

Partnership for Development The Case of Savelugu Municipal Assembly and World Vision Ghana

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Abstract

This study explored the effectiveness of the partnership relationship between the Savelugu Municipal Assembly (SMA) and the World Vision Ghana (WVG) as a case study of how partnerships between MMDAs and NGOs contribute to development in the Northern Region of Ghana. The exploration was done within the context of Development Cooperation as espoused in the Goal 8 of the MDGs as a means of promoting aid effectiveness. A Mixed Research Strategy, the Case Study Design and the Purposive Sampling Technique were some of the research methodological techniques employed for the study. The study suggests that the partnership between the two organisations was a mutual and impacted positively on the development of the Savelugu Municipality. This included improvement in water supply, sanitation, as well as education and healthcare delivery. The study suggests that partnership relationships that thrive on cordiality or mutual respect are most likely to impact positively on development.

Keywords: Partnership, MMDAs, NGOs, Development, Cooperation, Decentralisation

1.0 The Background of the Study

According to the National Development Planning Commission of Ghana (NDPC, 2011), Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) under Ghana's current Decentralisation System are required to prepare development plans to facilitate the translation of the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA) into programmes, projects and activities to be implemented for the benefit of the populace. Similarly, Section 10(3) of Act 462 mandates MMDAs to be responsible for the overall development of areas under their jurisdiction through the formulation of policies and the execution of development plans within their jurisdiction (Local Government Act, 1993). This needs to be done by analysing the specific Assembly's context and circumstances with regard to meeting the local needs and aspirations in harmony with national development goals and objectives contained in the National Development Policy Framework (NDPC, 2011).

In order to fulfill their mandates, MMDAs have often established partnerships with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Civil Society Organisations, Business and other Private Entities, and communities within their jurisdiction. As a result, the Savelugu Municipal Assembly established partnership with the World Vision Ghana since 1998 with the aim of sourcing funding and expertise to address the needs of the people in the areas of education, the provision of potable water, the delivery of healthcare, etc., (WVI End of Phase Evaluation Report, 2013).

The partnership arrangement between MMDAs and their development partners as a strategy of mobilising support for their development endeavours is in the context of the harmonisation and alignment of donor-recipient projects and programmes under the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness which was based on the fulfillment of the Goal 8 of the MDGs (Anderson and Therkildsen, 2007). According to Andersen and Therkildsen (2007), Aid Effectiveness has become a significant buzz word in development paradigms. In this connection, the partnership approach emerged as a strategy for managing development assistance for effective outcomes. All donors under the approach have the objective of reducing transactional costs and enhancing local ownership of their development agenda. Of course, as donors base their development assistance on different interests, the assumption behind the partnership approach is considered utopian, since it might not be possible to harmonise and align such different interests (Andersen & Therkildsen 2007).

Hyden (2008) considers the partnership approach as a naive concept that is initiated by donors through their commitment to harmonisation and alignment in line with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The approach requires a mutual relationship between donors and recipients to commit to ownership and alignment of development assistance. The partnership approach presupposes a high level of trust between partners in the sense that there is a social contract rather than a business contract. In this regard, recipients have to trust that donors are willing to align their assistance to their development strategy. Similarly, donors have to trust recipients' ability or

capacity to manage donations, since recipients will lose their credibility if they mismanage donations. Katz (2006), therefore, considers the partnership approach as a political arrangement built on trust.

In developing countries, partnership between Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and communities or their agents play an indispensable role in the reduction of poverty, increasing the participation of the deprived and the voiceless in decision making processes, etc. They also help in reinforcing and complementing government's effort for policy flexibility and service delivery to communities, and in most cases, their responsiveness is more effective in reaching some communities than government agencies (Overseas Development Institute, 2005). Ideally, the relationship between governments and NGOs should be one of partnership in a constructive division of labour in which the standard of service delivered by MMDAs is complemented by the more legible and responsive activities of NGOs (Overseas Development Institute, 2005). This, therefore, presupposed that every District Assembly in Ghana that considers the fulfillment of its mandate as outlined in Act 462 Section 10(3) pertinent would make extra effort to partner effectively with NGOs to assist them provide services that the Assembly could not have effectively provided to communities alone.

It is for this reason that the Savelugu Municipal Assembly took the opportunity of the partnership approach to partner with a number of development partners, including the World Vision Ghana in 1998 such that it could mobilise the needed resources to fulfill its mandate. This study, therefore, explored the effectiveness of the partnership between the Assembly and its development partners over the years and the benefits that it brought to the communities, using World Vision Ghana as a case study of partnerships between MMDAs and their development partners in the Northern Region of Ghana.

The import of the study is based on the fact that there have been a proliferation of NGOs in the Northern Region of Ghana as indicated by the Registrar General's report of 2011 which pre-supposes that there have been other sources of financial and technical assistance to the effort of MMDAs in the region in tackling their developmental challenges, including poverty reduction, poor healthcare delivery, inadequate water supply, poor sanitation and lack of access to education besides support from central government and local resource mobilisation. Besides this, the focus of the GSGDA has been poverty reduction. It is, therefore, expected that there would have been some improvement in development indicators in the region over the years. However, a number of research outcomes, including the SADA Strategy and Work Plan (2010) indicate that Northern Ghana is still challenged with most of the worst poverty indicators ranging from the economy, education, health, food and human security (Achanso, 2014a; GPRS I, 2003).

On the contrary, elsewhere, such as England, local authorities help to address the needs of deprived communities through partnership with NGOs, the private sector and individuals to provide strategic services and economic opportunities that improve the wellbeing of the people and communities. Through strategic partnerships, local authorities have carried out at the local level the provision of flexible structures to ensure maximum benefit to communities. The same structures are implemented in Scotland to try to address local community needs and the benefits are enormous. (Dennis A. R, 2002)

Relating the above situation to the functions and partnerships of local authorities in Ghana, the problem one may perceive as the underlining factor for the slow development pace in Northern Ghana in particular could be lack of effective partnership between the local authorities and their development partners which results in poor planning and coordination of development programs. A report by the National Development Commission (2010) that reviewed the contribution of NGOs to the National Development Agenda indicates that most of the decentralised heads at the MMDAs perceived NGOs as rivals rather than partners. In reviewing the post Liberian conflict and support provided by NGOs and lessons for Ghana, it was realised that some projects in Liberia delayed in implementation due to fear and lack of support at the Ministerial level (NDPC 2010). The key challenge identified in the NDPC review report was rivalry between Assemblies, Decentralised Departments and NGOs operating in communities within their jurisdiction.

These challenges call for more effort to establish an effective partnership between MMDAs and all development partners within their areas of jurisdiction, including NGOs, to effectively coordinate development programmes in these areas. As indicated earlier, it was clear from the Registrar General's 2011 report that there is a reasonable number of NGOs in the northern parts of Ghana yet communities in the region lag behind in many aspects of development indicators in the country. There have, therefore, been several calls on the government since independence to institute deliberate measures towards bridging the development gap between northern and southern Ghana (SADA 2010).

It is for this reason that this study seeks to explore the effectiveness of partnerships between MMDAs and NGOs operating in their jurisdictions with a specific focus on the partnership between the Savelugu Municipal Assembly and the World Vision Ghana in the Northern Region and to draw lessons that could enhance policy development to stimulate development in other local communities of similar characteristics.

1.1 The Methodology Employed for the Study

This study employed the Mixed Research Strategy for data collection and analysis. According to Slife & Williams

(1995), the Mixed Research Strategy involves the use of both qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments and integrating the two forms of data, using a distinct design that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks that best solves problems that could not have been effectively analysed using a single strategy. The core assumption of this form of inquiry is that the combination of the qualitative and the quantitative approaches provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than either of the approaches alone (Neuman-Lawrence, 2009). It is for this reason that the strategy was found as the suitable strategy for this study as it offered the opportunity of using a variety of data sources and multiple methods to analyse the various actors and how they perceive partnership and its impact on community development.

The qualitative strategy was used to collect data from the staff of the SMA, the Municipal GHS and GES directorates, as well as the staff of the World Vision Ghana. This was so because there was the need to have in-depth interaction or interviews with the respondents. The selection of the strategy in this regard was done in line with the argument by Slife & Williams (1995) that the qualitative research strategy involves interaction with smaller number of participants and the data collected is analysed inductively building from particular to general themes. Few people in management position were selected from these institutions through purposive sampling for the interaction. An interview guide was used to tease out information on the nature and impact of the relation between the SMA and the WVG.

On the other hand, the quantitative research strategy was used to collect data from Assembly Members who represented the voices of the communities in their respective electoral areas. The Assembly Members were 58 and all of them could not be interviewed one-on-one due to their large number. Closed ended questionnaires were designed to collect data from them on development programmes initiated through the partnership between the SMA and the WVG in their respective communities. In view of this, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to process the data and analysed in the form of tables and graphs to make meaning out of the communities' perspectives on development projects initiated through the partnership.

The data for the study was both secondary and primary as it is suggested that the combination of primary and secondary data for a piece of research is interesting because it provides the opportunity to solicit information from respondents directly, as well as making comparisons with the findings and views of other researchers (Yin 2003). The primary data was collected through interviews and questionnaires while the secondary data was collected through literature review. The aim of the secondary data collection was to review the existing relevant literature on the study topic in order to increase knowledge and understanding of the subject area and to guide and direct the study. In this regard, an extensive literature on the concepts of partnership, decentralised cooperation, the decentralisation in Ghana, the role of local authorities in development, the challenges of the Local Government System in Ghana and partnership between NGOs and local authorities.

The primary sources of data for this study included interviews with the staff of the World Vision Ghana Savelugu Area Development Program (WVG-ADP), the staff of the Savelugu Municipal Assembly (SMA), as well as the staff of some of the decentralised departments, including the Municipal Education Service (GES) and the Municipal Health Service (GHS). The Assembly Members from the communities were another source of primary data for the study.

1.2 Findings and Analysis

This study revealed that there was a high level of cordial relationship between the Savelugu Municipal Assembly (SMA) and the World Vision Ghana (WVG). This was confirmed by the ninety percent (90%) of the Assembly Members interviewed as they indicated that they were satisfied with the relationship because of the mutual respect the two parties exhibited. This was further confirmed by the staff of the two parties and those of the Municipal GHS and GES interviewed. For instance, the respondents confirmed that the Assembly often invited the WVG to its annual strategic planning meeting and this enabled the WVG to understand the direction of the Assembly to plan its own programmes to fit into the development plan of the Assembly. On the other hand, the WVG also invited the Assembly and its decentralised departments to make inputs into its strategic plans and this helped the organisation to design its short to medium-term plans to fit into the wider development plan of the Assembly.

Of course, the Municipal Assembly staff interviewed cited one occasion where the WVG bypassed the Assembly and went into communities to construct latrines but when its attention was drawn to that, the organisation never repeated the act. Beside the annual meetings, there was an MOU detailing the WVG interventions which was signed by the Municipal Chief Executive, the Heads of the beneficiary decentralised departments and the WVG Management. The MOU guided the relationship and increased transparency among the parties. The Municipal GES officer interviewed indicated that it was only the WVG administrative and remuneration budgets that were not disclosed to its partners. Beside this, the organisation shared its operational budget with the partners. The above response further confirmed the cordiality that existed between the SMA and the WVG.

The study also revealed that the WVG made an impact on communities in the SMA since it commenced operations in the Municipality. While this study revealed that there were other NGOs operating in the Savelugu Municipality, their contributions to development could not match that of the WVG. Some of the contributions of

organisation included the provision of potable water to the communities, primary health care services and the expansion of educational opportunities to a number of communities. According to the Municipal Assembly officer interviewed, the Savelugu Municipality in 2007 was ranked the leading guinea worm infested area in the world as Ghana was only second to Sudan and all the known cases in Ghana were from the Savelugu Municipality. This assertion was confirmed by the Daily Graphic report on Thursday, 7th August, 2014 that 501 cases were reported in 2008 and, in 2009, the Savelugu Municipal Assembly recorded 242 guinea worm cases, but this was reduced to 8 reported cases in 2010 representing 97 percent reduction.

The officer indicated that they could still remember an incident where the Director General of the GHS made a statement in an Assembly meeting in 2007 that if he had the opportunity to plug the Savelugu Municipality out of the Ghana map and declare Ghana a guinea worm free country, he would have done that. Due to the interventions of the WVG and other donor partners in providing potable water to communities in the Municipality, the Assembly had not recorded guinea worm cases since March 2011 and was working hard to achieve a guinea worm free status. Daily graphic Friday, 13 June 2014 further reported that Ghana has come a long way in the fight of guinea worm from 180, 000 reported cases in 1989 to only 8 case in 2010 in the Savelugu Municipality in the Northern Region of Ghana, and no cases has been reported since 2011.

The Savelugu School of the Deaf did not have any source of potable water and this affected their well-being and academic performance until the WVG provided a mechanized borehole to the school which transformed the school as the students can now get potable water to drink, wash and use for other purposes. The availability of water contributed to improvement of the performance of the pupils in their School Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) results to the extent that the School was ranked 1st in 2011 and 4th in 2012 in the Municipality's BECE Results League (WAEC 2011 & 2012 BECE Results). Previously, the pupils spent most of their time searching for water instead of learning.

In the area of education, the WVG did a lot in the provision of infrastructure, teaching and learning materials and community sensitisation on the importance of education. The Assembly together with the WVG and other partners provided access to education in most of the communities in the Municipality. According to the Municipal Assembly and the GES officers interviewed, the Assembly did not have much problem with access to education in the Municipality due to interventions by development partners like WVG, although the quality of education was still a challenge to the Assembly.

In addition, the WVG promoted the formation of mother-to-mother support groups to promote child health and to bring life and hope to communities. Primary healthcare activities were also supported to reduce child and maternal deaths in the communities. Advocacy activities were also carried out to change negative cultural habits and to improve enrolment drives and retention of children in schools. The Municipal Assembly officer interviewed indicated that the WVG's contribution was making impact in the communities except the fact that development is a dynamic issue, as one tries to close one gap another gap is created somewhere.

This study also revealed some challenges that the WVG encountered in its operations in the Savelugu Municipality. Some of the Assembly Members interviewed (8%) were not satisfied with the operations of the WVG in the Municipality. They felt that the organization's programmes were too focused on children rather than the provision of loans and farm implements (tractors) demanded by communities. Other challenges included the fact that few of the respondents' (4%) perceived the WVG to be a Christian organisation and, therefore, did not want to deal much with it as those communities were predominantly Moslem communities.

Another challenge to the WVG operations in the Municipality was poor participation of some community members in the WVG programs which resulted in delays in the implementation of some projects initiated by the organisation in the Municipality. Other interviewees complained that sometimes the maintenance of projects initiated by WVG, such as boreholes and classroom blocks, were left into the hands of communities but the cost of maintenance of such projects were beyond the capabilities of the communities. This made those projects unable to serve the communities as may be desired.

1.3. Conclusion

This study explored the effectiveness of the partnership between the Savelugu Municipal Assembly and the World Vision Ghana in facilitating community development. The exploration was done within the context of Development Cooperation as espoused in the Goal 8 of the MDGs as a means of promoting effectiveness in development assistance.

As indicated already, the study revealed that the partnership was a mutual one. This was exemplified by the spirit of openness and transparency exhibited by the two parties as they participated in the designing or reviewing of each other's development plans. The cordiality was also manifested by the longevity of the operation of the WVG in the Municipality. Unlike other partners of the Assembly that executed projects lasting between one and five years and rolled up, the WVG had operated in the Municipality for over fourteen years and was still prepared to stay on. This longevity in its operations in the Municipality helped the organisation to study the development trends and challenges in the communities and designed programmes that would have sustainable

impact on the communities which further fostered the mutual relationship.

As indicated already, the study also revealed that the WVG made a lot of contributions in the development of communities within the Municipality. The organisation contributed to the provision of potable water and sanitation services which led to the eradication of guinea worm infestation in the Municipality that happened to be one of the leading guinea worm infested areas in the World in 2007. The Assembly together with WVG and other development partners also helped to increase access to education in communities in the Municipality although the quality of education still remained a challenge in the Municipality. The WVG also provided a micro-credit facility to some communities in the Municipality which helped improved livelihood activities especially among women in the communities. The organisation also embarked on community sensitisation and advocacy programmes which contributed to increased school enrolment rates, reduced drop-out rates and a gradual change in negative cultural practices.

Overall, this study has suggested that MMDAs in the Northern Region that develop mutual relationship with their development partners stand the chance of making positive impact on development as exemplified by the results of this study as the mutual relationship between the Savelugu Municipal Assembly and the World Vision Ghana resulted in some positive development outcomes.

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