

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM

**ENHANCING COMMUNICATION BETWEEN DISTRICT ASSEMBLIES AND
CITIZENS IN THE PLANNING AND EXECUTION OF INFRASTRUCTURE**

PROJECTS –

**THE PERSPECTIVES OF CITIZENS AND DISTRICT ASSEMBLY OFFICIALS IN
THE TOLON DISTRICT OF THE NORTHERN REGION OF GHANA**

MOHAMMED NURUDEEN SALIFU

(MADC 16064)

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DECLARATION

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, Mohammed Nurudeen Salifu, the undersigned Master of Arts Student in Development Communication of the School of Graduate Studies and Research, Ghana Institute of Journalism, declare that this dissertation, with the exception of quotes and references contained in published books, journals, reports, articles, which have all been duly identified and acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and that it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the preparation and submission of this dissertation was supervised in accordance with the laid down guidelines for writing dissertation by the School of Graduate Studies and Research, Ghana Institute of Journalism.

SUPERVISOR'S NAME: DR. THOMAS ANTWI BOSIAKOH

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

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DEDICATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	ii
DEDICATION	iii
LIST OF ACRONYMS	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
ABSTRACT	x
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	9
1.3 Research Questions	11
1.4 Objectives of the Study	11
1.5 Significance of the Study	12
1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study	13
1.7 Organization of the Study	14
CHAPTER TWO	15
LITERATURE REVIEW	15
2.1 The Concept of Communication	15
2.2 Citizen-Government Communication – An Ingredient for Good Governance	17
2.3 Level of Communication Between Government and Citizens	21
CHAPTER THREE	29
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	29

3.1 Research Design.....	29
3.2 Study Population and Sample Size.....	32
3.3 Sampling Techniques	33
3.4 Methods of Data Collection	34
3.5 Data Collection Instruments and Tools.....	36
3.6 Data Presentation and Analysis.....	37
CHAPTER FOUR.....	39
PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS	39
4.1 FINDINGS	39
4.1.1 Communication mechanisms for enhancing District Assemblies’ communication with citizens	39
4.1.2 Issues/information to communicate about in the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects.....	53
4.1.3 Regularity of Communication Between District Assemblies and Citizens	58
4.1.4 Actions Required to Establish Regular Communication Between District Assemblies and Citizens	61
4.2 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS.....	67
4.2.1 Communication mechanisms for enhancing District Assemblies’ communication with citizens.....	67
4.2.2 Issues/information to communicate about in the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects.....	72
4.2.3 Regularity of Communication Between District Assemblies and Citizens	74

4.2.4 Actions Required to Establish Regular Communication Between District Assemblies and Citizens	75
CHAPTER FIVE	78
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	78
5.1 Conclusions	78
5.2 Recommendations	80
REFERENCES	82
Appendix 1: Interview/Focus Group Discussion Guide	90
Appendix 2: Interviewee’s Consent Form	93
Appendix 3: FGD Participants’ Consent Form.....	94

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFD	French Development Agency
CDD	Centre for Democratic Development
CIDA	Canadian Development Agency
CHPS	Community Health and Planning Services
DA	District Assembly
DACF	District Assemblies Common Fund
DANIDA	Danish Development Agency
DCD	District Coordinating Director
DCE	District Chief Executive
DDF	District Development Facility
DMTDPs	District Medium-Term Development Plans
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GIMCCD	Ghana's Inter-Ministerial Coordinating Committee on Decentralization
GSAM	Ghana's Strengthening Accountability Mechanisms
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
KFW	German Development Bank
LGS	Local Government Service
MDAs	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MMDAs	Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies
MMDCEs	Metropolitan, Municipal and District Chief Executives
MP	Member of Parliament
MTDP	Medium-Term Development Plan

NCT	National Competitive Tendering
NDPC	National Development Planning Commission
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
RING	Resiliency in Northern Ghana
SALAR	Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework	27
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ABSTRACT

Ghana's local government laws and policies require District Assemblies to have regular communication with their constituents. However, several studies have found communication between District Assemblies and citizens to be weak, particularly in the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects. This has limited citizens participation in the development process and created situations where projects such as schools, markets, toilets, etc. are abandoned. This study sought to establish, from the perspectives of citizens and District Assembly officials, how to enhance communication between District Assemblies and citizens in the planning and execution of infrastructure projects. Using the phenomenological approach, the study employed key informant interviews and focus group discussion to elicit views from citizens and District Assembly officials in the Tolon District of the Northern Region. Both the citizens and District Assembly officials were of the view that meetings are an effective channel through which citizens and District Assembly officials can have effective communication in the planning and implementation of projects. They also identified radio, information vans, social media, and Assembly Members. They think that District Assemblies should establish communication with citizens right from when they are preparing their development plans and sustain it till completion. Citizens should also be given adequate information about the projects at each stage. The study recommends, among others, that the Government ensures that assemblies develop communication plans which would include the use of meetings, radio and other mechanisms to disseminate information and seek the views of citizens on infrastructure projects.

Key Words: Communication, Local Government, Information Dissemination, Tolon District

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The introductory chapter provides a background to the study, which briefly describes the local governance system in Ghana, the role and responsibilities of Metropolitan Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) and the requirement for the MMDAs to communicate with citizens in the planning and implementation of development projects, including infrastructure. The chapter also contains the problem that informed the study, the research questions, the objectives, the significance of the study and the scope of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Local Governance in Ghana and Provision of Infrastructure Projects

The Constitution of Ghana provides the basis for local governance and decentralisation in Ghana. Section 240 (1) states that “Ghana shall have a system of local government and administration which shall, as far as practicable, be decentralized.” Thus, in accordance with the Constitution, a Local Government Law (Act 462) was promulgated in 1993 to “establish and regulate the local government system.” This law was subsequently replaced by the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 963). As per the act, a District (as well as Metropolitan and Municipal) Assembly is the highest political authority in the district and is responsible for exercising political and administrative authority in the district, providing guidance, giving direction to, and supervising the other administrative authorities in the district.

Section 12 (3) stipulates that a District Assembly shall:

- a) Be responsible for the overall development of the district;

- b) Formulate and execute plans, programmes and strategies for the effective mobilisation 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 obstacles to initiative and development;
- d) Sponsor the education of students from the district to fill particular manpower needs of the district especially in the social sectors of education and health, making sure that the sponsorship is fairly and equitably balanced between male and female students;
- e) Initiate programmes for the development of basic infrastructure and provide municipal works and services in the district;
- f) Be responsible for the development, improvement and management of human settlements and the environment in the district;
- g) In co-operation with the appropriate national and local security agencies, be responsible for the maintenance of security and public safety in the district;
- h) Ensure ready access to courts in the district for the promotion of justice;
- i) Act to preserve and promote the cultural heritage within the district;
- j) Initiate, sponsor or carry out studies that may be necessary for the discharge of any of the duties conferred by this Act or any other enactment; and
- k) Perform any other functions that may be provided under another enactment.

In addition, a District Assembly shall, in accordance with section 12 (4), take the steps and measures that are necessary and expedient to:

- a) Execute approved development plans for the district;
- b) Guide, encourage and support sub-district local structures, public agencies and local communities to perform their functions in the execution of approved development plans;
- c) Initiate and encourage joint participation with other persons or bodies to execute approved development plans;
- d) Promote or encourage other persons or bodies to undertake projects under approved development plans; and
- e) Monitor the execution of projects under approved development plans and assess and evaluate their impact on the development of the district and national economy in accordance with government policy.

As outlined above, one of the critical roles of MMDAs is to initiate, plan and deliver development projects to address the developmental needs of citizens in the various towns and villages in each district, municipality, or metropolis. Infrastructure projects are a major part of these development projects. As a result, projects such as schools, clinics, CHPS compounds, water and sanitation facilities, markets, etc. form a critical part of assemblies' medium term and annual development plans.

MMDAs mostly fund infrastructure projects from their share of the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF). The constitution establishes the DACF and provides that 10% of total government

revenues be transferred to and distributed by the assemblies annually for use in district assembly capital works (Ghana Audit Service, 2019). From 1994 to 2013, a total amount of GHc3072.89 million was disbursed to MMDAs, according to the Common Fund Secretariat.

Many projects are also funded from donor support, such as through the District Development Facility (DDF), which is a pool fund contributed by the Danish Development Agency (DANIDA), Canadian Development Agency (CIDA), French Development Agency (AFD) and German Development Bank (KFW). Through the DDF, “MMDAs will have resources to provide more infrastructural facilities which will improve the living conditions of the population in their localities” (AFD, 2015). From 2009 to 2012, disbursements to MMDAs from the DDF totalled USD210.65 million (AFD, 2015).

Like other districts, funding for capital projects in the Tolon district is through the DACF and DDF; from 2014 to 2017, the district received a total of GHc6.2m from the DACF and GHc1.5m from the DDF for its development projects (Ghana Audit Service, 2019).

The planning and delivery of infrastructure projects is a process as summarized below (Ghana Audit Service, 2019):

a) Project Initiation

The Assemblies, in accordance with the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) guidelines for the preparation of District Medium Term Development Plans (DMTDP), are to facilitate the preparation of Community Development Plans. They are to consult community members in the Sub-District levels on their current needs and aspirations; compile, harmonise and capture them in the DMTDP. Involving the citizenry in decision making and implementation, promotes effective development in the District as

the community members have a sense of ownership and responsibility for addressing the issues identified.

b) Planning and Design

Step 13 of the NDPC Guidelines for Preparation of DMTDP (2014-2017) requires District Assemblies to prepare Annual Action Plans (AAP), extracted from the DMTDP, to be implemented by the Departments and Agencies of the Assembly, in collaboration with NGOs, private sector and the communities. The relevance of the AAP is in helping the Assembly identify and plan for the projects to be implemented each year. The implementation of a capital project starts with designing the architectural and structural drawings. The drawings serve to guide the contractor during construction and the Assembly to monitor the works. They also aid in preparing bills of quantities (BoQ) to arrive at the estimated cost of the project and compare it with that of tenderers.

c) Procurement of Contractors and Consultants

Regulation 5.5.4 of the Public Procurement Manual requires advertisement of National Competitive Tendering (NCT) to be made in the public procurement bulletin, public procurement website and a national daily newspaper of general circulation in Ghana.

In line with the Public Procurement Act, 2003 (Act 663), MMDAs advertise 'Invitation for Bids' in the media for interested contractors to submit their bids for a certain category of projects. Bids are openly evaluated by Tender Boards and successful bidders awarded contracts upon submission of required documents, such as bid securities or bonds. Every MMDA is required by law to establish a tender board to advise the assembly on the award of contracts.

d) Project Implementation

Section 10 (clause 4e) of the Local Government Law requires MMDAs to “monitor the execution of projects under approved development plans and assess and evaluate their impact on the people’s development, the local, district and national economy.” Consequently, MMDAs are supposed to supervise and monitor ongoing projects to ensure quality and timely delivery. Project quality control is performed to ensure adherence to specification during the project implementation process and to suggest corrective actions necessary for reaching the appropriate quality levels.

e) Post Project Evaluation

On satisfactory completion of a project, the Assembly should issue a Completion Certificate to the contractor. This signifies the successful completion of the project and handed over to the client for use subject to making good defects during the defects liability period. It also signifies that all matters that need to be resolved have been resolved and makes the final monetary adjustments between the Assembly and the contractor, such as return of cash retention.

Communication Between District Assemblies and Citizens in the Planning and Execution of District Assemblies’ Projects

In initiating development projects, including infrastructure, Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) are required to consult with citizens as much as possible as part of guaranteeing their participation in the development process. This is in line with the provisions in Chapter 20 of the Constitution, which stipulates that “to ensure accountability of District Assembly officials, people in particular Local Government areas shall, as far as practicable, be afforded the opportunity to participate effectively in their governance.” The National Development Planning

(System) Act, 1994 (Act 480) also stipulates that “A District Planning Authority shall conduct a public hearing on any proposed district development plan and shall consider the views expressed at the hearing before adoption of the proposed district development plan.”

Act 963 also makes adequate provisions for MMDAs’ consultation with citizens in the development process. Section 83 (1b) of the act stipulates that: “A District Planning Authority shall ensure that the district development plans and the settlement structure plans are prepared with the full participation of the local community.” Section 40 stipulates that “A District Assembly shall enable the residents and other stakeholders in the district to participate effectively in the activities of the District Assembly and the sub-district structures of the District Assembly.”

As part of their Medium-Term Development Plans (MTDPs), District Assemblies are supposed to include a communication plan. Section 3.3 of the NDPC Guidelines requires every District Assembly to formulate communication strategies, among others, to:

- Disseminate the programmes, projects and Annual Progress Reports of the MDAs to inform/create awareness;
- Raise awareness of the expected roles of stakeholders in the implementation of programmes and sub-programmes of the MDAs;
- Promote dialogue and generate feedback on the performance of the MDAs; and
- Promote access and manage expectations of the public on the deliverables of MDAs.

Again, in outlining the duties of an Assembly Member, Section 16 (1) of Act 963 stipulates, among others, that “A member of a District Assembly shall as appropriate maintain close contact with the

electoral area of the District Assembly, consult the people of the electoral area on issues to be discussed in the District Assembly, collate their views, opinions, and proposals; and present the views, opinions and proposals of the electorate to the District Assembly.”

In addition, as part of the ‘Service Delivery Standards for MMDAs’ developed by the Local Government Service (LGS), “MMDAs are required to regularly and systematically seek the opinion of the citizenry within their areas of jurisdiction on the provision of both current and future services” and to “involve relevant stakeholders, beneficiary departments and communities in quarterly and annual monitoring of projects.”

These provisions, thus, clearly establish the basis for District Assembly officials to establish communication with citizens in a coordinated and fair manner to ensure that citizens’ aspirations, views and concerns are taken into consideration in planning and implementing development programmes and projects at the local level. Indeed, having effective communication with citizens is one of the ways to promote citizens’ participation in the development process. Participation may involve information-sharing, consultation, service access, programme inputting, election, representation, association and collaboration and that these forms of participation give the citizens the opportunity and power to engage in discussions and contribute to the decision-making process (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2010).

In fact, section 42 of Act 963 outlines the modalities and platforms for citizens participation in the activities of the MMDAs and these include various communication channels. It stipulates that “A District Assembly shall facilitate the establishment of a structure for stakeholder participation that may include the following:

- (a) information communication technology-based platforms;

- (b) town hall meetings;
- (c) budget preparation and validation fora;
- (d) notice boards announcing jobs, appointments, procurement awards and other important announcements of public interest;
- (e) visits to development project sites; and
- (f) other avenues for the participation of the people.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although District Assemblies are required to have consultations with citizens and other stakeholders in planning their developmental projects, studies have shown that consultation of citizens in the planning of development projects has been inadequate, thereby limiting citizens' participation in the development process. Oduro and Osei-Kuffour (2018) found that the conduct of public hearings as required under the planning systems and regulations, as part of the preparation of the Medium-Term Development Plans (MTDPs) for MMDAs, did not take place as often as required. The Media Foundation for West Africa (2019: p.10) has also observed that the implementation of the Local Government Act had "severe deficits with regards to citizens' participation and engagement. Whilst there are forums for consultation, they seem to be poorly supported or inactive."

As such, there continues to be situations where infrastructure projects such as schools, markets, toilets, police posts, etc. are completed but not in use by citizens or do not meet their needs because there was no effective communication between the assemblies and the communities during the planning of those projects. SEND-West Africa (2014), following a review of planned and

implemented DACF projects by 27 MMDAs in Ghana from 2010 to 2013, indicated that 46.4 per cent of citizens spoken to during the study were either not consulted or consulted on some projects and as a result, most of the projects were not being utilized because of poor location or poor execution of project.

Again, even where there has been some form of communication between citizens and District Assemblies, it has been limited to the planning stage of the MTDPs and virtually non-existent during project implementation (SEND-West Africa, 2014). As a result, citizens mostly claim little or no knowledge of projects in their communities, apart from seeing these projects spring up. They show a lack of knowledge of how the projects were initiated, who is funding the projects, what are the contract sums, who are the contractors, what are the timelines, what are the project specifications, etc. In the absence of such an effective communication between citizens and their assemblies, citizens become apathetic to ongoing projects in their communities and do not get involved in monitoring, sharing their concerns and supporting the construction of projects.

To address these problems, SEND-West Africa (2014) recommended increased communication or engagement between citizens and District Assembly officials throughout the planning and implementation of development projects. It is important to establish how we can make this possible. More importantly, what do citizens and District Assembly officials think about how to address this problem. Getting their point of view based on their experiences is certainly essential because they are the main participants and their perspectives would put us in a better position to take the right actions to improve communication between citizens and District Assemblies during the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects.

1.3 Research Questions

The main question that formed the basis for this research, is: “how can we enhance communication between District Assemblies and citizens in planning and executing infrastructure projects?”

This broad question was broken down into the following sub-questions:

- i. What are the communication mechanisms through which we can enhance communication between citizens and District Assemblies in the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects?
- ii. What should District Assemblies and citizens communicate about in the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects?
- iii. How often should District Assemblies communicate with citizens during the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects?
- iv. What actions are needed to ensure regular communication between District Assemblies and citizens in the planning and execution of infrastructure projects?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The overall objective of this study was to establish the perspectives of citizens and District Assembly officials on how to enhance communication between District Assemblies and citizens in the planning and execution of infrastructure projects.

The study had four specific objectives:

1. Establish the perspectives of citizens and District Assembly officials on the communication mechanisms through which District Assemblies can enhance communication with citizens in the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects.
2. Establish the perspectives of citizens and District Assembly officials on the issues or information that District Assemblies and citizens should communicate about in the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects.
3. Establish the perspectives of citizens and District Assembly officials on how regular District Assemblies should communicate with citizens when planning and implementing infrastructure projects.
4. Establish the perspectives of citizens and District Assembly officials on actions required to ensure regular communication between District Assemblies and citizens in the planning and execution of infrastructure projects.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, the findings of this study can be used as basis to engage with MMDAs and their oversight bodies, such as the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development and the Local Government Service, to take appropriate action to enhance communication between District Assemblies and citizens, especially in the planning and implementation of infrastructural projects.

Secondly, the study would provide useful information that can be used in formulating interventions aimed at promoting citizen-government dialogue, particularly at the local level. Increasingly, international and local non-governmental organizations and donor agencies have sought to

improve accountability, transparency and improved service delivery at the local level by instituting and strengthening mechanisms for citizens to engage with District Assembly officials to influence decision making, get informed on key governance issues and to demand accountability from duty bearers on the use of public resources.

Thirdly, this study would contribute to knowledge on how to ensure that there is effective communication between District Assemblies and citizens, particularly in the provision of infrastructural projects. As studies (Send West Africa, 2014; CDD Ghana 2014) found, there has been poor communication between District Assemblies and citizens' and there is need for increased engagement with citizens, especially during the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects.

Last, but not the least, studies like this one can provide the basis for further and more expansive studies to establish clearly what mechanisms (variables) are required for sustained and effective communication between District Assemblies and citizens, especially during the planning and implementation of capital projects.

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study

Citizens and District Assembly officials are expected to establish communication on a wide array of developmental issues and at different times. However, this study is focused on how to strengthen the communication that takes place or supposed to take place between citizens and District Assembly officials during the planning and implementation of MMDAs' infrastructure projects by the latter. The building of classroom blocks, clinics, CHPS compounds, water and sanitation facilities, markets and dams, etc. are among the key roles of MMDAs and it is expected that

enhancing communication between citizens and the MMDAs will enhance the performance, transparency and accountability of the MMDAs in the delivery of these projects.

Focusing only on the perspectives of a cross section of the citizens and District Assembly officials means it will not be possible to draw generalizations from the findings of this study. As a phenomenological study, the findings of this study will be based on the experiences of the participants in the study which, certainly, may vary from other people's experiences.

Moreover, the study is conducted in a peri-urban community and as such the views expressed by the participants may reflect their environment and may differ from the views of those in urban areas, such as the metropolitan and municipalities, where people are more sophisticated due to the greater exposure to mass media and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

1.7 Organization of the Study

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter One provides a background to the study as well as the problem statement, research questions, objectives, the significance of the study and the scope of the study. Chapter Two contains the conceptual framework that underpins the study and a review of existing studies related to the topic and, specifically, the objectives of the study. Chapter Three describes the methodological approach and tools adopted for this study and the justification for this. Chapter Four presents and analyses the data collected from the interviews and focus group discussions, whilst the Chapter Five presents a summary of the findings of the study under the various objectives. It also includes conclusions arrived at based on the findings and recommendations for further studies.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section examines available literature on the key concepts of the study. It also contains a review of existing studies related to the topic, and specifically the objectives of the study, with the aim of understanding clearly what research had been done already in that area, how these researches were conducted, what were the findings and conclusions and how they relate to the focus of this study.

2.1 The Concept of Communication

Communication has been defined variously. Dale (1969), Berelson and Steiner (1964) and Theodorson and Theodorson (1969) offer some useful definitions of communication, as cited by Croft (2004:8). Dale (1969) defines communication as the “sharing of ideas and feelings in a mood of mutuality.” Berelson and Steiner (1964) defines communication as “The transmission of information, ideas, emotions and skills...by the use of symbols.” Theodorson and Theodorson (1969) proposes this definition: “the transmission of information, ideas, attitudes, or emotion from one person or group to another...primarily through symbols.”

Similarly, Lunenburg (2010) defines communication as “the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another.” Owen Hargie (2011), cited by Leonard (2012:35), emphasises on communication being a process, one that involves an interchange of verbal and/or nonverbal messages within a continuous and dynamic sequence of events.

What is clear in all of these is that communication is established when there is an exchange of ideas, emotions and meaning between one entity and another via a medium. The medium of communication could be face-to-face, mass media, etc. The word communication is derived from the Latin word, *communis*, which means common. This underscores the fact that unless a common

understanding results from the exchange of information, there is no communication (Lunenborg, 2010).

Communication is classified into, at least four types, depending on how many people are involved: intrapersonal, interpersonal, group and mass communication. Intrapersonal Communication refers to communication with oneself using internal vocalization or reflective thinking (Leonard, 2012). Like other forms of communication, intrapersonal communication is triggered by some internal or external stimulus. Intrapersonal communication takes place only inside our heads. Through interpersonal communication, we form an understanding of who we are based on how other people communicate with us and how we process that (Leonard, 2012).

Interpersonal communication describes communication between people whose lives mutually influence one another (Leonard, 2012). It builds, maintains, and ends our relationships, and we spend more time engaged in interpersonal communication than the other forms of communication. Interpersonal communication occurs in various contexts and is addressed in subfields of study within communication studies such as intercultural communication, organizational communication, health communication, and computer-mediated communication. After all, interpersonal relationships exist in all those contexts (Leonard, 2012).

Lorimer (2002:67), citing O'Sullivan et al. (1983), defines mass communication as “the practice and product of providing leisure entertainment and information to an unknown audience by means of corporately financed, industrially produced, state regulated, high technology, privately consumed commodities in the modern print, screen, audio and broadcast media.” This definition emphasises the complexity of mass communication. Over the years, it has evolved from newspapers to high-tech satellite broadcast and online media.

2.2 Citizen-Government Communication – An Ingredient for Good Governance

Communication between citizens and government is seen as an important part of good governance; a critical feature of a functioning democracy, where the rights of citizens are guaranteed. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights establishes the right of people to have access to information, hold opinions and express these publicly, whilst Article 21 guarantees people's right to participate in government and governance processes, either individually or through chosen representatives. Therefore, some see democracy as “a process where citizens are heard by the state to a much greater degree and where citizens' participate directly in deliberation and decision making on political and policy issues as opposed to their interests being managed by powerful third party patrons or representatives who intercede on their behalf” (Action Aid, 2012:10; citing Schattan, et al., 2010:3).

Indeed, in well-functioning democracies, governments provide reliable and timely information to the public (OECD, 1996:3). Effective communications between government and the public is especially important in countries in transition, where major changes in state institutions – indeed in all aspects of life – have left the citizenry uncertain about the new roles of the government and public administration, and how to convey their views to representatives of the state (OECD, 1996:3).

Effective communication between government and citizens is essential for promoting accountable and responsive governance. This is because government transparency and access to information enables citizens to monitor and hold government to account for its actions. Indeed, there is significant evidence that transparency can reduce opportunities for corruption (Mcloughlin and Scott, 2010:5).

Ahenkan, Bawole and Domfeh (2013) note that an effective engagement of local communities and other stakeholders enhances transparency and improve upon service delivery within the local government systems. “A conscious effort to build capacities and create space for local engagement will enhance the efforts of decentralisation and fast track poverty reduction and national development in Ghana” (Ahenkan et al., 2013:191). They further observed that community involvement in planning and budgeting of MMDAs “has the potential to promote local democracy, enhance public policy making, improve service delivery, and poverty reduction” (Ahenkan et al., 2013:202).

From a development perspective, citizen-local government dialogue is seen as an enabler of citizen participation in the development process. As the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its Human Development Report 1993 noted, “People’s participation is becoming the central issue of our time and participation requires communication.”

Similarly, the George Washington University’s Institute for Public Diplomacy and Global Communication (2009:2) outlines the following key points about the functions and importance of communication between Government and citizens:

- There are three primary functions of government communication: informing, advocating/persuading (for policies and reforms), and engaging citizens.
- Communication represents an important function of government, responsible for improving three principle elements of government: effectiveness (building broad support and legitimacy for programs), responsiveness (knowing citizens needs and responding to them), and accountability (explaining government stewardship and providing mechanisms to hold governments accountable).

- But enhanced citizen participation is a key indicator of effective government communication. Effective public communication efforts enable citizen participation. Therefore, government communication is more than just developing effective spokespeople, it also involves the provision of customer-oriented services and building capacity for citizens to provide government with feedback as regards these services. In developing countries, this requires crafting and promoting good practices when it comes to transparency issues.

Beyond accountability, transparency, participation and responsiveness, communication also helps governments to foster better relationships with citizens, build trust and work with them to meet each other's needs and expectations. As Jianu et al. (2013) argues, through the communication process, a public authority seeks to establish a relationship of proximity with the citizen; by drawing near and starting dialogue, it sees the personal requirements and grievances. "The ideal would be to reach a point where both the citizens' interests, and those of the public institutions are met. That is why the institutional communication and the advertising techniques, implemented by them, play an important role in Public Administration" (Jianu et al., 2013:175). Therefore, formulating a strong and reliable communication program contributes, in a very important way, to the process of Public Administration, according to Jianu et al. (2013).

Again, effective communication between local government authorities and citizens contributes to the development of a place and community by making it easier for the government to implement its development projects and address any bottlenecks (Kruzmetra, Bite and Kronberga, 2018: 156).

The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) also describes local government's communication with citizens as one that involves "using many different methods to

find out what citizens think and value, and making the citizens in turn better informed about the responsibilities and activities of the local authority.”

According to the association, a systematic approach to citizen dialogue is critical for strengthening democracy and increasing the efficiency of local government. Consequently, the association has been focused on supporting its members to “develop systems and methods for citizen dialogue as part of the local governance process” and has identified what it sees as the possible gains from a systematic approach to citizen dialogue, some of which are stated below:

- Through dialogue, citizens may obtain a better understanding of the activities of the local authority. They may also obtain knowledge about the elected representatives’ responsibility for prioritization of common resources.
- More systematic citizen dialogue may lead to better agreement between public service supply and the citizens’ needs. The community’s needs are always changing, and there is a risk that the local authority continues to offer services that few people, or nobody require. Changing needs may be clarified through systematic dialogue.
- Increased participation gives stronger legitimacy to the decisions made by the elected representatives.
- Citizen dialogue early on in the decision-making process leads to an increased engagement and sense of responsibility among the citizens. Even if they do not get what they want, they have gained knowledge and understanding of the background to the decision which makes it easier to accept it.

- Different interest groups are given the opportunity to meet and solve problems together. The dialogue provides an arena where people can argue their views, but it is also a forum for listening to other people's opinions on the same issue.
- Increased participation also means more transparency and knowledge about the conditions for local government.

2.3 Level of Communication Between Government and Citizens

Whilst the role of communications in supporting democratic development and stimulating economic growth is increasingly recognised, in practice communications remains a relatively under-prioritised area of the so-called 'good governance' agenda (McLoughlin and Scott, 2010:5). The George Washington University's Institute for Public Diplomacy and Global Communication (2009) has observed that many countries around the world lack a culture of consultation and participation and many of them lack capacity in communication between government and the public.

In Ghana, there have been studies that have examined the level of communication between District Assemblies and citizens, a number of which have viewed it from the participation perspective, considering that communication is one of the avenues to enhance citizens' participation in the development process, as already mentioned.

Ghana's Inter-Ministerial Coordinating Committee on Decentralization (GIMCCD) conducted a study in 2014 to, among others, analyse existing communication strategies in Assemblies, determine their effectiveness and recommend practical ways for improving district assembly communication system. The study was conducted in three assemblies: Tema Metropolitan

Assembly, Ga West Municipal Assembly and Shai-Osudoku District Assembly using both primary (questionnaires, discussion and interviews) and secondary sources of data collection.

The key finding was that the district assemblies were not having frequent communication with the local people. Thirty percent (30%) of the respondents indicated that the assemblies communicate with the people on a quarterly basis and 18% indicated that it takes more than three months for such communication to take place. Twenty-two percent (22%) said the assemblies communicate with the people every month, 14% indicated it was daily and 10% said it was weekly. The rest said it was biweekly. Thus, almost half of the respondents (48%) indicated that communication between the assemblies and the people takes place either quarterly or beyond.

The study examined the appropriateness of the communication mechanisms being used by the assemblies and found that notice boards and information service vans were being used often, yet these were not the most appropriate. The study observed that the low use of electronic tools (Internet/Emails), the print media (especially Newsletters), Radio and TV was a major weakness.

Ahenkan, Bawole and Domfeh (2013), in a study to examine the role and level of participation of stakeholders in planning, budgeting and financial management of the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly, also found that there was poor communication between citizens and local authorities partly because of the poor involvement of citizens in the avenues provided for engagement with their assemblies. They found that participation of local people in community hearings, town hall meetings and other forms of engagements with their local authorities was very minimal and in some cases community members were not even aware of the process at all.

“Most of them have never heard about any community hearing aiming at soliciting their inputs for development projects that concern them.” p.203.

They found that assembly members and local councils, who were supposed to serve as a medium of communication between District Assemblies and the communities as per the local government law, were not that effective in performing their role.

“Although members of the District Assembly and the Sub-District Councils are required to collate and analyse in detail all the major problems of their communities to facilitate the formulation of programmes, projects and activities, and also mobilize community members, and facilitate the needs assessment in the communities during community dialogue meetings for onward submission to the District Assemblies, most members are not doing this.” (Ahenkan et al., 2013:203).

Ahenkan et al., (2013) concluded that “there has been very little space for local participation and that most of the stakeholders lack proper understanding of the planning, budgeting and the financial management systems of the district assemblies. This lack of space for stakeholder participation has constrained the promotion of effective, responsive and responsible government at the local level for poverty reduction. Procedures and structures for community engagement in the monitoring and evaluation of development interventions seldom exist.”

Bedelleh and Nobabumah (2013) conducted a study in three districts in the Upper West region of Ghana using interviews and focus group discussions to examine the extent to which local people participate in District Assemblies’ activities. They asked citizens which of the district assembly officials usually keep them informed about the development activities the assembly undertakes.

Findings of this study also showed weaknesses on the part of assembly members, leading to poor communication with citizens. Out of a total of 180 respondents, only 42.8% said they get informed through their assemblyman/woman.

Bedelleh and Nobabumah (2013:17) observed therefore that “The assembly members are not doing very well. This is because the remaining 57.2% of the respondents, who are in the majority, on the other hand, feel their assembly members do not get them informed about their respective District assemblies’ decisions.”

The study also assessed how regular the assembly members meet with their constituents. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the assemblymen/women interviewed indicated that they were able to meet with their constituents only once or twice officially in a year, 22.5 percent indicated they were able to meet more than twice in a year and only one person, representing 2.5 percent indicated that he/she was able to meet with the people as many times as was necessary.

As Bedelleh and Nobabumah (2013:18) note, “assemblymen/women have it as a duty to meet with their people, before and after each DA meeting to share their development concerns as well as get them know what actions the DA is taken to solve their problem.” Consequently, failure of assembly members to meet with the constituents means less communication between the District Assemblies and citizens.

Similarly, in a study to assess decentralization and conflict in the Kassena-Nankana West District, Tanle, Essaw and Titigah (2016) found that citizens could not communicate their issues to the District Assembly because “the participation of Assembly Members at the DA is not felt by a wider segment of the population and therefore does not create the needed opportunity for the voices of the citizens to be heard.”

In identifying the causes of conflict in local governance, community members who took part in the study alluded to poor communication between the District Assembly and the citizens. As Tanle, Essaw and Titigah (2016) note, “Poor information dissemination by DA staff coupled with

difficulties involved in accessing information from them was also identified by the community members as a cause of conflict in local governance. They attributed this to lack of communication channels of the DA.”

They noted that apart from sharing information with the citizens through the Assembly Members, there were other channels through which the Assembly could have disseminated information. However, these channels were not employed by the assembly. These findings confirm further poor communication between District Assemblies and citizens due to weaknesses in the functioning of the assembly members and the failure of the assemblies to utilise other communication channels.

Oduro and Osei-Kuffour (2018) have recently also confirmed that public hearings, which are an avenue for citizens and District Assemblies to communicate, did not take place as often as required. In a paper on Strengthening Stakeholder Participation in Decentralized Planning Systems in Ghana, they noted that “the public hearings are aimed at creating space for citizens to contribute to the MTDPs. Given the significance of public consultations in the planning process, the planning guidelines require that each MMDA organizes at least two (2) major public hearings at the district level during the formulation of the MTDPs.” Oduro and Osei-Kuffour (2018:3)

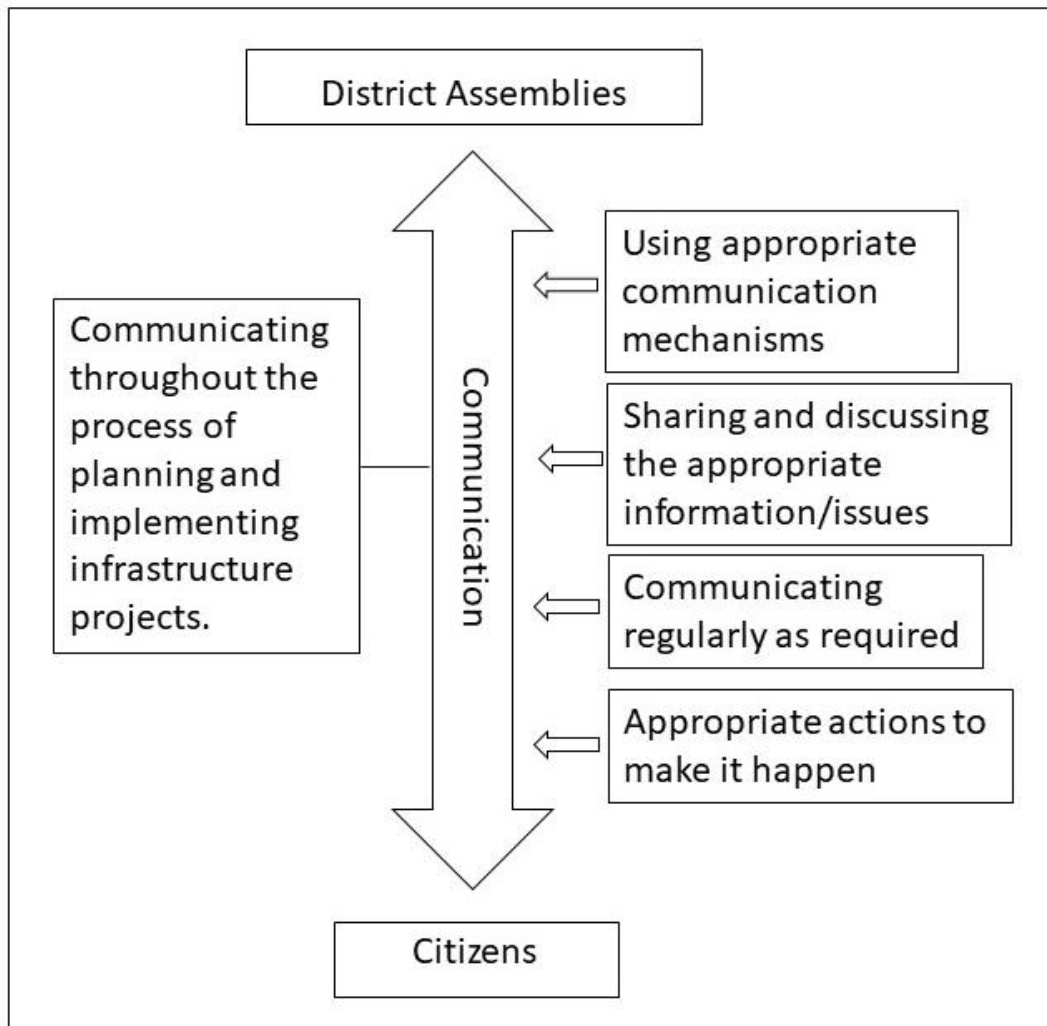
However, they found that out of the 40 MMDAs who were part of a study, 16 of them representing 40% held the first major public hearing while a significant majority (80%) failed to conduct the second public hearing which the technocrats explained was as a result of the lack of funds.

The study also found that the assemblies failed to distribute copies of the draft plan to the public prior to some of the hearings, as required by the planning guidelines. This means citizens and other stakeholders who took part in these meetings were not adequately informed and so could not have an effective communication with the assemblies.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 is the conceptual framework proposed to guide this study. As portrayed by the framework, communication between District Assemblies and citizens, which is the dependent variable, can be enhanced by getting an understanding of the various independent variables, i.e. the appropriate communication mechanisms to use, the appropriate information/issues to share or discuss, how regular such communication should take place and the appropriate actions to take to ensure that communication between citizens and District Assemblies happens as required. The framework was developed based on the literature reviewed, the problem being investigated and the objectives of the study.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Source: Author's Construct, August 2020.

2.5 Summary

Communication refers mainly to an exchange of ideas, emotions and meaning. It can be described as intrapersonal communication when it is within oneself; interpersonal when its between two people; group communication when it involves a few people; or mass communication when it is

channelled to a large group of diverse and dispersed people through a medium (radio, internet, television, newspaper, etc.) and mostly in the form of entertainment, information or education.

All over the world, communication between government and citizens is seen as a characteristic of good governance as it enables participation, accountability, transparency and responsiveness. As a result, governments, including local governments are expected to establish and maintain communication with citizens through the development process, particularly in decision making and implementation.

In Ghana, every District Assembly, being responsible for exercising political and administrative authority in a district, is required to have communication with citizens, particularly when planning and implementing development projects. To enable citizens' participation in the development process, the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 963) recommends to District Assemblies to communicate with citizens through town hall meetings; information communication technology-based platforms, budget preparation and validation fora; visits to development project sites, notice boards, among others.

In fact, the NDPC guidelines for the preparation of District Medium Term Development Plans (DMTDP) requires District Assemblies to consult with community members on their needs and aspirations when preparing their DMTDPs. However, studies (as presented above) have shown that in practice, District Assemblies do not communicate adequately with citizens. They do not organise public hearings as often as required, and assembly members do not also meet regularly with their constituents to discuss their concerns and convey it to the District Assembly. How to bridge this communication gap is the focus of this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section describes the methodological approach that was adopted for this study and the justification. Specifically, it describes how sampling was done to select the citizens and District Assembly officials who took part in the study, as well as how the community where the focus group discussions took place was arrived at. The section also describes the methods and instruments that were used to collect data and how the data was analysed.

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative research design, as this was more suitable for this type of research due to its characteristics and advantages. Shank (as cited in Ospina, 2004:2) defines qualitative research as “a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning.” By systematic he means “planned, ordered and public”, following rules agreed upon by members of the qualitative research community. By empirical, he means that this type of inquiry is grounded in the world of experience. Inquiry into meaning says researchers try to understand how others make sense of their experience (Ospina, 2004).

Qualitative researchers often study only a single setting or a small number of individuals or sites, using theoretical or purposeful rather than probability sampling, and rarely make explicit claims about the generalizability of their accounts (Maxwell, 2009:245). Qualitative research allows a researcher to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem; the process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2014).

The purpose of qualitative research is to describe and interpret issues or phenomena systematically from the point of view of the individual or population being studied, and to generate new concepts and theories (Mohajan, 2018). Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world (Western Sydney University, 2020, citing Merriam, 2016:6).

Mohajan (2018:18), citing Yauch and Steudel, 2003; Creswell, 2014, outlines major strengths of qualitative research as follows:

- Open-ended questioning reveals new or unanticipated phenomenon and raises more issues through broad and open-ended inquiry.
- Includes a diverse and representative cross-section of affected persons.
- It allows researchers to explore the views of homogenous as well as diverse groups of people help unpack these differing perspectives within a community.
- As statistics are not used in it, and uses a more descriptive, narrative style; and gains new insight. It can play the important role of suggesting possible relationships, causes, effects, and dynamic processes.
- It allows people to open up and allows for new evidence that was not even initially considered.
- It provides a rich picture of social phenomena and in its specific contexts reveals critical incidents.

- The data collection process requires limited numbers of respondents, which can be carried out with limited resources.

There are different types of qualitative research and they involve different sets of assumptions about what sorts of information (or knowledge) are important (Hancock, Windridge and Ockleford, 2007). The different approaches to qualitative research (Hancock, et al., 2007: 10) include: ethnography, grounded theory, interpretative phenomenological analysis, discourse analysis, conversation analysis, content analysis (this term can refer to a quantitative technique) and narrative analysis.

The phenomenological approach was more favoured for this study as it sought to understand the perspectives of citizens and District Assembly officials on how to enhance communication between District Assemblies and citizens in the planning and execution of infrastructure projects. Griffin (2000:45) describes phenomenology as “the intentional analysis of everyday life from the standpoint of the person who is living it.” This approach or tradition, he explains, emphasises people’s interpretation of their own subjective experiences.

According to Lester (1999:1), the purpose of the phenomenological approach is “to illuminate the specific, to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation. In the human sphere this normally translates into gathering ‘deep’ information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions and participant observation, and representing it from the perspective of the research participant(s).”

Lester (1999:1) also adds that “Phenomenological methods are particularly effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives, and therefore at challenging structural or normative assumptions.”

Therefore, by adopting the phenomenological approach, the study was focused on interpreting the findings from the lenses or social reality of those who took part in the study. As Marshall and Rossman (1980) notes, human behaviour is significantly influenced by the setting in which it occurs. Therefore, what may be appropriate means of communicating with citizens may not be the same for communicating with government officials. In fact, the view of citizens was of particular interest to this study. This is because identifying what channels of communication are appropriate for establishing effective dialogue with citizens can best be determined by citizens based on their preferences, capacities and/or convenience. Moreover, due to the unequal power relations in various communities (between men and women, youth and adults, the rich and the poor, minority and majority ethnic groups, etc.) and between citizens and District Assembly officials and politicians, it is important to get a better understanding of what can guarantee effective participation in communication for various groups.

3.2 Study Population and Sample Size

The population for this study comprised citizens and District Assembly officials of the Tolon district. The local government officials include both elected and appointed members of the General Assembly (the local legislative body), administrative staff of the assemblies (including District Coordinating Directors – DCDs, District Engineers and District Planning Officers) and political heads, that is Metropolitan, Municipal and District Chief Executives (MMDCEs).

In selecting a sample size for this study, the study was minded by the fact that smaller sample sizes are most suitable for qualitative studies and should only be as large as is required to get an appreciable amount of the various perspectives or viewpoints of the issues under study to avoid saturation. In fact, choosing a suitable sample size in qualitative research is an area of conceptual debate and practical uncertainty (Vasileiou et al., 2018). In most cases, however, samples in

qualitative research tend to be small in order to support the depth of case-oriented analysis that is fundamental to this mode of inquiry (Vasileiou et al., 2018, citing Sandelowski, 1996). For phenomenological studies, Creswell (1998) recommends five to 25 and Morse (1994) suggests at least six (cited by Statistics Solutions, 2020).

As such, 18 citizens and two District Assembly officials were targeted for this study. In the end, it was 12 participants who took part in the study, comprising 10 citizens and two (2) District Assembly officials. Further details on the participants are provided under data collection methods.

3.3 Sampling Techniques

In line with the research design, the study employed non-probability sampling techniques in selecting the study community and the participants for this study since the findings were not intended to be generalized, but to give an insight into what citizens and District Assembly officials believe are the ways to promote effective dialogue in the planning and implementation of infrastructural projects.

With non-probability sampling, also known as non-random sampling, samples are selected based on the subjective judgement of the researcher, rather than random selection (i.e., probabilistic methods), which is the cornerstone of probability sampling techniques (Lund Research Ltd, 2012). Again, non-probability sampling is convenient and cost effective and can be used for idea generation (Harrison, 2006).

Specifically, the purposive sampling technique was used to select Nyankpala for the focus group discussions. This was because the study was interested in identifying a community in which some degree of interactions between the assembly and citizens had taken place as that would make the citizens more appreciative of the importance of citizen-local government dialogue and better able

to share some insights on how to promote such dialogue. A few months before the study, the Tolon District Assembly had implemented a three-unit classroom project in Nyankpala, one of the large towns in the district, and through the intervention of a USAID-funded social accountability project (Ghana's Strengthening Accountability Mechanisms), there were some engagements between the citizens and District Assembly officials to discuss issues pertaining to the project.

Purposive sampling was also employed to select the interviewees for key informant interviews; that is the Assembly Member for the Nyankpala Electoral Area and the District Works Engineer. The Assembly Member, an elected member of the District Assembly, played a crucial role in facilitating the engagements between the citizens and the assembly and so had a lot of experience worth sharing. By virtue of his role, the Engineer happened to be at the forefront of the implementation of infrastructural projects in the district and had also been part of some engagements between the citizens and the assembly.

For the citizens, the study employed a combination of convenience sampling and non-proportional quota sampling, a variant of non-probability sampling, to select participants into various age and gender categories for focus group discussions. This was to allow some flexibility in the number of participants for each group, so far as it falls within the six (6) to ten (10) range. The Assembly Member was relied upon to identify citizens who were interested and available in this study. Convenience sampling is a type of nonprobability sampling in which people are sampled simply because they are 'convenient' sources of data for researchers (Lavrakas, 2008).

3.4 Methods of Data Collection

A variety of methods can be used in phenomenologically-based research, including interviews, conversations, participant observation, action research, focus meetings and analysis of personal

texts (Lester, 1999). For this study, two qualitative methods of data collection – focus group discussion (FGD) and key informant interview – were employed. Data collection occurred in August 2017.

The FGD method was employed for collecting data from citizens. The reason for this was that the issues under study concerned all citizens and it was expected that they may have common perspectives on the issues being studied. As Jayasekara (2012) notes, focus groups have clear potential when the researcher is interested in processes, whereby a group jointly constructs meaning about a topic.

Again, as observed by the UK's Overseas Development Institute (ODI), “the strength of FGD relies on allowing the participants to agree or disagree with each other so that it provides an insight into how a group thinks about an issue, about the range of opinion and ideas, and the inconsistencies and variation that exists in a particular community in terms of beliefs and their experiences and practices” (ODI, 2009). In addition, having an FGD would reduce the time spent in collecting data and also prevent the situation where so much data is collected and analyses is challenged.

Typically, focus groups consist of between 6 and 12 members drawn from a study population of interest, and sessions generally last between one and two hours until the topic has been covered to the satisfaction of participants (Freeman, 2006, citing Stewart & Shamdasani 1990). A total of 10 participants took part in the FGD and they comprised: five (5) adult males (i.e. 36 years and above), three (3) adult females (i.e. 36 years and above) and two (2) youth (18-35 years), who were both females. The initial plan was to hold separate FGDs for the different groups to make it more

comfortable for the participants, especially the women and youth to express their views. However, that could not happen because of the limited number of citizens who turned up for the discussions.

Again, the participants were mainly traders and farmers and they had given an indication that they had to complete these discussions in good time and attend to their activities, especially as these discussions were taking place during the farming season. Any delays could have led to a participant withdrawing from the study.

In view of this, efforts were made to ensure adequate participation of the women. Indeed, the men were very vocal and so the women had to be prompted a number of times to share their views on each topic being discussed. In some instances, the women were made to start the discussions before the men joined. Dagbani, which is the dominant and the indigenous language of the people of Nyankpala, was used for the discussions. In the end, it was a fruitful activity as the participants reinforced each other's views most of the time and some also made unique contributions.

The study conducted interviews with two District Assembly Officials: the District Works Engineer of the Tolon District Assembly and the Assembly Member for the Nyankpala Electoral Area, who is an elected local government official. This was the preferred method of gathering data from these participants because of the different experiences and expertise that each of them had in relation to the topic. The interview with the Engineer was conducted in English, whilst the interview with the Assembly Member was conducted in Dagbani.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments and Tools

The study employed two data gathering instruments: an FGD guide and an interview guide. Both guides were developed based on the objectives of the study and harmonized into one document.

The guide, which is attached to this report as an appendix, had two sections. The first section is an

introduction that provides brief information on the study, the rights of the research participants and other ethical issues. The second section contains the discussion areas and questions under each objective. Open-ended questions were used to elicit adequate information from the participants and to allow for follow up questions.

“Interview guides can be helpful to researchers who are conducting semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews. Qualitative interviews offer a means of collecting in-depth information about your topic so you will want to limit the number of questions you pose in order to enable your participant to have time to talk about the topic at length, without feeling rushed” (Knight, 2013:1).

A recorder was used to capture all the interviews and focus group discussions for the purpose of transcription. In addition, a notebook was used to take down the key points as a backup.

3.6 Data Presentation and Analysis

The following procedures were followed to examine, interpret, and present the data collected, manually. First, the recordings of the interviews and FGDs were translated and transcribed. The focus group discussions and interview with the Assembly Man were both conducted in the local language, Dagbani and so had to be translated in English during the transcription process. Second, the transcribed data, together with the notes taken, were reviewed to get a clear understanding of the views being expressed and to identify which areas of the study or objectives that the viewpoints related to.

Third, the data was content analysed thoroughly to identify broader themes and sub-themes and to code the themes. Coding, basically, involves labelling and organizing qualitative data to identify different themes and the relationships between them (Medelyan, 2019). In coding the data, ‘in vivo’ codes were largely used as the study employed an inductive coding method, which involves

creating codes based on the qualitative data itself (Medelyan, 2019). ‘In vivo’ codes are descriptive codes that come directly from the statements of subjects or are common phrases found in the texts being examined (Cope, 2010, citing Strauss and Corbin 1990). E.g. the code ‘community needs’ was developed to categorize all data that mentioned that District Assemblies and citizens should discuss the needs and priorities of communities during the planning of infrastructure projects.

Fourth, the data was reorganized under the appropriate themes or codes. E.g. all responses that mentioned radio as a communication mechanism through which District Assemblies can enhance their communication with citizens were put under the code ‘radio’. By categorizing the data into themes and sub-themes, a clear hierarchical relationship between the objectives, main themes and sub-themes was established.

Fifth, the data, as categorized, was reviewed once more to ensure the responses were indeed under the appropriate sub-themes and that the sub-themes were also under the appropriate main themes. This cleaning process continued throughout the report writing process to ensure accuracy in the reporting.

Sixth, narratives were developed under each objective, theme and sub-theme to interpret and present the findings. The verbatim responses, i.e. quotations, were used to illustrate or corroborate the narratives. This was followed by a discussion of the findings to underscore the implications and compare it to the literature reviewed, where possible. Conclusions and recommendations were then drawn and presented.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This section presents and discusses the data collected from the interviews and FGDs in line with the objectives of the study and based on the various themes identified through the analysis.

4.1 FINDINGS

4.1.1 Communication mechanisms for enhancing District Assemblies' communication with citizens

The study sought the perspectives of citizens and District Assembly officials on the communication mechanisms/channels through which District Assembly officials can enhance communication with citizens when planning and implementing infrastructure projects for communities; what makes these mechanisms suitable for this purpose; and what could potentially serve as a barrier in the use of these mechanisms. Five communication mechanisms were identified, and the perspectives shared around these mechanisms are presented below.

a. Meetings

Both the citizens and District Assembly officials see meetings as one of the most effective means through which District Assemblies can communicate with citizens in the process of planning and implementing their infrastructure projects. They think that through meetings, citizens get the opportunity to share their views and it also promotes consensus building. They also think that meetings give them a better opportunity to ask questions and get accurate information.

“Such meetings are very important because they help us to come to an agreement on issues” – FGD participant.

“[At the meetings] Everybody says what he or she thinks and then we discuss and select the best suggestions that will benefit the community. So even if you say something and it is not taken on board, it is not a problem” – FGD participant.

“On radio, anything can be said. Lies can be told and no one can question, but at the meeting we can seek the truth” – FGD participant.

The citizens and District Assembly officials think that community members, such as farmers, can best participate in communication with the District Assembly through meetings other than any other means. They believe that even citizens who do not get the opportunity to participate in meetings get the information because after the meetings, those who participate go to tell others what was discussed.

“In my view, the meetings help a lot. I say so because most of our people are farmers. During farming season, many farmers do not listen to radio that much; not to talk of watching of TV. But if you organize a meeting, you can get them to take part. Even if they do not take part, they will be told the issues discussed by other community members who attend the meeting. Even me, I am so busy that I mostly do not listen to radio or watch TV unless when I have a particular programme on radio that I monitor” – Assembly Member.

Both the citizens and District Assembly officials also think that through meetings, District Assemblies can get all important stakeholders in the community to participate and through that, they would get informed.

“The meetings target people who need to be involved. When the information is given on radio, many people do not border because the issue does not affect them. So, with the meeting, you can get those who will be affected to attend and do what is expected of them” – Assembly Member.

“For the assembly and the citizens to meet and talk, the assemblyman will have to work with the chief to mobilize the people and they will hold a meeting just like we have met here so that the assembly and the citizens will dialogue and everybody present will get informed of the issues” – FGD participant.

According to the District Assembly officials, meetings are actually used often by District Assemblies during the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects to establish communication with citizens either directly or through their elected assembly members or chiefs and opinion leaders.

“Before we arrive at any project, it has to go through the usual planning process. And the planning process starts with the community. They select the projects because through the community action plans. At the area council level, we are able to get the communities to tell us what their needs are. You know these community action plans is a way we use in finding out the needs of communities. And we do the necessary planning and we come, we call the assembly members to a meeting. We discuss these community action plans we try to disseminate it to the various stakeholders, including development partners. That feeds into our Medium-Term Development Plan and from these plans we tease out the annual action plans. After all these things, we do procurement plans. The assembly members are part of the process” – District Works Engineer.

“So, by this time, everybody would have known where projects would be going to based on the resources that we have. You know we prioritise. And everybody knows which community is going

to have what. It goes through the procurement process and the project is awarded and then we will take the contractor to the community, meet with the community and then we tell them what their roles would be in the execution of the physical project. And we make them to know that they have a monitoring role. And as part of their monitoring roles, they are supposed to ask certain questions, things that are not clear to them, that is demanding accountability” – District Works Engineer.

“You know, we do have area council meetings. At the area council level, you know we have meetings with them. Through that, we are able to inform them of plans we have for them,” – District Works Engineer.

Factors that affect the effectiveness of meetings as a communication channel

Whilst meetings can be an effective channel through which District Assemblies can communicate with citizens, both the citizens and District Assembly officials think that there are certain factors that sometimes make meetings ineffective. These factors are presented below.

i. Citizens’ lack of knowledge/understanding of the issues

Both the citizens and District Assembly officials identified the lack of information or understanding of issues being discussed at meetings as one that makes it difficult for citizens to participate effectively and make meaningful contributions in any communication with the District Assembly.

“When you don’t know much or understand what is being discussed, you will just be quite and say nothing because you do not know how to contribute to the discussion” – FGD participant.

“Sometimes, the challenge has been that we just call them on phone [to come to a meeting] and they come without knowing anything. They just come and sit down and now listen to what the meeting is about. I have heard of Assembly members complain of that” – District Works Engineer.

They think that when citizens are not given adequate information about the infrastructural projects being implemented, it makes it difficult for them to raise concerns regarding those projects, even when they see things going wrong.

“If you do not get proper information about the project, when you see something that you think is not going well, you are not sure how to intervene. You may give a suggestion and the people doing the work will say that your suggestion cannot be accepted because it is not in line with the contract. It’s all because there was no dialogue between us.” – FGD participant.

They believe, therefore, that for citizens to have effective communication with the District Assembly, they must be well informed of the issues and ahead of the discussions.

“Before meetings of such nature takes place, the information about that in the form of invitation with the agenda should be sent to them so that they would prepare to come and participate meaningfully. Even if it is not a letter, time should be taken to tell them what they are coming there for” – District Works Engineer.

ii. Not allowing participants to share their views

The citizens think that situations where only those considered to be leaders are those allowed to talk whilst many citizens are not given the opportunity to share their views or their views are not taken on board limit the participation and interest of citizens in meetings with the District

Assembly. They think that, for meetings between District Assemblies and citizens to be effective, citizens should be given adequate opportunity to express their views.

“Sometimes, the citizens do not talk because it looks like it is the leaders who have the right to talk, but what the leaders say is not enough to bring the desired results. So, when we are meeting, the leaders should open the way and announce to everyone that they can bring on board their contributions.” – FGD participant.

“Sometimes we sit for the meeting and there is no way for everyone to make their contributions and it is only the views of the leaders that will be accepted. Yet, the fact that you are a leader does not mean it is you alone that have the wisdom that can develop the area. So, anytime we are to hold meetings again, they should give opportunity to everyone to share their views. Whether you are a woman or child, you should be given the chance to make your contribution. If what you say is not right, the gathering will realise it. It is not good to say that if you are not a leader do not talk.” – FGD participant.

“Sometimes we choose leaders to represent us and everyone knows that they are our leaders. Then we come out to meet, they the leaders will say that they had an executive meeting and took some decisions. It is what they decided that will work. All that the others, who see what is right, will say will not be accepted. This can make meetings or development not to progress. Because what the leaders, who are just a few, about four, will say may not be good enough, yet it will be taken to represent the views of the whole community. They can make decisions without consulting us and because we chose them as our leaders, you cannot say anything. When that happens, we become fed up and get discouraged. Next time they call us to the meeting, we would not be interested in participating.” – FGD participant.

iii. Failure of authorities to fulfil commitments made

Both the citizens and District Assemblies think that one of the things that makes District Assemblies efforts to communicate with citizens through meetings ineffective or unsuccessful is the failure of authorities to fulfil their commitments. Their experiences have shown that many times, government authorities do not address citizens' concerns or do not fulfil commitments agreed during dialogue with citizens and this reduces citizens' interest in taking part in future dialogues.

“Sometimes, there is this kind of attitude. Do I call it apathy? The apathy stems from the previous experiences they have had with the assembly that makes them to develop this kind of attitude because sometimes we say certain things [and do not live up to it]. Some of them would not understand why we come and do community action plans, you make them to prioritise projects, then in the end [we do not fulfil their needs], even though we tell them how limited resources of the assembly are” – District Works Engineer.

“We need to see results. If the issues we discuss from the beginning of the project up till the end of the project are not addressed, we lose interest. Next time they call people, they will not come – FGD participant.

“Sometimes, a community does not develop because of the actions of its leaders. When we all know that this is the right thing, those who lead us will be given bribes and because we the citizens have no power, they the leaders will take the money and take no action because they have connived with those who will be doing the work to do the wrong thing.” – FGD participant.

iv. Late start/cancellation of meetings

The citizens also think that when meetings do not start at the time that was announced or are called off after citizens gather, it demotivates citizens from attending similar meetings. They said people may turn up early for meetings but will leave afterwards and may not come back again.

“We live our homes early to come for a meeting, but the meeting does not start early. When we agree on time, the meeting should start at that time.” – FGD participant.

“We have work to do, but we live it and come to the meeting. Sometimes you come and the meeting has not started only to be called to come back again. Sometimes the people we are to meet do not come and we feel deceived. Next time you will not go when they call because you think they will not come.” – FGD participant.

“One day, they told us to come out for a meeting at 9am and we did. We sat there till it was past 10am and the people we were to meet with had still not arrived.” – FGD participant.

v. Use of wrong language

The District Assembly officials think that using the wrong language can make communication with some community members during meetings ineffective and, thus, there is the need to use the right language and to use it appropriately.

“The dialogue should be in the language that they can understand. If you are going to communicate to a large audience like that, you need to choose the language very well. And even the one going to present it must be an expert. You can say something, and it would mean something else to somebody if you do not present it properly” – District Works Engineer.

Making Meetings Inclusive and Participatory

As part of the discussions, the citizens and District Assembly officials also shared their perspectives on how to ensure that women and youth are able to take part in meetings between citizens and District Assemblies and share their views. Below are those perspectives.

i. Encourage and give everyone, including women, the opportunity to speak up

The citizens and District Assembly officials think that during community meetings, the women are sometimes hesitant to talk. They said when a woman is silent, it is sometimes because she is not comfortable to speak because of the fear of saying something that contradicts what has been said by their husbands, fathers or other elderly men. They think the women should be given the opportunity and encouraged to share their views.

“Some of the women are shy to talk. Some also fear to talk” – FGD participant.

“The women might be afraid to talk and so whoever is leading the meeting should make sure that they say what bothers them or what suggestions they have. That is why they have been brought to the meeting.” – FGD participant.

“When we need the views of the women, we let them know that what we are discussing has benefits for both men and women and so if they fail to share their concerns, tomorrow if their needs are not met, it will be their own doing. At some meetings, the women are told that there is no need for anyone to be shy and that there is no big or small person. Everyone’s views are important” – Assembly Member.

“It is a meeting, so everybody should be given the opportunity and encouraged to say what he or she thinks. People should not wait and go home and say that this was what they were thinking

about the issues discussed. That is why we call it a meeting. We have all met to come to an agreement and discuss the issues that affect us. So, our mothers should be encouraged to share whatever concerns they have or whatever in their own thoughts will benefit our Ghana and the work being done” – FGD participant.

ii. Respect the views of everyone

The citizens believe that showing respect to everyone would encourage women and youth to speak up during meetings between District Assemblies and citizens.

“You see, we do not show respect to each other at the meetings that is why some people have gotten fed up and do not want to attend meetings. When they express their views, it is not accepted. So, if we want things to go well, let us accept each other’s views. That is all. The women even have more sense than us. They have more ideas than us. It is because we do not accept people’s views that is why when they attend meetings, they do not talk. Because if she speaks, they will not accept what she says. You see that” – FGD participant.

iii. Separate the men, women and youth

The Assembly Member thinks it is sometimes better to separate the men, women and youth and engage them separately so that they can share their views.

“Sometimes, when the men and women are called together to a meeting, the women do not talk. The men dominate the conversation and in so doing, the women and the youth are not able to share their views. The young people are not able to talk when their mothers and fathers are at the meeting. Likewise, the women are not able to talk when their husbands are at the meeting. So, the meetings are good, but it is sometimes good to meet the men, women and youth separately” – Assembly Member.

iv. Use the Assembly Member to organize the meeting

The Assembly Member thinks meetings should be organized through the assembly members so that they can mobilize every section of the society including chiefs, opinion leaders, women and youth to participate.

“If we go through the Assembly Member, that person will then mobilize the people who are required to participate. Just using radio to call people to a meeting is not enough because you may not get everyone who needs to participate to come. When I, the Assembly Man, comes to invite you [a citizen] to the meeting, you will not refuse to attend. You see that. So, if you want them [youth and women] to be at the meeting, you will have to pass it through the Assembly Member and then he or she will make sure that everyone who needs to participate does so” – Assembly Member.

b. Radio

Both the citizens and District Assembly officials see radio as one of the communication mechanisms that District Assembly officials can use to share information about infrastructural projects and other development projects with citizens. They think that many citizens listen to radio and can afford to buy radio sets, unlike TV.

“When we have met and discussed and the assembly wants the information to reach other citizens, they can use radio. When it goes on radio, many people will hear it. In this area, people listen a lot to [Radio] Justice, Savannah [Radio] and Simli [Radio], the one in Dalun” – FGD participant.

“I also see that Simli [Radio], [Radio] Justice and Savannah [Radio] are those that we listen to very well. If the assembly has information or issues it wants to share with the people, if the

assembly puts it on radio, it is something that will reach everyone and everyone will get to hear what the assembly has said” – FGD participant.

“Television is not as common as radio. Not everyone has TV. But for radio, I am sure however poor a woman [or man] is, she has a radio. So, it is through the radio that we mostly get information” – FGD participant.

“Through radio talk, we can share information. You see, radio goes wide. It has wide listenership. After the plans have been approved by the General Assembly, we can go on radio” – District Works Engineer.

The District Assembly officials believe that radio can be used by District Assemblies not only to share information but to hear from citizens as well.

“Through the GSAM project [a donor project], we had radio discussions a number of times and people called to tell us how happy they were with the discussions we were having. They told us that we educated them a lot about how assembly and citizens need to dialogue.” – District Works Engineer.

Both the citizens and District Assembly officials believe that the effectiveness of radio depends on the time. They think that many citizens listen to radio during the early hours of the day and evening and so that is the best time that District Assemblies can use radio to communicate with citizens.

“Many of us listen to radio mostly in the night because during the afternoon, we do not have time. It is in the night that we are idle, and you can hear any issue being discussed on radio” – FGD participant.

“After dawn prayers, people sit to have breakfast before leaving. During that time, if you have your radio on, you can hear what is being said on radio. You will hear the news around the country. But after you have had breakfast and set off to work, you will not be able to listen to radio again. It is others who will listen and inform you. If you finish your day’s activities, come home, bath and have supper, during that time you can also listen to radio” – FGD participant.

c. Communicating through Assembly Members

The Assembly Member sees himself and other assembly members as another channel through which citizens and District Assembly officials can exchange views and information during the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects. He says the assembly member is the first point of contact when citizens have concerns to share with the assembly about its development projects, including infrastructure. He believes that assembly members provide information received from the District Assembly about development projects to citizens and convey citizens’ concerns to the District Assembly. He said assembly members sometimes organize community durbars when the information they want to share is targeted at the larger community and, other times, they simply meet with those who need to have the information. He said in cases where the assembly member is not within reach, citizens can share their concerns with members of the unit committee who will then convey these concerns to the assembly member.

“When citizens have concerns, they can share them through their assembly members. The assembly member is usually the first person they approach to make their concerns known. Sometimes when the assembly member is not around they also talk to unit committee members and they in turn talk to the assembly member. We (assembly members) send citizens’ concerns to the assembly” – Assembly Member.

“When we attend meetings at the Assembly or unit committee, it is a must that we share the information with citizens. I always share information from our meetings when I go to sit with the traders at the market. In the night, there are people I sit with to converse. I tell them also any information I have” – Assembly Member.

“Depending on the kind of information that we get from the assembly, sometimes I go to the palace for them to make an announcement to citizens to gather at the chief palace for me to share with them the information. Sometimes, the information is meant for a particular group of people. In that case, we go to meet with those people and give them the information. For example, when the Nyankpala road was to be constructed, it was going to affect traders along the road and so we went to meet those traders and gave them the information. When the assembly told us that subsidies to fertilizers were going to be withdrawn by the Government, we, the assembly members came to tell the farmers” – Assembly Member.

d. Information Vans

The citizens think that the use of information vans for sharing of information to citizens is also appropriate and can be used to share information about infrastructure projects. They said information vans had been used before to make announcements and it worked because people acted based on the information they got from the information van.

“Sometimes we see a vehicle going around and giving announcements. Sometime back, they were announcing about some work that was to be done by some doctors. Another time, they were announcing to the people sitting close to the main road to move and, later, they moved. Whatever they have been doing to get this vehicle to make these announcements, they should continue. If that

is strengthened, it can be another way we can get information from the assembly” – FGD participant.

“Every district should have an information service van so that it can be used to share information with the citizens. If that is done, it will be very good” – FGD participant.

e. Social Media

The District Works Engineer thinks that District Assemblies can make use of social media to communicate more with citizens.

“We could have created platforms similar to WhatsApp or Twitter enabling citizens to ask assembly questions. So that we can also disseminate information to them through that platform. I know some NGOs, like Savannah Signatures, were trying to do something like that. If we could get partners to do that, it would have been very good. Projects, like GSAM, can create such platforms.” – District Works Engineer.

4.1.2 Issues/information to communicate about in the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects.

The citizens and District Assembly officials were asked what they think are the issues or information that District Assemblies and citizens should communicate about during the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects. The perspectives shared are presented below.

a. Details of the infrastructural projects

Both the citizens and District Assembly officials think that, when District Assemblies are constructing an infrastructure project, they should provide citizens with adequate information about the project, such as the contract sum, project duration, name of the contractor, awarding

institution, etc. so they can be well informed when discussing about the projects and they can monitor the projects to ensure success.

“The assembly should tell the community the cost of the project, the duration and how the contract was awarded. The assembly should also emphasise the fact that the project is for the community and not for the assembly and therefore entreat the citizens to monitor the project very well so that it is well executed” – Assembly Member.

“You [local government official] need to tell them about the cost of the project, the duration and who the contractor is. All this information they [the citizens] must have.” – District Works Engineer.

“We need to know the people given the work and those who asked them to do the work. We need to know who will be supervising the work. Sometimes, people come to construct a project and they do not want anybody to intervene even when they are doing the wrong things. When that happens, those projects do not go well” – FGD participant.

“The Assembly has to tell the assembly member the contractor who will do the work and who is the next person in charge, who also represents the contractor. As for the construction workers, anytime you go to the site, you can see them” – FGD participant.

b. Community needs and priorities

The Assembly Member thinks that community needs and priorities should be discussed during the planning of infrastructure projects. He said District Assemblies are supposed to meet with the communities when preparing their development plans to discuss about the developmental priorities

or needs of the communities. He said based on the needs of the citizens, a number of projects would then be prioritized and included in the assemblies' development plans.

“When the assembly and the citizens meet, the citizens indicate which development projects they need. They will say we need a school, toilet, road, or some other project. The assembly officials are not to tell the people what they need. They have to listen to what the people want to be done for them.” – Assembly Member.

“For instance, sometime back in my community, the authorities of the basic school said they needed more classrooms for the school. We wrote a letter to the assembly and we were not hearing anything. One day, the assembly officials visited the school and we discussed the concerns of the school, based on which the new classroom project was approved and constructed” – Assembly Member.

c. Resources needed for project implementation

The citizens think that when District Assemblies are communicating with them about their infrastructure projects, they should make it clear to them the resources they have available to implement the projects and the support they expect from the communities.

“When they are to give a contract, they should come out clear that this is how much they have and it can be used to pay the contractor. We will sit with them to know where we have to support. However, if they just go to start the work, we will also look on thinking our contribution is not needed.” – FGD participant.

“As citizens, we can support contractors to execute projects, when they have problems” – FGD participant.

d. Project updates and citizens' concerns

The District Assembly officials believe that in communicating with citizens during the implementation of projects, the assemblies should provide regular updates on the projects. When the project is ongoing or nears completion, the assembly should meet with the community to know their views on the progress of work. The assembly should give the community information about the status of payments to the contractor and why the project is progressing or not.

*“The assembly will ask the community whether they are okay with how the project is going. Is it going well and are they satisfied? This will bring out a lot of issues from the citizens. Sometimes, they tell the community whether funds have been given to the contractor or not and whether money is readily available to continue the project so that the citizens can understand why the project is progressing or not. For instance, during the recent construction of two three-unit classroom blocks in Warivi and Nyankpala, the assembly made it clear during a *GSAM meeting that the project in Nyankpala was delaying because of delays in the release of the common fund by the Government. They said the three-classroom project in the other community was progressing because it was funded from the DDF (District Development Fund)” – Assembly Member.*

“You see, Assemblies do monitoring and we do it in conjunction with the communities. During the construction stage, you can monitor three or four times. If it is a six-month project, it could be more. The assembly man, the chiefs and some opinion leaders, we involve them when we are doing the monitoring. You see when we go for the monitoring, we have different stakeholders in the monitoring team and every stakeholder has his interest. For example, as the Works Engineer, I am interested in things like have they complied with the specifications. I am also interested in the schedule, whether the contractor is going by that. May be, the Planning Officer and others are interested in physical stages. Just looking at it, they can also know whether things are moving well

or not. Okay, the functional areas of the building they said the building was going have, are they present. So, everybody has some interest. It would be of no use if there is no feedback” – District Works Engineer.

“The community, they would normally want to hear whether it is in line with specifications, whether the timelines are being followed. That is what they are interested in. And if there are delays, what is the cause of the delays. In fact, a lot of questions” – District Works Engineer.

“...as part of their [citizens] monitoring roles, they are supposed to ask certain questions, things that are not clear to them, that is demanding accountability. If for example, it is a school building you are putting up, they take keen interest in finding out about the project being disability-friendly and all those things. When you do not incorporate some of these things, they question it. It is because of the awareness [they got under the GSAM project]. Sometimes, you will be surprised. They ask you certain questions. [In] Warivi for instance, they are a little remote from the capital. Now you go there and they ask you some kind of questions. They asked us to do disability ramps to make it easy for the children with disability to access the building. They now know some of these things.” – District Works Engineer.

They believe that when there is opportunity to discuss citizens’ concerns, it sometimes leads to changes in the projects in line with citizens’ demands.

“Sometimes, the contract would have been signed already. And through the interactions they [the citizens] would bring certain things up and we are able to persuade the contractors to influence change in certain things to suit what [has been suggested]” – District Works Engineer.

4.1.3 Regularity of Communication Between District Assemblies and Citizens

The study sought the perspectives of the citizens and District Assembly officials on how regular District Assemblies should communicate with citizens when planning and implementing infrastructure projects.

Both the citizens and District Assembly officials think that District Assemblies should communicate very often with citizens during the planning and implementation of a project. However, they think the number of times will depend on how long it takes to complete the project. They think there should be more communication if the project takes longer to finish because the citizens need to be regularly informed of why the delays. The District Assembly officials said projects, with secured funding, mostly progress well and there is usually no need for several meetings to discuss those projects.

“The best is that in a year, there should be, at least, three meetings. Waiting for the project to complete before meeting is not good. If we were having meetings, the road in Nyankpala would have been properly constructed. We would have asked questions and put forward our concerns. It is the absence of such meetings that allowed the contractor to do shoddy work” – FGD participant.

“The projects are in types. Sometimes we are given a project and it takes a year or three months to complete. Some are completed in four or five months. If it is a one-year project, we may have many meetings with the assembly because we need to regularly be reminded of the project and progress so far. But if the project will last for only five months, then we and the assembly should have between three to four meetings before the project is completed” – FGD participant.

“We had two projects that were being implemented. Funds were available for one of the projects and so it was progressing very well. So, there were no meetings because there were no problems

to meet and discuss. But for the project in our community, we needed to meet often, like every month, because the project was not progressing well and if we do not meet regularly to explain to the people why the project was not continuing, the people will take it as an issue. So, in such cases, a meeting every month is good. However, if it happens that everything is available and the project is going on well, the Assembly and the community can meet every three months for the people to be given more information and to hear from the contractor any challenges that he has” – Assembly Member.

The District Assembly officials think that communication between citizens and District Assemblies and citizens regarding development projects like infrastructure usually begins at the stage when the assemblies are preparing their Medium-Term Development Plans (MTDPs). They said in accordance with the Local Government Law (Act 963), meetings are organised to discuss with citizens their development concerns and needs, so that these needs can inform the type of projects to be constructed.

“There is a period when the assembly comes to our communities and we sit with the people to draw their community plan. That is the start of the dialogue. That is when the citizens are able to discuss their development challenges and prioritize their needs. Everybody gets the opportunity to say their concerns. Based on this, the assembly can decide what it is going to do” – Assembly Member.

They said the District Assemblies are also required by the law to meet with the citizens and other stakeholders to brief them and seek their inputs on their draft development plans, based on the initial consultations conducted, before finalizing and approving the plans.

“When the plans are done, there is a dissemination and validation with the community again and other stakeholders to validate the plans. When we [Tolon District Assembly] were doing the 2018 plan, they (citizens) had a lot of inputs.” – District Works Engineer.

They also said that when a project is completed and being handed over for use, the District Assemblies are required to meet with the beneficiary community to inform them of the completion of work on the project, hand over the project for use and urge them to monitor the completed project and report any defects identified.

“When the contractor has finished with the job, then it moves into the defects liability period. There is still some monitoring role we have there. When the project is practically completed, we expect that the project be put into use. As the monitoring team, we again will have to be monitoring to see how it is functioning and to see how defects have appeared on the project and what is the nature of those defects. During this stage, we basically will hand over the project to the user agency, sometimes through the community chief. It is not a grand event, but everybody can come. We tell them what their roles would be up to when the project is completed.” – District Works Engineer.

The District Assembly officials also think that when District Assemblies secure funding to implement the development projects in their plans, they should engage the beneficiary communities once more to let them know about their preparedness to implement the projects and to confirm if the projects they wanted are still of priority or relevance, since the needs of the beneficiary communities might have changed.

“What is sometimes done is that, when the project is approved or the assembly gets money to implement the project, the assembly will come and you the assembly man will organize the

community for them to remind the people of what development projects they requested for and indicate which one they are ready to implement. You see we have MPs, we have the assembly and we even have those contesting for MP (All of them provide projects to their communities). So sometimes a community may say that light is their problem and by the time the assembly gets money to do this, someone else (MP or candidate) has already provided the light So, when the assembly gets the money, the assembly will come and ask the community whether the project they requested is still their prioritized need, then the people will confirm. For instance, you see our villages, some of them will tell you their main problem is the gutter. They will say that during the rains they are not able to sleep due to mosquitoes from the gutter. But after the rains are gone, they will change their prioritized need because they do not see the open gutter as a concern anymore.”” – Assembly Member.

The citizens think that at any time when they have concerns regarding development projects in their communities, they should communicate these concerns to the District Assembly.

“We can come together to hold a meeting; we call the assemblyman to come. Then we all put forward the issues that are of concern to us. Then the assembly can also take the issues to the assembly.” – FGD participant.

4.1.4 Actions Required to Establish Regular Communication Between District Assemblies and Citizens

The study sought the perspectives of the citizens and District Assembly officials on the actions that should be taken to ensure regular communication between District Assemblies and citizens in the planning and execution of infrastructure projects and who should take those actions. The perspectives provided are presented below.

a. Government should enforce the laws on consultation with citizens

The citizens think that the Government should compel District Assemblies to act in accordance with the laws that guide the planning and implementation of their development projects, including infrastructure projects, especially the laws that require them to engage and communicate with citizens during that process. They believe there are laws, but the laws are not obeyed. They think the assemblies should be made to play their mandated role of monitoring the projects and meeting with the communities to dialogue on the projects.

“There are a lot of laws, but they do not work. The assembly has engineers and they have knowledge about projects. Yet we have projects poorly executed and when they finish, the engineer will go and say that the work is perfect. The engineer knows what the laws says but is not following it. We need to have mercy on each other and respect each other.” – FGD participant.

b. Government should compel District Assemblies to implement action points from meetings with citizens

The citizens think District Assembly officials should be compelled by law to implement commitments made in their engagements with citizens. They believe this will encourage citizens to take active part in meetings with their District Assemblies.

“What I would say is that if whatever we agree at the meetings yield fruits, definitely we will be encouraged to continue dialoguing with the assembly. Having a meeting and discussing an issue and not seeing any result can make us disinterested in subsequent meetings. It is good to see what has been agreed being implemented from the beginning and to the end. If that happens, anytime there is an issue and we are called upon, we would take it seriously” – FGD participant.

c. Government should make funds available to District Assemblies to implement their development programmes

The District Assembly officials think the Government has to improve on the release of funds to District Assemblies to enable them to implement their development programmes. They believe that District Assemblies know how important it is to communicate regularly with citizens but are unable to do so due to the lack of funds. They think, therefore, that increased and timely release of funds from Central Government to District Assemblies would enable them to do what is expected of them in terms of planning and implementing infrastructural development projects, including communicating with citizens during the process. They identified the lack of funds as one of the main barriers to District Assemblies' communication with citizens.

“Those mechanisms [for communicating with citizens) already exist. Some of these things, we are aware, but we are not able to do them because of the challenges. We are constrained in some ways. Most of the challenges has to do with logistics that we are lacking. Those are the factors militating against our being able to achieve some of these things. I am speaking for most work departments of the assemblies. They have staffing challenge and then even the means of transport to monitor projects properly. And apart from the vehicle, there is this problem of fuel. As for that, it is a big problem” – District Works Engineer.

“We budget every year for some of this logistics I am talking of, for capital expenditure and goods and services, you understand. But what we get for the departments or for that matter the assembly as a whole is sometimes too ... [small]. May be in a year, one quarter's errn...this thing [funds] will just come. The rest will not come. And if it is coming, you budget for something realistic and what is sent to you is not realistic.” – District Works Engineer.

d. Government should provide logistical support to Assembly Members

The District Assembly officials think that the Government should work with District Assemblies to provide logistical support to assembly members to enable them to play their expected roles, particularly for them to go round to share information to citizens on their assemblies' development programmes and to mobilize citizens for meetings to discuss development projects, including infrastructure. They think one of the supports the Government and District Assemblies can provide to assembly members is to purchase motorbikes for them and give them fuel.

“The assembly man or woman represents the community. That person is a link between the community and the assembly and so needs to be supported. Going round to mobilize people or talk to people is not easy. We need motorbikes to facilitate our transportation. Sometimes even moving from the Tolon Assembly to the Nyankpala Chief Palace is a challenge due to the distance.” – Assembly Member.

“Assembly members' work is more of voluntary. To be frank, most of them, they should have been given logistics like fuel. Helping them to acquire motorbikes would have been very good. In some rich assemblies, they help them to acquire motorbikes. If it is loans they will give them or they can buy them the motorbikes and they will be paying small, small on some soft terms.” – District Works Engineer.

e. Government should partner with development partners and donors to support assemblies

The District Assembly officials think the Government should partner with more development partners to support District Assemblies to perform their roles and responsibilities. They think that when there is support from development partners, the assemblies are able to do what is expected

of them in terms of engaging with citizens in the planning and implementation of infrastructural projects.

“We had this partner, USAID/RING. They have come to strength us. They even gave the Works Department a motorbike, but it is not sufficient. We have a lot of logistical challenges” – District Works Engineer.

f. Communities should set up committees to represent them in monitoring projects

The citizens think that community leaders should liaise with their community members to select people to monitor the projects on behalf of the community. This, they believe, would empower them to raise concerns where necessary and communicate these concerns to the District Assembly.

“It would be good for the community to select people to lead in monitoring the construction of the project. Instead of the situation where they will bring somebody else to come and monitor, I would wish it is left to us the community to choose people to see how the project will be started and continued. For instance, they can monitor if the right quantity of cement is actually used. Otherwise, they will just do the work till the end and no one will understand what has been done”
– FGD participant.

The citizens believe that when they work with the District Assembly to monitor the assembly’s infrastructure projects in their community, the projects would be properly constructed and there would be no opportunity for fraudulent activities.

“When they are building a project in a community the people have to come together and visit the project regularly to see how work is going so that no construction worker gets the opportunity to

steal any construction material from the site; whatever amount of cement is provided is used on the project. This is to ensure quality projects, especially our schools.” – FGD participant.

“Without citizens’ involvement, projects are poorly constructed and it leads to a waste of resources. For instance, many roads are poorly constructed and after a few years, they are degraded, and the government has to divert money for other projects to reconstruct these roads. This is a waste of money” – FGD participant.

They also think that women should be involved in monitoring of the projects and that when women are involved, it is more beneficial.

“It should not be only men monitoring the projects. We the women can also do it. I even think they fear we the women than the men. When the men monitor them, it does not really bother them, but when we the women monitor, they will be saying that even the women in the area come to monitor the work. This will benefit all of us and our community” – FGD participant.

g. Communities should use the right channels to communicate their concerns

The District Assembly officials think that communication between District Assemblies would improve if community members identify issues affecting the implementation of projects and bring them to the attention of the assembly using the proper channels.

“As a community, when you see something, there is a channel through which you have to follow to get that something or problem to be addressed. So, they should try as communities to always use the right channel to get their concerns addressed. There is a problem, you do not attack the contractor, you get the assembly man informed. Then the assembly man will first call the engineer because we work with them or the coordinating director. And the coordinating director, if it is a

technical issue he cannot address, he will call the other officers concerned and put the problem across and then get the feedback to the community” – District Works Engineer.

“Sometimes, we remind the citizens that when you [citizen] see something you think is going wrong at the site, inform your assembly member or the unit committee to inform the assembly. There was a case in our community. The contractor had to pay the workers at some point and he had no money to do so. He decided to pick some of the cement they were not yet using and send it back to the supplier to replace it with cash so that when he gets money he can go back to buy the quantity he needs to continue working. Because of this, some citizens accused him of stealing the cement meant for the project and it became an argument. So, we do not approve of a situation where you [citizen] see something you think is going wrong at the site and you assault the contractor right away. Get the Assembly Man as soon as possible to inform him and then he will come and find out why” – Assembly Member.

4.2 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

4.2.1 Communication mechanisms for enhancing District Assemblies’ communication with citizens

In the view of the citizens and District Assembly officials, meetings, radio, assembly members, information vans and social media are communication mechanisms through which District Assemblies can communicate with citizens during the planning and implementation of their infrastructure projects.

Obviously, meetings were the most mentioned and discussed as it was seen as a very effective means through which District Assemblies can communicate with citizens. Both the citizens and

District Assembly officials believe that meetings provide the platform for District Assemblies to give information to citizens regarding infrastructure projects, meetings make it possible for District Assemblies and citizens to discuss and reach consensus on issues regarding infrastructure projects and it is through meetings that many community members, including farmers, can be reached.

Probably, the framers of the local governance law did appreciate this importance of meetings and made provisions for District Assemblies to hold meetings with citizens, e.g. public forums, public hearings, community needs assessment meetings, area council meetings, town hall meetings, etc., at various stages of planning and implementing their development programmes. As Kunbour (2009:132) notes, the decentralized planning process is expected to start from the Unit Committee level in each district, where development and potentials of local communities are to be collated through *public fora*. The law also requires that District Assemblies submit their district plans alongside evidence that public hearings were held (Ahwoi, 2000).

However, whilst the law prescribes and envisions the effective use of meetings by District Assemblies to communicate with citizens, the situation on the ground is not exactly that perfect. As Ahenkan et al. (2013), Oduro and Osei-Kuffour (2018) and others have observed, public hearings, town hall meetings and other meetings have either been poorly organised or held with poor citizen participation. For instance, Oduro and Osei-Kuffour (2018) in their study of 40 District Assemblies, found that only 16 of them organised one of the two public hearings they were required to hold. The majority (80%) failed to conduct the second public hearings.

Although meetings are a preferred communication mechanism, both the citizens and District Assembly officials recognize that meetings between District Assemblies and citizens are sometimes rendered ineffective due to a number of reasons. This includes: (i) citizens not given

adequate information to enable them appreciate and contribute to the issues being discussed; (ii) not giving citizens the opportunity to speak up and share their views; (iii) District Assemblies failing to fulfil commitments made during previous meetings; (iv) starting meetings late or cancelling them at the last hour and (v) using the wrong language.

These perspectives provide some insights into why community meetings with local authorities are sometimes not well attended by citizens. Indeed, access to information is critical for enabling citizens to exercise their voice, to effectively monitor and hold government to account, and to enter into informed dialogue about decisions which affect their lives. It is seen as vital for empowering all citizens, including vulnerable and excluded people, to claim their broader rights and entitlements (McLoughlin and Scott, 2010:29).

The failure of assemblies to provide relevant information to citizens, therefore, limits their ability to make informed inputs during meetings and to hold local authorities to account for their decisions and actions. For instance, Oduro and Osei-Kuffour (2018) found in their study of selected MMDAs in the Upper West that the assemblies failed to distribute copies of the draft plan to the public prior to holding some of their public hearings. As a result, some of the citizens and other stakeholders who took part in these meetings were not adequately informed to be able to interrogate the issues and share their views.

Both the citizens and District Assembly officials also recognize that women and young people sometimes do not take active part in community meetings with local authorities due to cultural barriers. They think that the participation of women, young people and other marginalised groups meetings can be enhanced if everyone is given the opportunity to speak up during meetings, there is respect for the views of everyone and the men, women and youth are separated when necessary.

they also think that working through assembly members would ensure that women and all segments of society are invited to participate in meetings.

To ensure that women and youth take active part in dialogues between citizens and District Assembly officials in the planning and implementation of MMDAs' infrastructural projects, everyone should be given the opportunity to speak up. The women and youth in particular should be encouraged to share their views. Every view should be accepted and respected in order to discourage people from sharing their views. When the women and youth are shy to talk when mixed with adult men, engage with them separately. To ensure that women, youth and all segments are included or represented in dialogue sessions, the Assembly Members should be involved in mobilizing citizens for the dialogue. They will ensure that everyone is represented.

Radio is seen mainly as an effective means through which District Assemblies can share information with citizens, including information on infrastructure projects. Both the citizens and District Assembly officials think that radio can be used to reach a large number of citizens because many people listen to radio. Radio sets are inexpensive and, as such, many citizens are able to afford them, unlike TV.

Indeed, radio has over the years been acknowledged as the dominant mass-medium in Africa with the widest geographical reach and the highest audiences compared with television (TV), newspapers and other information and communication technologies (Myers, 2008:5). One of the main reasons is that "radio seems to have proven itself as a developmental tool, particularly with the rise of community and local radios, which have facilitated a far more participatory and horizontal type of communication than was possible with the older, centralised broadcasting model of the 1960s and 70s (Myers, 2008:5).

Certainly, radio could be an effective means through which District Assemblies can share information on infrastructure projects to citizens, as radio, especially community radio, remains one of the information sources to many people in Africa. As the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) observes, what makes a community radio so powerful is its potential to reach out to people with little or no access to information. It is an efficient tool for educating and informing villagers about such critical issues such as health, education, and sustainable development (UNESCO, 2019).

As Ahenkan et al. (2013:207) notes, local radio stations can be “exploited by assemblies and civil society organisations to organise open government programmes to discuss the assembly planning systems and budgets and seek the inputs of listeners and contributors through phone-ins.”

However, both the citizens and District Assemblies recognise that the effectiveness of radio is also dependent on certain factors, one of which is the timing. In their view, the best times to reach citizens with information through radio is the early hours of the day and the evenings, because many people listen to radio around those periods.

Assembly Members serve as intermediaries between District Assembly officials and citizens. They are the first point of contact when citizens have concerns to share with the assembly and this should include concerns about infrastructural projects. Assembly members are supposed to convey citizens’ concerns to District Assembly officials and share the feedback with the citizens. Assembly and unit committee members must share with citizens any information on infrastructural projects that the assembly provides them.

Information vans are also effective in reaching citizens with information about MMDA's infrastructural projects. On many occasions, information vans have been used to share information and many citizens have taken some action based on the information received.

Social media can also be used to promote dialogue between citizens and District Assembly officials. Social media platforms can be created to function like WhatsApp and others where citizens can ask District Assembly officials questions relating to capital projects. Indeed, social media has the capability of conveying information from authorities to their audience, as well as, to obtain feedback from them (Asamoah, 2019).

However, the use of social media may be faced with some challenges. This may include the poor capacity of target users, low resident awareness of e-government tools at the MMDAs, and infrastructural deficits (Asamoah, 2019).

4.2.2 Issues/information to communicate about in the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects.

Unsurprisingly, both the citizens and District Assembly officials believe that one of the critical issues that citizens and District Assemblies should communicate about is the needs and priorities of the communities. They think this communication should take place when the projects are being initiated.

This is consistent with the law. As mentioned elsewhere, section 83 (1b) of the Local Governance Act 2016 (Act 963) requires District Assemblies to “ensure that the district development plans and the settlement structure plans are prepared with the full participation of the local community.” In addition, a District Assembly is required under section 88 (1) to conduct a public hearing on its

proposed District Development Plan and then “consider the views expressed at the hearing before the adoption of the proposed District Development Plan.”

Through discussing and identifying the needs and priorities of communities, District Assemblies would be in a better position to plan and implement projects that address the most felt needs of their communities. This would avoid situations where projects are abandoned after completion, as found by SEND Ghana (2014). Indeed, it has been proven that programmes with citizen’s participation coordinated by community level officials have generally been more successful than those without it (Amakye, 2017, c.f. Ahwoi 2010).

Both the citizens and District Assembly officials also believe that, during the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects, citizens should be provided with adequate information about the projects. This will include the contract sums, project durations, names of the contractors, etc. so they can be well informed when discussing about the projects and they can monitor the projects to ensure success. The assemblies should also provide regular updates on the projects to keep citizens abreast of the status of the projects and reasons for any delays. The authorities should also discuss with citizens regarding the resources they have and what support the need to get the projects implemented as required.

Citizens and District Assembly officials should also dialogue around citizens’ concerns regarding the projects. There should be opportunity for the citizens to share their views on the progress and quality of work and any other matters of interest.

4.2.3 Regularity of Communication Between District Assemblies and Citizens

In the view of the citizens and District Assembly officials, communication between citizens and District Assemblies should take place as often as possible when an infrastructure project is being implemented, depending on the duration of the project. They think that such communication should take place at various stages of the project, including:

- i. During the planning stages to enable the authorities and the citizens prioritize the developmental needs of the communities and identify which projects should be initiated.
- ii. When funds are available to commence project implementation so as to confirm if the projects are still relevant.
- iii. When construction is ongoing, so that any challenges can be discussed and addressed.
- iv. When construction works are completed and the project is into the defects liability stage, during which the project is being observed for any defects.
- v. When citizens have concerns.

This is understandable considering the processes that District Assemblies follow to initiate, plan, implement and hand over infrastructure projects for use. All projects, although there are exceptions, are supposed to emerge from the MTDPs of the District Assemblies. As such, communication between District Assemblies and citizens regarding infrastructure projects is expected to begin right from when the assemblies are preparing their MTDPs so that citizens needs can inform the type of projects to be constructed. In finalizing and approving the MTDPs, District

Assemblies are also required to hold public hearings when they can discuss and get the views of citizens and other stakeholders on their draft plans.

The communication between District Assemblies and citizens should continue throughout the life cycle of the project, including when funds are secured to start the project, when the project is ongoing and when it is completed. At any point in time when citizens have concerns, they can share this with the District Assembly through their assembly members, opinion leaders, meetings, among others.

4.2.4 Actions Required to Establish Regular Communication Between District Assemblies and Citizens

Apparently, both the citizens and District Assembly officials know that there are already existing laws and regulations that require District Assemblies to engage with citizens during the planning and implementation of their development projects, including infrastructure projects. As mentioned earlier, the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 963), for instance, requires District Assemblies to have consultations with communities and other stakeholders to prioritise the needs of their people and decide on development projects to include in their MTDPs.

It is not surprising therefore that both the citizens and District Assembly officials think that one of the key actions required to ensure regular communication between District Assemblies and citizens in the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects is for the Government to ensure that District Assemblies comply fully with these laws and regulations. That, indeed, is as essential as having the laws.

Unfortunately, compelling District Assemblies to follow the law may not be that simple, since implementing some of the provisions of the law, such as communicating regularly with citizens,

may require resources, financially and logistically. As indicated by the District Assembly officials, District Assemblies are mostly unable to fully implement their planned programmes for the year because of funding gap, which is mainly as a result of delays and inadequacy in the release of the DACF to District Assemblies by the Government.

It therefore makes a lot of sense that the citizens and District Assembly officials also think that one of the measures required for District Assemblies to communicate regularly with citizens during the planning and implementation of their infrastructure projects is for the Government to improve on the disbursement of funds to District Assemblies. When District Assemblies receive their budgeted amounts from the Government in the right quantities and at the right time, they would be in a better position to communicate more with citizens, e.g. by holding consultations and public hearings as required.

Certainly, the Government may not be able to honour its financial obligations to the assemblies, always, and so the suggestion to the Government to partner with more international development and donor agencies to support District Assemblies to perform their roles and responsibilities is in the right direction. The example of the Resiliency in Northern Ghana (RING) project is cited by the District Assembly officials. Through this USAID project, some assemblies in Northern Ghana were given motorbikes to support monitoring activities by the works departments.

It is very revealing to note through this study that one of the actions required in order for District Assemblies to have regular and effective communication with citizens is for the District Assembly officials to fulfil commitments they make to citizens in engagements with them. Understandably, both the citizens and District Assembly officials see a link between District Assemblies fulfilling their commitments and citizens being encouraged to participate actively in meetings and other

forms of communication with their assemblies. As noted in the findings, both of them think that failure of assemblies to fulfil their pledges demotivates citizens from taking part in meetings with their assemblies. This, thus, borders on trust. Citizens would be more encouraged to be engaging with their assemblies if they believe and trust that whatever views and suggestions they give would be acted upon by the authorities as agreed.

The District Assembly officials think that another critical action required in order for District Assemblies to have regular communication with citizens during the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects is for the Government to work with the District Assemblies to provide logistical support to assembly members. This may take the form of motorbikes, fuel, etc. This is certainly an important action considering the intermediary role that assembly members play. They represent their constituents in the District Assembly and are a channel through which the District Assembly shares and receives information and concerns from citizens.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

Based on the perspectives shared by the citizens and District Assembly officials, the study has arrived at the following conclusions regarding the communication mechanisms through which we can enhance communication between citizens and District Assemblies during the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects:

- A mixture of different communication mechanisms can be employed for citizens and District Assembly officials to have effective dialogue in the planning and implementation of MMDAs' infrastructural projects. They include meetings, radio, information vans, social media and the use of Assembly Members as intermediaries between District Assembly officials and citizens. Meetings, however, are most suitable for seeking consensus on citizens' needs and the development projects to be implemented. They are ideal for discussing citizens' concerns relating to a project and can serve as a platform for both citizens and District Assembly officials to negotiate improvements in the implementation of the projects. Radio and information vans can be effectively employed to disseminate information on MMDA's development plans and infrastructural projects. It is best to share information with citizens through radio during the early mornings and evenings. Social media can be used to engage with citizens who are online, especially young people, by sharing with them information and engaging them on MMDAs' projects.
- For there to be effective communication between District Assemblies and citizens in the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects, citizens should be given adequate information about the projects. This will include the project details (project name, contract

sum, duration, contractor, etc.), the design and specifications and updates on the progress of work. With this information, citizens would be in a better place monitor and share their concerns regarding these projects.

- There must be adequate opportunity for all segments of the population, including women and youth, to participate and share their views and concerns on the projects. Without the opportunity to contribute, citizens are not motivated to attend meetings. Communication should therefore not be one-way, from District Assemblies to citizens.
- The effectiveness of any communication between citizens and District Assemblies, especially through meetings, depends on trust. Citizens will be more willing to participate and share their views if they know that their views will be taken on board and that whatever is agreed will be implemented.

On how often District Assemblies should communicate with citizens during the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects, the study arrived at the following conclusions, based on the perspectives shared by the citizens and District Assembly officials:

- It is important for District Assemblies to establish and maintain communication with citizens right from when they are preparing their MTDPs, as this is when citizens get the opportunity to influence which types of projects their assemblies select for implementation. The assemblies should involve citizens as much as possible in the public hearings that are organised to present the draft plans to stakeholders for their approval.
- During project implementation, district assemblies have to periodically share project updates with citizens through meetings, radio and other communication channels.

Regarding the actions required to establish and maintain regular communication between District Assemblies and citizens, when planning and implementing infrastructure projects, the study concludes, based on the perspectives shared and discussed, that:

- The Government must ensure that District Assemblies comply with the provisions of the law and other guidelines that require them to communicate with citizens when planning and implementing their development projects, including infrastructure projects. However, to make this possible, there is need for the Government to ensure timely and adequately release of the DACF to District Assemblies to implement their annual programmes of action. The government must also seek additional resource support for the District Assemblies from its international development partners. This support could come in the form of vehicles, motorbikes, and fuel to support regular visits to the communities.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends as follows:

- The Government, through the appropriate Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) should ensure that District Assemblies develop communication plans which would include the use of meetings, radio, information vans, among others, to disseminate information and seek the views of citizens on issues pertaining to infrastructure projects.
- District Assemblies should build trust in their engagements with citizens by promising and doing what they can do, instead of making commitments that cannot be or are eventually not fulfilled.

- In organising community meetings to seek the views of citizens regarding development projects, including infrastructure, District Assemblies should work with the assembly members to ensure the inclusion of women, youth and all other marginalised groups. District Assemblies should also consider the local context and take appropriate actions to guarantee the active participation of these marginalised groups in such meetings. This may include giving such groups the opportunity for their voices to be heard and counted or meeting the groups separately to seek their views, when the cultural setting does not make it possible for them to such their views during the broader meetings.
- The Government should work with District Assemblies to support assembly members with resources to perform their duties. As highlighted in this study, assembly members are one of the channels through which District Assemblies communicate with citizens. They are mandated by law to collate the concerns of their communities and share with the District Assembly. However, without resources, assembly members are unable to meet with the people regularly. Resources such as motorbikes and fuel would enable them to travel across their electoral areas periodically to share information and also solicit views and concerns from citizens.
- District Assemblies should be assessed and rewarded/queried on how well they do in making information on their development projects available to citizens. This would put them on their toes to regularly share information with citizens.

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Appendix 1: Interview/Focus Group Discussion Guide

Interview/Focus Group Discussion Guide

Title of Study: Promoting Effective Communication Between District Assemblies and Citizens in the Planning and Execution of Infrastructure Projects – the Perspectives of Citizens and District Assembly Officials in the Tolon District of the Northern Region.

.....

Thank you for accepting to participate in this interview/focus group discussion. My name is Mohammed Nurudeen Salifu, a student of the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ) pursuing a Master’s Programme in Development Communication. This discussion is part of my research work as part of the requirements for my graduation.

The main objective of this study is to “identify, from the perspectives of citizens and District Assembly officials, ways to promote effective communication between District Assemblies and citizens in the planning and execution of infrastructure projects.”

You were carefully selected due to some interactions that your community has had with the Tolon District Assembly in relation to capital projects in your community.

Your views will therefore be very much appreciated as it will help us recommend to Government and other institutions on what they need to do in order to promote effective dialogue between citizens and local government authorities in the planning and implementation of infrastructural projects. Every participant is encouraged to share his/her views. There are no wrong answers and everyone does not have to agree to one viewpoint.

You have the choice to answer or not any question or withdraw from the study at any time. Please feel free to ask any question or seek information from me before, during or after the discussion.

I will like to record this conversation on tape, in addition to taking notes, so that I can adequately capture your views and avoid losing any useful information.

I hope we can complete this discussion in two-hours so that you can attend to other important matters.

In disseminating the findings of this study, we may use your photo and the information that you provide as and when deemed necessary. In this regard, kindly complete the Participant’s Consent Form to enable us proceed.

Thank you.

Discussion Areas/Questions

Objective 1: Identify, from the perspectives of citizens and District Assembly officials, the barriers to effective communication between District Assemblies and citizens in the planning and execution of infrastructure projects.

Seek participants' perspectives on the barriers to effective communication between District Assemblies and citizens in the planning and execution of infrastructure projects.

1. In your own view (s), what factors can hinder the effectiveness of communication between District Assemblies and citizens.
2. How can we avoid or deal with such challenges?

Objective 2: Understand the perspectives of citizens and District Assembly officials on the key considerations to promote effective communication between District Assemblies and citizens in the planning and execution of infrastructure projects.

Seek participants perspectives on the key considerations to promote effective communication between District Assemblies and citizens in the planning and execution of infrastructure projects.

Communication Mechanisms

3. In your own view (s), what are the communication mechanisms that have worked best to promote effective communication between District Assemblies and citizens in the planning and execution of infrastructure projects and how?
4. Why have these been effective; what characteristics make them effective.
5. In your own view (s), how effective have these communication mechanisms been in promoting participation for various segments of society, esp. for women and youth?
6. Is there anything that could be done to make them more effective?
7. Are there any other communication mechanisms that, in your own view (s), can also promote effective communication between District Assemblies and citizens in the planning and execution of infrastructure projects and why do you think so?

Timing/Frequency

	<p>8. In your own view (s), when is it appropriate for citizens and local government authorities to have effective communication during the planning and execution of infrastructure projects?</p> <p>9. How often should such dialogue take place?</p> <p>Content</p> <p>10. In your own view (s), what information or issue should be discussed or communicated during the planning and execution of infrastructure projects?</p> <p>Participation and Inclusiveness</p> <p>11. Who, in your own view (s), should take part in the dialogue?</p> <p>12. How do we ensure that women and youth take active part in the communication process?</p> <p>Roles & Responsibilities</p> <p>13. What should be the role of the Local Governance Authorities, on one hand, and citizens, on the other?</p>
<p>Objective 3: Identify, from the perspectives of citizens and District Assembly officials, the measures that should be instituted or strengthened to establish and maintain effective communication between District Assemblies and citizens in the planning and execution of infrastructure projects.</p>	
<p>Seek participants’ perspectives on measures that are required to establish and maintain effective communication between District Assemblies and citizens in the planning and execution of infrastructure projects.</p>	<p>14. In your own view (s), what measures should be instituted to establish and maintain effective communication between District Assemblies and citizens in the planning and execution of infrastructure projects.</p> <p>15. Who should have the responsibility of instituting or strengthening those measures?</p>

Appendix 2: Interviewee's Consent Form

Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ)

Interviewee's Consent Form

Based on the information that I have received about this study, I agree to participate in this study and grant you the permission to use of my photos and information only for the purpose of disseminating the findings of this study.

Name:

Sex:

Age:

Occupation:

Contact Details:

Signature:

Date:

Appendix 3: FGD Participants' Consent Form

Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ)

Focus Group Discussion – Participants' Consent Form

***Consent:** Based on the information that I have received about this study, I agree to participate in this study and grant you the permission to use of my photos and information only for the purpose of disseminating the findings of this study.

Date:

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Occupation	Contact Details	Consent