

## THE ROLE OF THE ASSEMBLY MEMBER IN GHANA'S DEVELOPMENT PROCESS: CASE STUDY OF THE DANGME WEST DISTRICT ASSEMBLY

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### ABSTRACT

Ghana's decentralization processes which was embarked upon in the late 80s resulted in the creation of District, Municipal and Metropolitan assemblies as local government institutions charged with the mandate of providing development at the local level with the active participation of local residents. The role of the Assembly Member was viewed as key if the local government could deliver results in accordance with its mandate. This paper sought to find out the extent to which the local legislators had performed using naturalistic investigative methods and processes with a focus on the Dangme West District Assembly. While assembly members were generally found to be doing quite well especially in the area of representation, the study could not identify any significant development results for the communities that might be attributable to the activities of members. This is due to a number of factors including low responsiveness by district assembly officials; uncooperative attitude by some members of opposing political parties; unnecessary interference by some chiefs and lack of logistics among others. To enable the people feel some impact of the developmental activities of the district Assembly, the author makes a strong case for the district assembly staff to improve upon their level of responsiveness improved internally generated funds and allocative efficiency. While there is also the need for central government to make a significant increase in the amount of money transferred to local governments, one would also wish that the law enforcement agencies will deal appropriately with those who contravenes the law regarding the non partisan nature of Ghana's local government system.

**Key Words:** *assembly member, Ghana's development process, Dangme West District Assembly*

### Introduction

Several approaches and strategies have been invoked, based on various theories, for the accelerated development of the local region and communities among which decentralization is key. Among the numerous development outcomes cited in favour of decentralization include the

empowerment of local communities through more effective participation in decision making; ownership of development processes and more sustainable pro- poor development outcomes.

Among others, ‘Aid donors tend to emphasize three major benefits to be derived from decentralization to local government institutions. The first is that public policies will be more responsive to local needs. Democratic decentralization should be a more effective way of meeting local needs than centralized planning. It provides a mechanism responsive to the variety of circumstances encountered from place to place, thereby improving allocative efficiency. Local politicians and bureaucrats are more responsive and accountable to the local population. Decentralization enables the benefits from government interventions to the citizens being served to be internalized’ (UNDP, 1997b; World Bank, 2000b; OECD, 2004) in Smith, 2007.

*“Consequently, the argument that decentralization has a part to play in poverty reduction has two dimensions: one, to do with participation, the other with responsiveness. When decision making power is located close to the poor communities, and the poor are organized to lobby for their interests, officials will be encouraged to respond to their needs. At the same time, widespread popular participation helps increase the voice of poor people in local affairs” (World Bank, 2001b). The poor benefit particularly from decision making based on local information. Governments which are well informed of local needs are best placed to help the disadvantaged, because they can direct resources to services of benefit to the poor, such as health and education” (Smith, 2007).*

Ghana might have been motivated by these benefits of decentralization when after going through numerous experiments of local government the country finally adopted the current local government system that established district, municipal and metropolitan assemblies in addition to other related substructures, about two and a half decades ago, as the basic local institutions for administration, initiation of development projects, resource mobilization, planning, budgeting and managing the implementation of programmes and projects for poverty mitigation and accelerated development.

*Subject to this Act, a District Assembly shall exercise political and administrative authority in the District, provide guidance, give direction to and supervise all other administrative authorities in the district. For the purpose of subsection (1) of this section, a District Assembly shall exercise deliberative, legislative and executive functions. Without prejudice to subsections (1) and (2) of this section, a district Assembly shall:*

- a) be responsible for the overall development of the district and shall ensure the preparation and submission through the Regional Co-ordinating Council*
  - i) of development plans of the district to the Commission for approval; and*
  - ii) of the budget of the district related to the approved plans to the Minister for Finance for approval;*

- b) *Formulate and execute plans, programmes and strategies for the effective mobilization of the resources necessary for the overall development of the district;*
- c) *Promote and support productive activity and social development in the district and remove any obstacle to initiate development;*
- d) *Initiate programmes for the development of basic infrastructure and provide municipal works and services in the district.*
- e) *be responsible for the development, improvement and management of human settlements and the environment in the district( Local Government Act, 1993, Act 462 Clause 10, subsections 1,2 and 3a-e)*

The assemblies were mandated to perform many other functions including the above for the attainment of the development aspirations of the local people. It is however noteworthy that apart from the 30% government appointees (who do not represent any electoral areas) and the member(s) of parliament, the assemblies are constituted by Assembly members elected as representatives from each electoral area (70%), on whose shoulders hung the development of their electoral areas and the entire district.

At their electoral areas the law further spells out the duties of assembly members as follows:

*A member of District Assembly shall as appropriate –*

- a) *Maintain close contact with his electoral area, consult his people on issues to be discussed in the District Assembly and collate their views, opinions and proposals.*
- b) *Present the views, opinions and proposals to the District Assembly.*
- c) *Attend meetings of the District Assembly and meetings of sub-committees of which he is a member;*
- d) *meet his electorate before each meeting of the Assembly;*
- e) *report to his electorate the general decisions of the Assembly and its Executive Committee and the actions he has taken to solve problems raised by residents in his electoral area;*
- f) *draw attention in general debate to national policies which are relevant to the subject under discussion*
- g) *actively participate in the work of the sub-committees of the Executive Committee;*
- h) *bring to bear on any discussion in the Assembly the benefit of his profession, experience or specialized knowledge;*
- i) *maintain frequent liaison with organized productive economic groupings and other person in the District; and*
- j) *Take part in communal and development activities in the district.(Republic of Ghana,1993,Act 462 clause 16 subsection 1a-j).*

While the central role of the assembly member in the attainment of the developmental functions of the district assembly is evident from the foregoing, the issue of how assembly members have

performed as well as the circumstances in which they have to work does not seem to be given the necessary attention.

### The Statement of Problem

As part of its key strategies for accelerated development and democratization processes, Ghana, under the leadership of former President JJ Rawlings, in the late 80's, undertook series of constitutional reviews that resulted in the current decentralized system of governance and administration, at the centre of which is the District, Municipal and Metropolitan Assemblies. The Assemblies are constituted of 30% government appointees in addition to the member(s) of Parliament in that district and 70% elected representatives of local government electoral areas and charged by law to "*be responsible for the overall development of the district*". As institutions and drivers of development, their specific functions include resource mobilization, development planning, budgeting & finance, implementation, monitoring and evaluation among others. *Decentralization is common in many developing countries. Local governments are becoming more common in such developing countries and are increasingly required to play larger roles in providing services, alleviating poverty, and facilitating development (Mitlin, 2000 in Shar, 2005).*

At the level of their electoral areas, the Assembly member is expected to perform at least twelve (12) other officially specified functions in addition to many other undocumented expectations from the electorate and other stakeholders. It is evident; therefore, that the success of the District, Municipal and Metropolitan Assemblies in the performance of their responsibility of delivering accelerated development and alleviating poverty will depend to a large extent on the ability of the assembly members to effectively perform their assigned role both at the assemblies and also at their electoral areas.

These notwithstanding, the Assembly member is currently beset with a number of challenges that could affect their performance, the major one being the fact that their position is purely voluntary. They currently receive no salary; no allowances and no logistics. The situation of the Assembly Member may still be more complicated if one considers the fact that amongst all elected politicians he/she is the one that lives closest to and with the electorate, most of whom have all kinds of expectations from politicians. In such an environment, one is tempted to wonder the extent to which the Assembly member is able to perform his/her numerous functions effectively to deliver development outputs to the district as a whole and also the electoral area.. The need to know what Assembly Members are able to do with reference to the expectations of the law as well as the electorate in the context of the above environments remains the major motivation for this study.

## Research Questions

The paper sought to find answers to a number of questions as follows: To what extent have assembly members in the study areas performed their functions? Do the Assembly members perform other functions not specified in the law? What are the opinions of the electorate regarding the performance of Assembly members? What kind of challenges do Assembly members face in the performance of their duties?

## Objectives of the Study

On the whole, the aim of the study is to find out the extent to which the elected Assembly Members in the Dangme West District have performed their role as representatives of their communities at the District Assembly and as leaders of development of the district as well. In pursuit of this goal the Specific objectives included:

To examine the extent to which Assembly Members in Dangme West District Assembly have performed their role as expected of them by the relevant laws; To ascertain what other roles Assembly Members may be performing in their respective communities; To assess the views of community members and the electorate regarding the performance of their Assembly Members; To identify the main challenges that could affect the overall performance of the Assembly member.

## Research Design and Relevance

The researcher employed naturalistic enquiry, specifically grounded theory methods to collect and analyze data using the Dangme West district as a case study. *In a case study, a researcher may intensively investigate one or two cases or compare a limited set of cases, focusing on several factors (Neuman, 2000:33).* This approach was best since among others, the data consisted mostly of narratives and also inductive reasoning was applied to draw conclusions. Out of the total of forty four (44) elected Assembly members in the Dangme West District Assembly, twenty two (22) or 50% were purposively sampled. Of the twenty two (22) sampled, eleven (11) were re-elected for a second term. The fact that appointed assembly members were consciously left out of the sample was because these have no electoral areas to which they are accountable. For the purpose of triangulation; six (6) other key figures from each electoral area were also sampled to know their opinion about the work of the Assembly member. These were made up of two (2) unit committee members; two local elders including the chief and two others representing the youth. Also sampled for their views regarding the performance of assembly members were all five key bureaucrats at the secretariat which included the coordinating director, the development planning officer and the budget officer among others. Data for the study were collected through personal interviews using open ended questionnaires thus allowing for flexibility, better interaction and the actual opinions of respondents to be captured. Relevant

literature on the legally stated role of the Assembly members in Ghana in addition to research work by others particularly on local leadership and related literature were also reviewed. The analysis of data involved the use of descriptive statistics and inductive coding using the SPSS as the main tool. Development at any level: local, regional and national, will be very hard to achieve without committed, competent and dynamic leadership. The study was expected to contribute to the evolving field of study and emphasis on place based or local leadership and its role in the improvement of the living conditions of the local inhabitants and the economy as a whole.

Literature Review

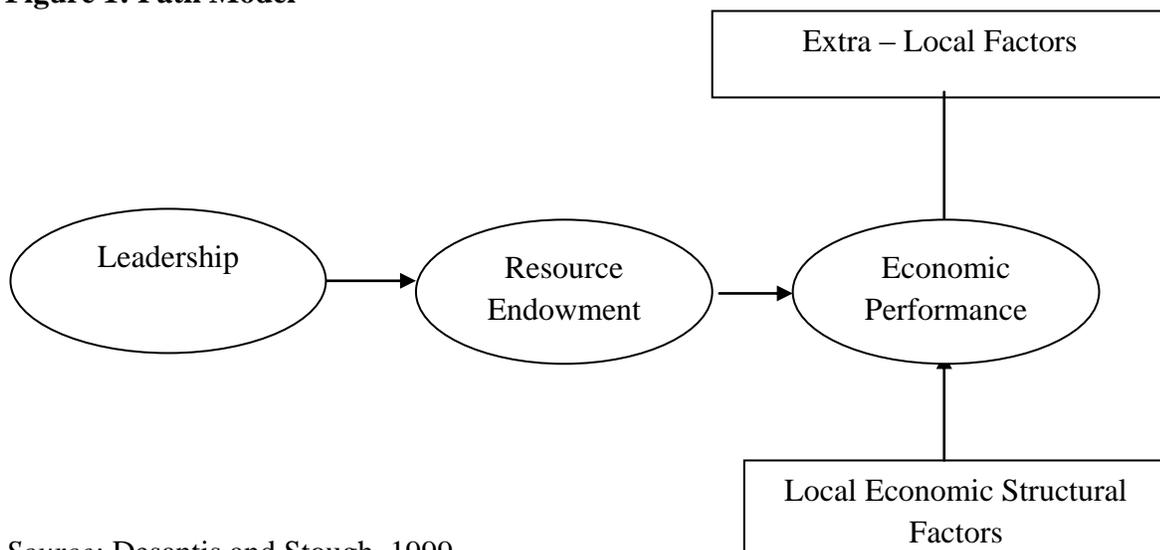
The Central Role of Leadership in Local Development

The belief in the availability of physical resource endowments as key prerequisite for socio-economic performance of a region had dominated theories of development until most recently when the primate role of leadership has started to gain the attention of social scientists.

“One of the most original and fundamental concepts in economic analysis is that economic growth and performance are related or tied to resources. The more endowed a region is in terms of resources the better it should perform, ceteris paribus. However, physical resources are only a minor part of the total value of finished products in the economies of the late 20th century” (Desantis and Stough, 1999:42)

The emerging theory of local leadership as key factor and determinant in the economic performance of a local region has been studied and tested by Desantis and Stough using thirty five Metropolitan regions of the USA, thus leading to the model presented in Figure one.

Figure 1: Path Model



Source: Desantis and Stough, 1999.

The model depicted above suggests that regional economic development effectiveness is directly related to a region's resource endowments and its propensity for leadership, *ceteris paribus*. In this formulation, leadership is modeled as a variable that amplifies the independent effect of resources (Desantis and Stough, 1999:42).

Regardless of the amount of resources available (or not available) leadership is critical in setting vision, inspiring hope, putting the available resources to the most efficient use for the benefit of all and developing trust in the people for leadership to enable them give their best to the community and society for the common interest of society. In summary the leader's role in mobilizing resources for the enhancement of the social and economic condition of the people in the locality cannot be over emphasized. For example it is a common knowledge that the social and economic problems facing Africa is not about resources but is one of leadership and good governance. "Leadership is about being able to attract people's dream in order to take them towards one idea, a goal while showing the way to achieve the project the people agree with. The rules are changing in local government and, in the same time, the theories in local leadership. Today's local leaders are at the heart of their communities- it is up to them to provide the imagination and the inspiration to create a community out of a place" (IFTENE, 2011).

The OECD (2001) notes "leadership development today is an increasingly important issue across member states: A new type of local leadership is required in the face of globalization, decentralization and intensive use of information technology. Policy coherence, negotiating and managing accountability in the midst of privatization, new public management and other reforms as well as growing expectations of transparency, adaptability and flexibility, demand more systematic and sustained attention to the development of a different kind of leadership".

In the context of Africa and Ghana in particular, even more will be required of local leaders who could make any meaningful impact in an environment of low incomes and poverty, low revenue for local governments, overbearing influence of political parties at all levels, absence of strong civil society at the local level and generally weak democratic and oversight institutions that may ensure effective public accountability. "Local government can gain much by paying more attention to leadership processes rather than focusing too much attention on structures and organizational charts" (Hamilton, 2011).

### **Decentralization and Development**

As a result of the numerous operational, efficiency and democratic challenges associated with centralization of decision-making, decentralization with the resultant local governments have been seen as the best way to achieve development in a more effective and efficient way. "Democratic decentralization should be a more effective way of meeting local needs than centralized planning. It provides a mechanism responsive to the variety of circumstances encountered from place to place, thereby improving allocative efficiency. Local politicians and

bureaucrats are more responsive to local needs. Decentralization enables the benefits from government intervention to the citizens being served to be internalized' (UNDP, 19976; World Bank, 2000b OECD, 2004). Decentralization is now frequently linked to poverty reduction in policy prescriptions by international agencies when the majority of the population are poor and are excluded from national politics, it is natural to think that decentralization will help the poor by positioning power at the local level where they have a chance of capturing it, or at least making it more responsive to their needs and interests”.

While the benefits of Decentralization and, local governments as spelt out in the foregoing may not be doubted, the quality of governance at the local level especially with respect to the attitude of public officers and appointees, how competent and responsive they are and how they interpret and implement the nature of the local government laws and manage the institutions may influence the extent to which the claims could be realized for poverty reduction to take place. The creation of institutions and systems in and of themselves do not deliver outcomes unless there is a commitment on the part of leadership and bureaucrats at all levels to ensure that systems and institutions work that one could expect any impact.

### **Conceptualizing the Role of the Assembly member in Ghana**

Kokor, (2001) categorized the role of the Assembly Member under three main aspects as follows:

1. Perspectives on the role, which are expectations defined by various legislations and public opinion
2. Assembly Members' own perspectives about their role
3. Assembly Member's actual role and performance record.

This paper's object is to investigate the actual role performed by assembly member's which will be a synthesis of the roles as defined by law in addition to the expectations of the electorate as well as the Assembly Member's own perspectives about their roles.

In conceptualizing the role of local councilors in Africa the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS – Habit, 1996) identifies a number of roles including leadership, policy, making decision-making, institutions builders, power brokers, facilitators, financiers, enablers and negotiators.

### **The Dangme West District**

The Dangme West district is located in the south eastern part of Ghana and has a total land area of 1442 square kilometres, thus making it the largest in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana which also represents 41.5% of the total land area of the region (Dangme West District Assembly, 2011). The population of the district was put at 96809 (population census, 2000) with

annual growth rate of 2.1%, and average household size of 5.2. The district is largely rural (76.4%) with agriculture being the major occupation (crops, livestock and fishing) employing 58.6% of the active labour force. According to information obtained from the district assembly, the district ranks among the most deprived districts in Ghana with very high levels of unemployment and poverty. The district has several needs in terms of the provision of infrastructure. Data obtained from the district assembly (2007) indicates that only 26% of households had toilet facilities; 30% of the 231 communities were connected to electricity; eighteen of the two hundred and thirty one settlement had access to pipe born water while all the rest were using water from boreholes, wells and other unprotected sources. Also only 40% of the 252 total road length in the district was surfaced. The district doubtlessly has a long way to travel on the road to development, the responsibility of which lies directly with the district assembly and for that matter the assembly members.

## Results, Interpretation and Discursion

### Gender of Assembly Respondents

Of the twenty two (22) Assembly members sampled, nineteen (19) or over 86% were males while only three (3) were females. The few number of females recorded here reflects the general low participation of women in political processes at both local and national levels in Ghana. The situation may be explained by a combination of factors which include the patriarchal nature of the Ghanaian traditional society; low levels of income that most women find themselves in which may also make it difficult for them to finance their campaign as well as the low encouragement that women may receive from their immediate family circles and the community at large. Commenting on similar situation in Sierra Leone Ngadie (2011) asserts that although the national constitution provides for rights of women like men, access to formal politics and decision- making still remains largely closed to off to women. This situation is in spite of the long history of women's involvement in politics and decision-making areas in the country including traditional societies.

### Occupation of Respondents

The Assembly members' role or service is purely voluntary and sacrificial by law to society. To be effective, one must have a gainful employment to enable them discharge their duties and also take care of their families. Data collected revealed that only six of them (27.3%) were employed in the civil service as teachers. All the rest were in different kinds of self employment such as farming (18.2%); trading( 45.5%) and artisan( 9%). Even though the occupational backgrounds of respondents show that a large majority of them were in self employment and for that matter could have flexible time schedules which could make it easy for them to attend most of the district Assembly meetings, the same situation could exert too much pressure on them as they may have to spend most of their time on their jobs in order to earn a living since those who fall within that categories of employment in Ghana, especially in the rural areas ,may find it hard to

earn adequate income. On the other hand, the teachers who find themselves in a much more secure employment may find it easier to commit time for their work as assembly members though that may be done at the expense of their teaching responsibilities.

### **Educational Attainment of Assembly Members**

The study revealed that eighteen (18) or 68% of respondents had up to secondary level education,(table 1); three (3) or 13.64% had certificate in a Higher National Diploma and (4) or slightly over 18% possessed a first degree.

**Table 1: Educational attainment of Assembly Members**

Educational Attainment of Assembly Members	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
SSS/O-Level	15	68	68
NHND	3	14	82
1st degree	4	18	100
Total	22	100	100

Considering the nature of work that the Assembly member is expected by law to perform such as analyzing and debating of the annual budget, awarding contracts; analyzing financial reports and discussing and approving the medium term development plans of the Assembly and the need for them to make quality contributions, one may view a situation such as this one where the general level of education of law makes is low as not quite helpful. If majority local law makers have wide shortcoming in understanding the technical documents and issues that would often go before them to consider, the quality of discussions and debates will be affected as well as the ability of same to make bureaucrats accountable. On the other hand the few members who possess at least diploma may dominate discursions either to their own advantage or at the expense of the views of the majority or could be targeted by officials of the assembly if they see such ones as exposing them.

### **District Assembly Committees and Sub-committees Where Respondents Serve**

The entire functions of the District Assembly are performed through committees and sub-committees which also sends the final outputs of their deliberations to the general Assembly for approvals. The study found that respondents serve in almost all committees and sub-committees of the Assembly. These include the Executive Committee (2); Public Relations and Complements Committee (2); Development Planning Sub-committee (4); and Social Services subcommittee (3). The rest are Works subcommittee (4); Justice and Security Subcommittee (5); and Finance and Administration subcommittee (2). Each assembly member belonged to at least one of these committees as required by the standing orders. Majority of the respondents were found to be serving in the Justice and Security Subcommittee (5); Works Subcommittee (4) and

Development Planning Subcommittee (4). These very subcommittees will require people with appreciable amount of technical knowledge in order that they could be effective. The fact that over 68% of the members have highest education not exceeding secondary level may not auger well for the effective discharge of the responsibility of members.

### **The Role of the Assembly Member**

In assessing the nature of and performance of assembly members regarding their role, three levels of assessment were carried out: the assembly member's own perspective about his role; the perspectives of the electorate of the role and performance of the assembly member and finally, the perspectives of bureaucrats at the secretariat of the district assembly.

### **The Role of the Assembly Member from the Perspective of the Electorate**

In response to the question on what the opinion leaders expected the assembly member to be doing for the community, all the responses clearly centered on development. These expectations ranged from the need for the assembly member to assist in the provision of school infrastructure (31%); provision of market facilities (26%); provision of street lights (21%); provision of public toilet facilities. The others include the provision of jobs for the youth and making the roads motorable. While these demands are legitimate on the part of the electorate as they also reflect some of the needs of their communities, it is at the same time quite unfair to expect the assembly member to provide these with his own resources as some of the respondents may imply. The major responsibility of the assembly member here is to send these needs to the district assembly for redress. It is also instructive to note that the duties of the assembly member as indicated in section 16 of the local government, Act 462, do not make the assembly member, as an individual, the initiator of development projects in the community unless one is looking at him/her as part of the district assembly body who is responsible for the overall development of the district. This notwithstanding, the fact still remains that the electorate continue to look up to the assembly member to bring development to their doorsteps with little concern as to who or where it is going to come from.

### **Other Expectations of the electorate**

For a more comprehensive understanding of the of the expectations of the electorate regarding the Assembly Member's role, (which assembly members do not accept as part of their responsibilities) 41% of the assembly members reported that they had been approached by the electorate to provide them with money so they could pay for the school fees of their children (table 2); another 45% reported being called upon to find solutions to conflicts involving chieftaincy (table 2) again over 22% also reported being asked by their electorate to pay for the medical bills of their family members while over 27% were also approached for jobs. While the people may be excused for making such demands of the assembly members on the grounds of poverty, the situation also demonstrates the seeming failure on the part of the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) to educate the public on the role of the Assembly

member as well as the role, responsibilities and rights of citizens among others. This observation may however not surprise anyone involved in politics in Ghana since the electorate has often seen politicians as people who control so much resources that they may also have to claim their share at least for helping them gain access to that office. The special problem facing the assembly member is that while the Member of Parliament for example lives far from the electorate and is seen only occasionally, the assembly member is always in the sight of the electorate thereby increasing the frequency at which people can approach him for all kinds of assistance.

**Table 2: Other Expectations of the Electorate**

Other Expectations from the Electorate	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
School Fees	9	41	41
Hospital Bills	5	23	64
Financial Help	2	9	73
Family Problems	2	9	82
Chieftaincy Issues	2	9	91
Employment Issues	2	9	100
Total	22	100	100

### **Performance of Assembly Members from the perspective of opinion leaders and DA officials**

In the face of all the above demands made on the Assembly member, the opinion members were asked to comment on the performance of assembly members. Of the one hundred and thirty two respondents, about 68% were satisfied with the performance of the assembly members while about 32% were not satisfied. It is however worthy of note that all of this respondents (opinion leaders) believed that the role of the assembly member is a very difficult one. Also, of the five key officials of the district assembly who were sampled on the general performance of assembly members, almost everyone agreed that the performance of assembly members was satisfactory although they also agreed that the problem of logistics and finance still remains a major challenge for assembly members.

### Is the Assembly Member Paid?

Considering the demands made by the electorate on the assembly member for all kinds of support, the opinion leaders were asked whether they believed that the assembly member was paid by the state for their service. As much as 65% of the one hundred and thirty two respondents were strongly of the view that that the assembly member was paid by the state while the other 45% said they did not know whether members were paid or not. The fact that these respondents were made up of unit committee members and other opinion leaders in the community must be a source of worry to all stakeholders' particularly civic educators concerning the level of ignorance among members of the public. It is therefore not surprising that people made all sorts of demands on the assembly member ranging from payment of their wards' school fees and medical bills etc..Still in response to another question on whether they think assembly members must be paid for their service, over 67% strongly agreed while more that 32% expressed agreement to the suggestion. This should also be instructive for policy makers to consider payment of salary or honorarium to assembly members since the people accept that the role of the assembly member is a difficult one and as such must be paid.

### Assembly Members' Advocacy for Development

One of the expectations of the local government Act, 1993, Act 462 is that the assembly member would present the developmental problems of his/her electoral area to the district Assembly for appropriate redress. Members were therefore asked whether they have done that in the midst of the numerous development challenges facing their communities which included the problems of difficulty of access to potable water and sanitation, difficult surface accessibility, poor school infrastructure and joblessness among others. Of the total number of respondents (22), 45.5% often go to the district assembly to advocate for such facilities, while majority of them (54.5%) did not find the need to do it(table 3).

**Table 3: Do you go the District Assembly to advocate for your electoral area?**

Do you Consult the District Assembly to Advocate for your Area	Frequency		Cumulative
	Percent	Percent	Percent
Yes	10	46	46
No	12	54	100
Total	22	100	100

On whether they were satisfied or encouraged by the responses that they often received from the staff of the assembly on such advocacy, more than 86% expressed dissatisfaction with the responses from the staff (table 4). Those who did not go to the assembly to advocate for development cited the lack of positive responses from staff of the assembly as the main discouraging factor. This particular finding is in agreement with the findings of another study

conducted in the Amansie East district of Ghana by Akotey and Baah-Enumh(2007)in which only 15% of CSO leaders agreed that the district Assembly was addressing the pressing developmental needs of the communities. While the assembly may find it difficult to satisfy all the problems of development facing the communities simultaneously as a result of limited financial resources, the overwhelming number of dissatisfied assembly members with respect to the level of responsiveness of administration must be a source of concern for the assembly regarding the extent to which it is living up to its *raison d'être*.

Table 4: Are you happy about the responses you get from the District Assembly?

Are you happy about the responses you get from the District Assembly?	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Satisfied	3	14	14
Not satisfied	19	86	100
Total	22	100	100

### The Assembly Member at Meetings

Most of the work of assembly members particularly in the area of making bye laws, debating and approval of the budget, award of contracts and development planning etc. are made at meetings of the general assembly and at committee levels. The way in which these meetings are organized and chaired could affect the quality of discursions and morale of members which would also affect the quality of decisions. Members were therefore asked about their opinion on the way assembly meetings were called; how the meetings were chaired and payment of transport costs and seating allowances. On the manner in which the assembly meetings were chaired, almost 82% of members expressed satisfaction (table 5). They went further to explain that all members were often offered opportunity to make their contributions to assembly meetings. This notwithstanding, 41% of respondents were not satisfied with how their contributions were treated at the floor of the assembly. Regarding the time for the commencement of meetings, majority of the assembly members (59%) were not happy with the administration since according them meeting were always late in starting. For the respondents, most of them had to travel long distances on very difficult terrain thus making it difficult for most of them to travel back to their locations. Besides, assembly members also expressed no less dissatisfaction with payment of seating allowances and transport costs by the administration which they claimed were very small ranging from Gh.10 – Gh.20(\$5 - \$10) per meeting. These complaints by assembly members have the potential to affect the quality of discursions at meetings since members may have to rush through discursions in order to make time for travelling back to their destinations.

**Table 5: Satisfaction with the way meeting were chaired?**

Satisfaction with the way meetings were chaired.	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Satisfied	18	82	82
Not satisfied	4	18	100
Total	22	100	100

### Barriers to the effective Performance of Assembly Members

The study also sought to find out what constitute the main impediments and challenges making the work of the local legislators difficult. It was revealed that 36% of respondents saw partisan politics at the local level as a major challenge even though the law forbids anyone, including political parties, from contesting, supporting or campaigning against someone on partisan grounds. The problem, according to respondents was that, members of other political parties, especially the major ones, would often not support or take part in the development initiatives of the assembly member. They would even go further to discourage others from giving their support to such projects and communal labour initiatives of the assembly member. The need to punish such criminal acts cannot be overemphasized when one considers the harmful effects the behaviour on development of the communities. 'Sanctions attached to those who breach the law on the non-partisanship of district assembly elections must be applied. It must be remembered that such breaches actually amount to breaches of the constitution for which enforcement actions under Article 2 of the constitution can lie'(Ahwoi, 2010:257). Chiefs were also reported as constituting another problem for assembly members as they still try to interfere with the legitimate work of the assembly member (table 6). Most of them do not seem to know the limits of their role and the area that should be the domain of the assembly member and unit committees.

Another major problem facing assembly members in the discharge of their role is the problem of the electorate or the community not responding to the meetings called by the assembly member. The law requires the assembly member to call a meeting before and after assembly meetings to brief the electorate on the agenda and proceedings of the assembly. The failure of community members to attend such meetings could deprive them of useful information and the opportunity to participate in the decision making and development processes of the community which is one of the strongest arguments for decentralization. One may however attribute this level of apathy to the low impact that the assembly has made on the people in terms of development. 'When people do not see what local governments are doing for them, apathy will be induced'(Ahwoi, 2010:256).

**Table 6: Which of the following, in your opinion, is making your work difficult?**

Which of the following, in your opinion, is making your work difficult?	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Chief	5	23	23
Unit committee	2	9	32
Political Parties	8	36	68
Community people	7	32	100
Total	22	100	100

## Conclusions

Through personal interviews with a number of elected assembly members, unit committee members, local opinion leaders and the key staff of the Dangme West District Assembly the study has established that assembly members have generally performed their role as expected of them by law in spite of numerous challenges. These notwithstanding, it was observed that unless the district assembly staff improves on their level of responsiveness and resourcefulness, development and poverty alleviation may take a long time to get to the communities being represented by the assembly members. It has also been suggested that the National Commission for Civic Education intensifies their mass education efforts to get chiefs, political parties and the generality of the electorate desist from engaging in acts that may be considered as sabotage and unnecessary interference in the legitimate business of the Assembly member.

## Recommendations

One of the findings in the study is that, of the twenty two elected assembly members, only three (3) were females. It will be recommended that the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) intensifies its mandated educational campaigns with much more emphasis on encouraging more women to get involved in political processes at the local level since this could serve as a good training ground for future national leaders. Furthermore, our educational institutions should also encourage girls, particularly those at the basic and secondary levels, to take up leadership positions since this can also help women demystify leadership role as belonging to the man only.

Regarding the general low level of education amongst the assembly members, it is being suggested that more training workshops shall be organized for the local law makers by key stakeholders including the Institute of Local Government Studies (ILGS), The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development and other Not-for-Profit partners to boost the morale and confidence of members. The training should may focus on topics such as community

mobilization skills, advocacy techniques, district assembly procurement processes and budget analysis among others.

The Study established that more than halve the number of elected assembly members were not in the habit of taking the development problems facing their electoral areas to the district assembly for possible solutions as a result of low responsiveness on the part of officials. While it is true that the assembly may not be able to provide immediate solutions to all the problems at the same time, one may want to recommend to the district assembly to collect and compile all such requests for the purpose of creating a database which could constitute the basis of the DA medium term development and action plans. This could go a long way to encourage the assembly members to do more in reporting the development challenges of their localities to the district assembly as is required of them.

On the issue of sabotage and lack of cooperation for the initiatives of the assembly member by opposing political parties, it is hereby suggested that the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) in collaboration with the National Electoral Commission (NEC) and the law enforcement bodies work together to educate the public on the provisions of the law (Act 462, 1993) regarding the nonpartisan nature of the local government system and also arrest and prosecute offenders to serve as deterrent for other would be offenders. This finding should also serve as a good eye opener for those who may suggest that Ghana's local government system be made partisan to enable open sponsorship of candidates by political parties. Assembly members need to be equipped with skills in visionary leadership, project identification, proposal writing, fund raising and networking to enable them take their own development initiatives since the district assembly seems to lack sufficient capacity to respond to calls of development from the communities.

The incidence of chiefs interfering, rivaling and making the work of the assembly member difficult deserves attention from policy makers. In the mean time, it is being suggested that the NCCE organize appropriate joint workshops for chiefs and assembly members to be properly informed about their different realms of operation to be clarified. Even though the law may be clear, there seems to be a lot of work to be done on education. Finally, the need to pay some form of monthly honorarium or allowances to assembly members should be given a serious consideration by government. This will enable them recover some of the costs they incur in the process of performing their role and also compensate the local law makers for their service to the state.

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