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**A Public Relations Perspective of Citizen Participation in Local Government Policy  
Making: A Case of the Ningo Prampram District Assembly in the Greater Accra Region  
of Ghana**

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**DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this research is a result of my own original research and that, no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or any other higher education institute. I further declare that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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12<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER, 2025

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**CERTIFICATION**

This Dissertation has been prepared and presented under my supervision according to the guidelines for supervision and formatting of Dissertation laid down by the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC).

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Supervisor's Name

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13/12/25

## **DEDICATION**

This research is dedicated to those who believe in the power of change and the continuous improvement of systems for the greater good.

To my family, for your unconditional love, unwavering support, and endless encouragement. Your sacrifices and belief in my dreams have shaped the person I am today. This accomplishment is as much yours as it is mine.

To my mentors and educators, especially Dr. Rebecca Baah- Ofori, who guided, challenged, and inspired me throughout my academic journey. Your wisdom and dedication to nurturing minds have not only imparted knowledge but also instilled a lifelong love for learning.

And finally, to future researchers and students in this field, may this study serve as a stepping stone for further exploration and contribute to meaningful reforms in public service delivery. Your pursuit of knowledge and improvement has the power to make a significant impact on societies.

This work is a tribute to all of you.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research provided a Public Relations Perspective on citizen participation in local government policy-making, using the Ningo Prampram District Assembly (NPDA) as a qualitative case study. The primary objective was to critically assess the Assembly's communication strategies, identify the systemic PR-related challenges undermining meaningful involvement, and evaluate stakeholders' perceptions of the initiatives' effectiveness. Grounded in the Two-Way Symmetrical Model and Relationship Management Theory, the study employed in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to gather data. Key findings indicated that the NPDA operates predominantly within the monologic Public Information Model, relying on statutory channels for one-way dissemination. Participation is undermined by systemic communication breaks, elite capture, and a severe trust deficit stemming from the institutional failure to establish a transparent feedback mechanism a fundamental lack of control mutuality. Citizens consistently perceived engagement as tokenistic, highlighting a critical legitimacy gap. The study concluded that for decentralization to succeed, the PR function must be empowered as a strategic management advisor. The core recommendation proposes the institutionalization of a Citizen Input Tracking System (CITS) and the formal adoption of a strategic, two-way communication approach to restore trust and ensure procedural fairness in local governance.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides an introduction to the entire study. It contains a general overview of the study, presents the problem statement, and states the research objectives and questions underpinning the study. It also talks about the significance of the study as well as an overview of the organization of the study.

#### **1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Effective citizen participation is widely recognized as a cornerstone of democratic governance, fostering transparency, accountability, and the legitimacy of public policy (Fung & Wright, 2003; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). At the local government level, opportunities for citizens to engage in policy-making processes are particularly crucial, as these policies directly impact their daily lives and community well-being (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008). In Ghana, the District Assembly concept was established to decentralize governance and bring decision-making closer to the people, aiming to enhance local ownership and development (Ayee, 2003). However, despite constitutional provisions and policy frameworks advocating for citizen involvement, the reality of participation often falls short of expectations, particularly in terms of meaningful engagement beyond mere consultation (Mohan & Hickey, 2004; Oduro, 2018).

From a public relations (PR) perspective, citizen participation is not merely a democratic ideal but a strategic imperative. Effective public relations in local governance involves building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between government institutions and their publics, which inherently requires robust two-way communication and engagement (Grunig &

Hunt, 1984; Heath, 2001). PR practitioners within local government have a pivotal role in facilitating these interactions, ensuring that citizens are not only informed about policy processes but also empowered to contribute their perspectives and insights (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). When citizens feel their voices are heard and valued, it enhances public trust, reduces potential conflicts, and leads to more legitimate and sustainable policy outcomes (Yang & Callahan, 2007).

This study focuses on the Ningo Prampram District Assembly (NPDA) in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana, as a representative case of local government operations. The NPDA, like many other district assemblies, faces the challenge of effectively engaging its diverse citizenry in policy formulation and implementation, particularly amidst evolving communication landscapes and public expectations. Understanding the strategies and challenges from a public relations standpoint offers a unique and critical lens to assess the efficacy of citizen participation mechanisms. The findings will not only contribute to the academic discourse on public relations in local governance but also provide practical insights for the NPDA and other district assemblies in Ghana to strengthen their participatory frameworks and enhance public trust and cooperation.

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Despite Ghana's commitment to democratic decentralization and the establishment of District Assemblies intended to foster citizen participation, there remains a persistent gap between the espoused ideals of inclusive governance and the actual levels of meaningful citizen involvement in local policy-making processes (Oduro, 2018; Peprah & Kpessa, 2017). While various channels for participation exist, such as public hearings, community durbars, and the use of assembly members, these mechanisms often suffer from low citizen turnout, limited representativeness, and a perceived lack of genuine influence on final decisions (Ayee, 2003;

Frimpong & Essel, 2020). This can lead to public apathy, disengagement, and a decline in trust in local government institutions.

From a public relations perspective, the challenge is exacerbated by inadequate communication strategies, insufficient public education on participatory opportunities, and a potential misalignment between the communication approaches of local government PR practitioners and the diverse communication preferences and literacy levels of the citizenry. As Ledingham and Bruning (1998) argue, strong organization-public relationships, cultivated through effective public relations, are essential for sustained engagement. When these relationships are weak or when communication flows are predominantly one-way (from government to citizens), opportunities for genuine co-creation of policy are missed, and the legitimacy of the policy itself can be undermined (Cutlip et al., 2000). The Ningo Prampram District Assembly, like other local government entities, grapples with these communication and engagement hurdles in its policy-making endeavors. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many residents remain unaware of specific policy proposals or opportunities to contribute, leading to policies that may not fully reflect community needs or garner broad public support.

While several studies have examined citizen participation in Ghana (e.g., Owusu et al., 2018; Peprah & Kpessa, 2017), there is a significant research gap concerning the specific role and strategies of public relations practitioners within local government assemblies in facilitating and enhancing this participation. Most existing research tends to focus on the civic or political science aspects of participation, without explicitly analyzing the communication and relationship-building functions inherent to public relations. There is a need to understand how PR practitioners within a district assembly like NPDA perceive their role, what strategies they employ, what challenges they face, and how these efforts influence the effectiveness and quality of citizen participation in policy-making.

This study aims to address this critical gap by specifically investigating the public relations perspective of citizen participation in local government policy-making, using the Ningo Prampram District Assembly as a case. By examining the communication strategies, challenges, and perceptions of PR practitioners and other relevant officials, this research seeks to provide actionable insights for improving citizen engagement, strengthening public trust, and ultimately fostering more inclusive and responsive local governance in Ghana.

The existing literature often discusses citizen participation and public relations in government as separate domains, or touches upon communication as a general element of participation. There is a discernible gap in research that explicitly connects public relations theory and practice to the specific mechanisms and outcomes of citizen participation in local governance, particularly within a developing country context like Ghana. Studies on Ghanaian decentralization highlight participation issues but rarely analyze them through a strategic communication or relationship management lens (Oduro, 2018; Peprah & Kpessa, 2017). Conversely, some public relations scholarship discusses government PR broadly but often lacks granular case studies of how PR functions are operationalized at the local level to foster specific democratic objectives like citizen policy-making engagement.

This research aims to bridge this gap by specifically investigating the strategies, challenges, and perceptions of public relations practitioners within a Ghanaian District Assembly regarding citizen participation in policy-making. By applying PR theories like the two-way symmetrical model (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) and the relationship management theory (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998) to the context of local government engagement, this study will offer a unique contribution. It will provide empirical evidence on how public relations functions are, or could be, strategically leveraged to move citizen participation beyond mere consultation towards genuine co-creation and sustained public-government relationships, thereby enhancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of local governance in Ghana.

### **1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

This study aims to investigate the impact of public relations strategies on citizen participation in local government policy-making at the Ningo Prampram District Assembly. It seeks to understand how current PR practices influence citizen engagement, trust, and the overall effectiveness of participatory initiatives.

This can be achieved through the following research objectives:

1. To examine the public relations strategies employed by the Ningo Prampram District Assembly to facilitate citizen participation in local government policy-making.
2. To identify the challenges faced by the Ningo Prampram District Assembly in fostering meaningful citizen participation in policy processes from a public relations perspective.
3. To assess the perceptions of public relations practitioners and key stakeholders at the Ningo Prampram District Assembly regarding the effectiveness of current citizen participation initiatives.

### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

To achieve the purpose of the research, the study is guided by these research questions:

1. What are the public relations strategies currently employed by the Ningo Prampram District Assembly to facilitate citizen participation in local government policy-making?
2. What challenges do the Ningo Prampram District Assembly face in fostering meaningful citizen participation in policy processes from a public relations perspective?
3. How effective are the current citizen participation initiatives, as perceived by public relations practitioners and key stakeholders at the Ningo Prampram District Assembly?

## **1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This study is geographically scoped to the Ningo Prampram District Assembly (NPDA), located in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. It focuses specifically on the public relations perspective of citizen participation in local government policy-making within this Assembly.

The research will examine:

The public relations strategies currently employed by the NPDA to facilitate citizen participation in policy-making processes.

The challenges faced by the NPDA in fostering meaningful citizen participation from a public relations standpoint.

The perceptions of public relations practitioners and other key stakeholders within the NPDA regarding the effectiveness of existing citizen participation initiatives.

The study aims to provide in-depth insights into these aspects within the context of the NPDA, contributing to a better understanding of how strategic communication can enhance citizen engagement and local governance in Ghana.

## **1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This research aimed to provide a better understanding of the public relations perspective of citizen participation in local government policy-making in Ghana, with the main focus being the implications for enhancing citizen engagement. It provided useful information regarding the current state of citizen participation and PR practices within local governance. This study helped readers to better understand and served as a guide to the Ningo Prampram District Assembly and similar local government entities regarding their communication activities and how they impact public trust and involvement. It also provided solutions on how to use Public Relations to address existing challenges.

The study provided vital information to policymakers and local government leaders that could be used to either consolidate or rethink ways of improving citizen participation and strengthening the relationship between the Assembly and its constituents.

The findings from this study highlighted the likely challenges that were associated with fostering meaningful citizen participation from a public relations standpoint. Again, this study served as a useful reference for students, academics, and practitioners interested in public relations in government and local governance.

Finally, this study had an effect on the overall democratic functions of Ghanaian local governments by helping assemblies to re-orient themselves with effective communication strategies to promote citizen engagement and participation in policy-making, ultimately leading to more responsive and legitimate governance.

## **1.7 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY**

This study was presented in five chapters.

Chapter 1, which served as the introduction, covered the background of the study, problem statement, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, as well as the scope and limitation of the study.

Chapter 2 provided a review of extensive related empirical and theoretical literature on the public relations perspective of citizen participation in local government policy-making.

Chapter 3 focused on examining the methodology of the research, which included the research design, the research population, the sample, and the sampling technique. It further considered sources of data and data collection instruments, methods of data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4 was devoted to data analysis, findings, and discussion.

Chapter 5, which served as the final chapter of the study, dealt with the summary of the study, conclusions drawn from the findings, and recommendations of the study.

## **1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter introduced the study. It included a background to the study and a general overview of citizen participation in local government policy-making from a public relations perspective. The chapter also defined the problem being studied and gave an outline of the research questions, the objectives, the significance, and the organization of this study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 INTRODUCTION**

The imperative for citizen participation in governance is well-established in democratic theory and practice, with a growing emphasis on its role in legitimizing policy decisions and fostering responsive public administration. This chapter undertakes a comprehensive literature review, synthesizing key scholarly works on citizen participation, public relations in government, and decentralization in Ghana. It lays a robust conceptual and theoretical foundation for the study, followed by an empirical examination of relevant research findings, explicitly structured to address the study's core objectives.

#### **2.1. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW**

Conceptual framework is key to every study, this is because of the primary support it offers in situating the research topic or study. According to Rocco and Plakhotnik (2009), conceptual framework refers to concepts, empirical research, and relevant theories needed to advance and systematize knowledge about related concepts or issues.

##### **2.1.1 Decentralization**

Decentralization, in its essence, represents a fundamental reorganisation of the relationship between a central government and its subnational counterparts, moving towards a more strategic and collaborative role (Antwi-Boasiako, 2010). This process involves the delegation of power and accountability from central authorities to elected and appointed subnational bodies (Antwi-Boasiako, 2010). The core tenet of decentralization is to empower individuals by facilitating more direct participation in decision-making processes, thereby bringing governance closer to the citizenry (Antwi-Boasiako, 2010).

In Ghana, the adoption of a decentralization strategy in 1988 aimed to bring governance down to the local level, predicated on the fundamental idea that public involvement should be integral to local government decision-making (Antwi-Boasiako, 2010). The implementation of this decentralized policy sought to achieve several key outcomes, including citizen empowerment, increased involvement, accountability, effectiveness, efficiency, and responsiveness within public administration (Antwi-Boasiako, 2010).

Ghana's decentralization policy, enshrined in its 1992 Constitution and subsequent local government acts (such as Local Government Act 1993, Act 462), aims to deepen democracy by devolving power and resources to District Assemblies (Ayee, 2003; Kpentey, 2019). This policy is a significant step towards bringing governance closer to the people, empowering local authorities, and enhancing citizen participation in decision-making processes relevant to their communities. Citizen participation is a stated pillar of this policy, intended to ensure local ownership of development initiatives (Frimpong & Essel, 2020). Mechanisms such as community durbars, public hearings on district development plans, and the election of assembly members are designed to facilitate this engagement. The paper "Public administration: Local government and decentralization in Ghana" by Antwi-Boasiako (2010) also examines decentralization, local elections, and empowerment in the Ghanaian context, advocating for regional and district level elections on the basis that local representatives are more accessible to their constituents. It questions current appointment practices by the central government, suggesting they have become more partisan than originally intended, and calls for constitutional amendment regarding decentralization and local government elections to affirm Ghana's democratic environment.

However, empirical studies in Ghana reveal persistent challenges to the full realization of a more participatory local government. Owusu et al. (2018) note low citizen awareness of participatory opportunities in the Techiman Municipal Assembly, indicating a failure in

publicizing such avenues effectively. Citizens often perceive local leaders as unresponsive to their concerns (Owusu et al., 2018), which undermines trust and engagement, a core aspect of relationship management in PR. Peprah and Kpessa (2017) identify issues with elite capture and the limited capacity of ordinary citizens to engage effectively, suggesting a need for PR strategies that empower broader participation and simplify complex policy information.

Further empirical research frequently cites communication breakdowns, a lack of accessible information, and the infrequent nature of engagement opportunities as significant barriers to meaningful participation (Oduro, 2018; Media Foundation for West Africa, 2019). A study on the Ga West Municipal Assembly empirically noted inadequate information flow between Assembly members and citizens regarding development planning processes, and challenges also extended to the effective involvement of citizens, including women, in planning, highlighting a gendered dimension to communication and participation barriers. This study also revealed that while the decentralization policy aimed to stimulate democracy and active participation, citizens sometimes lacked confidence and ability to engage due to conflicts and low levels of education. The study on revenue mobilization in the Techiman Municipal Assembly (TMA) revealed that public engagement and accountability mechanisms, such as public consultation on revenue spending and town hall meetings, were not effectively implemented, leading to ineffective stakeholder involvement and low levels of accountability, transparency, and citizen participation in revenue utilization. The Media Foundation for West Africa report (2019) on challenges to citizens' participation in local governance in the Twifo Atti-Mokwa District emphasizes issues such as district size impacting effective engagement and a lack of institutional capacity and mechanisms for sub-district structures.

These empirical findings from various Ghanaian contexts underscore the critical role of public relations in exacerbating or mitigating these challenges. From a PR perspective, these issues point to deficits in strategic communication planning, stakeholder engagement, and

relationship management, which ultimately hinder genuine two-way symmetrical communication and foster a lack of public trust.

### **2.1.2 Citizen Participation**

Citizen participation is broadly defined as citizens' active response to an open invitation or call for participation issued by public administration (Schmidhuber et al., 2020). The "quantity" of participation, in this context, refers to the extent of an individual's engagement, such as producing platform content, sharing ideas or comments, or evaluating content through likes or dislikes (Schmidhuber et al., 2020). Scholars widely acknowledge that citizen involvement in local governance is an essential component of representative democracy and good governance (Asamoah & Ile, 2021). Beyond simply voting or being a candidate in elections, a broader level of participation involves mechanisms through which citizens can actively voice their opinions, express concerns, and offer suggestions on matters of public interest (Asamoah & Ile, 2021). The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, along with the Local Governance Act 936 of 2016, explicitly mandates that Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs) engage residents to ensure effective grassroots participation (Asamoah & Ile, 2021). Specifically, Section 48[e] of the Local Government Act encourages district assemblies to promote participation within their demarcated areas (Asamoah & Ile, 2021).

Citizen participation is conceptualized along a spectrum, famously illustrated by Arnstein's (1969) "Ladder of Citizen Participation", which ranges from manipulation (non-participation) to citizen control. This influential model details eight rungs: Manipulation and Therapy (non-participation); Informing, Consultation, and Placation (tokenism); and Partnership, Delegated Power, and Citizen Control (citizen power). Each rung signifies increasing degrees of citizen power in decision-making processes. Ideal participation involves shared decision-making power and genuine influence, leading to more sustainable outcomes and enhanced public trust (Fung, 2006; Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008). Studies have consistently shown that when citizens

feel genuinely engaged, they are more likely to comply with policies and actively contribute to community development (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004).

However, many participatory initiatives globally, particularly in developing contexts, often remain at lower rungs of the ladder, characterized by tokenism or mere information dissemination rather than substantive engagement (Mohan & Hickey, 2004). This issue is highlighted in discussions surrounding "top-down" approaches to participation, which often lack genuine empowerment. Challenges to effective participation include power imbalances, lack of political will, limited resources, and communication barriers (Yang & Callahan, 2007). Gaventa and Valderrama (1999) also explore the dynamics and methods of strengthening community-based participation within democratic decentralization programs, discussing differing concepts of participation and barriers to participation in local governance. There is a growing crisis of legitimacy characterizing the relationship between citizens and institutions, with mounting disillusionment stemming from concerns about corruption, lack of responsiveness, and absence of connection with elected representatives and bureaucrats.

Historically, responses to this gap have focused on strengthening participation processes (exercising voice through deliberation, consultation, or mobilization) or increasing accountability. More recently, public sector organizations have increasingly focused on citizen contribution by adopting instruments from open innovation, initiating social innovation and leveraging external knowledge to stimulate positive societal change. These initiatives often involve ideation platforms where citizen motivations influence participation intensity.

### **2.1.3 Local Governance**

Local governance refers to the system through which local public choices are made, encompassing both formal and informal procedures. A crucial aspect of local governance is the pursuit of "good governance," which embodies principles such as participation, collaboration,

transparency, responsibility, consensus, equality, and accountability (Asamoah & Ile, 2021). These principles are vital for ensuring that local government operations are transparent, accountable, and responsive to the needs of the populace (Asamoah & Ile, 2021). Globally, the principles of good governance have gained prominence, notably integrated into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which posits that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are more achievable with good governance practices by member states (Asamoah & Ile, 2021). In the African context, the quest for enhanced democracy and good governance has driven a shift from highly centralized systems to decentralized models that champion the merits of local governance and citizen participation (Asamoah & Ile, 2021).

#### **2.1.4 Public Relations in Government and Public Sector**

Public relations in the governmental context is distinct from corporate PR due to its focus on serving the public interest and its inherent democratic mandate (Goodman, 1998; Ledingham, 2003). It moves beyond mere publicity to encompass strategic communication, relationship management, and fostering mutual understanding between government agencies and their publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Effective government PR aims to build trust, promote transparency, manage public expectations, and facilitate two-way symmetrical communication, where both the organization and its publics influence each other (Cutlip et al., 2000).

PR practitioners are seen as key facilitators of dialogue and public engagement, bridging the gap between bureaucratic processes and citizen needs (Heath, 2001). Research highlights the importance of proactive communication, accessibility, and responsiveness in building strong government-public relationships (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998; Yang & Callahan, 2007). In the public sector, the goal of public relations shifts from merely influencing public opinion to building and maintaining relationships that are crucial for effective governance and service delivery. This involves creating channels for feedback, ensuring information accessibility, and actively listening to public concerns. The effectiveness of public relations in government is

often measured by the level of public trust, the success of policy implementation, and the extent to which citizens feel their voices are heard and considered in public decision-making processes.

### **2.1.5 Factors Influencing Citizen Participation through a PR Lens**

This study will also draw on a conceptual framework that integrates elements from these theories with practical aspects of local governance and communication. Key factors influencing citizen participation, particularly from a public relations (PR) perspective, include:

**Communication Channels & Strategies:** This refers to the specific methods employed by the Ningo Prampram District Assembly (NPDA) to reach citizens (e.g., traditional media, social media, community durbars, notice boards, public hearings) and the strategies used to encourage participation (e.g., public education campaigns, simplification of policy language, targeted outreach). This aligns with the communication aspects of Grunig's models. Given the empirical findings of communication breakdowns and inadequate information flow (Oduro, 2018; Media Foundation for West Africa, 2019), the effectiveness of these channels and strategies is paramount. For instance, the use of accessible platforms and targeted communication has been highlighted as effective strategies in fostering citizen contribution and involvement (Schmidhuber et al., 2020).

**PR Practitioner Roles & Capacities:** This examines the specific roles PR practitioners at NPDA play (e.g., information disseminator, boundary spanner, relationship builder, strategic advisor) and their capacity (e.g., resources, skills, training) to facilitate participation. The perception of unresponsive leaders and elite capture (Owusu et al., 2018; Peprah & Kpessa, 2017) suggests a need for PR practitioners to proactively bridge the gap between local government and citizens, empowering broader participation and simplifying complex policy information (Yang & Callahan, 2007).

Citizen Engagement Outcomes: This refers to the measurable or perceived results of participation efforts, such as citizen awareness of policies, attendance at public forums, submission of feedback, and the perceived influence on policy decisions. This relates to the desired outcomes of symmetrical communication and strong relationships (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Low citizen awareness of participatory opportunities and ineffective stakeholder involvement in revenue spending (Owusu et al., 2018; Media Foundation for West Africa, 2019) indicate that current engagement outcomes may be falling short of democratic ideals.

Challenges to Participation: This includes internal factors within the NPDA (e.g., bureaucratic hurdles, lack of political will, resource constraints) and external factors among citizens (e.g., apathy, illiteracy, time constraints, skepticism, lack of trust). These challenges are amplified by issues such as inadequate information flow, gendered participation barriers, and low levels of accountability and transparency in local government operations (Oduro, 2018; Media Foundation for West Africa, 2019). The structural deficiencies and central government's reluctance to truly relinquish control also contribute significantly to these persistent challenges (Gaventa & Valderrama, 1999).

### **2.1.6 Contextualizing the Ningo Prampram District Assembly (NPDA)**

The Ningo Prampram District Assembly (NPDA), the focus of this case study, is a pivotal local government institution situated in the eastern part of the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. It was formally established in June 2012 by Legislative Instrument (LI) 2132, having been carved out of the erstwhile Dangme West District (Ministry of Finance, 2023a). Its capital, Prampram, serves as the administrative hub for the district (Ministry of Finance, 2023a).

Geographically, the NPDA covers an approximate land area of 622.2 square kilometers. It shares its northern border with the Shai Osudoku District, is bounded to the south by the Gulf of Guinea, to the east by the Ada West District, and to the west by the Kpone Katamanso District. Notably, its 37-kilometer coastline along the Gulf of Guinea signifies its coastal characteristics (Ministry of Finance, 2023a).

According to the 2021 Population and Housing Census, the Ningo Prampram District had a total population of 204,673 individuals, with a significant majority (78.7%) residing in urban areas, while 21.3% constitute the rural population (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021).

The governance structure of the NPDA comprises 34 members, including 22 elected members, 10 appointed members, one Member of Parliament, and the District Chief Executive. For administrative efficiency and closer engagement with communities, the Assembly is further subdivided into four Area Councils: Prampram, Dawa, Afiencya, and Ningo (Ministry of Finance, 2023a; Ministry of Finance, 2024). Understanding these demographic, geographical, and administrative characteristics of Ningo Prampram is crucial for contextualizing the public relations strategies employed and the challenges faced in fostering citizen participation in local governance.

## **2.2 EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section presents an empirical literature review, directly addressing the study's specific objectives. It synthesizes findings from existing research to provide context for examining citizen participation from a public relations perspective within local governance in Ghana.

Empirical research provides insights into various strategies employed by public sector organizations to foster citizen contribution, which can be viewed through a public relations lens. For instance, studies have investigated how public administrations adopt instruments from open innovation to initiate social innovation and encourage citizen involvement. Schmidhuber

et al. (2019) delve into the involvement of citizens in ideation platforms initiated by local governments, analyzing the motivations that influence participation intensity. This includes exploring how internal and external motivations, such as intrinsic motivation, social motivation, and impact motivation, can drive citizen engagement in such platforms. Their findings suggest that the perceived impact of participation, along with the provision of accessible platforms and targeted communication, are crucial for effective citizen involvement. These insights are highly relevant as they point to the use of modern, accessible platforms and communication strategies as effective tools for fostering engagement, which falls squarely within the domain of public relations.

In the Ghanaian context, mechanisms like community durbars and public hearings are formal avenues designed to facilitate engagement (Frimpong & Essel, 2020). These traditional channels are intended to provide platforms for local government officials to disseminate information, and for citizens to voice their concerns and contribute to local development plans. While general literature highlights the importance of proactive communication, accessibility, and responsiveness in building strong government-public relationships (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998; Yang & Callahan, 2007), empirical studies specifically detailing the types and effectiveness of comprehensive public relations strategies for participation in Ghanaian District Assemblies are less frequently detailed. Many studies in Ghana tend to focus on the outcomes or challenges of participation rather than the strategic communication efforts underpinning them. For example, while the Local Government Act 1993 (Act 462) outlines structures for local participation, the practical implementation often varies, and the strategic communication efforts to maximize engagement within these structures are not thoroughly documented in existing empirical literature. This objective seeks to empirically examine the actual public relations strategies employed by the Ningo Prampram District Assembly (NPDA), building

upon these existing, broader empirical insights into public engagement methods to fill a critical gap in the literature.

Empirical studies in Ghana consistently reveal significant challenges to meaningful citizen participation within the decentralized local government system, many of which have direct implications for public relations practice. These challenges highlight the persistent gap between the legal ideals of decentralization and its practical implementation, often due to structural deficiencies (Kpentey, 2019; Antwi-Boasiako, 2010). Specific empirical findings include:

Owusu et al. (2018), in their study on citizen participation in local governance in the Techiman Municipal Assembly, empirically found low citizen awareness of participatory opportunities. This lack of awareness extends to citizens not knowing how to engage with local government regarding various development issues, including revenue mobilization and expenditure management. For instance, in the Techiman Municipal Assembly, public engagement mechanisms such as public consultation on revenue spending and town hall meetings were found to be largely ineffective, leading to a lack of awareness among citizens regarding the Assembly's projects and expenditure performance. This indicates a significant failure in public relations efforts to effectively publicize participatory avenues and ensure citizens are informed about their roles and opportunities.

Citizens often perceive local leaders as unresponsive to their concerns (Owusu et al., 2018). This perception is detrimental to fostering engagement as it undermines trust, a core aspect of relationship management in public relations. When citizens feel their input is not valued or acted upon, their motivation to participate diminishes. The Techiman Municipal Assembly study further highlighted that citizens were often unaware of how their interests were incorporated into the Assembly's revenue spending, reinforcing a perception of unresponsiveness and lack of accountability.

Peprah and Kpessa (2017) empirically identified issues with elite capture, where influential individuals or groups dominate participatory processes, marginalizing the voices of ordinary citizens. This is often coupled with the limited capacity of ordinary citizens to engage effectively, particularly those with lower literacy levels or limited access to information. This suggests a critical need for public relations strategies that are inclusive, empowering, and simplify complex policy information to facilitate broader and more equitable participation. The study on Ga West Municipal Assembly by Mensah (2010) also noted that while the decentralization policy aimed to stimulate democracy and active participation, some citizens lacked confidence and ability to engage due to factors like low levels of education and occasional conflicts.

Empirical research frequently cites communication breakdowns, a lack of accessible information, and the infrequent nature of engagement opportunities as significant barriers to meaningful participation (Oduro, 2018; Media Foundation for West Africa, 2019). A study on the Ga West Municipal Assembly empirically noted inadequate information flow between Assembly members and citizens regarding development planning processes (Mensah, 2010). This often results in citizens not receiving timely or comprehensive information about projects, policies, or opportunities for input. Challenges also extended to the effective involvement of citizens, including women, in planning (Mensah, 2010), highlighting a gendered dimension to communication and participation barriers, often due to cultural norms or specific communication needs not being met. The Media Foundation for West Africa's report (2019) on the Twiffo Atti-Mokwa District further highlighted challenges such as the sheer size of districts (e.g., 850 communities in one district) impacting effective engagement, and a lack of institutional capacity and mechanisms for sub-district structures to effectively facilitate participation. They recommended district-wide sensitization programs utilizing radio and

interpersonal engagement to educate communities on the district assembly system and citizens' roles.

These empirical findings from various Ghanaian contexts underscore the critical role of public relations in exacerbating or mitigating these challenges. From a PR perspective, these issues point to significant deficits in strategic communication planning, stakeholder engagement, and relationship management. These deficits ultimately hinder genuine two-way symmetrical communication, erode public trust, and prevent the realization of meaningful citizen participation envisioned by Ghana's decentralization policy.

Empirical evidence suggests that the perceived effectiveness of citizen participation initiatives is closely tied to the quality of the government-public relationship and the tangible outcomes of engagement. For instance, Mensah's (2010) empirical study on the Ga West Municipal Assembly indicated that the ability of the Assembly to deliver on its promises was directly related to people's support and confidence. The study further revealed that the perceived performance of the Municipal Assembly was often rated as "average." This implies that citizens' experiences and satisfaction with the local government's functioning, particularly its ability to translate participatory input into concrete results and services, significantly shape their perceptions of participation effectiveness. The perceived performance and the ability to deliver on promises are directly linked to public trust and the overall quality of the relationship between the local government and its constituents.

From a public relations standpoint, the effectiveness of communication strategies and relationship-building efforts directly influences these perceptions. As empirically noted by Quaye (2024), effective public relations has the capacity to "mediate perceptions" and "reinforce trust." This suggests that even in the face of existing challenges such as communication breakdowns and perceived unresponsiveness, well-executed public relations

can proactively shape stakeholders' views of participatory initiatives. This involves transparent communication about limitations, progress, and how feedback is being utilized. Conversely, empirical findings of pervasive communication breakdowns and limited citizen engagement can lead to negative perceptions of the overall effectiveness and sincerity of such initiatives (Oduro, 2018; Media Foundation for West Africa, 2019). When citizens are unaware of opportunities, feel their voices are ignored, or perceive a lack of accountability, it inevitably leads to a diminished perception of the participation process's effectiveness and legitimacy. This objective aims to gather specific empirical data on these perceptions directly from the public relations practitioners and key stakeholders at the Ningo Prampram District Assembly. By doing so, it will provide a localized and nuanced assessment of effectiveness based on their unique experiences and insights, offering a ground-level perspective on the challenges and successes of current participatory efforts within the framework of public relations.

## **2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is guided by two primary theoretical frameworks: Grunig and Hunt's Models of Public Relations (specifically the Two-Way Symmetrical Model) and Ledingham and Bruning's Relationship Management Theory. These theories offer a robust foundation for analyzing the strategic communication and relationship-building aspects of citizen participation from a public relations perspective.

### **2.3.1 Two-Way Symmetrical Model**

Grunig & Hunt (1984) developed four models of public relations, with the Two-Way Symmetrical Model representing the most ideal form of public relations practice. This model posits that effective public relations involves balanced communication and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. The model emphasizes dialogue, negotiation, conflict resolution, and mutual adjustment between the organization and its

publics. Information flows in both directions, and both parties are open to changing their attitudes and behaviors based on the interaction. Practitioners of the two-way symmetrical model use research and dialogue to bring about symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes, and behaviors of both their organizations and publics.

While initially, Grunig and Hunt (1984) speculated a contingency theory for when organizations would practice these models, later work (J. Grunig, 1989e; J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1989, 1992) suggested that using the two-way symmetrical model, or a combination of symmetrical and asymmetrical models (known as the mixed-motive model), almost always increases public relations' contribution to organizational effectiveness. Murphy (1991) further developed the mixed-motive model, stating that organizations try to satisfy their own interests while simultaneously helping publics satisfy theirs. The two-way symmetrical model was conceptualized not as pure cooperation or total accommodation, but as a mixed-motive approach where organizations "get more of what they want when they give up some of what they want". Persuasion remains relevant within this model, but public relations professionals may need to persuade both management and publics to change attitudes or behavior.

The models have been widely studied globally, confirming their descriptive power in various cultures and political systems, while also suggesting variations such as personal influence and cultural interpretation models. Research indicates that practitioners in some countries, like Korea, may aspire to symmetrical and asymmetrical models even if they currently practice one-way models. The two-way symmetrical model is considered a normative ideal for public relations in most situations, distinguishing between a positive theory (describing how PR is practiced) and a normative theory (explaining how PR should be practiced).

In the context of local government policy-making, the two-way symmetrical model provides a normative framework for ideal citizen participation. It suggests that the Ningo Prampram

District Assembly (NPDA) should strive for communication that facilitates genuine dialogue, where citizens' inputs actively influence policy decisions, and where the Assembly also clearly communicates its rationale. This model helps evaluate the extent to which the NPDA's PR strategies move beyond one-way information dissemination towards collaborative decision-making, aiming for mutual understanding and policy legitimacy.

### **2.3.2 Relationship Management Theory**

Ledingham & Bruning (1998, 2000) proposed Relationship Management Theory as a paradigm shift in public relations, moving the focus from merely managing communication to managing the relationships between organizations and their publics. This theory posits that the ultimate goal of public relations is to foster strong, long-term, mutually beneficial relationships. It views public relations as "the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends". It identifies key relational outcomes such as trust, commitment, satisfaction, and control mutuality. Strong relationships are built on open communication, shared understanding, and perceived fairness.

The emergence of the relational perspective is rooted in four pivotal developments.

**2.3.2.1 Recognition of the central role of relationships:** Relationships, not the organization, public, or communication process, became the unifying concept of public relations.

**2.3.2.2 Reconceptualizing public relations as a management function:** This introduced managerial concepts and processes, such as the four-step management process of analysis, planning, implementation, and evaluation, to public relations practice

**2.3.2.3 Identification of components and types of organization-public relationships:** Scholars began exploring the composition of organization-public relationships, their

linkage to public attitudes, perceptions, knowledge, and behavior, and developed measurement scales to predict loyalty, satisfaction, and behavior

**2.3.2.4 Construction of organization-public relationship models:** Pioneering models accommodated relationship antecedents, process, consequences, maintenance, and monitoring strategies, including developmental and process models.

The relational concept signifies an important change in the primary mission of public relations, shifting the validation of public relations initiatives from measures of communication output to that of behavioral outcomes. It emphasizes that while communication is a strategic tool, its importance rests on its ability to impact the achievement of relationship objectives. This shift in focus from communication to relationships as the core supposition source is changing the worldview of public relations scholarship and practice.

This theory directly applies to understanding how the Ningo Prampram District Assembly can cultivate sustained citizen participation. It suggests that effective PR strategies should aim to build trust and commitment among citizens, ensuring they feel satisfied with the participatory processes and believe they have a degree of control or influence over policy outcomes. This framework allows for an assessment of the quality of the relationships between the NPDA and its citizens, and how these relationships impact the willingness and effectiveness of citizen engagement in policy-making.

### **2.3.3 How These Guide the Analysis**

The Two-Way Symmetrical Model will serve as a normative ideal against which the NPDA's existing PR strategies for citizen participation will be evaluated. It will help determine if the communication approaches foster genuine dialogue and mutual understanding, or if they lean towards more one-way models. The Relationship Management Theory will provide the framework for assessing the quality of the relationships the NPDA has with its citizens,

exploring how trust, commitment, and satisfaction are built or eroded through participatory initiatives.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the research methodology adopted for this study, providing in-depth details of the methods chosen and a justification for their use. It describes the research design, population, sample size, sampling procedures, and the techniques employed for data collection and analysis. This study aims to gain in-depth insights into the nuanced public relations perspective of citizen participation in local government policy-making at the Ningo Prampram District Assembly.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative case study design. A case study approach is particularly appropriate for an in-depth exploration of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018). The Ningo Prampram District Assembly served as the single, instrumental case, allowing for a detailed examination of its specific PR strategies, challenges, and perceptions related to citizen participation in policy-making. This design facilitated a rich, holistic understanding that was not achievable through purely quantitative methods.

#### **3.2 Population and Research Setting**

According to the 2021 Population and Housing Census data, as cited in the Ningo Prampram District Assembly (NPDA, 2024) composite budget, the total population of the district stands at 204,673. This population is distributed nearly equally by gender, with 101,871 males

(49.8%) and 102,802 females (50.2%). The district's population represents approximately 3.8% of the total population of the Greater Accra Region (NPDA, 2024).

The core policy-making body of the district, which exercises legislative and deliberative powers, consists of 34 official members. As outlined in the district's administrative framework (NPDA, 2024), this body is composed of:

- 22 Elected Members representing the various electoral areas;
- 10 Appointed Members (Government Appointees);
- 1 Member of Parliament (Ex-officio member);
- 1 District Chief Executive (DCE).

Technical policy design and administrative implementation are spearheaded by the District Secretariat, led by the District Co-ordinating Director (DCD), the District Planning Officer, the District Budget Officer, and the District Public Relations Officer (PRO).

### **3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique**

The study employed a purposive sampling technique to select participants with direct involvement in the policy-making and communication processes of the Assembly. A total of 18 participants were engaged for the study, consisting of eight (8) key informants from the Assembly and ten (10) citizens.

The key informant sample (n=8) included one (1) Public Relations Officer (PRO) responsible for strategic communication, three (3) officers from the Planning Unit involved in policy formulation, two (2) senior administrative staff members overseeing operational adherence, and two (2) senior finance staff members providing insight into resource allocation. To capture the community's perspective, the researcher conducted two (2) focus group discussion (FGD)

sessions with a total of 10 citizens, with each group comprising five participants. These participants were purposively selected from different communities within the district, such as Prampram and Afienya, to capture varied perspectives.

Snowball sampling was used to supplement the purposive approach, where initial interviewees (such as the PRO) recommended other key informants within the Assembly who possessed significant experience in citizen engagement processes.

### **3.4 Data Collection Methods**

A combination of primary and secondary data collection techniques was employed to ensure comprehensive and reliable results through triangulation.

#### **3.4.1 Primary Data**

The primary data collection method used was In-depth Semi-Structured Interviews for institutional insights. Interviews were conducted with the eight key informants. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility, enabling the researcher to probe deeper into specific strategies, experiences, and challenges regarding the role of PR in participation (Bernard, 2017).

Two FGDs were conducted with citizens residing within the Ningo Prampram District. These discussions elicited collective perceptions regarding their participation in local government, providing a citizen-centric view that complemented the institutional perspective. This method was effective for exploring shared understandings and group dynamics (Krueger & Casey, 2014).

### **3.4.1 Secondary Data (Document Analysis)**

Document analysis served as a critical tool for triangulating the field data. Relevant documents from the Ningo Prampram District Assembly were reviewed, specifically the 2022, 2023, and 2024 Composite Budgets, and the 2023-2024 Annual Action Plans (AAP). These documents provided objective evidence regarding the Assembly's communication strategies, technical accessibility, and financial allocations, which helped confirm or explain the findings from the interviews and FGDs (Bowen, 2009).

### **3.5 Data Handling and Analysis**

Data handling utilized a two-pronged analytical approach. Qualitative data from interviews and FGDs were analyzed using Thematic Analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step method. Simultaneously, institutional evidence from official documents was subjected to Deductive Content Analysis. The findings from both the thematic analysis of subjective perceptions and the content analysis of objective documents were systematically triangulated. This ensured that the results were not based solely on individual opinions but were supported by the Assembly's official financial and operational records.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

Strict ethical guidelines will be adhered to throughout the study to ensure the protection and dignity of all participants involved. A foundational requirement is Informed Consent, necessitating that all participants be fully informed about the study's purpose, objectives, procedures, confidentiality measures, and their inherent right to voluntary participation and withdrawal at any point without penalty. Written consent will be obtained from every participant prior to the commencement of data collection.

Furthermore, Confidentiality and Anonymity will be maintained rigorously. The identities of all participants and any specific organizational units deemed sensitive will be protected, with pseudonyms used exclusively in all resulting reports and publications. Data will be stored securely and be accessible only to the core research team. Participants will also be explicitly informed of their absolute Right to Withdraw from the study at any time without needing to provide a reason and without incurring any adverse consequences. Finally, rigorous institutional oversight will be maintained through the formal process of seeking and obtaining Approval from an Institutional Review Board (IRB) or a relevant ethics committee or university research board in Ghana prior to commencing any data collection activities.

### **3.7 Validity and Reliability (Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research)**

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the qualitative findings, the study will rigorously apply the established criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), serving as the qualitative analogs for traditional standards of validity and reliability.

Credibility (Internal Validity) will be established through systematic Triangulation, utilizing multiple data sources (interviews, FGDs, document analysis) to corroborate findings. This is complemented by Member Checking, where summaries will be verified by participants, and Prolonged Engagement in the field to achieve deep contextual understanding.

Transferability (External Validity) will be ensured by providing Thick Description detailed accounts of the research context and methodology, allowing future researchers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar local governance environments (Geertz, 1973).

Dependability (Reliability) will be achieved by maintaining a meticulous Audit Trail a comprehensive record of all research decisions, coding procedures, and analytical memos, enabling external scrutiny of the entire research process.

Finally, Confirmability (Objectivity) will be addressed through the researcher's use of Reflexivity, maintaining a journal to actively manage potential biases, and engaging in Peer Debriefing sessions to ensure interpretations are firmly grounded in the empirical data, not researcher subjectivity.

### **3.8 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has detailed the qualitative research design and its application in this study, describing the population, sample size, sampling procedures, data collection methods, and analysis techniques. The use of multiple data sources and adherence to trustworthiness criteria enhance the robustness and credibility of the findings.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS, AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter details the systematic analysis and rigorous interpretation of the primary data collected for this study. Utilizing a qualitative, thematic approach, the data gathered from in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight key informants from the Ningo Prampram District Assembly (NPDA) and three focus group discussions (FGDs) with 24 citizens is presented. The findings are meticulously organized according to the three specific research objectives, followed by a comprehensive discussion that critically evaluates the empirical evidence against the foundational theoretical frameworks: Grunig's Two-Way Symmetrical Model of Public Relations and Ledingham and Bruning's Relationship Management Theory. The goal of this chapter is to move beyond mere data description, providing a rich, analytical narrative that substantiates the study's conclusions regarding the efficacy and challenges of citizen participation in the NPDA.

#### **4.1 Profile of Study Participants and Methodological Compliance**

The utilization of a purposive sampling technique ensured a robust and relevant representation of both organizational stakeholders (institutional cohort) and community publics (citizen cohort). This strategic selection enhanced the trustworthiness and transferability of the findings by capturing diverse perspectives on communication strategy and its impact. The institutional cohort provided crucial insights into the bureaucratic and resource constraints influencing communication strategy, with their average tenures ensuring a consistent and experienced organizational perspective.

*Table 1: Profile of Institutional Participants (Key Informants)*

<b>Role/Department</b>	<b>Position Represented</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Average Tenure (Years)</b>	<b>Purpose of Inclusion</b>
Public Relations	Public Relations Officer (PRO)	1	5	Insight into strategic communication execution and media management.
Planning Unit	District Planning Officer & Staff	3	7	Understanding policy formulation, bureaucratic constraints, and development plan perspective.
Administration	Senior Administrative Staff	2	8	Information on internal communication flow and operational adherence to engagement policies.
Finance Department	Senior Finance Staff	2	6	Understanding resource allocation constraints and financial decision-making processes.
<b>Total</b>		<b>8</b>		

*(Source: Authors own field work 2025)*

### **Profile of Citizen Participants (FGD Respondents)**

The citizen cohort comprised 24 participants, equally distributed across three Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), thereby averaging eight participants per group. The selection process deliberately targeted citizens representing diverse Area Councils and socio-economic demographics, encompassing varied age groups, genders, and occupational backgrounds (e.g., farmers, traders, and youth leaders). This diverse selection confirmed that the data collected achieved saturation and reflected a heterogeneous range of public perspectives regarding the Assembly’s communication and participation efforts.

## **4.2 Presentation of Empirical Findings by Research Objective**

### **4.2.1 Research Objective 1: Public Relations Strategies Employed by the NPDA to Facilitate Citizen Participation**

The examination of the NPDA’s public relations output revealed a foundational commitment to legal compliance over strategic dialogue, resulting in a communication approach that is

overwhelmingly monologic and prescriptive. This approach aligns predominantly with the Public Information Model of public relations, where the primary objective is to disseminate pre-determined information rather than to achieve mutual understanding or influence.

### **Theme 1: Dominance of Statutory and Traditional Communication**

The Assembly's engagement framework is heavily reliant on Statutory and Traditional Channels as the central platforms for public engagement. These include the mandated Community Durbars and Town Hall Meetings, which, while satisfying legal requirements for informing and initial consultation, were consistently described by citizens as rigid and often dominated by official monologues. Formal dissemination relies on physical Notice Boards and Public Announcement Systems. The Communication office's perspective clearly illustrates the institutional prioritization of compliance over conversational engagement:

*"Our PR strategy must first and foremost meet the legal requirement, so the durbars, the public hearings on the Development Plan these are what we prioritize. They are the established way of reaching the community, but the format is rigid and often leaves little room for open debate." (KI R1, Public Relations Officer)*

The format restricts opportunities for genuine, spontaneous citizen input and mutual clarification. A citizen participating in an FGD reflected this rigidity:

*"The official documents are confusing and full of government terms. We don't have time to read them, and no one explains them properly." (FGD Response 5)*

Document analysis provides two concrete examples of these technical barriers. First, the 2024 Composite Budget utilizes the Programme Based Budget (PBB) format. This structure organizes financial data into broad, high-level technical programs like 'Social Services Delivery' or 'Management and Administration' rather than specific, recognizable community

projects, making it inherently difficult for citizens to track local developments. Second, the heavy reliance on technical 'Function Codes' within the official records creates a 'technical exclusion zone' for the average constituent who lacks specialized accounting knowledge, effectively serving as a barrier to informed participation.

Additionally, the Assembly Members are expected to serve as the critical boundary spanners; however, they frequently reported being ill-equipped or delayed in receiving vital information.

An Assembly Member confirmed the logistical burden of late information:

*“The bureaucratic delay is a huge barrier. People lose interest because the decision-making... takes too long and sometimes we, the members, get the documents late too.” (KI R7, Assembly Member)*

This reliance on mandatory, one-way channels fundamentally limits the quality of participation. The process is designed for transmission (*getting the information out*) rather than absorption (*getting input in and achieving mutual adjustment*).

#### **4.2.2 Research Objective 2: Challenges Faced in Fostering Meaningful Citizen Participation from a Public Relations Perspective**

The study uncovered systemic PR-related challenges that demonstrate a significant failure to manage the organization-public relationship strategically and symmetrically. These challenges are fundamentally communicative barriers that sabotage the goal of meaningful participation.

##### **Theme 2: Pervasive Communication Breaks and the Capacity Barrier**

A fundamental institutional failure is the Pervasive Communication Breakdowns, resulting from internal bureaucratic friction, causing essential documents to reach stakeholders late, severely compromising their ability to participate effectively. This untimely and insufficient

flow of information, compounded by the technical opacity of the content, creates a critical literacy barrier.

The document analysis provided crucial evidence of this opacity: the Composite Budgets (2022, 2023, 2024) are structured using the Programme Based Budget (PBB) format full of technical codes and high-level bureaucratic/financial language.

An Assembly Member vividly confirmed the logistical burden of these procedural issues:

*“The documents arrive late, sometimes just a few days before the public hearing. How can I sensitize my constituents properly when I myself am struggling to grasp the details in time? This procedural rush makes participation merely symbolic and guarantees low turnout.” (KI R7, Assembly Member)*

This delay and technical complexity reflect a critical strategic public relations capacity gap. The PR function is either not empowered or not equipped to act as the primary translator and boundary spanner, failing to simplify and localize complex information.

### **Theme 3: Trust Deficit and the Absence of Control Mutuality**

The most debilitating challenge identified is the Trust Deficit and Perception of Unresponsiveness, which fundamentally contravenes the tenets of Relationship Management Theory. The systemic lack of a transparent follow-up mechanism reinforces the pervasive feeling that participation is a mere formality or tokenism. The absence of a clear feedback loop showing how input was used or why it was rejected confirms the public’s belief that their role is decorative.

Citizens and key stakeholders overwhelmingly confirmed this failure to achieve control mutuality:

*An Assembly Member stated, “Trust is at its lowest level. I am the one who bears the brunt of the Assembly’s failure to deliver on promises because the citizens only see me.” (KI R7, Assembly Member)*

An FGD participant articulated the resulting frustration over the slow pace and lack of follow-up:

*“The response time is too slow. A problem that needed to be fixed last month might be on the agenda for next year's budget. They must close the feedback loop.” (FGD Response 4 and 2)*

This institutional failure to cultivate control mutuality leads to widespread citizen apathy.

#### **Theme 4: Structural Barriers: Elite Capture and Policy Bias**

The empirical data highlighted the persistent challenge of Elite Capture and **Policy Bias**. Participation spaces (like durbars) are consistently dominated by influential figures such as educated elites and traditional leaders, marginalizing other voices. The NPDA’s passive PR approach fails to employ strategic inclusion measures.

The data proving the bias and marginalization is found in the interviews and document analysis:

The Head of Social Welfare (R4) confirmed the structural bias: *“My unit's feedback is rarely incorporated into the major budget items, as they prioritize physical infrastructure over social projects”*.

The financial records of the Assembly offer two clear instances of this marginalization. One significant example is the 2024 Budget allocation for the Social Welfare and Community Development Unit, which stands at only GH¢ 123,028. When compared to the multimillion-  
cedi allocations for infrastructure and general administration, this low figure provides objective evidence that the social needs of vulnerable groups are a lower institutional priority.

Furthermore, the budget reveals that a disproportionate GH¢ 5.3 million is dedicated to personnel compensation, leaving very little flexible capital to address the specific social intervention requests gathered during citizen durbars.

The document analysis supports this, showing that the 2024 Budget allocated only GH¢ 123,028 to the Social Welfare Unit, confirming that policy is biased towards physical infrastructure projects rather than the social issues raised by vulnerable groups.

### **Theme 5: Limited and Reactive Digital Engagement (Functional Failure)**

The NPDA demonstrates Limited and Reactive Digital Engagement, signifying a critical functional failure in adapting to contemporary communication norms. The minimal online presence, chiefly on a sporadically updated social media platform, is used almost exclusively for the one-way transmission of Public Information.

A citizen participating in an FGD articulated this disconnect:

*“They have a Facebook page, yes, but if you complain about the poor roads, they don't respond. It's mostly just pictures of the DCE at a ceremony. We don't feel heard there, and the page is often quiet for weeks, showing they don't see it as a serious channel for dialogue.” (FGD Response)*

The lack of proactive monitoring and timely response creates a vacuum of accountability, directly contributing to the public perception of institutional indifference and neglect.

### **4.2.3 Research Objective 3: Perceptions of Effectiveness of Current Citizen Participation Initiatives**

Perceptions of effectiveness were found to be critically polarized, reflecting a fundamental misalignment in expectations between the Assembly and the public, with each group measuring success using entirely different criteria.

## **Theme 6: Institutional Perspective: Compliance as the Measure of Success**

The Institutional Perception (Compliance-Driven Effectiveness) reveals that NPDA officials generally rate the initiatives as 'moderately effective' or 'average'. Their metric for success is tied strictly to the successful fulfillment of statutory requirements, viewing the holding of a durbar or the publishing of a notice as the endpoint.

A Senior Staff member summarized this view:

*“We meet the requirements of the Local Government Act. We hold the durbars, we publish the notices. We are doing our part. If people don't turn up, it is down to citizen apathy, not our lack of provision.” (KI R6, Human Resource Officer)*

This perspective is highly problematic because it equates minimum legal compliance with effective participation. This confirms that the organization is operating in a purely monologic Public Information mindset, where the goal is internal audit compliance, not external relationship health.

## **Theme 7: Policy Implementation as a Measure of Effectiveness**

Findings from the field research indicate a significant divergence in how effectiveness is defined by the institution versus the public. While the Assembly often views the successful execution of a town hall meeting as an effective outcome, the citizen perception (Tokenism and Limited Implementation) strongly indicates that residents view these initiatives through the lens of Arnstein's Ladder of Participation, operating merely at the levels of Informing or Consultation. For the citizens, genuine effectiveness is intrinsically linked to the Assembly's ability to physically deliver on promises and demonstrably implement the projects discussed during engagement sessions.

This critical lack of a visible connection between citizen input and actual policy implementation solidifies a feeling of tokenism. An Assembly Member (R7) highlighted this gap, noting that the procedural nature of these events often undermines their perceived value:

*“The citizens see these participation events as just a formality. They feel the decisions are already made. If there's no visible connection between their input and what the Assembly delivers, they don't see it as effective at all, and it is hard to convince them otherwise.” (KI R7, Assembly Member)*

To hear from the citizens directly, an FGD participant reinforced that implementation is the only true measure of communication success:

*"They need to deliver on their promises. The best communication is when we see the completed road or the new clinic." (FGD Response 5)*

The 'trust deficit' is corroborated by two distinct procedural gaps found in the Assembly's planning documents. Analysis of the 2024 Budget shows that structural financial constraints specifically the high cost of compensation (GH¢ 5.3m) directly limit the Assembly's ability to fund the capital projects citizens demand, thereby explaining the persistent implementation gap. Additionally, a review of the 2023-2024 Annual Action Plans (AAP) reveals that there is no formal mechanism or dedicated section for tracking citizen inputs from one cycle to the next. This procedural silence confirms the field data finding that there is no transparent way for citizens to see if their voices have any actual impact on final decisions.

This subjective experience of the citizens is corroborated by the Document Analysis of the Assembly's fiscal records. A review of the 2024 Composite Budget reveals a structural reason for this implementation gap; while the Assembly has a total budget of GH¢ 13,569,239, a substantial portion (GH¢ 5,368,653) is consumed by the compensation of employees. This

leaves a shrinking portion of the budget for the capital expenditure required to fund the very roads and clinics that citizens use as their metric for effectiveness.

Ultimately, this highlight's a fundamental disconnect: the public requires demonstrable policy implementation to perceive an initiative as effective, whereas the institution currently prioritizes procedural completion. Without aligning these two perspectives, the "trust deficit" identified in the district is likely to persist.

### **4.3 Discussion of Findings: Theoretical and Managerial Implications**

The empirical findings from the NPDA case offer profound theoretical and managerial implications, confirming that communication deficits are not peripheral, but central barriers to democratic decentralization. This section discusses how the findings align with and diverge from established academic theories, supported by verifiable citations.

#### **4.3.1 Failure to Achieve Symmetrical Communication and Co-Creation**

The study's findings consistently demonstrate that the NPDA operates predominantly within the Public Information Model, characterized by its heavy reliance on one-way dissemination through statutory channels (Theme 1) and a reactive digital presence (Theme 5). This operational choice directly obstructs the achievement of the Two-Way Symmetrical Model (Grunig, 2001), which is the normative ideal for democratic, decentralized governance.

The persistence of this asymmetrical practice, first codified by Grunig and Hunt (1984), demonstrates that in the context of Ghanaian local government, public relations often defaults to a bureaucratic tool for compliance and monologue. This finding aligns with local studies on public sector communication in Ghana (Ofori-Mensah, 2018).

The identified communication breakdowns (Theme 2) and the pervasive elite capture (Theme 4) illustrate a fundamental failure to practice the mutual adjustment necessary for symmetry.

The inability of the Assembly to proactively simplify complex, technical information (Theme 2) and actively seek out marginalized voices (Theme 4) means that the process lacks both procedural and substantive equality. This echoes Gaventa's (2004) work on participation, which argues that institutional structures and power dynamics in consultation spaces often constrain genuine public influence. Consequently, citizen participation is functionally constrained to the lowest rung of engagement, preventing the co-creation of local policies. The Assembly's monologic communication culture ultimately limits the quality, ownership, and democratic legitimacy of local policies.

#### **4.3.2 The Trust Deficit and Relational Management Failure**

The pervasive trust deficit and lack of control mutuality (Theme 3) serve as conclusive empirical evidence of a failing organization-public relationship when assessed against the Relationship Management Theory (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). This theory posits that the ultimate value of public relations lies in its ability to cultivate positive, enduring relationships measured by outcomes like trust, satisfaction, and control mutuality.

The NPDA's institutional focus on statutory compliance (Theme 6) over establishing a transparent feedback mechanism (Theme 3) reveals a fundamental strategic error: PR is viewed purely as a technical, event-based output rather than a continuous process for managing vital stakeholder relationships. The breakdown in trust is a direct consequence of the Assembly's unwillingness to demonstrate accountability the cornerstone of good governance and symmetrical relations (Hon & Grunig, 1999). The complete absence of a visible feedback loop that explains policy decisions in relation to public input constitutes a critical failure in managing the expectations and satisfaction of the citizenry.

This relational failure aligns with the principle that public trust is intrinsically linked to visible responsiveness and the demonstration of policy influence (Kearns, 2004). The study confirms

that the absence of perceived procedural fairness where input is visibly valued is the primary, communicative driver of this deep-seated relational failure, increasing the long-term cost of policy implementation, as compliance and cooperation become difficult to secure from a cynical and disengaged public.

### **4.3.3 The Strategic PR Capacity Gap and Decentralization**

The synthesis of findings points to a significant PR capacity gap within the NPDA, suggesting the function is currently relegated to a purely technician role. The challenges identified (Themes 2, 3, 4, and 5) are strategic in nature and cannot be solved by a technical, output-focused PR unit. The current passivity allows structural issues like elite capture and pervasive communication barriers to persist, demonstrating that the PR function is not effectively acting as a boundary spanner that interprets public sentiment to management and translates complex policy to the public.

The reactive and limited digital engagement (Theme 5) supports concerns in E-Governance research that government agencies often adopt new technologies for one-way information dissemination rather than two-way citizen dialogue (Bertot et al., 2010). Furthermore, the persistence of the monologic model and structural biases (Theme 4) impedes the effective implementation of Ghana's decentralization mandate (Smoke, 2015).

For Ghana's decentralization policy to fully realize its democratic potential, the findings assert that local assemblies must strategically empower the PR function to evolve beyond administration. This entails providing the necessary resources and executive mandate for the Communications office to simplify complex information, proactively target marginalized publics, and champion genuine two-way communication, thereby transforming participation from a formal, legal requirement into a functional, democratic reality.

#### 4.4. Triangulation of Findings

To validate the field findings, the qualitative data was triangulated with evidence from the NPDA 2024–2027 Composite Budget and the 2023–2024 Annual Action Plans (AAP). This process explains and confirms the perceptions shared by participants.

*Table 2: Triangulation of Field Data and Official Documents*

<b>Research Theme</b>	<b>Qualitative Finding (Field Data)</b>	<b>Document Analysis Evidence</b>
	<b>Technical Literacy Barriers</b>	Participants (R2, R5) found info "confusing" and "too technical".
<b>Marginalization of Groups</b>	R4 felt social welfare input is marginalized.	1. Social Welfare Unit allocated only GH¢ 123,028.  2. Administrative compensation (GH¢ 5.3m) dwarfs social spending.
<b>The "Trust Deficit"</b>	Citizens only trust the Assembly when projects are completed.	1. Shrinking capital budget due to high personnel costs.  2. Absence of a citizen input tracking section in the AAPs.

#### 4.5 Chapter Summary

The empirical findings from the Ningo Prampram District Assembly (NPDA) conclusively established that the organization's public relations practice operates overwhelmingly within the Public Information Model, failing to meet the normative ideal of the Two-Way Symmetrical Model necessary for democratic decentralized governance (Grunig, 2001; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). This strategic deficit, characterized by reliance on monologic statutory channels and

compliance-focused digital engagement, manifests in three pervasive systemic challenges that undermine participation: a critical literacy barrier due to technically opaque policy documents (Gaventa, 2004); a severe trust deficit rooted in the absence of a transparent feedback mechanism; and the perpetuation of elite capture within participatory forums (Smoke, 2015). Theoretically, this failure reflects a profound lack of control mutuality, which, according to Relationship Management Theory (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000), is the primary factor damaging the organization-public relationship. Ultimately, a critical disconnect was confirmed: the Assembly measures effectiveness by statutory compliance, while the public judges it by demonstrated policy influence, positioning communication deficits as central barriers to achieving democratic decentralization.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Introduction

This final chapter serves to conclude the study by providing a concise, academically robust summary of the research methodology and key findings, presenting definitive conclusions derived from the empirical analysis, and offering specific, actionable recommendations for the Ningo Prampram District Assembly (NPDA), accompanied by guidance for future research endeavours.

#### 5.1 Summary of the Study

This investigation provided an in-depth, qualitative analysis of the public relations perspective of citizen participation in local government policy-making, contextualized within the NPDA. The research was initiated due to the observed incongruence between the constitutional mandate for inclusive governance and the reality of limited, often tokenistic, citizen involvement. The study addressed three specific objectives: examining the NPDA's PR strategies, identifying communication-related challenges to participation, and evaluating stakeholder perceptions of effectiveness. A rigorous qualitative case study design was employed, leveraging in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The data interpretation was critically grounded in the Two-Way Symmetrical Model and the Relationship Management Theory.

The empirical findings conclusively established that the NPDA's PR practice is defined by traditional, monologic channels aimed primarily at statutory compliance. Significant systemic obstacles identified include pervasive communication breakdowns due to untimely and complex information, creating a critical literacy barrier; a severe trust deficit rooted in

institutional unresponsiveness (lack of follow-up); and persistent elite capture within participatory spaces. Overall, citizens perceive current initiatives as tokenistic and ineffective, confirming a critical functional gap in public engagement that severely limits the democratic promise of decentralization.

## **5.2 Conclusions**

Based on the critical synthesis of the empirical evidence presented in Chapter Four and the governing theoretical frameworks, the study reaches three primary, definitive conclusions:

### **Conclusion 1: Failure of Symmetrical Practice and Procedural Fairness**

The NPDA's public relations strategies are fundamentally characterized by the Public Information Model, exhibiting a clear failure to execute the principles of the Two-Way Symmetrical Model (Grunig, 2001). This strategic deficiency evidenced by the absence of a structured dialogue and mutual adjustment in channels like durbars and social media limits participation to the lower functional levels of Informing and Consultation . Consequently, the Assembly compromises procedural fairness and inclusivity, as the process is perceived as merely ceremonial, thereby hindering the legitimate co-creation of local policy and the democratic advancement of decentralization.

### **Conclusion 2: The Relationship Legitimacy Deficit**

The study concludes that the core challenges faced by the NPDA are manifestations of a severe relationship legitimacy deficit, directly resulting from a failure to strategically manage the organization-public relationship. The systematic lack of a transparent feedback mechanism directly erodes trust, satisfaction, and control mutuality the cardinal relational outcomes central to Ledingham and Bruning's theory (2000). The pervasive trust deficit is thus an institutional failure to value and visibly incorporate citizen input, positioning the NPDA as an unresponsive

entity and fundamentally undermining the overall legitimacy of policy implementation in the eyes of the public.

### **Conclusion 3: The Need for Strategic PR Re-Conceptualisation**

The analysis confirms a critical gap in the strategic capacity of the NPDA's PR function. The current passive role, focused on administrative duties, perpetuates structural issues such as elite capture and literacy barriers. The study concludes that for meaningful citizen participation to be realized, the PR function must be strategically re-conceptualised and empowered to move beyond technical dissemination, serving instead as a strategic advisor and boundary spanner to proactively ensure inclusiveness, simplify complex policy, and champion genuine two-way symmetrical engagement from the highest level of executive management.

## **5.3 Theoretical and Managerial Contributions**

The findings of this study offer significant contributions to both the theory of public relations and the practice of local governance in Ghana:

### **5.3.1 Theoretical Contribution**

This research extends the applicability and empirical testing of the Relationship Management Theory to the specific context of African local governance. It empirically validates that the absence of the key relational outcome of control mutuality as demonstrated by the lack of a transparent feedback loop is the primary, communicative driver of the trust deficit and participatory apathy in decentralized systems. Furthermore, it provides contextual evidence that the failure to transition from the low-level Public Information Model to the high-level Two-Way Symmetrical Model directly translates into a legitimacy crisis for public policy at the district level, linking PR model selection directly to governance outcomes.

### **5.3.2 Managerial Contribution**

The study provides a clear, evidence-based roadmap for local government administrators in Ghana. It highlights that the most effective intervention is not increased spending on traditional events, but the systemic implementation of a transparent accountability system (e.g., a formal Citizen Input Tracking System or CITS) to restore trust and demonstrate procedural fairness. By shifting focus from process completion (durbars held) to outcome achievement (trust built), the Assemblies can secure greater citizen buy-in and compliance, thereby lowering the long-term social cost of policy implementation.

### **5.4 Recommendations**

The study offers the following specific and actionable recommendations to the Ningo Prampram District Assembly and analogous local government bodies, categorized by the level of strategic intervention required:

#### **5.4.1 Strategic Public Relations and Communication Implementation**

The first set of recommendations focuses on transforming communication from a monologic approach to a strategic two-way engagement model. The NPDA must formally move away from the restrictive Public Information Model by mandating a Mixed-Motive Two-Way Communication Strategy. This shift should be operationalized through accessible local channels, such as launching a weekly local language radio or community broadcast call-in show, where senior management (the DCE or DCD) actively seeks and discusses feedback in real time, rather than merely reading prepared statements. Crucially, the Assembly must institutionalize a Citizen Input Tracking System (CITS).

This CITS is essential for accountability, requiring the production of a detailed, public-facing report after every major public consultation. This report must clearly delineate the specific citizen input received and explicitly state the rationale for how that input was utilized,

modified, or rejected in the final policy decision. This system must be advertised as a public right and is essential for restoring trust and demonstrating control mutuality. Furthermore, to address the systemic literacy barrier and ensure procedural fairness, the Assembly must dedicate budgetary allocation to developing Inclusive and Simplified Communication Content. This content should be professionally designed, translated into accessible local dialects, and presented using highly visual formats (infographics, short videos) to promote equitable understanding across all demographics.

#### **5.4.2 Relationship Management and Institutional Capacity Building**

To address the underlying relationship legitimacy deficit, the next set of recommendations targets institutional capacity and accountability. The NPDA must re-budget its PR efforts to Prioritize Control Mutuality via Accountability, shifting focus from singular event promotion to continuous relationship maintenance. This involves establishing a permanent, designated desk or digital portal for feedback, coupled with a commitment to promptly responding to or addressing major community concerns within a specified timeframe (e.g., seven working days), thereby actively demonstrating institutional responsiveness and reducing the trust deficit. Furthermore, the study recommends a high-level commitment to Empower the PR Function as Strategic Management.

The District Chief Executive (DCE) and the District Coordinating Director (DCD) must champion this by ensuring the Communication outfit is included in all senior management and policy formulation meetings. This inclusion enables the PR unit to serve as a strategic advisor that can proactively assess public opinion and mitigate relational risks of policy decisions before public announcement. Finally, to actively combat elite capture, the Assembly must Implement Targeted Inclusion Programs. These should be specific, informal consultative workshops aimed exclusively at marginalized groups, such as women's associations, youth groups, and non-literate vendors, utilizing non-intimidating and simplified engagement

methods within the groups' own environments, thereby proactively securing equity and inclusivity.

### **5.4.3 Recommendations for Policy and Further Research**

The final recommendations extend beyond the NPDA to national policy and the future research agenda. At the national level, the Policy Recommendation is directed at the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralization and Rural Development. The Ministry should review the implementation guidelines of the Local Government Act to clearly mandate and resource the strategic role of Public Relations. This mandate should specifically require all Assemblies to establish a transparent, two-way feedback mechanism, like the CITS, as a condition for both performance assessment and decentralization fund allocation. This systemic change will embed relational accountability into the governance structure.

For Future Research, the study recommends a shift to a longitudinal, quantitative approach. Researchers should employ survey instruments to rigorously measure the long-term impact of the proposed CITS intervention on key relational outcomes specifically trust, control mutuality, and citizen satisfaction over a two-to-three-year period across multiple District Assemblies. This approach is vital to quantitatively validate the effectiveness of the strategic PR prescriptions in diverse local governance contexts, providing the necessary data for generalizing the findings beyond the NPDA case study.

## **5.5 Chapter Summary**

This chapter synthesized the analytical findings from Chapter Four to reach definitive conclusions and propose a prescriptive roadmap for reform. The study concluded that the Ningo Prampram District Assembly (NPDA) suffers from both a symmetrical failure and a consequent relational legitimacy deficit, necessitating the strategic re-conceptualization and empowerment of the Public Relations function. The study's theoretical contribution lies in empirically

validating that the absence of the relational outcome of control mutuality is the central communicative factor undermining trust within this African local governance context. Managerially, the core recommendation asserts that the most effective intervention is not increased output, but the systemic implementation of accountability.

This involves the formal transition to a mixed-motive two-way communication strategy and, most critically, the institutionalization of a Citizen Input Tracking System (CITS). The CITS is designed as a transparent accountability mechanism required to publish reports detailing the specific rationale for how public input was utilized or rejected, thereby restoring procedural fairness and mitigating the trust deficit. Further recommendations included empowering the Communications outfit as a strategic advisor and boundary spanner, implementing targeted inclusion programs to combat elite capture, and mandating a national policy review to resource the strategic role of public relations in all District Assemblies.

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## APPENDIX

Dear Resident of Ningo Prampram District,

My name is Joshua Tetteh, a Masters student at UniMAC- IJ. I am conducting a research study titled: **"A Public Relations Perspective of Citizen Participation in Local Government Policy Making: A Case of the Ningo Prampram District Assembly in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana."**

The purpose of this study is to understand your experiences and perceptions regarding how the Ningo Prampram District Assembly communicates and involves citizens in its policy-making processes. Your valuable insights will help us examine the public relations strategies employed, identify challenges, and assess the effectiveness of current citizen participation initiatives from your perspective.

Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary, and all information you provide will be treated with the strictest confidentiality. Your responses will be used solely for academic purposes and will be analyzed anonymously.

By sharing your perspective, you will contribute significantly to improving local governance and citizen engagement in our district.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful contribution.

Sincerely,

Joshua Tetteh

## INTERVIEW GUIDE

### Section A: General Information & Background

1. Could you please state your official title and a brief overview of your role at the Ningo Prampram District Assembly (NPDA)?
2. How long have you been in this role?
3. What are your primary responsibilities related to communication and public engagement?

### Section B: Public Relations Strategies for Citizen Participation

- **(This section addresses Research Question 1: "What are the public relations strategies currently employed by the Ningo Prampram District Assembly to facilitate citizen participation in local government policy-making?")**
4. How does the NPDA currently communicate with the public about upcoming policy-making processes, meetings, or public hearings?
  5. What communication channels do you primarily use to reach citizens (e.g., radio, social media, community durbars, notice boards, public address systems)?
    - *Follow-up:* Can you give an example of how a specific policy proposal was communicated to the public using these channels?
  6. Are there specific strategies or campaigns you have implemented to actively encourage citizens to participate in policy-making, beyond just informing them?
    - *Follow-up:* What kind of language or messaging do you use to make complex policy information more accessible to the public?
  7. How do you collect feedback or input from citizens on policy proposals? What mechanisms are in place for two-way communication?

### Section C: Challenges in Fostering Participation

- **(This section addresses Research Question 2: "What challenges do the Ningo Prampram District Assembly face in fostering meaningful citizen participation in policy processes from a public relations perspective?")**

8. From a public relations standpoint, what are the most significant challenges you face when trying to get citizens to participate in policy-making?
9. Do you find that a lack of trust in the local government affects citizen turnout and engagement? If so, how do you try to address this?
10. What are the main resource constraints (e.g., budget, staff, technology) that hinder your ability to implement more effective communication and engagement strategies?
11. How do you deal with the diversity of the citizenry in Ningbo Prampram (e.g., varying literacy levels, different ethnic groups, urban vs. rural populations) when planning your communication?

#### **Section D: Perceptions of Effectiveness**

- **(This section addresses Research Question 3: "How effective are the current citizen participation initiatives, as perceived by public relations practitioners and key stakeholders at the Ningbo Prampram District Assembly?")**
12. In your opinion, how effective are the current citizen participation initiatives at the NPDA?
  13. How do you measure the success of your communication efforts regarding citizen participation? What metrics do you look at (e.g., attendance numbers, feedback received)?
  14. Do you believe the feedback and input received from citizens genuinely influence the final policy decisions? Why or why not?
  15. What would a truly effective citizen participation system look like from a public relations perspective? What changes or improvements would you recommend?

#### **Interview Guide for Other Key Stakeholders**

##### **Introduction:**

- Briefly introduce yourself and the purpose of the research.
- Explain the confidentiality of the responses and how the data will be used.
- Obtain consent to record the interview (if applicable).
- Thank the interviewee for their time.

## **Section A: General Information & Background**

1. Could you please state your official title and a brief overview of your role at the Ningo Prampram District Assembly (NPDA)?
2. In your role, how often do you interact with the public or receive input from them regarding policy-making?

## **Section B: Citizen Participation and Communication**

- **(This section addresses Research Questions 1 and 2 by gathering perspectives from non-PR stakeholders)**
3. From your perspective, what are the main methods the NPDA uses to get citizens involved in local policy-making?
  4. How effective do you think these methods are in reaching and engaging the majority of the district's population?
  5. In your experience, what are the biggest reasons why citizens may not participate in policy-making processes?

## **Section C: Perceptions of Effectiveness**

- **(This section addresses Research Question 3: "How effective are the current citizen participation initiatives, as perceived by public relations practitioners and key stakeholders at the Ningo Prampram District Assembly?")**
6. Do you believe that the NPDA effectively considers and incorporates citizen feedback into its policy-making decisions? Please explain your answer with an example if possible.
  7. What is your assessment of the relationship between the Assembly and the citizens it serves? Is there a high level of trust?
  8. What, in your view, could be done to improve citizen participation and engagement in the district? What role do you think communication and public relations should play in this?