks have also been provided.

Participants from all 4 districts admitted that there are disparities in the distribution of infrastructure facilities and that the problem has existed for a long time. However, the Assemblies are making conscious efforts to minimize disparities are made in line with national development goals of bridging gaps. For example, allocation of facilities is done according to the provisions of the Medium Term Development Plans of the Assemblies. These plans are said to have been prepared through a process of

consultation among all stakeholders from the Unit Committees through the Area Council representatives to the Assembly members as well as representatives of decentralized departments in the districts. In this regard projects are said to be sensitive to community needs and demand. Out of these plans, annual rolling plans are prepared and executed. The bureaucrats of the 4 assemblies contend that gradually, existing disparities are narrowing. Other opinion leaders and some groups have supported this. For example, opinion leaders in Bongo District remarked that “we might not be getting enough for the whole district, but the little we get in terms of such facilities is distributed fairly”.

Nevertheless, the influence of some personalities can determine the allocation of some facilities to some communities. There are instances that some personalities like members of parliament and ministers have influenced the allocation of some facilities to some communities outside the Medium Term Plan.

Human resource allocation

We considered the extent of fairness in the allocation of human resources within the districts for the delivery of services such as education, health, sanitation and administration in general. The study provided evidence to show that the District Assemblies have not yet succeeded in getting administrative staff to function at the sub-district levels. In Northern Region, pilot schemes are taking off for the recruitment of basic staff for the operation of a few Area Councils. In Bongo, secretaries, treasurers and watchmen have been recruited for the area councils with effect from May 2005. In Bolgatanga, the picture is still gloomy.

For educational staff, participants complained about the unfair distribution against the remote communities. Although efforts are consciously made to balance the equation there remains much to be done. The situation is not better for health staff. Disparities in educational and information facilities were cited as a major factor responsible for the unwillingness of staff to stay in remote areas.

Furthermore, in the struggle towards economic development as well as service delivery in the districts, the importance of human resource cannot be overemphasized. Sometimes, DAs spend a great deal of money and time in providing training for their regular staff to ensure an improvement in their efficiency and ultimately the efficiency of the Assembly. For example, effective training programmes are provided to augment their performance. This situation of course is supportive of the office of the DA just as it erodes the efficiency of community participants and other private sector participants who hardly get the opportunity to undergo similar training programmes.

Closely related to the issues of human resource discussed above is the provision of material resources. The way this is provided has had serious implications on how DAs perform their community development functions. In most cases, material resources and other logistics such as computers, vehicles, motorcycles, etc are either provided on temporary basis or as special support to certain projects within the DA. In other words, strengthening has been directed specifically to these projects without much attention being paid to the whole DA or the networks on which it relies for effectiveness. When there is a tendency to concentrate resources in target sections of the DA, other parts will fail to deliver the required level of support and the DA as a whole will not be able to achieve its goals and objectives. We may also note that

sometimes the DAs are accused of not distributing development projects equitably. Among some remote or inaccessible communities for example, there are complains that their DAs have done very little or nothing at all for their communities.

Another problem about the distribution of resources by the DA is that much attention was given to the provision of physical infrastructure and other amenities at the expense of economic development. In particular, investments in productive activities and the creation of job opportunities have not received attention (Yankson, 2000).

Information dissemination

The study also considered the dissemination of information within the district as an important component in the assessment of the extent of fairness in resource allocation. The information has been defined along the lines of central Government policy as well as Regional/District Projects, programmes and policies.

The bureaucrats explained that some of the information is disseminated through decentralized departments in collaboration with District Assemblies while others are directly disseminated by the District Assemblies. Where information is disseminated directly by the District Assemblies, Assembly members are critical in determining extent of fairness because most information on government policy and programmes are communicated through assembly members to communities.

Results of the study show that information dissemination through Assembly members has not been as effective as envisaged because of the inability of some Assembly members to meet their constituents regularly. Assembly members contend that

constituents are generally not well informed and expect some refreshment when meetings are held. Since they are unable to provide such refreshment, meetings are usually not well patronised and so information is not disseminated the way it should.

The consequences of the unfair dissemination of information have been the denial of some communities and individuals to play their role in accessing some development opportunities. The bureaucrats of the District Assemblies explained that the existence of information gap account for the inability of most individuals and community members to access the Poverty Alleviation Fund or other credit packages.

5. Conclusion

In general, guidelines for resource allocation at the local (district) level have been appropriately carved. The Medium Term Development plan prepared within the framework of the themes of the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) is the guiding document. The allocation of community facilities such as schools, health and administrative infrastructure have been found generally to conform to the plan in spite of occasional erratic influences and decisions of some personalities.

However, in terms of resources that are allocated to individuals such as the Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF) the guidelines are often circumvented. Supposedly independent committees for the allocation are hardly given any free hand to operate. This state of affairs has negative implications for the participatory development agenda of recent times. It erodes the confidence of people in the local authorities as mechanisms for equitable allocation of resources.

As a poverty endemic area, the Northern Regions would not experience shared growth if allocation of resources at the micro level is not fair. For it is the allocation of resources to individuals and group of individuals that will enable them make good use of community resources such as schools, health facilities, electricity, dams, dugouts and roads. When resource distribution to individuals is not fair, growth no matter how large will not be shared. Without shared growth, macroeconomic prospects will not be sustainable.

Government policy of zero tolerance for corruption needs to be demonstrated at the local level in terms of the disbursement of the PAF. Priority must also be given to development considerations instead of partisan party loyalty in appointing DCEs in order to check politicisation of resource allocation. A serious consideration must be given to the full implementation of the sub-district structures to facilitate information dissemination. For the people to “feel the growth in their pockets” resource allocation at the local level needs to be closely monitored to ensure compliance with guidelines.

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