

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT DECISION-MAKING IN GHANA:  
A CASE STUDY OF THE SUAME MUNICIPAL ASSEMBLY.



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## DECLARATION

I, Lucia Osei Asamoah, affirm that this mini-thesis titled "**Citizen Participation in Local Government Decision-Making in Ghana: A Case Study of the Suame Municipal Assembly**" is my work. I, at this moment, declare that, to the best of my knowledge, it does not contain any previously published or written material by another individual, nor does it include any substantial content that has been accepted for the granting of any other degree, diploma, or academic qualification from any other educational institution. Any external sources utilized in this thesis are appropriately acknowledged and referenced.

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## ABSTRACT

Scholarly consensus underscores the essential role of citizen engagement in local governance as a foundational element of representative democracy and effective governance. Across various African nations, the pursuit of increased democracy and good governance aligns with efforts to shift away from highly centralized systems toward models prioritizing individual initiatives and citizen involvement in governmental affairs. Inclusive participation is critical for municipal budgets, development plans, bylaws, and other aspects impacting citizens' daily lives. However, despite the growing demands for participation, accountability, and transparency, there remains a significant gap in well-defined and documented research on citizen participation in local government activities in Ghana. This qualitative case study is guided by Arnstein's Ladder of Participation and Fung's Varieties of Participation model. It focuses on the Suame Municipal Assembly (SMA) to examine the extent of citizen participation in local government decision-making in Ghana. The study's findings shed light on the significance of town halls and public hearings as crucial platforms for citizen engagement in local government decision-making at the SMA. Additionally, there are highlighted imbalances in influence during decision-making due to a knowledge gap between citizens and others, such as municipal staff and assembly members. Furthermore, the findings revealed that although there is some level of two-way communication during town hall and public hearings, officials often dominate the discussions, diminishing the importance of citizens' viewpoints within the Assembly. The study also identifies several barriers that hinder meaningful participation, including limited accessibility, inadequate information dissemination, inconsistent meeting scheduling, a perceived lack of influence, constraints imposed by legislative and policy frameworks, and financial limitations. To address these challenges, the study recommends that the Assembly expand avenues for citizen engagement and create an inclusive environment where citizens feel empowered.

**Keywords:** Governance, Democracy, Decentralization, Local Government, Decision-making, Planning, Budgeting, Citizen Participation, Suame, Ghana

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADC	African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance
ANC	African National Congress
DACF	District Assembly Common Fund
DDF	District Development Fund
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
IGF	Internally Development Fund
MMDAs	Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
OECD	Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development
RCC	Regional Coordinating Council
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SMA	Suame Municipal Assembly
VoP	Varieties of Participation



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## CHAPTER ONE

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Introduction

Scholars widely praise that citizen involvement in local governance is essential to representative democracy and good governance (Arnstein, 1969; Michels & de Graaf, 2010). Governance encompasses both the formal and informal procedures that control how public choices are made (Auriacombe & Sithomola, 2020). Good governance comprises participation, collaboration, transparency, responsibility, consensus, equality, and accountability (Auriacombe & Sithomola, 2020). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, accepted by all United Nations member states in 2015 and as a plan for peace and prosperity, guides many countries worldwide (Sustainable Development Goals Progress Report, 2020). At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Developed Goals (SDGs), which are proven more achievable with the practice of good governance by member states (SDG Progress Report, 2020). The principles that embody good governance have hence gained prominence in many countries.

Many Sub-Saharan African countries are signatories to the African Union's Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance (ADC). As such, they are expected to abide by its rules regarding the rule of law and the legal framework for democratic and participatory governance (Uwizeyimana & Maphunye, 2014). The quest for more democracy and good governance has been coupled in most African countries by attempts to graduate from a highly centralized system into one that exemplifies the merits of individual initiative and citizen participation in government affairs (Bawole, 2017). Democratic decentralization has gained acceptance over the past few decades as a means of promoting cooperation and synchronizing interactions between the various levels of government and the multiple sectors of a nation to encourage participation, transparency, equality, and accountability (Gaventa & Valderrama, 1999; Michels & de Graaf, 2010). Decentralization is the reorganization of the relationship between the central government and its subnational governments toward a more strategic role, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2019). It discusses how the central government delegated power and accountability to elected and appointed subnational bodies. (OECD, 2019). According

to Bossuyt and Gould (2000), decentralized governance empowers people by allowing more direct decision-making participation.

As democracies have emerged in Africa, a focus on enhancing citizen participation in decision-making has developed. Citizen participation in local governance is essential in representative democracy and good governance, and everyone applauds it (Arnstein, 1969; Michels & de Graaf, 2010). Participatory governance is represented in mechanisms that enable citizens to engage in public decision-making, and it has gained recognition as a powerful tool for promoting democracy and improving accountability (Michels & de Graaf, 2010). Callahan (2007) argues that citizens should be permitted to participate in policy decision-making that impacts their lives in ways other than voting and contacting elected officials. Citizen participation is explained by Callahan (2007) as involving the public in administrative and planning processes within government and that such interaction between citizens and administrators helps address policy and service delivery concerns. Citizen participation in local government decision-making is recognized for increasing development initiatives, transparency, accountability, and efficiency (Fung, 2006). Acheampong and Dinye (2015) also contend that such involvement can potentially restructure the conventional roles of citizens as outsiders and officials as authorities in local government affairs. Participation is necessary for government decision-making processes involving the municipal budget, development plans, bylaws, and other matters because these decisions impact citizens' daily lives (Piper & Von Lieres, 2008). This is particularly essential in West Africa, where lousy governance undermines government legitimacy, institutional capacity, and ethics.

Ghana, a country in the west of Africa, adopted a decentralization strategy in 1988 to bring governance down to the local level (Osman & Abdulai, 2018). Decentralization was predicated on the fundamental idea that local government decision-making should involve the public. Implementing a decentralized policy sought citizen empowerment, involvement, accountability, effectiveness, efficiency, and responsiveness (Ahwoi, 2010; Antwi-Boasiako, 2010). The Local Governance Act 936 of 2016 and other enabling laws, including the Republic of Ghana's Constitution (1992), demand that Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs) engage residents to ensure effective grass-roots participation (Constitution of Ghana, 1992). MMDAs are expected to seek feedback from the public within their demarcated areas on how best



to meet their needs. This study looks at citizen participation in local government decision-making in Ghana.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Most African countries have implemented a decentralized system, emphasizing developing and improving grassroots participation. Scholars have sought to evaluate the effectiveness of this participation. It has then been noticed that the region's most pressing challenge in today's increasingly complex societies is ensuring meaningful citizen participation in all levels of government decision-making (Chikerema, 2013). The region's numerous efforts to engage in participatory governance over the years appear to have had little success. Temesi and Teller (2013) assert that the capacity of local governments to involve citizens in providing services with which they have been tasked determines the effectiveness of this style of governance. Local governments often force citizens out by forbidding engagement (Plotajner & Mende, 2004). Chikerema (2013) claims that in some circumstances, citizens are provided with channels such as local government elections, participatory budgeting, consultative forums, and public hearings. Even when people use these channels, the local administration does not consider their suggestions (Auriacombe & Sithomola, 2020). Hence, municipalities operate without soliciting community feedback despite demands from statutory tools, including the constitution and procedures (Nel & Denoon-Stevens, 2015).

Regarding citizen involvement in local governance, Ghana is hardly an exception. Chapter 20 of Ghana's 1992 Constitution strongly emphasizes decentralization, and local governments must give citizens meaningful opportunities to participate in governance. However, participation has been predominantly limited to citizen involvement in local elections. Consequently, scholarly attention in Ghana has been mostly directed towards examining citizens' participation in local elections (Arkorful, Lugu, Hammond & Basiru, 2021; Ahenkan et al., 2013; Acheampong & Dinye, 2015; Amponsah, Opoku, Amankwa, & Dagba, 2017; Kpentey, 2019). However, existing frameworks encourage municipal assemblies to actively engage their communities beyond the bounds of the electoral process. This broader level of participation entails mechanisms through which citizens can voice their opinions, express concerns, and offer suggestions. Few scholars have explored citizen engagement beyond the scope of electoral contexts. Moreover, even with these few studies, the focus has been on the northern areas of the country (Akudu et al., 2012; Mohammed, 2016;



Be-ere, 2022; Mohammed et al., 2023), neglecting other crucial areas. It is necessary to recognize the fundamental significance of participation, evaluate its efficiency, and raise awareness across all levels. This study assesses citizen participation from the southern part of the country, specifically from the Ashanti Region of Ghana. Focusing on a municipality in this region is crucial to gaining a thorough understanding of how far the citizens participate in decision-making at the local government level. This study used the Suame Municipal Assembly in Ghana's Ashanti Region as a case study to shed light on this topic.

### **1.3 Research questions**

The main research question for this study was, what is the extent of citizen participation in the decision-making processes of the Suame Municipal Assembly (SMA) in Ghana?

Specifically, the study was guided by these questions.

1. What avenue(s) exist at the Suame Municipal Assembly for citizens to participate in decision-making?
2. What are the power dynamics inherent in the decision-making process at the Suame Municipal Assembly?
3. How far are the citizens' views considered during decision-making at the Suame Municipal Assembly?
4. What are the challenges and opportunities to strengthen citizen participation in decision-making at the Suame Municipal Assembly?

### **1.4 Research Aim and Objectives**

The study's main objective was to examine the extent of citizen participation in the decision-making processes of the Suame Municipal Assembly in Ghana. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. To identify the avenue(s) at the Suame Municipal Assembly for citizens to participate in decision-making.
2. To identify the power dynamics inherent in the decision-making process at the Suame Municipal Assembly.
3. To explore how far citizens' views are considered in decision-making at the Suame Municipal Assembly.

4. To present the challenges and opportunities to strengthen citizen participation in decision-making at the Suame Municipal Assembly.

### **1.5 Justification and Relevance of the Study to the Field of Public Administration**

Citizen participation in governance is a pillar of democratic societies. It empowers citizens by giving them a voice in decision-making processes and fosters transparency, accountability, and legitimacy in government actions. In the context of Ghana, a nation committed to numerous international agreements and development frameworks, including the Kigali Declaration (2005) on Leadership Capacity Building for Decentralized Governance and Poverty Reduction in Sub-Saharan Africa, pledges under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 16, comprehending the dynamics of citizen participation becomes imperative. However, the existing research on citizen participation in Ghana remains marred by regional biases. These biases limit our ability to gain a comprehensive understanding of how citizens across diverse regions and contexts in Ghana engage with governance processes.

Specifically, this study serves as a crucial resource for policymakers, offering evidence-based insights to guide the development and implementation of policies aimed at strengthening democratic processes and fostering increased citizen engagement within Ghana. Also, by extending the geographical scope of citizen participation studies within Ghana, this research enriches the existing body of knowledge in the field. It broadens our understanding of how citizens across various regions of the country engage with the democratic process, allowing for a more comprehensive assessment of the factors influencing citizen involvement. Lastly, this study is a foundational reference for future research on citizen engagement in Ghana. Researchers and scholars seeking to delve deeper into this area will find this study's findings and methodologies invaluable for building upon and expanding the knowledge base surrounding citizen participation within the country.

### **1.6 Limitations of the Study**

The study faced limitations due to its research approach, sample size, and data collection procedure. It primarily adopted a case study approach, which restricted the generalizability of the findings regarding citizen participation in local governance in Ghana. The limited scope of the

study period also prevented the inclusion of additional case studies. Also, using the snowball sampling method for the citizens led to overrepresenting certain groups and underrepresenting others, making it difficult to generalize findings to the broader population. Lastly, the Assembly allocated a staff member to assist the researcher with collecting data. Hence, respondents felt uncomfortable and hesitant to respond to specific questions, creating bias in responses.

### **1.7 Organization of the Study**

The study was structured into five chapters. In the first chapter, the focus was on the introduction, problem statement, research objectives, and the significance of the study. The second chapter was dedicated to a review of relevant literature and establishes the theoretical framework that underpins the study. Chapter three outlined the research methodology employed in the study. It described the approach used for data collection, the sample size, and the data collection procedures. In the fourth chapter, the collected data is analyzed. The fifth and final chapter presented the study's findings, conclusions, and recommendations.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a comprehensive review of the literature related to the research topic. The chapter begins by defining essential concepts such as decentralization, local government, citizen, citizen participation, and decision-making. The review covers various underlying themes such as the decision-making process of local governments, the mechanisms for citizen participation in decision-making, the extent of involvement, the intended goals and outcomes of participation, barriers to participation, and ways to strengthen participation. Additionally, this chapter explores Ghana's decentralized system framework and identifies the constitutional provisions for citizen participation. The chapter then discusses the theoretical framework underpinning this study, including Arnstein's Ladder of Participation and Fung's Variety of Participation model.

#### **2.1 Definition of concepts**

##### **2.1.1 Decentralization**

Decentralization has gained widespread promotion globally and has become a well-known concept in most parts of the world. Its adoption in underdeveloped nations in Latin America, Asia, and Africa was motivated by the conviction that it can advance development and widen the sociopolitical landscape (Arkorful et al., 2021). Although different scholars have contested the concept, there are similarities in their definitions. Decentralization, for instance, was described by Rondinelli (1992) as the transfer of decision-making authority and accountability from the central government to the local sector. According to Bossuyt and Gould (2000), decentralization is the transfer of resources, responsibilities, and decision-making authority to democratically elected local authorities that are mostly or separate from the national government. Similarly, Bawole (2017) noted that decentralization involves the transfer of obligations and power from a higher government institution to a lower government. According to the definitions, decentralization is the vertical or horizontal transfer of authority to make decisions, responsibility for carrying them out,

and resources, typically from one administrative/political structure at the top to another at the bottom.

### **2.1.2 Local government**

The concept of local government has a long history, dating back to ancient civilizations and community groups (Smith, 2005). Scholars have associated the idea with democracy, decentralization, and governance (Smith, 2005). Chikerema (2013) argues that local government is crucial for democratization and promoting mass participation in decision-making. Indeed, local government is the cornerstone of a democratic political system, as it enables intelligent and responsible citizenship. Local government is an outcome of devolution, which, in turn, is a consequence of decentralization (Chikerema, 2013). Instead, Shah (2006) noted that different countries have established local governments through diverse methods. They were found, for instance, by special clauses in the national constitutions of various nations, such as Japan and India (Shah, 2006). On the other hand, countries like the US and Australia have established local governments within their state institutions (Shah, 2006). Additionally, several nations, including the United Kingdom and New Zealand, have created local governments by enacting laws at a higher level of central government (Shah, 2006). China has established local governments through presidential decrees, while Canada and Pakistan have done so through provincial legislation (Shah, 2006). Local governments are defined by Ozer and Akcakaya (2014) as government agencies with unique resources, budgets, and staff who have legal obligations and authority to make decisions that serve the needs of the community where they are located. The local governments are mandated to deliver a range of specified services to a relatively small geographically delineated area. The definitions from various scholars show that local governments are the decentralized bodies that are given the power, responsibilities, and resources to carry out these duties within a specific geographical area.

### **2.1.3 Participation**

The concept of participation encompasses various dimensions and interpretations across different disciplines and contexts. In development studies, Chambers (1994) defines participation as how those who have a stake in an issue influence and share control over the decisions. This definition emphasizes stakeholders' active involvement and empowerment in shaping development



outcomes. Participation refers to the involvement of individuals or groups in decision-making processes that affect their lives and communities (Cornwall, 2008). This concept can take various forms, such as political participation (voting and protesting), social participation (volunteering and community organizing), and more. Scholars like Arnstein (1969) have viewed participation as a crucial component of social justice and democracy since it includes various views and perspectives in decision-making. She introduces the concept of the "ladder of citizen participation," emphasizing the varying degrees of influence citizens can have in decision-making processes. Cornwall (2008) has also linked participation to individual empowerment, social cohesion, and positive social outcomes. Cooke and Kothari (2001) define participation, highlighting its transformative potential. They describe participation as enabling people you work with to influence and share control over the decisions that affect them (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). This definition emphasizes the aim of participation to challenge power structures and promote social change. Fung (2006) defines participation as the active involvement of citizens in public decision-making processes. According to Fung, citizen inclusion in decision-making enhances the quality and legitimacy of decisions (2006). The concept of participation encompasses a range of definitions that reflect its multidimensional nature. These definitions highlight the varying degrees of citizen influence, the transformative potential of participation, and its role in democratic governance.

#### **2.1.4 Citizen and Citizen Participation**

The term 'citizen' was initially employed in the 1960s concerning urban renewal and anti-poverty measures (Andre, 2014). Kymlicka (2017) defines a citizen as a political community member with legal rights and duties within that community. Citizenship can be understood formally as well as substantively. Formal citizenship refers to the legal status and privileges the state bestows on individuals, such as the right to vote. In contrast, substantive citizenship relates to people's level of engagement and inclusion in a political community (Isin & Turner, 2002). Race, class, gender, and sexuality can all impact this (Isin & Turner, 2002).

Citizen participation is a crucial component of decentralized governance. As governments transition from simply decentralizing power to fully implementing decentralized governance, participation becomes increasingly essential (Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007). Cunningham (1972) identified three key elements that constitute citizen participation. The first element involves



ordinary individuals who do not hold formal positions of power within the community (Cunningham, 1972). The second element is the exercise of power by these individuals, and the third element involves decisions that significantly impact the community (Cunningham, 1972). Therefore, citizen participation refers specifically to the involvement of ordinary people with limited power sources in decision-making processes related to their community.

Cunill (1997, as cited in Gaventa & Valderrama, 1999) notes that while citizen participation is related to political participation, it is distinct in that it encompasses participation that is not mediated by political parties but by citizens beyond voting for political authorities. Gaventa and Valderrama (1999) defined citizen participation as the active involvement of citizens with a particular social interest in public activities. Similarly, Fourie (2001) defines the concept as the democratic right of citizens to participate in decision-making that directly affects their lives. As described by Devas and Grant (2003), citizen involvement is the process through which people have a say in and control over choices that impact them. Similarly, Esau (2008) describes it as an approach that enables citizens to participate in decision-making processes that affect their daily lives. Taking a broader view, Andre (2014) characterizes it as a process in which ordinary individuals, whether acting independently or as part of a group, voluntarily or as a matter of obligation, participate to influence decisions that affect their community. In summary, the definitions capture the idea that citizen participation is when citizens are allowed to participate in decisions that affect their day-to-day activities at the central or local government levels. This study focuses on this participation at the local level of government.

### **2.1.5 Decision-making**

Decision-making has been used in various subjects, including mathematics, sociology, psychology, economics, and political science. Simon (1977) defines decision-making as selecting various options or courses of action based on specific criteria or values. This definition focuses on the action undertaken by the actors. Other scholars indicate the actors or levels at which these actions take place. For instance, Schoemaker and Russo (2016) state that it entails an individual, group, or organization deciding on future activities to pursue, given a set of objectives and resource constraints. Moreover, decisions can be made at several levels, from individual choices to group or organizational decisions. They can include rational and non-rational variables such as emotions, values, and prejudices (Schoemaker & Russo, 2016). Some definitions also stress the stages

involved in undertaking the action of selection from various options. For example, Walker and Miller (2020) state that decision-making involves several stages, including identifying the problems that need immediate attention, defining the proposed strategy, adopting it, and assessing its effectiveness. Different actors may have varying degrees of influence and input at each stage, depending on the issue at hand (Walker & Miller, 2020). Consideration of many perspectives, exploring options, and evaluating prospective outcomes based on criteria or values are all required for effective decision-making. In this research, it is the process by which the local government decides how to allocate resources in a way that affects the people within a specific geographical area.

## **2.2 Forms of Decentralization**

The forms of decentralization are the various ways the concept presents itself. From the literature, there are three forms of decentralization. These include deconcentration, delegation, and devolution.

### **2.2.1 Deconcentration**

Johnson (2002) claims decentralization entails deconcentration when local authorities are urged to take on duties that central line agencies formerly handled. Nonetheless, Ozmen (2014) highlights that the transferred function primarily impacts the geographical distribution of authority, with only a minor and insignificant change in the autonomy of the receiving entity. Hence, it is considered the least effective type of decentralization used in decentralized states (Ozmen, 2014).

### **2.2.2 Delegation**

Delegation is the most extensive form of decentralization. Schneider (2003, as cited in Ozmen, 2014) characterized this phenomenon as the transfer of authority to local governments, making them both subordinate and autonomous entities concerning the federal government. The national government transfers tasks when certain entities are created, such as implementation units (Ozmen, 2014). The primary difference between deconcentration and delegation is how the central government exercises control. In the case of delegation, the central government relinquishes specific powers and functions to local governments through agreements, establishing clear lines of accountability for the actions taken by the latter.

### **2.2.3 Devolution**

According to Johnson (2002), devolution is a type of decentralization in which local bodies are given the political and financial power to carry out tasks delegated to them. Devolution is the transfer of authority from the top government to lower levels (OECD, 2001). Devolution typically shifts responsibility for services to local governments, empowering them to elect their mayors and councils, generate revenue, and possess independent decision-making power (Ozmen, 2014). According to Ozmen (2014), devolution provides the highest level of autonomy among the three forms of decentralization.

## **2.3 Types of Decentralization**

The three components of decentralization show how powers, responsibilities, and resources are transferred to local governments. Renckens (2012) identifies these as administrative decentralization, political decentralization, and fiscal decentralization.

### **2.3.1 Administrative decentralization**

Administrative decentralization is the first component the central government seeks to disseminate to local governments, including planning and delivery of education, health, sanitation, and others (Renckens, 2012). Rondinelli (1992, as cited in Ozmen, 2014) observed that the concept involves delegating planning, financing, and management responsibilities for certain functions from the central to local government entities. Administrative decentralization can also be explained as moving branches and authority at the national level to the local areas and officials (Der Bebelleh & Nobabumah, 2013).

### **2.3.2 Political decentralization**

This concept is usually associated with systems where power is dispersed among various groups, and citizens elect representatives to act on their behalf (Ozmen, 2014). It provides for the direct election of some local government members as it features elected and appointed executives. Manor (1995, as cited in Der Bebelleh & Nobabumah, 2013) defined political decentralization as the transfer of authority and the resources needed by local authorities who act independently of the national government.

By transferring law-making authority to the local level, political decentralization, according to Topal (2005), intends to offer more power to the populace and their locally elected representatives in public decision-making. These decentralized systems typically have three levels of government. These are the tiers of government at the national, regional, and local levels (Ozmen, 2014).

### 2.3.3 Fiscal decentralization

Fiscal decentralization gives local governments the authority and obligation to levy taxes on their population and establish an open and participatory system for individuals to participate in budget decisions (Renckens, 2012). Manor (1995, as cited in Der Bebelleh & Nobabumah, 2013) points out that it is the delegation of control over budgetary and financial decisions to decentralized officials. Since the design and implementation of fiscal decentralization are crucial to the success of decentralization reform, it is seen as more critical and challenging to undertake (Berg, 2004). According to the World Bank (2013), fiscal decentralization can be implemented under specific circumstances, including self-financing through user fees, co-financing in which users contribute money or labor, increasing local revenues, transferring general revenues from taxes collected by the central government to local governments, and finally, allowing municipals to borrow.

**Table 2.1: Forms and Types of Decentralization**

Decentralization Strategy	Type of Decentralization	Recipient Institution
Deconcentration	Administrative	Governments bureaucratic units
Delegation	Administrative and Fiscal	Public corporations, executive agencies
Devolution	Administrative, Fiscal, and Political	Democratically elected Local governments

Source: Pastory (2014)

## 2.4 Decision-making in Local Governments

Local governments are responsible for making decisions that directly impact the lives of citizens within their jurisdiction, from enforcing public policies to managing public resources and infrastructure. The effectiveness of decision-making in local governments is crucial to guarantee



that the needs and interests of the community are adequately represented and addressed. Decision-making in local governments involves various stakeholders, including elected officials, administrative staff, community groups, and residents. In multiple countries, the prevailing system involves representatives being elected at the local level to represent the people during the making of decisions with little to no involvement from the people themselves. (Devas & Grant, 2003). While these elected officials are expected to evaluate the specific needs and priorities of those they represent to make informed decisions, this is frequently not the case (Devas & Grant, 2003). Some elected representatives may engage in various forms of consultation with their constituents. Still, such consultations can be biased, and those who do not make such efforts are more concerned with their gains (Devas & Grant, 2003).

Many local governments presently offer chances for citizen participation in decision-making processes as a supplement to the periodic elections. To maintain accountability, the role of government and how it interacts with its people and civil society organizations are reevaluated in a decentralized government (Mishra, 1994). Walker and Miller (2020) claim that there are several steps involved in the decision-making process in a local government, including identifying the issue, deciding which one requires the government's attention, formulating potential solutions, adopting a strategy, and finally, the stage of assessing the strategy's efficacy. Different actors may have varying degrees of influence and input at each stage, depending on the issue at hand and the political context. Local governments must balance the competing demands of high-quality services while being fiscally responsible and accountable to their constituents. Ultimately, effective decision-making in a local government requires a commitment to open and collaborative governance and the ability to balance competing interests and priorities in a way that best serves the needs of the local community.

## **2.5 Mechanism of Citizen Participation in Decision-making of Local Governments**

Local governments play a crucial role in shaping the policies that directly affect the lives of citizens within their jurisdictions. Therefore, it is essential to ensure citizens are involved in decision-making. The idea that citizens should be allowed to participate in decisions made by the local government on how resources are to be distributed for their benefit has been well contested. The necessary thing is then for the local governments to support the people's participation by creating avenues within which they can share their views (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001).

Local governments have employed various approaches to encourage people to participate in decision-making. These methods include interactive policymaking, deliberative forums such as public meetings and hearings, and e-governance (Michel & de Graaf, 2010). Although some critics view public meetings as a mere democratic formality that does not provide a platform for the people to participate during the policymaking process, Adam (2004) argues that they can facilitate engagement. Despite not allowing for direct participation, Adam (2004) suggests that public meetings enable people to provide relevant information to the government for agenda setting.

Participatory budgeting is another worldwide mechanism to promote citizen engagement in local government decision-making. It is a process that enables citizens to decide how public funds are used (Sintomer, Herzberg, & Rocke, 2012). According to Sintomer et al. (2012), participatory budgeting is a process that allows citizens to directly decide how to allocate a portion of the public budget in a participatory and inclusive way. Despite its advantages, critics argue that participatory budgeting has a limited participation rate, which could undermine its effectiveness in representing the broader public interest (Gordon, 2012). In support of Gordon's (2012) assertion, Mikesell and Mullins (2011) reviewed the progress made toward improving efficiency in public budgeting in the United States. They found that participatory budgeting is a less preferred approach to garner direct citizen participation in improving public budgeting and finance. Hence, although it allows the public to participate directly in budgeting, it offers the people a limited level of participation, undermining effective involvement.

Moreover, Ebdon and Franklin (2006) also examined citizen participation in budgeting. They sought to identify the factors influencing the participation process and noted that the engagement mechanism is crucial (Ebdon & Franklin, 2006). The citizen budget advisory committee has been used to involve citizens, but Ebdon and Franklin (2006) argue that it is costly in terms of time and effort and has limited participation. Instead, they suggest that focus groups are more selective and suitable for officials seeking to identify citizen preferences (Ebdon & Franklin, 2006). Focus group discussions involve people of all ages, genders, and social statuses as participants are selected. This means that how participants are chosen offers more opportunities for broader participation. Overall, local governments worldwide have adopted various mechanisms such as public hearings, e-governance, participatory budgeting, advisory committees, and focus groups to involve citizens in decision-making processes that affect them.



## **2.6 Citizen Participation in Local Government Decision-making in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Citizen participation during decision-making is a crucial aspect of democratic governance at all levels of government. Local governments are required to create mechanisms for citizen participation in their activities. However, there is a lot of discontent with how governmental institutions respond to residents and their negligible impact on service delivery (Narayan, 2000). There is also debate about the extent of citizens' participation through these mechanisms. As Goetz and Gaventa (2001) argued, participation should go beyond consultation and enable citizens to have a more direct influence on policy decisions.

In 2008, Esau conducted a qualitative study to evaluate the performance of the Ward Committee, a South African instrument promoting local government involvement. The author selected Bonteheuwel as a case study and concluded that although the Ward Committee is an excellent idea for participatory governance, it is symbolic and lacks power (Esau, 2008). As a result, participation in Bonteheuwel was non-existent (Esau, 2008). Similarly, Piper and Von Lieres (2008) used case studies to study public involvement in municipal governance in South Africa. They found that the invited spaces for participation were ineffective and exploited by elites to gain political power (Piper & Von Lieres, 2008). They argued that citizen participation, including the Ward Committees and Izimbizo, was meaningless under the current platform (Piper & Von Lieres, 2008).

In 2018, Marango, Magaya, Francis, Kamuzhanje, and Mutongoreni assessed Matare, a community platform, to promote citizen participation in budget adoption in Zimbabwe's Chimanimani Rural District. The study discovered no clear strategy for promoting engagement in council issues and that many citizens were not exposed to the budget drafting process (Marango et al., 2018). In a different study, Devas and Grant (2003) discovered that although there are many opportunities for citizen participation in Uganda, the level of participation is much lower than suggested by legislation. The legislative instruments demand a level of participation where citizens do more than spectate what is happening but instead make changes to decisions. However, Marango et al. (2018) indicate that the avenues currently existing in Zimbabwe have nothing to offer. Revealing nature, Devas & Grant (2008) noted that meetings to discuss development plans with citizens do not occur frequently enough, and in some cases, they are poorly attended (Devas & Grant, 2008). Similarly, in Kenya, the traditional approach to governance is still prevalent, with

limited opportunities for citizen participation (Devas & Grant, 2003). In summary, the literature suggests that effective citizen participation, where citizens can influence policy, is non-existent. In these cases, the authors noted that the opportunity to participate exists. However, these avenues offer limited participation for citizens who cannot participate to influence decisions being made.

## **2.7 Goals and Outcomes of Citizen Participation in Sub-Saharan Africa**

In democratic governance, citizen participation in decision-making plays a vital role. It gives people a place to express their ideas and concerns about directly or indirectly affecting them. The outcomes of citizen participation may differ based on the context, goals, and strategies implemented. According to Thompson and Allen (2011), municipalities may engage citizens for many reasons, such as to educate and inform the people, enhance the decisions of government, allow citizens to have an impact on policies, legitimize the decisions made, and promote the trust of citizens in their government. The evidence from the literature suggests that citizen participation can empower the public, improve service delivery, and promote good governance.

### ***2.7.1 Citizen participation empowers the public in shaping policy.***

Citizen participation is a crucial component of democratic governance as it enables people to engage in the political process and shape policy decisions that affect their lives. Through participation, citizens can exercise their right to voice their opinions and ideas, contributing to developing policies that align with their needs. For instance, Lerner (2011) sought to understand the popularity of participatory budgeting, which involves citizens in municipalities' budgeting process. Lerner's (2011) review of the literature revealed that participatory budgeting results in a more educated citizenry and greater efficiencies, making them capable of shaping decisions. This has driven the use of participatory budgeting as a mechanism for citizen participation in many parts of the world. Similarly, Gordon, Osgood, and Boden (2016) observed that participatory budgeting aims to empower citizens by placing the final decision-making on municipal budgets in their hands. In conclusion, involving citizens in decision-making empowers them to shape policies that impact their lives and communities.

### ***2.7.2 Citizen participation seeks to improve service delivery.***

Citizen participation can improve service delivery, as citizens can provide valuable feedback and insights that identify gaps and weaknesses in existing services, leading to a more efficient service delivery system. Gordon (2012) claims that the involvement of citizens in the budgeting process assists elected officials and officials in deciding which municipal services are most essential and which are not. Also, Bossuyt and Gould (2000) highlighted that local governments struggle to offer accepted services that can improve people's lives when there is a lack of public input into decision-making. Therefore, enhancing citizen participation can improve service delivery, ultimately reducing poverty (Bossuyt & Gould, 2000).

In contrast to the belief that citizen participation can continually improve local government service delivery, research by Williams and Kihehere (2013) in Uganda suggests otherwise. They found that involving citizens in decision-making does not always lead to a substantial change in the quality and quantity of service delivery (Williams & Kihehere, 2013). Similarly, Conyers (2007) investigated the link between decentralization and service delivery in Sub-Saharan Africa and concluded that while decentralization facilitates participation, it has no direct effect on the quality, quantity, or equality of the local government's services. Instead, it operates through intervening variables such as the information accessible to the people, the source of the power exercised, the availability of resources, and then the performance of the local government (Conyers, 2007). While some argue that citizen participation can enhance service delivery, other scholars contend that insufficient evidence supports this claim, as studies have failed to demonstrate significant improvements in the services provided.

### ***2.7.3 Citizen participation improves democracy.***

Democracy is a type of governance in which citizens can participate and be represented. Its foundation is rooted in the notion that people should hold the power to govern themselves. Essential to democracy is the involvement of citizens in decision-making, enabling them to express their opinions on matters that impact their lives. The greater the number of people participating in this process, the more likely they are to hold their leaders accountable. This accountability is vital for maintaining a robust and healthy democracy.

According to Cuthill (2003), citizen participation is crucial in developing people and their social capital, which contributes to building strong local democracies. In representative democracies, citizen involvement is a vital determinant of democratic quality (Tvaltvadze, 2017). As Tvaltvadze (2017:6) notes, "Citizen participation in decision-making serves as the foundation of local democracy; local self-government, at a more direct level than central government, is for the people, by the people.". This emphasizes the necessity of the participation of citizens in building local democracy. Guo and Neshkova (2013) also suggest that citizen involvement in decision-making injects democratic values into decisions by appointed bureaucrats. Similarly, Devas and Grant (2003) found that decentralization promotes the legitimacy and accountability of local government in Kenya and Uganda. Additionally, public engagement facilitates municipal governments' use of their authority and responsiveness to citizens (Devas & Grant, 2003). Moreover, Michels and de Graaf (2010) noted in their study on two municipalities in the Netherlands that citizens being engaged positively influences the quality of democracy practiced. Similarly, Irvin and Stansbury (2004) surveyed to assess the benefits of citizens being engaged in decision-making. Through a review of the literature on the topic, the authors found that citizen participation is worth pursuing as it promotes higher levels of cooperation from people when policymakers introduce initiatives that may have adverse effects (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004).

In conclusion, citizens' participation at the local level while making decisions plays a vital role in improving democracy. Empowering citizens to engage in decision-making processes actively promotes accountability and transparency in governance. Citizens are better equipped to hold their leaders accountable, and including their perspectives in policymaking helps ensure that policies are more responsive to community needs and priorities.

## **2.8 Barriers to Effective Citizen Participation in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Despite the promise of enhanced participation through democratic decentralization, the apparent gap between this promise and the reality of participatory politics suggests significant barriers to full implementation. Previous research has identified several factors that serve as barriers to meaningful citizen participation. These barriers can prevent citizens from fully engaging in decision-making processes and limit the potential for democratic decentralization to lead to more inclusive and effective governance.



Time constraints can hinder effective participation in decision-making, as noted by Nabatchi (2010). High transaction costs, including the time and money required to participate, can outweigh the potential benefits for individuals (Nabatchi, 2010). Chikerema (2013) also argues that low citizen participation can be attributed to the timing of meetings, which may not accommodate citizens' busy schedules. Councilors may contribute to this problem by scheduling meetings at inconvenient times or obscure locations to avoid public scrutiny, as explained by Blair (2000). These factors can result in inefficient opportunities for participation that fail to generate interest among the public.

In addition to time constraints, external factors such as political influence and legal frameworks can impede effective citizen engagement in addition to time constraints. Nyama and Mukwada (2022) studied citizen participation in local government planning and identified political interference and prohibitive legal frameworks as significant obstacles. Similarly, Ronoh, Mulongo, and Kungat (2018) observed that geo-political factors, including political interference, can limit participation. Additionally, Der Bebelleh and Nobabumah (2013) identified individual factors such as lack of interest, lack of skills, no formal education, and low socio-economic status as barriers to effective citizen engagement.

In conclusion, the factors affecting the extent to which citizens are engaged can stem from public officials and citizens themselves. These factors include time constraints, political interference, restrictive legal frameworks, and citizens' attitudes toward participation.

## **2.9 Strengthening Citizen Participation in Local Governance in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Over the past few years, increasing attention has been on enhancing citizen participation in local governance throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. This focus stems from the realization that citizen engagement is vital for fostering more democratic, accountable, and responsive local governments.

One potential approach to enhancing citizen participation is through capacity building. Cuthill and Fien (2005) propose that local governments can support citizen engagement in local governance by implementing capacity-building processes. Capacity building involves interventions designed to strengthen an organization's ability to achieve its objectives and fulfill its mission (Connolly & York, 2002). Wing (2004) notes that an organization must have sufficient staff with the necessary skills, appropriate technical systems, sustainable physical infrastructure, and adequate financial



resources. In the case of citizens, Cuthill and York (2003) argue that human capital should be developed to enhance citizens' skills, experience, and knowledge. Social capital should also be created by fostering relationships within and between groups in the community and the government (Cuthill & York, 2003). Finally, local governments should focus on their institutional ability to build the capacity of the local government.

Creating more opportunities for engagement can also strengthen citizen participation. Gordon et al. (2016) proposes that combining traditional citizen engagement approaches with multiple social media platforms can help overcome barriers and engage citizens, as has been adopted by many United States cities. According to Thompson and Allen (2011), many people in the United States use social media, making these platforms a less costly tool for reaching the public. Lukensmeyer, Goldman, and Stern (2011) note that social media has been adopted at the federal level to inform the public about programs and build relationships with those living in the community, providing an example for municipalities on how best to reach their constituents. However, as Gordon et al. (2016) point out, restrictive policies can hinder the successful use of social media platforms to strengthen citizen participation.

Additionally, scholars suggest that strengthening citizen participation can be achieved through a review of the legislation regulating local governments' activities. According to Tvaltvadze (2017), rigid legislation can limit participation and hinder its effectiveness. The author proposes that legislative instruments can be used to strengthen citizen participation (Tvaltvadze, 2017). As many attempts to regulate local government structures have led to inconsistent and chaotic processes, Tvaltvadze (2017) emphasizes the need for legislation that guarantees citizens' participation, especially in the context of systematic change.

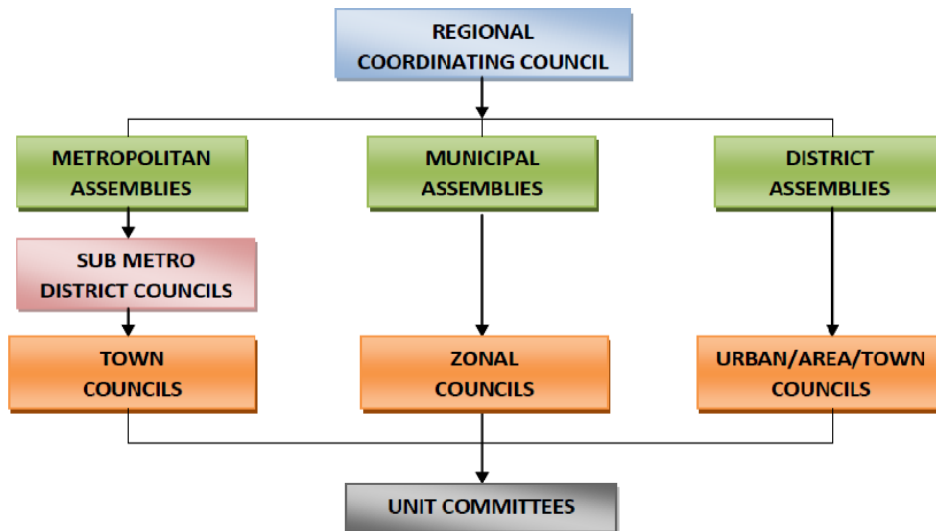
To strengthen participation, it is crucial to focus on building the local governments and the people's capacity, creating more engagement opportunities, and reviewing legislative instruments that may hinder participation. Capacity building can be achieved through developing human and social capital and institutionalizing the government's ability to facilitate community capacity building. Creating more opportunities for engagement can involve the use of social media platforms, as well as combining traditional citizen engagement approaches with digital tools. Additionally, reviewing legislation that regulates local government activities can eliminate barriers to effective citizen participation and promote consistency and systematic change.

## **2.10 The Structure of Ghana's decentralization framework**

In the late 1980s, Ghana initiated a series of reforms to decentralize power to the local level, as noted by Osman and Abdulai (2018). One of the key outcomes of these reforms was the passage of the Local Government Law (PNDCL 207) in 1988, which established one hundred and ten (110) district assemblies (DAs) with legislative, executive, and administrative powers, along with various acts and legislation. According to Bebelleh and Nobabumah (2013), these DAs were empowered to lead the initiation, facilitation, and execution of development activities in their districts. According to Ayee (2000), when Ghana's fourth republic was created in 1993, the Local Government Law (PNDCL 207) was abolished and integrated into the Local Government Act 462. To facilitate effective decentralization, several legislative instruments were put in place, including the Civil Service Law 1993, the District Assembly Common Fund Act 1993, the National Development Planning Commission Act 1994, and the Local Government Service Act, as highlighted by Bebelleh and Nobabumah (2013). According to Osman and Abdulai (2018), the main goal of local government is to give communities the chance to actively engage in activities linked to the development of their areas. It also aims to provide a platform for political participation and advance responsive and equal development.

Ghana's local government system is divided into a Metropolitan Assembly with four tiers and a Municipal Assembly with three tiers (Asibey, Amponsah, & Yeboah, 2019). The Regional Coordinating Council (RCC), headquartered in each regional capital, supervises and coordinates the performance of all local governments in that area and sits at the pinnacle of this organization (Asibey et al., 2019). The Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs), which are below the Regional Coordinating Council (RCC), are followed by sub-district institutions, including Urban, Town, and Zonal Councils (Asibey et al., 2019). The Municipal Assembly has a population of over 95,000, the District Assemblies have over 75,000, and the Metropolitan Assembly spans a geographic area of over 250,000 (Bebelleh & Nobabumah, 2013).

### **Figure 2.1 The Structure of Ghana's Decentralization Framework**



Source: Zakari (2012)

### 2.10.1 Administrative Decentralization in Ghana

Ghana's parliament established the Local Government Act and related legislation in 1993 following the decentralization framework to create administrative districts across the country (Renckens, 2012). These administrative districts, commonly called Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies, serve as decentralized bodies with the authority to deliver services to the local populace. Their establishment aims to empower communities at the grassroots level.

### 2.10.2 Political Decentralization in Ghana

Assemblies in Ghana must contain elected and appointed officials under the 1994 Constitution. The people choose Two-thirds of the members, and the president appoints the remaining members (Asibey et al., 2019). The President also appoints the Chief Executive, and the assembly selects a Presiding Member who serves as the speaker through a two-thirds vote of approval (Renckens, 2012). The Regional Coordinating Council (RCC) governs all regional activities and is above the local assembly (Renckens, 2012). It includes a presidentially appointed Regional Minister, Deputy, Presiding Member, and Chief Executive (Renckens, 2012).

### 2.10.3 Fiscal Decentralization in Ghana

At present, local governments in Ghana have three primary sources of revenue: the District Development Fund (DDF), the Internally Generated Funds (IGF), and the District Assembly

Common Fund (DACF) (Renckens, 2012). The decentralization framework policy (2010) aims to balance the transferred functions and available fiscal transfers since resources must suffice to cover the district's overall cost of municipal and development services. The DDF comprises external funds from the country as grants, loans, and aid (Renckens, 2012). A district internally raises the IGF from various sources, including fees, fines, taxes, etc. In Ghana, market fees and fines are the most significant sources of IGF (Renckens, 2012). Districts may also impose taxes on businesses and commercial property owners. The DACF is a fund distributed by Ghana's central government, representing 5 percent of the total major government revenue (Renckens, 2012).

## **2.11 Constitutional and Legislative Provision for Decentralization and Citizens' Participation in Ghana**

### **2.11.1 International obligation**

According to the 2010 Decentralization Framework, Ghana has ratified several international and sub-regional treaties that require the state to transfer authority and responsibility to lower levels of government to foster democracy and good governance. These include the Kigali Declaration (2005) on Leadership Capacity Building for Decentralized Governance and Poverty Reduction in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Victoria Falls Declaration (1999) on an African Vision of Decentralization, and Commitment under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), as well as the trend towards an increasing role for local authorities (Decentralization Framework, 2010).

### **2.11.2 National Framework**

The 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution's relevant provisions, as well as decentralization-related laws like the Local Government Act of 2016, Decentralization Policy of 2010, and the National Development Planning (System) Act of 1994, as well as sector-specific initiatives and guiding documents, all contribute to the national context in which decentralization operates.

#### ***1992 Fourth Republican Constitution***

The assembly system of local government was formed in 1988 with the passage of PNDCL 207, which established metropolitan, municipal, and district assemblies with the power to enact legislation and manage budgets, plans, and rates. According to Asibey et al. (2019), the Fourth



Republican Constitution, which enshrines these clauses, views decentralization to advance democracy and encourage citizen participation in government.

Chapter 20 of the Constitution focuses on Decentralization and Local Governance, guiding institutional arrangements, functions, and resources. It describes critical processes for successfully implementing decentralization, such as transferring duties, responsibilities, and resources from the national government to local governments (Constitution of Ghana, 1992). Additionally, the ability of local governments to organize, manage, and carry out policies is evaluated (Constitution of Ghana, 1992). The third step entails creating a solid financial base with dependable and ample sources of income (Constitution of Ghana, 1992). Opportunities for effective engagement in governance are also developed to guarantee local authorities are held accountable.

The 1992 Constitution's Article 34 Section 5 (d) requires the state to further democracy by delegating control of the executive and judicial branches of government to the regions and localities (Constitution of Ghana, 1992). The state must also give citizens plenty of chances to engage in decision-making at all levels (Constitution of Ghana, 1992). By guaranteeing that authority and resources are dispersed fairly across the nation and that the people's opinions are heard and considered when formulating policies, this clause seeks to make democracy a reality.

### ***2016 Local Government Act***

This act establishes the legal framework for implementing constitutional provisions related to local government. The purpose of this guideline is to make it easier to conduct business inside the assembly system. (Local Government Act, 2016). It aims to provide a clear and consistent framework for the functioning of local government, ensuring that the constitutional provisions are operationalized effectively (Local Government Act, 2016).

The District Assembly must allow citizens and other district stakeholders to participate in its operations and other structures under Section 40 of the Act (Local Government Act, 2016). These activities may include the establishment of by-laws, fee-fixing, planning, and budgeting for the district (Local Government Act, 2016). The Act emphasizes the importance of residents and stakeholders engaging in the deliberative functions of the Assembly, making representations, and attending Assembly proceedings, especially in matters related to by-laws and fee-fixing resolutions (Local Government Act, 2016). The ultimate objective of this provision is to ensure



that the District Assembly is accountable and responsive to the needs of the community it serves and that the decisions made reflect the people's aspirations.

The District Assembly must encourage the establishment of mechanisms that permit participation by citizens and other stakeholders under Section 42 of the Local Government Act (Local Government Act, 2016). According to the Act, these structures can be public notice boards, town hall meetings, budget preparation and validation forums, site visits, ICT-based platforms, and any other way to involve the community in decision-making processes (Local Government Act, 2016). This clause intends to guarantee that the District Assembly upholds inclusiveness, accountability, and transparency in its operations and that the populace's voices and opinions are heard and considered.

### ***The 2010 Decentralization Framework***

In line with the aims, objectives, and strategies of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development Sector Medium Term Development Plan, the policy framework is created to support them (Decentralization Policy, 2010). The policy's main objective is to encourage sustainable and equitable economic growth, combat poverty, and enhance local service delivery by promoting public engagement (Decentralization Policy, 2010). The policy acknowledges the important achievements made possible by decentralization over the previous 20 years, including proof that decisions can be made at the local government level and encouraging citizen participation in governance (Decentralization policy, 2010). The guiding principles of this policy include the right of all people to take part in decision-making at all levels of government, the promotion of local government accountability through effective citizen participation, and the improvement of local government authorities' capacity to develop, propose, and carry out policies (Decentralization Policy, 2010). The policy acknowledges that planning should be participative and bottom-up, incorporating suggestions from communities, chiefs, and interest groups in creating the district development plan (Decentralization Policy, 2010). Based on the legal and legislative provisions for decentralization and citizen participation in Ghana, as indicated by the 1992 Constitution, the Local Government Act of 2016, and the Decentralization Framework of 2010, Ghana is committed to promoting citizen participation in governance at the local level. These provisions ensure that decision-making processes are inclusive and participatory, with input from various stakeholders,

including communities, chiefs, and interest groups. The following section looks at the local governments putting these frameworks into action by creating platforms and engaging the people.

## **2.12 Mechanisms of Citizen Participation in Local Government Decision-Making in Ghana**

Section 42 of the Local Government Act indicates the District Assembly must promote the establishment of structures that enable the participation of residents and other stakeholders (Local Government Act, 2016). These structures, as stated in the Act, may take the form of town hall meetings, budget preparation and validation forums, public notice boards, visits to development sites, information communication technology-based platforms, and any other means of involving the community in decision-making processes (Local Government Act, 2016). District Assemblies can adopt the proposed structures in the Act or create one that will effectively serve their needs. For example, Ahenkan et al. (2013) discuss the significance of stakeholder meetings at the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly. Likewise, Der Bebelleh and Nobabumah (2013) highlight the importance of public meetings, while Be-ere (2023) identifies the role of public meetings in Ghana's Nadowli Kaleo and Atwima Kwanwoma districts.

## **2.13 Citizen Participation in Local Governance in Ghana**

In Ghana, citizens' participation at the municipal level has been limited to the electoral process, although several frameworks indicate higher levels of participation. This is shown in the different studies on citizen engagement that have been done. Most research concentrates on the electoral process and its gendered aspects. For example, Acheampong and Dinye (2015) undertook a study in Ejisu to investigate women's engagement in local administration. According to the findings, less than 25% of the women in Ejisu were members of the local governance structure, namely elected assembly members (Acheampong & Dinye, 2015). This is due to men's perceived superiority and women's illiteracy in Ejisu (Acheampong & Dinye, 2015).

In addition, Abakah (2018) did a study to investigate women's experiences with local governance activities in rural areas. The research was conducted in Ghana's Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese area. According to the findings, women in the Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese district are likelier to participate in local governance activities than to be chosen for important decision-making positions

(Abakah, 2018). Similarly, Adatuu and Apusigah (2018) investigated the prevalence of gendering in local administration in Ghana's Builsa North district. The findings revealed that women in the district could not run and win elections, resulting in their under-representation at all levels (Adatuu & Apusigah, 2018). These studies show that participation, specifically women's participation in election processes, was low due to illiteracy and male superiority.

On the other side, avenues were developed, and citizens were included in planning and budgeting decision-making. Few academics have looked at this facet of involvement. According to these studies, residents were not meaningfully consulted during decision-making, and their engagement was limited. For example, Ahenkan et al. (2013) undertook a study to assess stakeholder participation in planning and budgeting at the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly. Findings revealed that such participation was limited because stakeholders lacked a proper grasp of the process (Ahenkan et al., 2013). This understanding is shared by Der Bebelleh and Nobabumah (2013), who, in their study to examine the extent of participation of local people in the activities of the local government, discovered that participation was low because of low awareness among citizens on the need for them to participate and lack of understanding (Der Bebelleh & Nobabumah, 2013).

Similarly, Akudu, Fielmua, and Akugri (2012) examined the effectiveness of local participation in local governance in the Bawku area of Ghana. Findings showed fewer instances where participants were consulted, only at the stage of identifying a problem (Akudu et al., 2012). Mensah, Andres, Baidoo, Eshun, and Antwi (2016) also reported that local people's participation level in Kumasi City on issues linked to urban green spaces was low because people were neither informed nor consulted. Moreover, in a recent study, Be-ere (2023) contended that citizens participating directly in the planning of the Medium-Term Development Plan of local governments in the Nadowli Kaleo and Atwima Kwanwoma districts is limited and could be described as non-existent. According to these studies, citizen participation in local planning and budgeting is poor and limited.

#### **2.14 Barriers to Citizen Participation in Local Government Decision-Making in Ghana**

Research is limited in this area, in the case of Ghana. Be-ere (2023) indicated that issues of limited resources at the local level affected local governments' capacity to engage the people effectively.

In their report, the Media Foundation for West Africa (2019) reported that the challenge to citizen participation is that Ghanaians do not make sure of the opportunity to participate; they are not well-informed and empowered to engage in decision-making. Although gender-focused, Amponsah et al. (2017) investigated the factors influencing low female political participation in Ghanaian local government. Amponsah et al. (2017) discovered that inadequate financial resources, perceptions of politics as a "dirty game," and a lack of capacity and confidence on the part of women affect participation. Overall, it has been determined that the factors influencing citizen participation can come from both public officials and citizens.

## **2.15 Theoretical Framework**

The study utilized two models, namely Arnstein's ladder of participation and the democracy cube by Archon Fung. These models provide a framework for understanding the levels of citizen participation and are applicable at the local government level. Both models were selected for their similarities while focusing on different aspects of citizen participation in local governance. This study combined both to provide a more comprehensive view of citizen participation.

### **2.15.1 Ladder of Participation**

Arnstein's Ladder of Participation is a popular concept for identifying distinct levels of citizen involvement in decision-making processes. Scholars such as Fung and Wright (2003), Rowe and Frewer (2005), Gaventa (2006), and Cornwall (2008) have used the model as a theoretical framework to analyze and evaluate citizen participation in a variety of contexts, including participatory budgeting, community development, and environmental governance. Arnstein's model is popular because it provides a clear and thorough explanation of the levels of citizen participation in decision-making processes. According to Arnstein (1969), involvement is necessary for democracy in theory but not practice. She believes that involvement is needed to redistribute power and empower marginalized communities. Her Participation Ladder has eight rungs that vary from low to high levels of public participation: manipulation, therapy, informing, consulting, placation, partnership, delegated power, and citizen control (Arnstein, 1969). Arnstein's work is a product of the Participatory Democracy movement, which seeks to challenge the United States' traditional system of Representative Democracy (Arnstein, 1969). She



understands the importance of assessing citizen participation and its impact on decision-making outcomes.

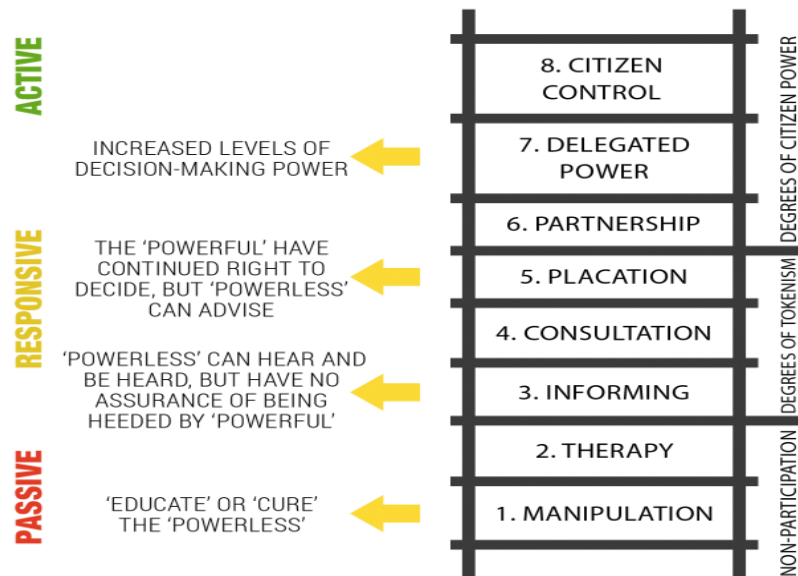
The rungs at the bottom of the ladder, 'manipulation and therapy,' are classified as non-participation because no actual participation has happened (Arnstein, 1969). 'Manipulation' is the lowest form of involvement, in which the public is merely observers who are manipulated into believing that their input is being considered, whereas 'therapy' is when people are made to think they have no power and are mentally ill, resulting in them being forced to work on changing themselves rather than being given a voice in decision-making processes (Arnstein, 1969).

Tokenism characterizes the middle rungs of Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (informing, consultation, and placation), where citizens have minimal participation and influence (Arnstein, 1969). 'Informing' raises awareness about participation, 'consultation' invites citizen participation in decision-making without guaranteeing that their concerns will be considered, and 'placation' provides some form of influence. Still, officials dominate the decision-making process (Arnstein, 1969). According to Arnstein (1969), these engagement degrees do not represent citizen power because they merely create the illusion of inclusion.

Partnership, delegated power, and citizen control are at the top of the ladder, representing the highest level of citizen power and influence in decision-making (Arnstein, 1969). The 'partnership' rung involves citizens and stakeholders sharing power, whereas 'delegated power' entails high levels of citizen engagement and decision-making authority (Arnstein, 1969). The highest rung is citizen control, when citizens have the ultimate authority to influence change (Arnstein, 1969).







Source: IACD, 2019

**Figure 2.2: Ladder of Participation**

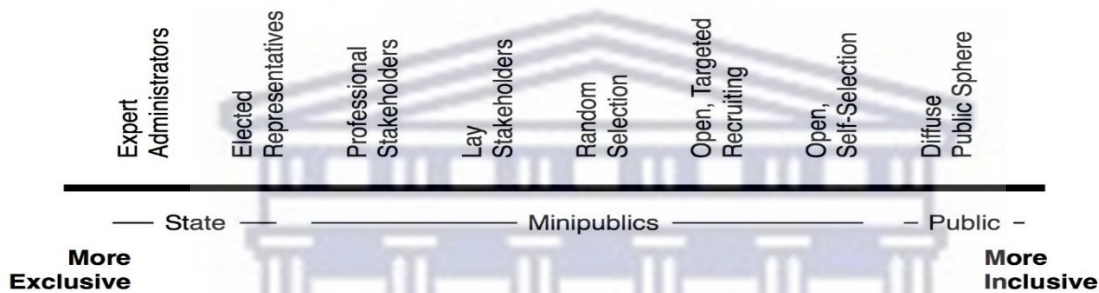
It has been said that the ladder model oversimplifies the intricacies of public participation, which can occur in various ways and to varying degrees. Despite this drawback, Arnstein's Ladder of Participation offers a rigorous framework for classifying different levels of public participation, from complete citizen control to non-participation (Arnstein, 1969). This study aims to determine the degree of citizen participation in local government decision-making using this ladder. By looking at the precise rung on the ladder that represents the level of involvement in each decision-making process, researchers can determine if people are actively participating in the decision-making process or if they are only being informed or consulted without any meaningful influence.

### 2.15.2 Democracy Cube

Archon Fung's democracy cube provides a thorough framework for categorizing many sorts of citizen participation in democratic governance, making it helpful in understanding prevalent forms of participation in local democratic governance. Scholars such as Nabatchi and Leighninger (2015), Mendelberg (2002), and Warren (2007) have used the model to investigate and evaluate various methods of citizen engagement, such as deliberative forums, public hearings, and participatory budgeting. This paradigm has assisted in identifying the strengths and limitations of

multiple forms of participation and making recommendations for improving democratic government and citizen involvement. The model employs a three-dimensional representation of citizen participation in local government activities, with continuums representing participant selection procedures, forms of communication, and the level of power and authority offered to public participants (Fung, 2006).

There are eight main types of selection, ranging from more exclusive to more inclusive, according to Fung (2006). These tactics include administrators who are experts, elected officials, professionals, and lay stakeholders, randomly selecting participants, targeting specific people, open self-selection, and diffusing the public realm (Fung, 2006). The selection procedures govern how people are picked to participate in decision-making processes.

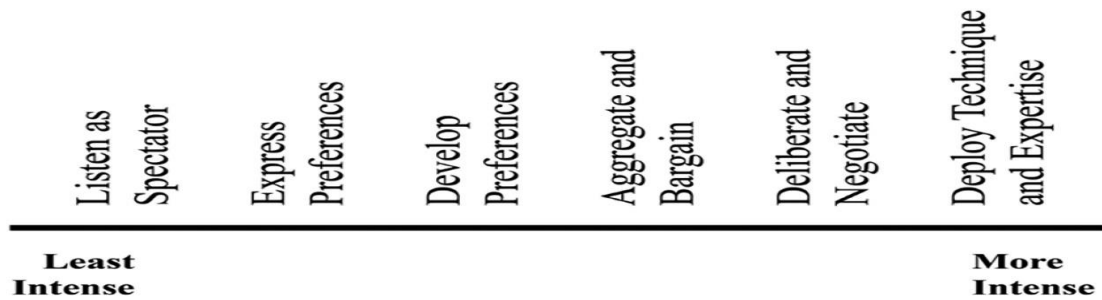


*Source: Fung (2006)*

**Figure 2.3: Participant Selection Methods**

Each approach has its own set of constraints and prerequisites for participation. The most exclusive is 'Expert Administrators and Elected Representatives,' which require expertise, experience, and financial backing. At the same time, the 'Diffuse Public Sphere' has the lowest barriers to involvement but a minor influence over government policy and decision-making (Fung, 2006).

The modes of communication within the participation area are the second aspect of Fung's participation concept. Communication can be classified into six types, from passive listening to active bargaining and expert deployment (Fung, 2006). These modes of communication are critical in determining how much influence participants will have on decision-making (Fung, 2006).



Source: Fung (201)

Figure 2.4: Modes of Communication

The democracy cube developed by Archon Fung classifies six types of communication in public engagement in democratic governance. The most prevalent is 'Listen as a Spectator,' in which individuals attend events but do not offer their opinions (Fung, 2006). When individuals voice their preferences, officials are not obligated to act on them (Fung, 2006). 'Develop Preferences' encourages individuals to deliberate and reason to examine and modify their perspectives (Fung, 2016). Participants in 'Aggregate and Bargain' work together to reach a resolution or compromise (Fung, 2006). 'Deliberate and Negotiate' refers to sharing viewpoints, experiences, and reasons to build opinions (Fung, 2006). 'Deploy Technique and Expertise' is often done by professionals and specialists, with no participation from the general people (Fung, 2006). The level of influence granted to participants is determined by the mode of communication used.

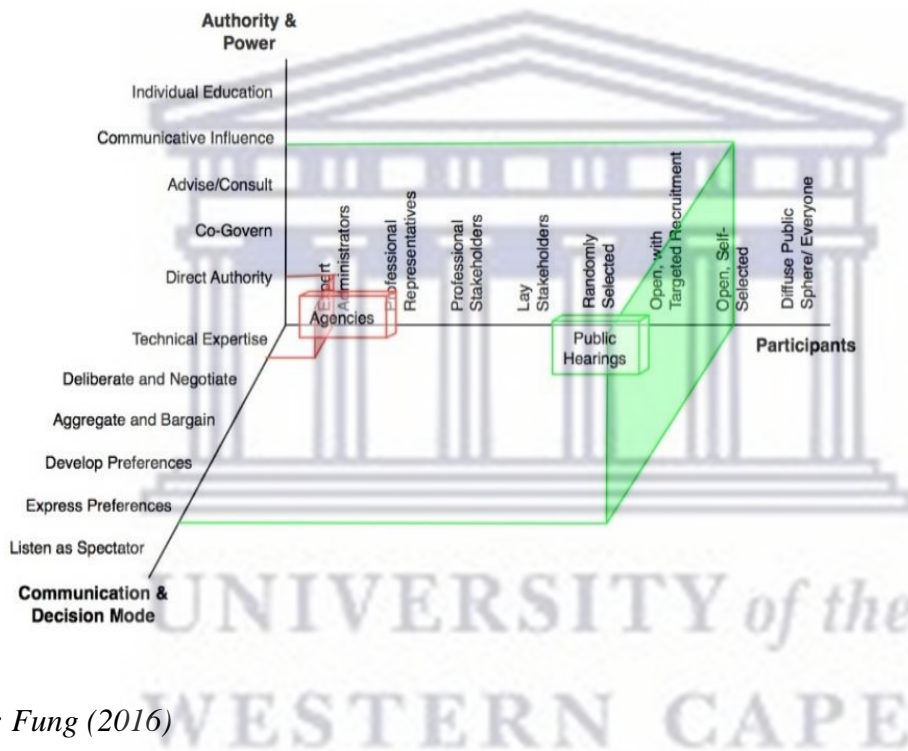
Finally, the model considers each participant's level of power and authority. Personal benefit, communicative influence, advice and consultation, co-governance, and direct control are the five levels of power and authority, organized in ascending order from least to most influential (Fung, 2006). These levels represent the most popular techniques for including the public in local government and the nature of their engagement.



Source: Fung (2016)

**Figure 2.5 Various degrees of authority**

Personal Benefits, Communicative Influence, Advice and Consultation, Co-Governance, and Direct Control are the five categories of public engagement in democratic governance identified by Fung (2006). 'Personal Benefits' include gaining information or a sense of civic responsibility, whereas 'Communicative Influence' indirectly affects the state or its agents by changing or mobilizing public opinion (Fung, 2006). 'Advice and Consultation' occurs when authorities hear advice from participants while maintaining their authority and power, whereas 'Co-Governance' happens when public members collaborate with officials to establish plans or policies (Fung, 2016). When public participants exercise direct control or authority over a governmental process, this is called 'Direct Control' (Fung, 2006).



Source: Fung (2016)

**Figure 2.6: Democracy cube**

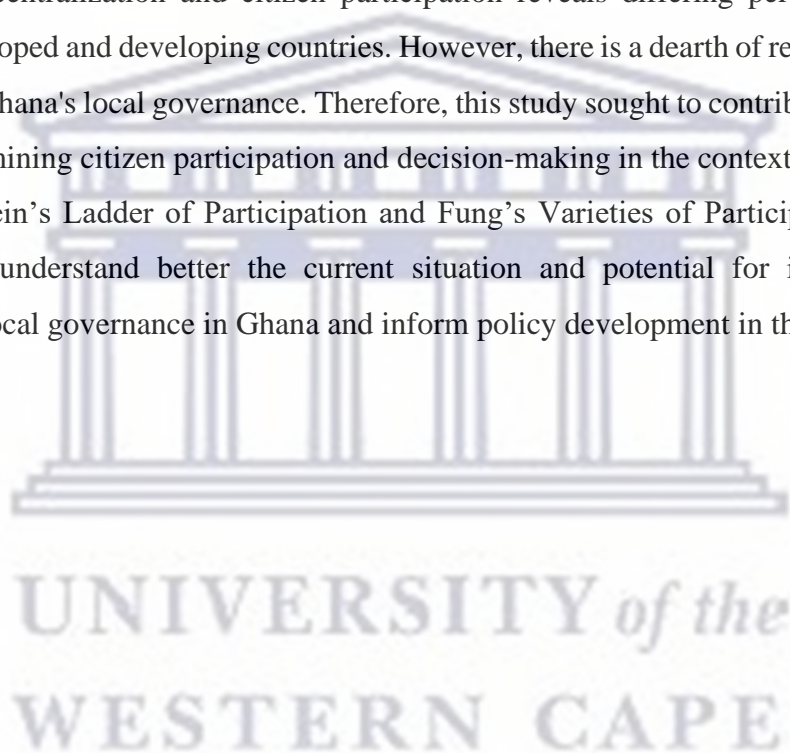
The model classifies several types of citizen participation, ranging from low to high intensity, and determines the most successful forms for accomplishing democratic goals (Fung, 2006). The model exhibits the complex and dynamic nature of citizen engagement in practice. It provides a complete framework for studying and measuring various types of citizen involvement, making it

helpful for this study to determine the extent of citizen engagement in local government decision-making.

In summary, this research aims to examine the extent of citizen participation in local government decision-making in Ghana and explore the degree of influence citizens are granted. To achieve this objective, the democracy cube and Arnstein's Ladder of Participation will be utilized to analyze the methods of participant selection, modes of communication, and degree of influence accorded to participants. Both models' strengths will be leveraged, and their limitations will be considered when applying them in practice.

## **2.16 Conclusion**

Literature on decentralization and citizen participation reveals differing perspectives in most regions and developed and developing countries. However, there is a dearth of research on citizens' participation in Ghana's local governance. Therefore, this study sought to contribute to the existing literature by examining citizen participation and decision-making in the context of Ghana. Hence, guided by Arnstein's Ladder of Participation and Fung's Varieties of Participation Model, the study aimed to understand better the current situation and potential for improving citizen participation in local governance in Ghana and inform policy development in this area.





## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the methods used to gather and assess data to accomplish the study's goals. The chapter addresses problems with the study's profile, population, sample size, sampling techniques, data gathering and processing tools, and ethical concerns. The chapter also examines various research methodologies and identifies the one used for the study.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The plan and strategy a researcher uses to conduct a study, including the methodologies and methods utilized to collect and evaluate data, is known as the research design (Babbie, 2016). According to Grover (2015), research design is a comprehensive strategy to address a problem and acts as a blueprint for collecting, measuring, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting data. A sound research design ensures the study findings' validity, reliability, and generalizability to the target population (Babbie, 2016). The selection of a research design hinges on the research question, available resources, and contextual limitations (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). This study will employ a case study design to examine the topic at hand. Baxter and Jack (2008) define a case study as a research methodology that enables the exploration of a phenomenon within its natural context. If the researcher concentrates on one issue at a time and obtains in-depth information about it, case studies are well-liked and frequently employed. Case studies investigate modern problems in the context of real-world situations (Yin, 2003).

The case study approach is suitable for this study as there is limited knowledge on this subject in Ghana, and it will allow for an in-depth examination of the subject. However, the approach prevents the ability to generalize the research findings.

#### **3.2 Research Setting**

The study's physical, social, and cultural context are all considered in the research setting (Bryman, 2016). It could be a physical location, a field site, or a classroom setting. The social and cultural factors may include the study participants' conventions, values, and beliefs (Bryman, 2016). It is essential in research design because it influences the data collection and analysis strategies that

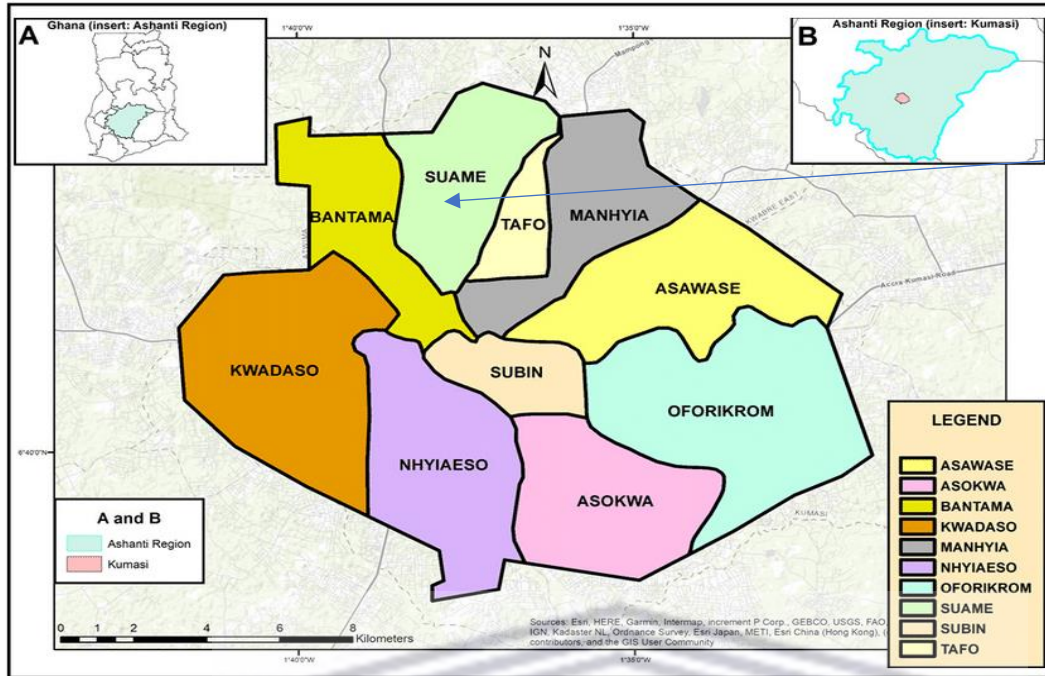
will be employed (Creswell, 2014). The research setting is critical in qualitative research since it can affect data collection procedures and the relationships developed between the researcher and participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Researchers must carefully assess the research environment and take necessary procedures to eliminate biases while maximizing the study's validity and reliability.

Suame is a constituency with representation in the Ghanaian Parliament. It was once located in the Kumasi Metropolitan District but now operates as a municipal assembly in Ghana's Ashanti Region. The Suame Municipal Assembly is one of Ghana's 260 Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs) and one of 43 MMDAs in the Ashanti Region. Furthermore, it is one of the 38 newly constituted districts in the country and one of the five Sub-Metropolitan District Councils to be given Municipality status under Legislative Instrument (L.I) 2295 of 2017.

Suame Municipality is bordered to the north by the Afigya Kwabre South District, to the east by the Old Tafo Municipality, and to the west and south by the Kumasi Metropolis. Its strategic location allows intra and inter-trading activity, transforming it into a commercial exchange hub. The municipality has a minimum population of ninety-five thousand people. The assembly is divided into thirteen (13) departments. The Assembly's operations are overseen by the Municipal Chief Executive (MCE), whom the President chooses. The Assembly is made up of twenty-five (25) Assembly members, seventeen (17) of whom are elected by the people and eight (8) of whom are appointed to represent various regions.

The logo of the University of the Western Cape, featuring a stylized building facade with columns and a pediment, positioned above the text "UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE".

UNIVERSITY of the  
WESTERN CAPE



Source: Frimpong (2022)

**Figure 3.1: A map showing Suame within Kumasi Metropolis.**

### 3.3 Research Approach

The selection of research methodologies varies by discipline and is influenced by the nature of the research subject under inquiry. Creswell (2009) distinguishes three primary research methods: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed. The qualitative approach focuses on determining how people interpret real-life occurrences, and by investigating variations in variables, quantitative research analyzes cause-and-effect relationships (Cropley, 2023). To present a more complete picture of the study subject, the mixed approach, which includes both qualitative and quantitative data, is mainly used (Cropley, 2023).

In the case of this study, a qualitative technique was used to investigate the research subject at hand. A qualitative method is intriguing because it allows respondents to share more detailed thoughts and insights. Fine and Hallett (2014) state that the qualitative research approach helps find causes and uncover descriptive contrasts among variables. Furthermore, Cropley (2023) argues that qualitative research analyses these understandings within behavioral science and looks at how people make meaning of their real-life experiences. Gaining knowledge about these

constructs of reality and revealing the nature of the world as it is experienced, organized, and interpreted by people in daily life are the main goals of qualitative research. Respondents will get the chance to openly express their opinions and contribute to a thorough understanding of the subject matter using a qualitative method.

### **3.4 Target Population**

A significant aspect of the qualitative research process involves determining the appropriate population to study. The target population refers to the specific group of individuals or objects the researcher intends to investigate (Babbie, 2016). It is the group to which the researcher aims to generalize the study's findings. In certain instances, the target population may be defined by characteristics or attributes such as age, gender, race, or occupation. These defining criteria help narrow down the population of interest. Alternatively, the target population can be determined by a specific location or setting, such as a school, hospital, or community, to provide a clear context for the study. Careful consideration of the target population allows researchers to tailor their research methods and data collection strategies to effectively capture the experiences, perspectives, and insights of the individuals or objects within that population. In the qualitative approach, the population under study typically consists of human participants (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013). In this study, three distinct groups were identified as respondents: municipal staff, assembly members, and residents of Suame Municipality.

### **3.5 Sampling Technique**

The term "sampling technique" describes the process by which researchers select a subset of people or things from a broader population to be included in a study (Bryman, 2016). Creating a representative sample that accurately reflects the traits and diversity of the target population is the primary goal of sampling. Probability and non-probability sampling are two examples of the numerous sampling techniques. To ensure that every member of the population has an equal chance of being chosen, probability sampling entails randomly selecting people or things from the population (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). On the other hand, non-probability sampling entails choosing participants or items based on convenience, accessibility, or the researcher's discretion (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). In a qualitative research approach, many sampling procedures can be adopted, guided mainly by the research design (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013). It is primarily non-



probability sampling that is adopted for qualitative studies. Convenience, purposeful, snowball, and theoretical sampling methods are the four primary categories of non-probability sampling approaches (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013). Even though non-probability sampling techniques encounter many sampling errors and biases (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013), they are much quicker and easier to carry out because they do not require a sampling frame as in the case of probability sampling techniques.

For this study, snowball and purposive sampling methods were both used to recruit study participants. Both are non-probability sampling techniques that a researcher can use to select respondents. The snowball sampling approach is employed when it is challenging to find individuals who exhibit the desired characteristics (Burns & Grove, 1993). According to this strategy, existing study participants seek their social networks for prospective volunteers (Polit & Beck, 2006). Since the samples are already familiar with the first sample, this strategy can be utilized to communicate with them more successfully (Polit & Beck, 2006). The main drawback of this method is that it may be affected by the under- or over-representation of certain groups in the population (Polit & Beck, 2006). However, it is the only method that can be adapted to target the needed study participants. The typical use of purposive sampling involves inviting participants based on pre-selected standards pertinent to a particular research subject. According to Lopez and Whitehead (2013), it is intended to offer information-rich situations for in-depth study because participants are people who have the necessary position, experience, and particular knowledge to deliver the information researchers are looking for. The researcher must pick and approach candidates cautiously, excluding those who do not fit the profile.

The selection process was purposeful, involving selecting municipal staff from the District Planning Coordinating Unit. This consists of members from the various departments of the Assembly coming together to coordinate planning and budgeting. This criterion ensured that respondents possessed substantial institutional knowledge and a comprehensive understanding of citizen participation processes. Similarly, the Assembly members were selected using the same method, focusing on those elected by the people. Citizens engaged or previously engaged in decision-making processes constituted the third group of participants. The snowball sampling technique was applied to identify these citizens, aiming to include individuals who possess experience in local decision-making processes. The research sought data saturation, resulting in

twenty-three respondents comprising four municipal staff, four elected assembly members, and fifteen citizens.

**Table 3.1: Distribution of the sampled population**

<b>Staff Respondents' Distribution at SMA</b>		
<b>S/N</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Number</b>
1	Central Administration	2
2	Budget Unit	1
3	Planning Unit	1
	Total staff respondents	<b>4</b>
<b>Elected Officials' Respondent Distribution at SMA</b>		
<b>S/N</b>	<b>Zones</b>	<b>Number</b>
<b>1</b>	Maakro	1
<b>2</b>	Suame	2
<b>3</b>	Kronum	1
	Total elected officials' respondent	<b>4</b>
<b>Citizen Respondents' Distribution at SMA</b>		
<b>S/N</b>	<b>Zones</b>	<b>Number</b>
1	Maakro	4
2	Suame	6
3	Kronum	5
	Total citizen respondents	<b>15</b>
	<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>23</b>

Source: Author's fieldwork data, 2021

The table indicates that the four municipal staff interviewed were from three (3) departments. Also, from the three (3) zones within the municipality, the four (4) elected Assembly members were

purposefully chosen, and fifteen (15) citizens were also interviewed through the snowball method. The staff members consisted of both males and females. The elected assembly members were all males, as there were no female elected assembly members within the municipality. The researcher could not deal with the problem of gender imbalance regarding the citizens because of the reliance on referrals, as it comes with the snowball technique.

### **3.6 Source of Data**

Data is a collection of facts from which conclusions are drawn. In research, before conclusions and findings are made, there must be a process of gathering data. The source of data refers to the method by which a researcher collects information for their study (Babbie, 2016). The choice of data source depends on the research question, the availability of data, and the researcher's resources. Various data sources are available to researchers, including primary and secondary sources. Primary data sources, such as surveys, interviews, and observations, are collected specifically for the research study (Babbie, 2016). Secondary data sources, such as government reports, academic journals, and books, have already been ordered by others (Babbie, 2016).

The choice of data source depends on the research question and the data type required to answer the question. This research made use of both primary and secondary data. The primary data sources were municipal staff, elected officials, and Suame residents. Books, journal articles, unpublished works, reports, and other materials were secondary sources.

### **3.7 Methods and Data Collection Instrument**

A data collection instrument is a tool used by researchers to gather data for their study (Maxwell, 2013). The choice of data collection instrument depends on the research question, the type of data required, and the resources available. Several types of data collection instruments include surveys, interviews, focus groups, and observation checklists (Maxwell, 2013). The methods adopted for data collection are determined mainly by the research questions and objectives, although in qualitative research, this changes during the process (Maxwell, 2013). According to Cropley (2023), qualitative researchers get information by having the subjects of their studies tell stories about how they perceive the world. Speaking or writing and other kinds of communication like audio and videotapes are the main components (Cropley, 2023). It can also occur because of careful and methodical observation of individuals' daily lives (Cropley, 2023).

This study used the qualitative approach because it was considered appropriate for answering the research questions. The following qualitative tools involving document analysis, participant observation, observation, in-depth interview, semi-structured interview, and focus group discussions were at the researcher's disposal. However, this study adopted and relied on semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The interviews were conducted in both English and Akan using an interview guide and a voice recorder. The interviews lasted for an average of 20 – 40 minutes. The interview guide helped during the interview process to ensure that all questions were covered in the field. The field note assisted in noting essential information, and the recorder was used to record the interview for easy transcription.

### ***3.7.1 Semi-structured interview***

Semi-structured interviews are a popular data collection method in social science research because they compromise the freedom of unstructured interviews and the rigid manner of structured interviews (Bryman, 2016). In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer has a list of pre-determined questions. Still, they also have the flexibility to ask follow-up questions or probe deeper into specific topics. The open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview allow participants to provide more detailed responses than they might in a structured interview. This can provide valuable insights into the participant's perspective, experiences, and opinions (Maxwell, 2013). The semi-structured interview was used to collect data from the municipal staff, elected Assembly members within the municipality, and the selected citizens to assess their knowledge of the participatory avenues, their perception of them, the challenges of using them, and how they can be improved.

### **3.8 Data Collection Procedure**

The procedure for gathering data for a research study encompasses several stages and procedures, and it is a crucial part of the research process (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013). The accuracy and validity of the study's findings depend heavily on the quality of the data gathered. The process entails deciding on the sampling strategy, choosing the target population, creating the data collection devices, and implementing the data gathering process (Gillham, 2000).

For this study, a letter was sent to Suame Municipal Assembly to introduce the study to them and seek their permission. The Assembly gave permission and sent a letter from the ethics committee



that was used in the application for ethical clearance. The data collection started with the staff members from the Assembly who were interviewed face-to-face. With the assistance of the Head of the Human Resource department and the Presiding Member, the elected Assembly members were contacted, and interview appointments were scheduled at the Assembly Hall. In some cases, the Assembly member preferred not to be recorded; hence, notes were taken. Some community members were consulted with the help of the staff and the Assembly members. Upon acceptance to be interviewed, participants were given more information on the study, and their permission was sought for the interview to be recorded.

### **3.9 Data Analysis**

The procedures used to organize and analyze the data gathered for a research study are called data analysis. The efficacy and validity of the study's conclusions depend on these procedures (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Data cleansing, coding, and entry are some of the processes in the analysis (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). While coding entails giving the data labels or categories, data cleaning refers to locating and fixing flaws or inconsistencies in the data. Data entry entails entering the information into a database or software to be analyzed (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013).

Qualitative data analysis frequently uses coding and categorizing data to find themes or trends. Thematic analysis was used to examine the semi-structured interview data. That is, using the research questions as a guide, looking for meaningful themes within the data collection. The transcripts of the interviews were reviewed, and similar-sounding words and phrases were noted and given a code throughout the analysis of each participant's transcript. This made it possible to read lengthy text passages and identify key themes in the literature.

### **3.10 Ethical Consideration**

Ethical considerations are a crucial aspect of research since they refer to the rules and procedures that secure the rights and welfare of participants throughout the study process (Flick, 2018). These factors reduce potential harm to participants while ensuring that the research is handled ethically and respectfully. Obtaining informed consent from participants, maintaining their privacy and confidentiality, and ensuring they are not subjected to any needless pain or discomfort are all ethical considerations in research (Flick, 2018). Researchers must also follow the ethical rules and restrictions research institutes and funding organizations set forth.

Respondents were given information sheets that informed them of the study's goals, the information types required, and what would be done with the data they contributed. The information sheet was explained in the local dialect when the respondent could not read. Respondents were also given a consent form indicating the choice of participating or not participating after the study's objective had been made clear, ensuring that participation was voluntary. To ensure confidentiality, no personal information was collected from respondents, and their identities were not revealed. It was also made clear to respondents that the data they supply will only be utilized for academic purposes. To help them better understand the nature and purpose of the study, the participants were shown an introductory letter from the Department, School of Government. The UWC ethics board also examined the study's tools, and ethics clearance was provided.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on analyzing the data that were collected for this study. The semi-structured interviews with the Staff, the Elected Assembly members, and the citizens were transcribed. Codes were derived deductively and inductively to analyze the transcribed interviews and themes generated from them. The themes derived were directly linked to the study's research questions to understand the data. It further explores the data and shows findings that correspond to the aim of the study, which is to examine the extent of citizen participation in local government decision-making in Ghana, the Suame Municipal Assembly (SMA) used as a case study. The data was analyzed along the objectives of the study. The first objective was to identify the avenue(s) that exist at SMA for citizens to participate in decision-making and its nature; the second objective sought to explore the perception of how citizens regard these avenues for participation in decision-making at SMA; the third objective explored how far the views of citizens are considered in decision-making at Suame Municipal Assembly, and lastly, the study sought to present the challenges associated with citizen participation at Suame Municipal Assembly.

Regarding the semi-structured interviews conducted with the staff, elected officials, and citizens, it is essential to note that the researcher employed pseudonyms composed of letters and numbers during the analysis phase. This measure was taken to ensure the confidentiality of participants' information, as assured to them in this study. The analysis is presented as follows: The pseudonyms assigned to the three categories of research participants are distinct. Municipal staff is represented by the letters 'MO,' elected Assembly members by the letters 'AM,' and citizens by the letters 'CT.'

**Table 4.1 shows the participant groups and their pseudo-names.**

<b>Categories of participant</b>	<b>Participant ID</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
<b>Municipal staff</b>	MO (1-4)	4
<b>Assembly Members</b>	AM (1-4)	4

<b>Citizens</b>	CT (1-15)	15
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*Source: Author's construct, 2023*

#### **4.1 The Available Avenues for Citizen Participation in Decision-making Processes at Suame Municipal Assembly**

This section explores the avenues at SMA for the local people to participate in decisions. It also draws on the relevant section of the Local Government Act 2016 about participation in Ghana's decentralized government. Moreover, this section employs the results of interviews conducted with key staff and some elected Assembly members of the Municipal Assembly to identify the avenues created for participation, the nature of these avenues, and the purpose of engaging the people in decision-making processes at the Suame Municipal Assembly.

##### **4.1.1 The Avenues for Citizen Participation at Suame Municipal Assembly (SMA)**

According to Section 40 of the Local Government Act of 2016, the District Assembly must make it possible for district residents and other interested parties to participate in the Assembly's decisions regarding bylaws, fee-fixing resolutions, planning, budgeting, and other structures. Gaventa (2001) points out that if local governments seek to support participation, the most critical decision is to create avenues to share their views. Section 42 of the Local Government Act (2016) then instructs District Assemblies to establish a structure for participation, which may include the following: Town hall meetings, budget preparation, validation fora, visiting development sites, and other avenues for the participation of residents and stakeholders.

In the SMA, engaging the citizens was crucial to its decision-making process. To enable this engagement, two primary avenues for the citizens to participate in decisions concerning planning and budgeting at the Assembly, Town hall meetings, and public hearings were identified. These platforms enable people to express their views on issues that have an impact on their lives as well as to ask questions during decision-making. One of the key responsibilities of municipalities is developing a four-year plan known as the Medium-Term Development Plan, encompassing environmental, social, and economic concerns within the community. It is noteworthy that the Suame Municipal Assembly leverages public hearings to involve the community during the formulation of this Medium-Term Development Plan. Once approved, this plan undergoes annual



implementation. Consequently, municipalities prepare an Annual Action Plan outlining the specific steps, activities, and resources required to address the identified priority issues from the Medium-Term Development Plan. The Annual Action Plan serves as the instrument through which the Medium-Term Development Plan is executed annually. Hence, municipalities engage the people in preparing the Annual Action Plan through Town hall meetings. This was evident in the interviews conducted with municipal staff, in which they were asked what avenues had been created to engage the people. One municipal staff stated:

*A public hearing is the first avenue for the people when preparing the Medium-Term Development Plans.*

*...town hall meetings are organized twice every year... for seeking people's input in preparing the Action Plan and Budget (MO04, 10/01/2023).*

Another municipal staff, concurring with the point, added:

*...community durbars and public hearing on the budget is adopted and used in planning and budgeting here at Suame. (MO03, 12/01/2023)*

The quotes above indicate that SMA uses town halls and public hearings to engage with residents, which aligns with the provisions of the Local Government Act (2016) and demonstrates the Assembly's commitment to citizen participation. The finding is consistent with the studies conducted by Ahenkan et al. (2013), Der Bebelleh and Nobabumah (2013), and Be-ere (2023), who identified mechanisms such as stakeholder meetings, public hearings, and community forums used in some municipalities in Ghana to engage their citizens. In studies in Sub-Saharan Africa, Michel and de Graaf (2010) argue that deliberative forums such as public meetings and hearings provide citizens with essential avenues to express their views on specific issues. Furthermore, other mechanisms for citizen participation which was not identified in this study, such as petitions, committees, e-governance, and participatory budgeting, have been identified in the literature (Andre, 2014; Sintomer et al., 2012; Edbon & Franklin, 2006; Gilia, 2013). These mechanisms enable citizens to participate in local decision-making processes and contribute to more democratic and inclusive governance.

In summary, town halls and public hearings exist for citizen participation in decision-making at the Suame Municipal Assembly. However, the literature shows several forms of avenues used in countries around the world.

#### **4.1.2 The Characteristics of the Avenues Established for Citizen Participation in Decision-making at Suame Municipal Assembly**

Two avenues for citizen engagement in decision-making have been identified at the Suame Municipal Assembly: the town hall meeting and the public hearing. These avenues have distinct characteristics within the Ghanaian context, as revealed through interviews with staff and elected assembly members. The interviews provided insights into how information is shared, the key actors who participate, their selection and representation, and the frequency of meetings organized annually.

First, it was noted that the primary information-sharing tool used by the municipal to call on the people for their attendance at town hall meetings and public hearings incorporates modernity and traditional ways. Information vans, information centers, and Gong-gong beaters are used to communicate with people. Information vans and centers are crucial in providing essential information to community members on various areas of interest. The gong-gong beater is an individual who beats the ‘gong,’ a percussion instrument with a stick, to pass vital information from the authorities to the community members. In response to the question on how they communicate meeting day, time, and venue to the community, one assembly member reveals that:

*We use the information centers.... traditionally we have what we call the gong-gong. So, the gong-gong beater can get the information across (AM<sub>03</sub>, 5/01/2023).*

A municipal staff further emphasizes that.

*We also make use of information vans that go around announcing the meeting date, time, and venue to the public. (MO<sub>03</sub>, 12/01/2023)*

This shows the Assembly’s approach to communicating with its members. It incorporates modern and traditional methods to meet the diverse community's communication needs. Mensah, Tetteh, Ampratwum, and Kuffour (2015), in their study involving 17 local authority areas in Ghana,

identified that the information-sharing tools mostly used are the radio, gong-beaters, and information centers. The literature also shows that this approach has been adopted by several local governments in Sub-Saharan Africa and beyond the continent. To illustrate, Marinkovic (2022) found a similar result: a municipality in Serbia used a combination of communication tools, such as flyers and posters, alongside social media platforms and email newsletters, to inform citizens about upcoming meetings. Similarly, the finding is consistent with the Sintomer et al. (2012) study in France, where municipalities use traditional methods such as posters and flyers, while others utilize modern tools, like social media platforms and mobile applications, to inform citizens about upcoming public meetings. The Assembly's approach provides an interesting case study for exploring the potential benefits of combining modernity and tradition in local governance.

Additionally, in town hall meetings and public hearings, the participants are self-selected, meaning they are open platforms where anyone can attend. However, individuals or groups are invited to participate in certain situations based on their ability to provide good insights. This ensures that different views are represented, as self-selected participants may not guarantee equal community representation. When questioned on how participants are selected to be engaged during the meetings, a municipal staff indicated that:

*...the town hall meeting is everybody. They are open to everyone. ... but there are certain people we cannot do away with. ...these are the people we invite (MO<sub>04</sub>, 10/01/2023).*

On the same question, another elected assembly member concurs with MO<sub>04</sub>, stating that:

*Some are specially invited, ... when it comes to a health issue, those [community members] having such problems will be targeted and hence invited (AM<sub>03</sub>, 5/01/2023).*

The quotes above show that town hall meetings and public hearings in SMA are open to anyone interested in attending and participating in discussions. However, there are situations where the Assembly may specifically invite specific individuals or groups to contribute to the conversations, which could encourage some tokenism, as Arnstein observes (1969). The literature shows divergent views on this approach. For example, open self-selection is described by Fung (2016) as a commonly used selection method in public hearings, allowing individuals to participate if they possess the necessary interest, willingness, availability, and resources. However, Michels and de

Graaf (2010) argue that granting universal participation rights may not always be the optimal solution, as differences in knowledge, skills, and interests can result in limited representativeness and low motivation. Leach (2006) proposes a hybrid approach incorporating representative participants and individuals with diverse perspectives into the discussions to balance representation and diversity. Consequently, open self-selection is often complemented by open-targeted recruitment, where specific individuals or groups are selectively recruited for local decision-making (Goss, 2016). In the case of Ghana, these individuals are the Chiefs, Queen Mothers, and Committee Members, and they are invited because they are prominent in the community (Be-ere, 2023). This approach allows for diverse ideas to be shared and considered (Goss, 2016).

Furthermore, it was observed that both town hall meetings and public hearings serve distinct purposes, such as problem identification, agenda setting, and certain aspects of implementation. These gatherings offer an avenue for individuals to voice their concerns to municipal staff and elected Assembly members, providing input on the issues that need attention and offering insights. However, citizen participation beyond these stages of the decision-making process is not widely prevalent. One municipal staff emphasized this by stating:

*... it is not only about the preparation [of the Action Plans and the Medium-Term Development Plans] but also the implementation of policies and projects (MO04, 10/01/2023).*

Likewise, a citizen expressed the view that:

*I think the preparation stage. ... we also get involved in the implementation stage, but for the [monitoring and] evaluation stage, I don't think so (CT11, 31/01/2023).*

The available evidence suggests that citizen participation within the Suame Municipal Assembly primarily focuses on specific stages of the decision-making process, namely problem identification, agenda setting, and implementation. This aligns with the findings of Akudu et al. (2012), who argued that there were fewer instances where participants were consulted in the Bawku area of Ghana. It was only at the stage of identifying a problem. Also, Andre (2014)



observes that citizen participation often tends to be confined to specific stages of the decision-making process, lacking effective engagement beyond those stages.

In summary, town hall meetings and public hearings share similarities in terms of their information-sharing tool, participant selection, and the stages of the decision-making process where participants play a crucial role.

#### **4.1.3 The Purpose of Citizen Participation in Decision-Making Processes at the Suame Municipal Assembly.**

Given the fast development and complicated difficulties facing contemporary society, it becomes harder for elected leaders to deal with these concerns independently. Consequently, there is a growing recognition of the need to incorporate a broader range of knowledge in decision-making processes, giving rise to the demand for more participatory democracy where citizens actively engage with contemporary issues rather than merely observing (Cuthill & Fien, 2005). In the case of the Suame Municipal Assembly, town hall meetings and public hearings provide opportunities for citizen participation in decision-making. It was essential to understand the Assembly's objectives in establishing these avenues for participation. Interviews revealed that the Assembly organized these meetings to uphold effective governance principles, enable community members to express their opinions, enhance responsiveness to community needs, and keep the public informed about the Assembly's activities.

Firstly, the Assembly recognizes the significance of citizen participation in fostering effective governance. It believes that involving citizens in decision-making enhances accountability and legitimacy. With a dedication to advancing the principles of good governance, the Assembly organizes town hall meetings and public hearings, creating platforms for citizens to voice their opinions and raise their concerns to municipal staff and elected Assembly members. A municipal staff's perspective on this matter is that:

*I think it promotes good governance (MO<sub>04</sub>, 10/01/2023).*

Another municipal staff further underscored the significance of these mechanisms, emphasizing that:

*... the Assembly cannot do without them. ...whatever we do as a municipality, we must seek their [community members] consent (MO<sub>01</sub>, 11/01/2023).*

It is evident from the above quotes that SMA aims to promote effective governance by organizing town hall meetings and public hearings. Extensive research indicates that involving citizens in decision-making enhances democracy, and citizen participation plays a vital role in local democracy and good governance (Tvaltvadze, 2017; Thompson, 2011). Specifically, scholars (Devas & Grant, 2003; Michel & de Graaf, 2010; Guo & Neshkova, 2013) have emphasized that citizen participation places democratic values into decision-making processes, fosters legitimacy, and strengthens accountability in local government.

Also, the Assembly values citizen participation as it allows people to shape policies and decisions that impact their lives. In line with this, the Assembly organizes these meetings to serve as a platform for citizens to engage with their municipal staff and elected Assembly members, voice their concerns, and contribute to developing policies that address the community's needs. A municipal staff indicated that:

*... in making decisions, you don't impose a decision on the people, but let them come out with their visions... (MO<sub>04</sub>, 10/01/2023).*

Another municipal staff claimed that:

*We collect their views and put their ideas into the formulation of policies. ...we collate all their views and put them in the yearly Action Plans of the Assembly (MO<sub>03</sub>, 12/01/2023).*

The town hall meetings and public hearings organized by the Assembly serve as platforms for involving citizens in shaping policies that address the community's needs. This aligns with the findings in the literature, which highlight that participatory budgeting, a mechanism of citizen participation, empowers citizens by placing the final municipal budget decision-making in their hands, providing an opportunity for them to shape policies that directly affect them (Gordon et al., 2016).

In addition, the meetings ensure that the Assembly is responsive to the community's needs. These meetings can help the Assembly communicate directly with the community and receive feedback

on various issues. This can then inform the development of policies and programs that better meet the community's needs. As a municipal staff perceptively stated

*Sometimes, I remember certain places where they could build a market for their people, but the people would not need the market. Rather, they need a football park. So, we want to know precisely what they need us to do for them (MO<sub>01</sub>, 11/01/2023).*

The objective of involving citizens in decision-making at the Suame Municipal Assembly is to enhance its responsiveness to the community's needs. This is consistent with scholars such as Zipfel (2008) and Osei-Kuffour and Koomson (2014), who argue that citizen participation in local government affairs is crucial for effective service delivery. They suggest that local governments can prioritize essential and nonessential services based on the feedback received from citizens. However, William and Kihehere (2013) and Conyers (2009) hold the opposite view that involving citizens in decision-making does not always lead to improved service delivery. Ribot (2003) argues that evidence of change in service delivery quality and quantity is insufficient to support this claim.

Lastly, the purpose of the meetings is not only to engage citizens in decision-making processes but also to keep them informed about the activities of the Assembly. The Assembly uses these meetings to provide information to the public. By informing the citizens of ongoing and upcoming projects, policies, and programs, the Assembly aims to increase public understanding and awareness of its activities. It is the view of an assembly member that:

*...most people are ignorant about the structures of the Assembly. ... so, when we organize the town hall meetings, we explain many issues to them so they can understand certain events that happen at the Assembly (AM<sub>01</sub>, 10/01/2023).*

This shows that the Assembly utilizes the meetings to inform the public about its operations. It is worth noting that various participatory budgeting methods also aim to achieve outcomes such as fostering a more knowledgeable citizenry (Gordon et al., 2016).

In all, the Suame Municipal Assembly, through its town hall meetings and public hearings, seeks to advance effective governance, give the people the opportunity to shape policies, make the Assembly responsive to the needs of the community, and keep them informed about the activities of the Assembly.

## 4.2 Identifying the Power Dynamics Inherent in the Decision-Making Processes at SMA.

Gaventa and Valderrama (1999) argued that citizen participation involves power exercised by different participants in the various spaces created for interaction. To understand the level of citizen engagement during town hall meetings and public hearings, it is crucial to understand the power relations at play in identifying problems, setting agendas, selecting alternatives, and more. As Walker and Miller (2020) put it, decision-making in a local government involves several stages, including identifying the problems, which ones need immediate attention, the proposed strategy, adoption, and assessing its effectiveness. Different actors may have varying degrees of influence and input at each stage, depending on the issue at hand (Walker & Miller, 2020). Participants, citizens, elected Assembly members, and administrators must understand their roles in decision-making processes. The interviews revealed different perspectives on the roles of citizens, elected Assembly members, and staff in decision-making.

The interviews revealed that some citizens perceived the staff and elected members as experts on the issues being discussed, given their access to information and resources unavailable to them. As a result, staff and elected members were viewed as knowledgeable and experienced, making their opinions valuable to the community. Consequently, citizens often defer to the expertise of the staff and elected members, depending on them. This gives the municipal staff and elected members significant power during these meetings to make decisions that affect the community. As a citizen points out:

*... the Assembly members and staff are well-educated, which is what they do best. So, after telling them what I want, it will be left to them to decide whether my view can be added or if they can change certain things to suit my needs (CT05, 19/01/2023).*

This is further concurred by another respondent.

*There are times that we share our views on specific issues, and they [municipal staff] feel like they have the best approach to tackle the matter at hand. When it comes to that, they know best, so we leave it to them to deal with it. (CT04, 17/01/2023).*

Based on the interviews, it can be deduced that municipal staff and elected members hold significant power in determining necessary actions and how they should be done. Consequently,



the community looks to these officials for guidance and relies on them to make informed decisions. The power relation between municipal staff, elected members, and citizens, as observed in the interviews, aligns with the findings of Buckwalter (2014) regarding citizen participation in review panels for child protection agencies in many U.S. cities. The author explains that citizens often lack the technical expertise required for effective engagement (Buckwalter, 2014). Hegel and Gerber (2020) further contribute to this perspective by highlighting imbalances in influence and control among participants throughout the decision-making process, which can come from differences in expertise and resources. Levine (2017) also acknowledges that despite residents' perceived empowerment, officials ultimately retain decision-making authority, highlighting the unequal power distribution in such contexts. This also happens when many professionals and experts who deal with public issues show public involvement as problematic. They believe that the complexity of modern problems cannot be adequately addressed through shared knowledge and creativity alone (Levine, 2017).

In all, it can be viewed that the citizens view the assembly members and municipal staff as experts during decision-making, and hence, they rely on the officials' judgment, granting them power.

#### **4.3 Citizen Engagement in Decision-Making at the Suame Municipal Assembly: Understanding the Level of Involvement**

This section examines how citizens' perspectives were considered during the decision-making process and how this influenced the resulting outcomes. The analysis draws on interviews with citizens, municipal staff, and elected officials. Firstly, it analyzes the nature of the discussions and interactions during town hall meetings and public hearings. Lastly, this section evaluates the efforts made by administrative officials to incorporate citizen views into policymaking.

##### **4.3.2 Analyzing the Nature of Discussion and Interaction in Citizen Participation Avenues At SMA**

One crucial aspect of citizen participation is the discussion and interaction within these avenues. The degree of engagement relies on the quality of communication and interaction between citizens, municipal staff, and elected members. Data analysis revealed that the interaction primarily consisted of staff and elected members informing the public about the meeting's agenda, allowing

individuals to express their views and pose questions. After that, a follow-up meeting is organized, and the people are informed whether their views and opinions are considered in the decisions being made. However, it is noted that some citizens expressed reservations regarding the nature of this interaction during town hall meetings and public hearings.

Firstly, it was observed that both the town hall meetings and public hearings show two-way communication between municipal staff, elected members, and citizens. Before the meetings, the citizens are informed about the agenda to enable them to prepare and provide input. Subsequently, the agenda is further explained during the conference. In this case, the citizens are provided updates on ongoing and upcoming projects or presented reports on the Assembly's activities. A citizen indicated that:

*At the last meeting, we went to, they spoke of the Suame Interchange, how the interchange will come about, and where exactly we stand. So, they were just making it known to us that this was the problem we would face. (CT04, 17/01/2023).*

Once the public has been informed of the critical matters, they can offer feedback, pose questions, and actively contribute to the decision-making process, facilitating two-way communication between community members and the Assembly. This enables the public to seek clarification and obtain further information from the Assembly members. According to a citizen,

*We ask questions, and through those answers we are given, it helps us understand exactly what is going on. (CT06, 20/01/2023).*

Citizens are not spectators during these town hall meetings and public hearings. They can ask questions, enabling community members to understand better the decision-making processes and policies being discussed.

Secondly, there is a feedback mechanism in the decision-making process. After the first meeting, the Assembly evaluates how they can incorporate the citizens' views from the first meeting into the proposed plans they have prepared. A municipal staff further clarifies this,

*When we are preparing the development plan, we go back to them again after the situation analysis, and those things, you go back so that they can confirm that these are the things that you told us we implemented and these are the true reflection, like the validation type of session for them to confirm whether what they said is what is really on the paper or the document (MO<sub>04</sub>, 10/01/2023).*

Another staff member confirms this,

*It depends on when we organize the open forum. So, if we organize it at the end of the year, that means you want to solicit their idea into the ensuing year. But we can also have it within the year so that we can tell them what we have done with what they want. (MO<sub>01</sub>, 11/01/2023).*

However, some citizens felt that these meetings lacked balance and were dominated by officials rather than allowing for meaningful two-way communication. They believe the meetings are more of a monologue, with the Assembly providing information rather than engaging in a meaningful discussion. This has led to concerns that the meetings are not as participatory as they should be, and as such, they lack substantive debate and dialogue. As explained by a citizen

*...at the end of the day, you only go there to listen to the Assembly; they tell things that are happening. (CT<sub>08</sub>, 23/01/2023).*

Another respondent shares this view.

*...one problem is that sometimes you go there, and you listen to theirs mostly (CT<sub>09</sub>, 25/01/2023).*

This indicates that the citizens tend to listen more and express their views less during the meetings held at SMA. The municipal staff and assembly members justified their dominant speaking roles by emphasizing that they called for the meetings. This is evident in the response of an assembly member.

*I make sure that myself and the staff, we talk about 70% and then we give about 30% to people for them to speak because, obviously we have come with a message to deliver so we will talk more, and after that, we will hear from them. (AM<sub>01</sub>, 10/01/2023).*

This demonstrates that the Assembly dominates the discussion, limiting the opportunities for the people to express their views and opinions. This is consistent with the study by Berner, Amos, and Morse (2011), who argued that in cities in North Carolina, citizens perceive a lack of effort from elected officials to actively seek their input during the budget process, particularly in public meetings. They find the public meeting format, characterized by one-sided communication from presenters to the board, ineffective for meaningful participation (Berner et al., 2011). Citizens ask for a system that incorporates two-way communication, fostering meaningful dialogue with staff and elected officials as part of the process (Berner et al., 2011). According to Lanniello, Lacuzzi, Fedele, and Brusati (2019), creating good interaction results in successful citizen participation since engagement can be insincere in some circumstances and is, therefore, unlikely to result in successful citizen participation.

In summary, the town hall meetings and public hearings serve as a platform where the public is informed of the activities of the Suame Municipal Assembly. It also allows people to express their views as well as ask questions. However, it is still dominated by the officials rather than allowing for meaningful two-way communication.

#### **4.3.3 Evaluation of the Efforts to Translate Citizens' Views into Policies At SMA**

A critical aspect of citizen participation is ensuring citizens' views and opinions are considered when making policies. For citizen participation to be meaningful, administrative officials must incorporate citizens' opinions into policymaking. While citizens may be able to express their views and provide feedback, it is ultimately up to the executive officials to incorporate these views into the final decision. It was previously identified that power during decision-making is with the officials and the elected members, giving them the mandate to set the agenda, adopt policies, and implement them. It was also identified that there is no meaningful discussion and that the officials dominate interaction. This leads to the argument that the decision-making process is futile.

A noteworthy finding from our observations is that some citizens who were interviewed believe their participation cannot yield meaningful outcomes. While the participants exhibited enthusiasm for the opportunity to express their perspectives and contribute to policy development, they anticipated their opinions and ideas would be duly acknowledged and incorporated into the eventual policy implementations. Nonetheless, citizens perceive their involvement in the decision-



making process as ineffective, primarily due to the absence of tangible and intangible results stemming from their participation, such as integrating their views into policies or decisions. Consequently, this ineffectiveness engenders disillusionment among the public, fostering a perception that their involvement is undervalued.

One citizen highlights this concern by stating:

*The final decision will not be a true reflection of what the people need. So, I think on paper, it is supposed to be a good initiative that we can use to channel our problems to the District Assembly but, it is not working (CT<sub>12</sub>, 01/02/2023).*

Another citizen adds that:

*They hear them [the public's view] and then they [are] also factored into decision-making, but mostly it's not for the convenience of the people. So, in effect, I think it's not very effective. It's not serving its purpose. (CT<sub>13</sub>, 06/02/2023).*

Also, some respondents mentioned that their input is sometimes acknowledged but frequently only partially included in the decision-making process. This partial integration can lead to frustration and inconsistency among citizens. While they value the occasional recognition of their viewpoints, they also seek a more dependable and substantial impact on policy outcomes. A citizen shared this when asked whether their views are considered during decision-making.

*Sometimes it is real and sometimes feeble. ...what we discussed in that meeting, some are taken, but not all. We talked about the road in Suame here. The road in the community is very bad. ...like from Embassy Hotel to the Suame Market, the road is very bad. (CT<sub>05</sub>, 19/01/2023).*

Another citizen articulated a similar sentiment, remarking,

*...the opportunity is there for you to share your views and request something. At the end of the day, some things will not be considered, and others will be. We do not get everything a 100%. (CT<sub>04</sub>, 17/01/2023).*

A municipal staff further concurred on the point, also stating:

*It should be [fully incorporating citizens views into the plans] but, no, I do not think so. That is how it is supposed to be. But whether we always take what they want is sometimes debatable. (MO<sub>01</sub>,11/01/2023).*

The analysis indicates a significant disconnect between the decisions made by municipal staff and the expressed interests of citizens during meetings for citizen engagement. This suggests that despite providing opportunities for citizen input, the decisions made by officials may not align with the preferences and views of the citizens. This perspective underscores the significance of seeking citizen input and ensuring its consistent and sincere incorporation into policy decisions to align citizens' expectations with their actual influence on the decision-making process. Similar findings have been reported in the literature, highlighting the prevalence of decision-making systems where decisions have little or no input from the people the decision will affect (Devas & Grant, 2003). In the case of Ghana, scholars (Akudu et al., 2012; Mensah et al., 2016; Be-ere, 2023) contend that citizen participation in planning and budgeting is low and, in some instances, non-existent. In Sub-Saharan Africa, similar findings have been made in this regard. For example, studies conducted by Buccus, Hemson, Hicks, and Piper (2008) argue that ward committees in South Africa cannot effectively incorporate community input into development planning processes, while Esau (2008) contends that participation in Ward Committees is merely symbolic and lacks meaningful power.

Furthermore, research conducted by Marango et al. (2018) found that the Matare platform used to engage citizens in Zimbabwe failed to facilitate effective participation due to a lack of exposure to the budget formulation process and a lack of clear strategies for encouraging participation in council affairs. Additionally, Adam (2004) argues that while public meetings allow people to send information to the government for agenda setting, they do not provide direct participation opportunities.

In summary, while two-way communication occurs during town hall meetings and public hearings, officials dominate the discussions. A follow-up meeting is held to inform citizens whether their views have been considered. However, citizens reported that their opinions are sometimes only partially considered and, at other times, not considered at all, rendering the process ineffective.

#### 4.4 Barriers to Effective Citizen Participation at Suame Municipal Assembly

The significance of citizen participation in decision-making processes has been widely recognized as an essential aspect of promoting good governance and sustainable development. However, despite its potential benefits, various barriers often impede effective citizen participation. In the case of the Suame Municipal Assembly, several challenges hinder the meaningful engagement of citizens in the decision-making process. Both citizens and municipal staff hold different perspectives regarding these barriers. Citizens face challenges such as limited accessibility to decision-making spaces, inadequate dissemination of information and knowledge to the public, inconsistent scheduling of meetings, and perceived lack of influence in the decision-making process. On the other hand, municipal staff face challenges such as limitations of the legislative and policy frameworks, as well as financial constraints that limit their ability to engage citizens effectively.

First, the citizens believe that lack of accessibility impedes effective participation at the local level. In this context, "accessibility" refers to the ability of individuals to access and participate in available opportunities. The lack of accessibility is due to educational background and geographical location. Regarding educational background, it was noted that the citizens could not understand and engage in the meetings because most were illiterate. On the other hand, geographical location limited the public's access to these meetings due to distance and transportation issues. These barriers to accessibility have a substantial impact on the public's capacity to engage in decision-making processes. A municipal staff clarified this matter, stating:

*Some people want to come..., but they claim because of the location of the Assembly, they cannot make that distance. (MO<sub>02</sub>, 10/01/2023).*

A citizen shared their experience, emphasizing that:

*In our local settings, the illiteracy rate is very high. So, the Assemblies sometimes must find a lot of ways of convincing the people to even participate in certain things (CT<sub>08</sub>, 23/01/2023).*

This proves that educational background and geographical location impact citizens' opportunities to participate in town hall meetings and public hearings. In line with this, research by the Media Foundation for West Africa (2019) reported that the challenge to citizen participation is that

Ghanaians do not have the opportunity to participate because of illiteracy. Studies in Sub-Saharan Africa also highlight similar findings. For example, Nyama and Mukwada (2022) highlight that lacking knowledge and skills can hinder effective citizen participation in Zimbabwe. Similarly, Bebelleh and Nobabumah (2013) identify individual factors such as a lack of skills and formal education as barriers to citizen participation at the local level.

Also, the citizens believe they are not given enough information and knowledge to participate in these meetings at Suame. This refers to the lack of access or insufficient information provided to the public about matters that affect them, including policies and decision-making processes. So, when this happens, they cannot clearly understand the issues or the implications of decisions being made. This lack of information creates a barrier to effective participation because the public cannot engage meaningfully in the decision-making process if they do not understand the issues. This is evident in a statement by a citizen:

*... there are people in the assembly [community] that the assembly benefits from, but then they do not even know what the assembly does for them. All they know is the Assembly takes this and that. (CT<sub>13</sub>, 06/02/2023).*

Thus, the Assembly's limited dissemination of information and knowledge hinders the public's ability to actively participate in shaping the policies that impact their lives. This observation aligns with findings from the literature. For instance, the Media Foundation for West Africa (2019) reported that most Ghanaians are ill-informed about the processes, limiting their participation. Also, Ahenkan et al. (2013) contended that participation was limited at Sefwi Wiawso because stakeholders lacked a proper grasp of the process. Ghaffari and Tonkaboni (2020) discovered in their study on citizen participation in environmental issues that a significant challenge lies in participants lacking a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Furthermore, participants are often insufficiently informed about relevant issues and developments (Ghaffari & Tonkaboni, 2020).

Moreover, it was noted that inconsistent scheduling of meetings served as a barrier to the effective participation of citizens in Suame municipality. This refers to the irregularity of the frequency and timing of meetings, which can make it difficult for members of the public to plan and attend meetings. Inconsistent scheduling makes it challenging for individuals with other commitments to



attend meetings, resulting in a limited diversity of voices and perspectives being represented. One citizen reported,

*In my case, when the meeting is organized, we are just a few people who go to these meetings. Sometimes, time is a deciding factor for most people. If they have time, they do go. (CT05, 19/01/2023).*

Ultimately, inconsistent scheduling of meetings can hinder the full participation of the public in decision-making processes, which can have negative implications for the democratic legitimacy of those processes. This issue has been highlighted in the literature. For instance, Devas and Grant (2003) observed that infrequent meetings intended to engage the public resulted in low attendance in Uganda. Nabatchi (2010) described this phenomenon as a cost-benefit analysis for citizens, where the high transaction cost of participating outweighed the potential benefits. This cost may include the time required to attend meetings (Nabatchi, 2010). Chikerema (2013) further argued that low citizen participation is influenced by the timing of meetings, which often fails to consider the busy schedules of citizens. Blair (2000) explained this as a habit among councilors who may fear public scrutiny and manipulate the process by scheduling meetings at inconvenient times or in obscure locations.

Lastly, the perceived lack of impact on decision-making processes leads to limited motivation for public participation. This refers to a situation where members of the public believe that their opinions or feedback will not significantly affect the final decisions made. This belief arose from past experiences where the public's views were not considered or the decision-making outcomes did not align with the public's expectations. As a result, the citizens are less motivated to participate in decision-making processes as they do not see the point in investing their time and effort into something they perceive as futile. According to a citizen,

*For someone to be encouraged to go to a place more than once, you know that the first time the person went there, they achieved something good which will motivate you to go for a second time. But if you go there for the first time and achieve nothing, it means that the person is wasting their time so they will not go again. (CT01, 12/01/2023)*

This perceived lack of influence creates a sense of apathy among citizens, becoming a significant barrier to effective participation and resulting in limited input from the public within Suame. This,

in turn, can lead to less representative and less effective decision-making processes. This is consistent with Roberts (2004), who explains that the current system, which discourages or significantly hinders substantive citizen involvement, supports the conclusion that citizens may lack motivation or interest to participate when asked. Consequently, the failures in direct participation can be attributed to a sense of ineffectiveness of a system that initially prevents meaningful citizen engagement (Roberts, 2004). Adding to that, Esau (2008) explains that people would be more inclined to participate in public meetings if they could observe a direct connection between their attendance and fulfilling a specific need.

On the other hand, the officials believe that their ability to engage the citizens effectively is limited by the various legislation and policy frameworks that coordinate their activities. These refer to the rules and regulations governing local governments' activities in Ghana. This is a hindrance to incorporating citizen feedback and opinion into decision-making processes. It was explained that the rules are often rigid and require a certain level of formality. As a result, municipal staff may be unable to consider certain people's views regarding decision-making. This was well-explained by municipal staff.

*Maybe the budget...before we even engage the citizenry. Some guidelines come from the Ministry of Finance as to how we should go about it. So, when we have a meeting, and the people air their views, we will consider them, but we also must make sure it is within the mandate of the Ministry of Finance so that they do not contradict. ... So, we take their views, but we will make sure that it is within the mandate of the central government.*  
(MO<sub>01</sub>,11/01/2023)

The quote above shows that rules governing these meetings shape the behavior and limitations of the Assembly, which can hinder meaningful engagement. This finding is consistent with other studies in the literature. For instance, Walker and Miller (2020) explain that legal requirements impact the government's ability to involve citizens in decision-making despite the influence of needs effectively. This notion is supported by Nyama and Mukwada (2022), who highlight how restrictive legal frameworks can impede citizens' effective participation at the local level. Additionally, in Australia and the United Kingdom, institutional arrangements within water management units have posed challenges to facilitating effective participation by hindering knowledge sharing between local governments and participants in water management forums

(Collins & Ison, 2009). Hierarchical systems prioritizing control over collaboration can further hinder citizen participation, leading to a disconnect between citizens and administrators (Buckwalter, 2014).

Also, the officials believe that financial constraints hinder their ability to engage the public effectively. When local governments face financial constraints, it can limit their ability to organize and conduct public meetings, forums, and other forms of citizen engagement. Hence, there are limited resources to advertise meetings, provide transportation for citizens, or offer incentives for participation, such as refreshments or compensation for time. These can ultimately discourage individuals from participating in the decision-making process. A municipal staff explained that:

*Engaging them is very expensive for the Assembly. Because you need to mobilize them, you need to refresh them, and you need to prepare where to organize the meeting. (MO<sub>01</sub>, 10/01/2023).*

Financial constraints posed a significant challenge in assessing the practicality of including citizens' perspectives in the decision-making process. This required a thorough review of resource allocation and funding availability to ensure the effective integration of citizens' voices.

*When they air their views, that is what we want. We want a toilet. We want to water. ... We will put it down and later when we have funds, we will consider that. ... Because we deal with funds. If you do not have money, we cannot work. So, we will come but before we can consider it, there should be a time where we have money before we can do it. (MO<sub>01</sub>, 11/01/2023).*

The financial constraints the Assembly faces pose challenges to effectively engaging the public and seeking their opinions on matters that affect them, as indicated in the quote above. It also affects the Assembly's capacity to consider the citizens' needs in their plans. This aligns with findings in the literature where Walker and Miller (2020) highlighted how fiscal constraints can impact the participatory decision-making processes of local governments, as they must balance their financial responsibilities with other duties. Moreover, Amponsah et al. (2017) emphasize that inadequate financial resources contribute to the low participation of individuals in decision-making processes. Addressing these financial limitations will be essential to create more inclusive and accessible opportunities for public engagement.

In conclusion, several factors have been identified as barriers to effective citizen participation. These include limited accessibility, insufficient dissemination of information and knowledge to the public, inconsistent scheduling of meetings, perceived lack of influence, limitations imposed by legislative and policy frameworks, and financial constraints. These barriers collectively hinder the ability of citizens to engage meaningfully in decision-making processes and limit the inclusivity and effectiveness of public participation at Suame Municipality.

#### **4.5 Theory and Practice: Citizen Participation in Decision-making Process at SMA**

The study utilized Arnstein's Ladder of Participation and Varieties of Participation model as a theoretical framework. The citizen participation dynamics in the Suame Municipal Assembly (SMA) resonate in both frameworks. For instance, in the Varieties of Participation model, when selecting participants, it was observed that involvement in town hall meetings and public hearings was based on open self-selection. This approach has the lowest barriers to participating in decision-making but offers minimal influence.

Regarding communication modes, participants in these meetings often play the role of passive listeners, functioning more as spectators with limited opportunities to express opinions. Officials are not bound to act on these opinions. As for the level of influence, citizens typically act as advisors and consultants. Despite providing advice, officials maintain their authority and power, aligning with Arnstein's ladder of participation, specifically on the third rung.

During town hall meetings and public hearings, citizens are well-informed and can share their opinions after receiving information. However, this participation tends to be more of an illusion of inclusion rather than genuine involvement in decision-making. Even though citizens may have limited influence, officials still dominate the decision-making process, creating a perceived but not actual participation.

#### **4.6 Chapter Conclusion**

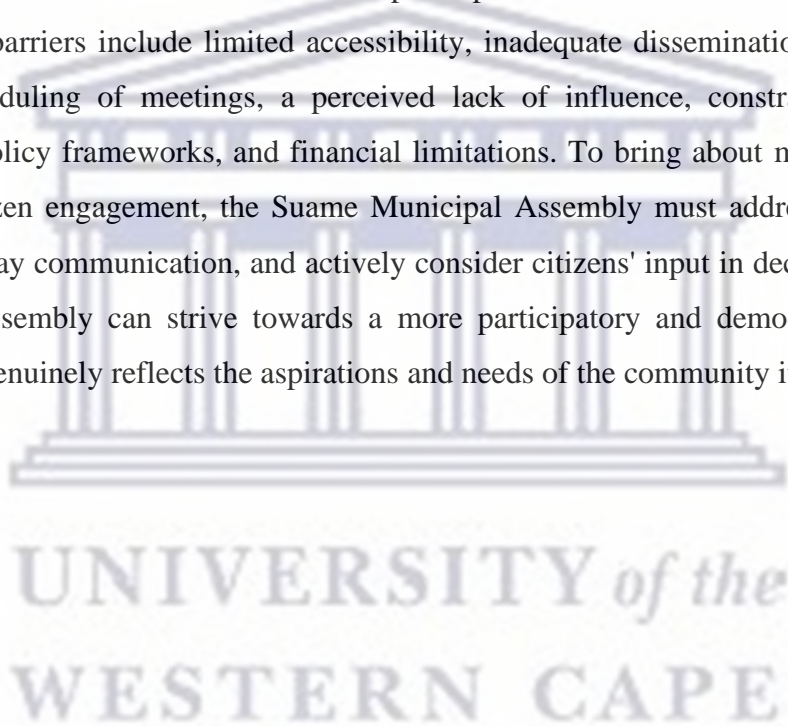
At Suame, Town hall meetings and public hearings provide essential platforms for the citizens to involve themselves in local government decision-making. These avenues share similarities regarding the tools used to share information, the selection of people who will participate, and the stages of decision-making where citizen involvement is allowed. However, they differ in how often they are held and the specific objectives they aim to achieve. The Suame Municipal Assembly



recognizes the significance of these meetings. It organizes them to promote effective governance, shape policies that address community needs, and keep citizens well-informed about the activities of the Assembly.

Moreover, citizens generally view municipal staff and elected members as the primary decision-making experts, often relying on their judgment and expertise. While there may be some level of two-way communication during the town hall meetings and public hearings, as well as a feedback mechanism, it is evident that discussions tend to be dominated by municipal staff and elected members, leading to citizens' viewpoints being given less consideration by the Assembly. These contribute to a perceived gap between citizen input and actual decision-making outcomes, undermining these participatory processes' effectiveness and inclusivity.

Additionally, several barriers hinder citizens' participation in town hall meetings and public hearings. These barriers include limited accessibility, inadequate dissemination of information, inconsistent scheduling of meetings, a perceived lack of influence, constraints imposed by legislative and policy frameworks, and financial limitations. To bring about meaningful change and enhance citizen engagement, the Suame Municipal Assembly must address these barriers, encourage two-way communication, and actively consider citizens' input in decision-making. By doing so, the Assembly can strive towards a more participatory and democratic governance framework that genuinely reflects the aspirations and needs of the community it serves.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter aims to present this study's key findings, conclusion, and recommendations. This contributes to the broader understanding of the research topic and further research. The first section summarizes the findings as it concludes the study. The second section offers recommendations for the Suame Municipal Assembly, policymakers, and scholars.

#### 5.1 Conclusion

The crucial role of citizen engagement in local governance is argued as a fundamental component of representative democracy and effective governance. Good governance encompasses various principles within the realm of governance, including participation, collaboration, transparency, responsibility, and accountability. In many African nations, pursuing greater democracy and good governance has coincided with efforts to transition from highly centralized systems towards models prioritizing individual initiatives and citizen involvement in governmental affairs. Decentralization has emerged as an important approach in recent years, aiming to enhance the relationship between different levels of government and sectors within a nation. By transferring authority and responsibility to elected and appointed subnational bodies, decentralized governance empowers individuals by enabling their direct engagement in decision-making processes. This inclusive participation is crucial for municipal budgets, development plans, bylaws, and other aspects directly impacting citizens' daily lives.

Ghana, a country in the west of Africa, adopted a decentralization strategy in 1988 to bring governance down to the local level. Decentralization is predicated on the fundamental idea that local government decision-making should involve the public. The Local Governance Act 936 of 2016 and other enabling laws, including the Republic of Ghana's Constitution (1992), demand that Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs) engage residents to ensure effective grass-roots participation. MMDAs are expected to seek feedback from the public within their demarcated areas on how best to meet their needs. However, a notable gap exists in well-defined and documented research on citizen participation in local government activities in Ghana despite the increasing calls for participation, accountability, and transparency.

Using Suame Municipal Assembly (SMA), part of the 43 Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs) within the Ashanti Region of Ghana as a case of inquiry, the study intended to fill the gap by providing documented research on citizen participation in local government activities. Through a qualitative approach, the study examined the extent of citizen participation in local government decision-making at the Suame Municipal Assembly. To achieve this aim, the study was guided by four specific objectives. These objectives include identifying the avenue(s) that exist at Suame Municipal Assembly for citizens to participate in decision-making, exploring the perception of citizens regarding the avenues and their participation in decision-making at the Suame Municipal Assembly, exploring how far the views of citizens are considered in decision-making at Suame Municipal Assembly and to present the challenges that impact effective citizen participation in decision-making at Suame Municipal Assembly.

The first objective identified the avenues through which citizens in Suame can be engaged in decision-making. The findings highlighted town hall meetings and public hearings as key platforms for citizen participation in local government decision-making at SMA. These mechanisms align with practices observed in other Sub-Saharan countries, suggesting similarities in approaches. However, it is worth noting that specific platforms identified in other countries were not present in the context of SMA.

The next objective identified the power dynamics inherent in the decision-making process at the Suame Municipal Assembly. The findings highlighted that the key players in the decision-making process are municipal staff from the District Planning Coordinating Unit, Assembly members, those elected and appointed, and the citizens. However, citizens highlighted imbalances in influence during decision-making. This is because of the knowledge gap between themselves and the others (municipal staff and assembly members). This means the municipal staff and assembly members have more influence on the decision-making outcomes than the citizens. This finding is consistent with assertions by other scholars on how power is distributed in a decision-making space.

The third objective of the study aimed to assess the extent to which citizens' views are incorporated into decision-making processes at SMA. The findings revealed that while there was some level of two-way communication during the town hall meetings, public hearings, and a feedback mechanism, municipal staff, and assembly members tended to dominate the discussions, resulting

in citizens' viewpoints being given less importance by the Assembly. This contributes to a perceived gap between citizen input and actual decision-making outcomes, undermining the effectiveness of these participatory processes. These findings align with the research conducted by other scholars in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Ghana, who argue that the existing structures often create an illusion of engagement without granting citizens meaningful power. This suggests that citizen participation is often symbolic rather than substantially impacting decision-making processes.

The final objective of the study aimed to identify the challenges that hinder effective citizen participation in decision-making at SMA. The findings highlighted several barriers, including limited accessibility, inadequate dissemination of information, inconsistent scheduling of meetings, a perceived lack of influence, constraints imposed by legislative and policy frameworks, and financial limitations. These factors collectively impede meaningful citizen participation at the Suame Municipal Assembly, restricting the ability of citizens to engage actively in decision-making processes. The literature shows similar findings on the factors that impede effective citizen participation in Sub-Saharan Africa and Ghana.

In all, there is awareness of the need for citizens to be engaged in decision-making. Hence, the Assembly creates avenues, and citizens are invited to participate. However, their views and opinions are not considered. This shows that citizens do not have power and are given the illusion of being included in decision-making. It can be said that citizen participation at the Suame Municipal Assembly is tokenistic.

However, it is essential to consider the study's limitations when interpreting the findings. Firstly, this study adopted a case study approach, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to the broader context of citizen participation in local governance in Ghana. Additionally, the sample size for this study is limited to twenty-three participants, including four staff members, four elected assembly members, and fifteen citizens. It is important to note that the interviewed citizens may not represent the experiences of all individuals who actively engage in the activities of the Assembly.



## **5.2 Recommendation**

The following suggestions are made to enhance citizen involvement in decision-making at the Suame Municipal Assembly (SMA) based on the study's findings:

1. SMA should ensure that town halls and public hearings are effectively utilized and provide meaningful opportunities for citizen participation. Efforts should be made to create an inclusive environment where citizens feel empowered to voice their opinions and have their views considered in decision-making processes.
2. SMA should address citizens' negative perceptions of these meetings. It is crucial to ensure that citizens perceive these gatherings as opportunities to genuinely influence policies and decision-making rather than mere platforms for politicians' agendas.
3. SMA should address the identified challenges that hinder effective citizen participation. This includes improving accessibility by considering venue locations, transportation, and meeting times. Dissemination of information should be enhanced to ensure citizens are well-informed about the issues at hand and meetings are scheduled consistently.
4. The government should prioritize allocating adequate funds to support the participation initiatives of local governments in Ghana. This can include budgetary allocations for citizen engagement activities, such as organizing town hall meetings, public consultations, and awareness campaigns. Sufficient funding will enable local governments to communicate and involve citizens in decision-making processes effectively.
5. Policymakers should evaluate the existing legislative and policy frameworks that may impede effective citizen participation in Ghana. The aim should be to create an enabling environment that supports and encourages citizen involvement in decision-making processes.

## **5.3 Areas for Further Studies**

Based on the findings, several areas for further studies can be implied:

1. Further research can explore the factors contributing to the absence of specific citizen participation platforms in Suame or, broadly, Ghana, which are present in other countries. This would provide insights into the feasibility and effectiveness of introducing these

platforms within the local context while evaluating their potential influence on citizen engagement.

2. Future studies can focus on examining the extent of citizen participation in municipalities across the Ashanti Region of Ghana. This would entail evaluating citizen engagement mechanisms, practices, and outcomes within diverse municipalities of the region. Such research has the potential to advance the understanding of citizen participation in local governance in Ghana.

#### **5.4 Chapter Summary**

The chapter primarily centers on the study's conclusion and recommendations. The conclusion concisely summarizes the study, including its objectives and an overview of the findings. Drawing upon these findings, the study offers a range of approaches that the Suame Municipal Assembly and policymakers in Ghana can consider enhancing citizen participation in Suame and across Ghana. Furthermore, the study highlights potential areas for future research that can contribute to a deeper understanding of the topic.



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## **Appendix**

### ***Interview Guide for Suame Municipal Assembly (SMA) Staff***

***Part I: To identify the avenue (s) at the Suame Municipal Assembly for citizens to participate in decision-making.***

1. What avenue (s) are created by the Assembly for citizens to participate in decision-making?
2. How are participants selected, and who are those who are selected to participate in decision-making?

***Part II: To understand the perception of the citizens regarding these avenues for participation in decision-making at the Suame Municipal Assembly.***

3. What has been the public's response towards this avenue for them to decide what happens at Suame?

***Part III: To explore how far citizens' views are considered in decision-making at the Suame Municipal Assembly.***

4. What is the reasoning behind creating this avenue to encourage citizens to participate in the assembly's decision-making?
5. How does communication take place within this avenue?
6. At the end of the process, does the final decision reflect in any way the interest of the citizens as expressed within these avenues?

***PART IV: To identify the challenges encountered in effective citizen participation in decision-making at the Suame Municipal Assembly.***

7. What challenges do you face in creating these avenues for effective citizen participation?
8. In your view, what challenges do the public face in using these avenues to participate in decision-making?
9. What are the opportunities to strengthen citizen participation at Suame Municipal Assembly



***Interview Guide for Elected Assembly Member***

***Part I: To identify the avenue (s) at the Suame Municipal Assembly for citizens to participate in decision-making and the nature of the avenue/s.***

1. What avenue (s) are created by the Assembly for citizens to participate in decision-making?
2. How are participants selected, and who are those who are selected to participate in decision-making?

***Part II: To understand the perception of the citizens regarding these avenues for participation in decision-making at the Suame Municipal Assembly.***

3. In your view, what is the public's response towards this avenue created for them to participate in deciding what happens at Suame?

***Part III: To explore how far citizens' views are considered in decision-making at the Suame Municipal Assembly.***

4. On your part, what is the main reason why you encourage your people to participate in the assembly's decision-making?
5. How does communication take place within this avenue?
6. At the end of the process, does the final decision reflect in any way the interest of the citizens as expressed within these avenues?

***Part IV: To identify the challenges and opportunities to strengthen citizen participation in decision-making at the Suame Municipal Assembly.***

7. what challenges do you think the assembly faces in creating these avenues for effective citizen participation?
8. What challenges do you and the people you represent face in using these avenues for their participation in decision-making?
9. What are the opportunities to strengthen citizen participation at the Suame Municipal Assembly?

***Interview Guide for the Public***

***Part I: To understand the perception of the citizens regarding these avenues for participation in decision-making at the Suame Municipal Assembly.***

1. In your view, how do you regard the avenue (s) created for you to participate in deciding what happens at Suame?

***Part II: To explore how citizens' views are considered in decision-making at the Suame Municipal Assembly.***

2. What is the main reason why you participate in the assembly's decision-making?

3. How does communication take place within this avenue?

4. At the end of the process, does the final decision reflect your interests as expressed within these avenue(s)?

***Part III: To identify the challenges to effective citizen participation in decision-making at Suame Municipal Assembly.***

5. what challenges do you think the assembly faces in creating these avenues for effective citizen participation?

6. What challenges do you face in participating in SMA's decision-making?

7. What are the opportunities to strengthen your participation in decision-making?

