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Planning with the area council: experience with CBP in Ghana

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Introduction

The concept and practice of participatory planning (also called variously bottom-up planning, sub-district planning, etc.) is not new in Ghana, however the link to the national planning system is either weak or non-existent. This article highlights the experiences of two projects which aim to deepen community participation in planning and link it to the existing planning system of the country. It also discusses Ghana's experience in planning at the sub-district level, reviewing approaches by the communities, NGOs, project interventions, etc. and outlines Ghana's local government system, CBP and its lessons, and the way forward.

Background

The Local Government Act of 1993 (Act 462) established the current local government system, while the National Development Planning (Systems) Act of 1994 (Act 480) provides for a decentralised planning system in Ghana. However a number of factors hamper their effective implementation, including limited financial and human resources. As a result, structures like the town/area councils, which provide the link between the community and District Assembly (DA), are either functioning poorly or do not exist. In practice, participatory planning has usually not been applied in sub-district

planning, except in planning for specific projects.

Ghana has a four-tier system. It consists of a Regional Coordinating Council on the first tier, the Metropolitan/Municipal and District Assemblies on the second tier, Town/Zonal/Urban/Area Councils on the third tier and the Unit Committees on the fourth tier.

Traditionally, social and project participation is promoted through public fora or by representation. Public fora are mainly open community meetings to which invitation is by public announcement (beating the gong-gong). Discussions at these meetings are open to all, but in practice a few vocal individuals dominate the discussions. In most cases women and the marginalised, though they may be present, may not make any contribution or challenge any decision. Representation is based on the traditional structure and is limited in most cases to male family and tribal heads. Where NGOs are involved, all-inclusive participation approaches have often been adopted, e.g. separating discussants by gender, livelihood and age.

The legal basis of participation is through representation at the Assembly level, with elections held once every four years. The Local Government Act provides for the election of 70% of the membership of the Assembly and 30%

Table 1: Steps in the formal local government planning process (abridged)

Step	Involves
1.	Sensitisation of all stakeholders ¹ in the planning and resource-mobilisation system to give inputs to the preparation of the five-year development plan.
2.	Collection, collation and reviewing of data/information from the above sources including questionnaires necessary for producing district profiles on education, health, agriculture, commerce, industry, poverty, etc. which aid in the plan preparation.
3.	Every Unit Committee submits its plans to serve as input for the composite plan of the Assembly through the area councils
4.	All Unit Committees' plans are then harmonised into a holistic unit. Together with the inputs from departments, NGOs/CBOs and other donor agencies, a district profile is built to serve as the basis of fashioning the Five-Year Development Plan of the district.
5.	Critical review of the profile by the District Planning and Co-ordinating Unit and a consultant employed for that purpose.
6.	From the reviewed profile a Statement of Plan/Project Proposal is prepared.
7.	The Project Proposal is then submitted to sector heads for their technical assessment.
8.	The Statement of Plan is then submitted to appropriate sub-committees for ranking. Ranking is important because of the limited finances of the Assembly.
9.	All proposals from sub-committees are then submitted to the Executive Committee for debate.
10.	The first Draft Document is then prepared and sent to all the Area Councils for public hearing.
11.	After the public hearing the second Draft Document incorporating comments from the Area Councils is prepared.
12.	The second Draft is again sent back to the Executive Committee and then General Assembly for debate.
13.	It is then subjected to a public hearing at the Area Councils.
14.	The final document is prepared and submitted to the Regional Co-ordinating Council for onward transmission to the National Development Planning Commission.

by appointment. At the sub-district level representation is also by election and appointment (with the same 70%/30% formula).

Therefore there is a challenge to have a participatory system where all members of the community can participate effectively in decision-making.

The way the formal planning system functions is shown in Table 1. In practice, this system has only been applied erratically with district plans prepared in 1996, and then in response to the Poverty Reduction Strategy in 2003.

In Ghana, the chieftaincy institution is highly respected, wields a lot of power and influence in local processes and resource mobilisation, and presides over community meetings where development is discussed. Community-initiated

projects that have the personal involvement of the chief are likely to succeed and be sustained. Conversely, situations of unity or disunity at community level can often be traced to the role played by chiefs. However, the outcomes of these local processes do not necessarily link with the formal planning system, despite there being legal provisions for the participation of chiefs in the local government system².

NGOs' experience in participation has moved on from the era where NGOs implemented projects with little or no consent of the communities, to a situation where most NGOs are consciously increasing community participation in the formulation, implementation, management and evaluation of their projects. NGOs have used a number of approaches to enhance community participation, usually

¹ The stakeholders include the decentralised departments and the relevant sub-committees of the District Assembly. Other stakeholders include the local private sector operators, NGOs/CBOs and ordinary citizens within the district.

² Government appointees to the general District Assembly and the sub-structures are appointed by the District Chief Executive (DCE) in consultation with the chiefs and 6% out of the 30% government appointees to the general assembly are allocated to the chiefs. They are also represented at the RCC.

Table 2: Application of the CBP methodology in Adansi East and Asante Akim South Districts

Element	How applied
Planning unit	Area/town council
Methodology	Visioning and livelihoods analysis, using interest groups rather than social groups Less emphasis was put on outcomes in the first round
Facilitation of area plans	By local facilitators drawn from the area council, the decentralised departments and some retired civil servants
Training of facilitators	By facilitators from the DPCUs
Financing of planning process	District Assembly with some support from the four-country project
Funding of the plans	From local revenue ⁵
Linkage to district plans	Supposed to be first tier of plans towards district plan. However timing of PRSP process meant that district plans were produced without area inputs, except for the first two area councils
Implementation of the area council plans	Implementation of town/area plans is supervised by the town/area council committee with support from the Traditional Authority
Monitoring of implementation at area council level	By area council committee

in Adansi East and Asante Akim South District respectively.

Local facilitators from the two town/area councils were trained to facilitate the planning processes in their councils. The generic four-country CBP manual was used as the basis for the facilitators, which was adapted, with a five-day planning process. Facilitators were drawn from the District Planning and Co-ordinating Units (DPCU) of the two District Assemblies. Their roles consisted purely of guiding and providing technical information and advice. They were also responsible for writing up of the final plan using the information generated from the process. The result was a five-year development plan for each of the councils.

After successful piloting in one area council in each district, a decision by the Technical Committee was taken to extend CBP activities to cover the rest of the town/area councils in the two districts. This activity was suspended for some time for the districts to respond to the government's instruction to develop a three-year development plan based on the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) guidelines. After this, all area councils were covered in the two districts, a total of nineteen town/area councils, and about fifty facilitators were trained. All of the nineteen town/area councils now have a five-year development plan.

⁵ The locally generated revenue is derived from six main sources. These are Land, Fees (cattle ponds, market dues, slaughter houses etc.), Licences, Trading Services, Rates (basic, property and special rate) and miscellaneous sources.

Implementation of these plans has started, and there has been extensive community action, effects of which can be seen in the first two area councils covered.

The Village Infrastructure Project (VIP)

The Village Infrastructure Project (VIP) is a second project, which has been using elements of CBP approach in Ghana. In contrast to the CBP Project, which only has very limited funds for learning and sharing, this is a US\$60 million five-year poverty reduction and community-driven development initiative of the Government of Ghana with support from the World Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW). It closes in June 2004 and a follow-up project is being planned at present. The project aims to enhance the quality of life of Ghana's rural poor through increased transfer of financial and technical resources to develop and sustain basic village level infrastructure. Its specific objectives are to:

- a) Empower local communities and beneficiary groups to identify, plan, implement and maintain small village-level infrastructure investments;
- b) Increase rural communities' access to development resources to leverage the implementation of rural development priorities set by beneficiaries;
- c) Strengthen institutional capacity at community and

Table 3: Key elements of the VIP methodology

Element	Involved
Selection of pilots	Development of criteria based mainly on agricultural production, the state of rural infrastructure in the districts, poverty levels and population. The most deprived districts were then selected for the pilot programme.
Training	Development of training manuals using consultants. Recruitment of training consultants who were passed through "Training-of-Trainers" workshops. Training of area council and unit committees in roles, groups, planning, participatory M&E, community-based procurement and financial management.
Planning methodology	Use of area council members, opinion leaders from identifiable groupings, and traditional authorities. Development of Community Action Plans culminating in area council plans with prioritised sub-projects for implementation.
Financing of planning process	By VIP.
Financing of implementation	Procurement of services and works for the prioritised projects already determined by the area councils. Funding by VIP through area council accounts.
Implementation	At the area council level. Some support is provided by District Assemblies.
M&E	Project monitoring by area council.

district levels in order to improve the efficiency of rural transfers and to ensure sustainability of poverty reducing interventions, and;

- d) Support the government's strategy of decentralisation of development responsibilities to District Assemblies and other local government entities.

The project focuses primarily on infrastructure (water, post-harvest, and transport), but also has an institutional strengthening and capacity building component which focuses on "learning-by-doing". It also has a small enterprise development (micro-credit) component. The project is being implemented in all the 110 districts of the country. The project has used NGOs and consultants to strengthen the capacities of the districts in areas such as participatory planning, financial management, procurement, and facilities management. Key elements in the methodology are shown in Table 3.

To further support the deepening of the decentralisation process, VIP has embarked on building the capacities of some 61 selected area councils on a pilot basis (usually one per district) by assisting them in producing a plan, making appropriate decisions and then implementing the projects resulting. As well as area council members, others have been trained, including opinion leaders from various identifiable groupings, traditional authorities, identifiable women's groups and leaders. This approach has helped to

build consensus between the various factions of the rural societies within the area councils' jurisdiction.

At this stage some area councils have signed contracts, and prioritised projects are being implemented, with some support, by the District Assemblies.

Innovations in the use of participatory methodologies

One of the innovations introduced by both projects in Ghana has been the inclusion of traditional rulers in the planning process. Chiefs and elders were individually contacted during the pre-planning stage to discuss and explain the modalities of the process, and in both cases were part of the training and planning process. Apart from the chiefs participating in all subsequent meetings, they also played the role of mobilising the communities to attend these meetings. The participatory methodologies (including use of livelihoods analysis) have also enabled the full participation of disadvantaged groups including women.

In the CBP project, a plan hearing was also introduced as part and parcel of the planning process whereby the first draft plan was subjected to public discussion at area/town council level. Inputs from the first public meeting are incorporated in the plan for a second public hearing. The final plan is adopted as a working document at a public hearing, thus making the process outlined in Table 1 a reality.

A focused group discussion



Preference ranking on flipcharts

MAIN PROBLEMS PREFERENCE RANKING GROUP TOTALS						
	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL
1. EMPLOYMENT	50	67	62	50	41	312
2. EDUCATION	58	65	71	68	50	312
3. MARKET	59	54	64	61	42	280
4. ROAD B/D'S	55	56	49	40	67	267
5. RURAL ROAD	79	59	73	47	75	333
6. REPRESENTATION	19	36	22	16	24	117
7. COMMUNITY GOV	50	48	44	53	52	247
8. TELECOMM	53	49	41	49	29	230
9. HOUSING/ACCOM	37	37	31	19	23	147
10. HEALTH	40	34	47	41	29	191
MARKET/LOCAL PROD	19	24	18	30		119

The DCD addressing the workshop



Photos: Adansi East District Assembly

VIP provided training of the area councils, made funds available directly for them to manage, and assisted them with participatory M&E. In Adansi East and Asante Akim, the districts have decided on revenue sharing with the area councils, and the introduction of community-managed funds is a significant innovation.

Lessons learned

The experience from both CBP and VIP is that area councils are able to develop effective long-term plans, and that local facilitators can be trained to do this. In the two CBP districts, where the whole districts were covered, there was a major commitment from the DAs to support the process. The experience was that a mixed team of local facilitators drawn from the town/area council with frontline staff of the decentralised departments performed better than town/area council facilitators alone. This may be due to the fact that the frontline workers brought external influence, experience and resources to bear on the process.

Planning at the town area council level has assisted with developing consensus amongst different stakeholders, helping to iron out their differences and agree on a common approach to solving their developmental problems.

On the VIP, encouraging and giving preference to identifiable women's groups and leaders has enhanced gender participation. To enhance participation in the planning

process, both community forum and representation approaches should be adopted with enough time allowed for the various livelihood group representatives to consult their members for feedback and inputs. Public hearings including acceptance of the final plan are a crucial step for a higher sense of community ownership.

The involvement of the town/area council in plan facilitation, implementation and evaluation could be one way of resuscitating the town/area council concept, which has largely become defunct in Ghana. As VIP experience rolls out we will also be able to assess the capacity at this level to manage funds.

Ways forward in the future

For Ghana four issues are paramount. These are:

- Advocating for reactivating the town/area council concept as an effective level for managing community-driven development;
- Harmonising various approaches to CBP and CDD by government and NGOs for best practice and adoption by District Assemblies;
- The need for an effective champion in the national Ministry, MLGRD, and also allies to advocate for CBP to be included in the national planning process.
- Institutionalising a steering committee of experienced players in participatory planning as a think tank to advance the course of CBP in the country.

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