

# “Who Am I to Go and Make Policies?”: Increasing Participation of the Urban Poor in Governance in Ghana, 2011–15



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### PROJECT DATA

<b>IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES:</b> Global Communities, Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly, Accra Metropolitan Assembly	<b>SECTOR:</b> Governance
<b>DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE:</b> Improving Governance and Services for the Urban Poor	<b>COUNTRY:</b> Ghana
<b>DELIVERY CHALLENGES:</b> Data Availability and Baselines; Stakeholder Engagement; Skilled Human Resources; Awareness and Communication Strategy	<b>REGION:</b> Africa
	<b>IMPLEMENTATION YEARS:</b> 2011–15
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## Executive Summary

Rapid urbanization and economic development in Ghana since the 1990s led to a rise in the number of informal settlements and slums. By 2010, more than half of the urban population lived in such communities, and many lacked access to public services. Most inhabitants also had little to no knowledge about their rights as citizens and had no say in the allocation of public resources. In an effort to remedy the situation, the city governments of two of the country’s biggest cities—Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi—introduced reforms in their planning and budgeting process through the IncluCity project. An international nonprofit organization named Global Communities<sup>1</sup> led implementation of the project from October 2011 to September 2015.

The overarching objective was to improve participation of the urban poor in governance by enhancing their ability to advocate for quality services and to hold elected officials accountable. To achieve those objectives, the implementation team had to bring together two diverse groups: (a) community members who had little understanding of their rights and responsibilities, and (b) local government officials who had little knowledge of why and how to engage the urban poor. Project staff members first identified and tried to understand the gaps in services provided by local governments; then the staff promoted common understanding between both parties by training them in community engagement processes and by providing platforms for frequent interaction. With the help of the Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi assemblies, the team next empowered community members to come up with development initiatives and built trust between community

This case study was authored by Mark Sefa Aboagye based on interviews conducted in Ghana in September 2019. The case study is part of a Global Delivery Initiative series produced in partnership with the Korea Development Institute School of Public Policy and Management.

<sup>1</sup> The organization was known as CHF International at the time but changed its name to Global Communities in 2012.

members and the local governments through partial sponsorship of some community initiatives. Sustaining community engagement after the project ended in 2015 proved to be a challenge, but the initiative had a lasting effect in shifting the governance paradigm to a more bottom-up process.

## Introduction

“We felt alienated from the governance system of the assemblies,” said Daniel Addy, a representative of a community-based organization in Mamprobi, a suburb of Ghana’s capital city, Accra. “I personally did not see any need to vote in the assembly elections when the assembly did not do anything for us.”<sup>2</sup> Addy’s perception that elected representatives did little for his community was a sentiment shared by many slum dwellers in Ghana before 2011. Growing populations had increased the burden on already under-resourced city governments, thereby leading to poor service delivery and increased crime.

From 1990 to 2010, Ghana underwent rapid economic growth. According to World Bank data, Ghana’s annual GDP growth averaged 6.4 percent between 2005 and 2010, making it one of the fastest-growing economies in Africa (World Bank 2015). At the same time, the country experienced rapid urbanization, with an annual urban growth rate of 4.2 percent between 2000 and 2010 (Ghana Statistical Service 2014). Rapid urbanization prompted the emergence of many informal settlements, which were mostly inhabited by the very poor (Owusu and Afutu-Kotey 2010).

In 2010, almost 50 percent of the urban population in Ghana lived in informal settlements and slum communities. Because many communities were not formally recognized, they were largely ignored by the government and therefore lacked many basic public services (Lamberson, Adams, and Arsenault 2016). Some communities did not have access to potable water, others did not have adequate toilets and garbage disposal facilities, and some communities did not have schools or libraries. All communities wanted their voices to be heard.

Ghana, like many other democratic countries, had adopted decentralization while hoping to improve the

lives of its citizens and to ensure the accountability of its government. Under the decentralized governance system, Ghanaians were represented by metropolitan, municipal, and district assemblies, known as local assemblies.<sup>3</sup> According to Ghanaian laws, the local assemblies were in charge of the overall development of their respective communities.

Although the local assemblies were supposed to take the wants and needs of the communities they represented into account, the assemblies in practice offered little or no opportunity for public participation when deciding how to allocate their budgets. According to Nana Ama Yirrah, executive director of the Community Land and Development Foundation (COLANDEF)—a Ghanaian nongovernmental organization (NGO) that focuses on community development, land tenure security, and gender equality—slum dwellers did not have access to information about the decentralized governance system and lacked knowledge about how to organize themselves to get better representation in the assemblies’ discussions. As a result, their communities received little to no support or budgetary allocation from local governments. “They had no voice whatsoever in governance,” Yirrah said.<sup>4</sup>

Global Communities had been working in Ghana since 2007 to address some of the problems. In 2010, the Ghana branch of Global Communities partnered with the University of Ghana to evaluate the relationship between poor urban communities and their local governments. The study revealed that there were limited mechanisms to engage poor communities and that the assemblies were perceived to be unresponsive to community needs (Owusu and Afutu-Kotey 2010). Drawing on those findings, Global Communities secured US\$4 million from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to implement the IncluCity project from October 2011 to September 2015.

Global Communities established the project in collaboration with two city governments: the Accra Metropolitan Assembly and the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly. Accra, the capital and largest city in Ghana, had an estimated population of 2.5 million in 2011, making it the 11th largest metropolitan area in Africa. In Accra, Global Communities targeted the

2 Author interview with Daniel Addy, Accra, September 11, 2019.

3 Ghana has 254 metropolitan, municipal, and district assemblies on the basis of criteria that a metropolis should have a minimum population of 250,000 people, a municipality should have a minimum of 95,000 people, and a district should have a minimum of 75,000 people. See appendix for the structure of the local government system in Ghana.

4 Author interview with Nana Ama Yirrah, Accra, September 9, 2019.

24 poorest slum communities, which had a combined population of about 1 million people. Sekondi-Takoradi, the third-largest city in Ghana and comprising the twin cities of Sekondi and Takoradi, was home to more than 560,000 citizens at the time. Because of the discovery of oil and the rapid growth of the crude-oil industry in the region, the city’s population had grown rapidly, leading to an increase in the city’s slum communities and informal settlements. Of the 48 communities in the metropolis, Global Communities selected the poorest 35, home to approximately 250,000 residents, to participate in the IncluCity project.

Global Communities used a previous project it had implemented in Ghana called SCALE-UP (Slum Communities Achieving Livable Environments with Urban Partners) as well as drawing on similar participatory governance projects by the World Bank as the basis for designing the IncluCity project. The overarching objective was to take advantage of existing local governance structures in order to lay the foundation for improved governance and service delivery, specifically for the urban poor. The IncluCity project had two major components: (a) participatory governance, planning, and budgeting; and (b) local government revenue generation. The logic was that when citizens were made aware of their responsibilities and were allowed to set their own development priorities, they would start demanding improved services. Recognizing that local governments might not have enough resources to meet such demands, the second component of the project sought to help the local governments find ways to increase revenue and to enhance their ability to respond to citizens’ needs.

## **Delivery Challenges**

### **Data Availability and Baselines**

Although the intervention was aimed at improving services and governance, no data were available in Sekondi-Takoradi to evaluate its existing services or the performance of its assembly. “The city government did not have enough information on which services the communities wanted improvements in or how the community members perceived [the assembly’s] functions,” said Isaac Aidoo, the development planning officer at the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly. “They did not have any monitoring and evaluation

mechanisms to check service delivery [or know] what the communities prioritized.”<sup>5</sup> Conversely, Accra had already carried out a survey in 2010 to identify the gaps in service delivery as perceived by citizens.

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

The guidelines of Ghana’s National Development Planning Commission mandated all local assemblies to plan their development projects through “strong” community participation. The commission required the local governments commission to submit Medium-Term Development Plans covering their assembly’s aspirations and priorities over a period of three years. According to the commission, this plan was supposed to be a compilation of the aspirations and priorities of all communities under each particular local assembly (NDPC 2010). However, the local assemblies rarely engaged community members and service providers in their development planning process and activities. Usually, according to Yirrah, development plans were prepared by the assemblies with little or no community engagement. “Sometimes project ideas were developed at the national level without any input from local governments nor community representatives,” Yirrah said. “Many of the projects were national projects which the community members did not even know about.”

### **Skilled Human Resources**

In the past, some assemblies had made efforts to improve community participation but found they did not have the resources or knowledge to begin participatory planning and budgeting. “You don’t just go into the community to mobilize people,” said Aidoo. “You need specific skills training to know how to go about it. Most of our staff here, including myself, did not have that knowledge and skill.”

### **Awareness and Communication Strategy**

Most slum dwellers were not aware of their rights to demand accountability from the local government or of their responsibility to participate in planning the development of their communities. “I used to think that governance was for the high-level politicians,” said

5 Author interview with Isaac Aidoo, Sekondi, September 12, 2019.

Addy, describing the perspective of many people in his community. “Who was I to go and make policies?”

This lack of awareness exacerbated inequality in the communities. “The problem is universal: affluent communities and educated citizens know their rights, and they have some means to demand accountability,” said Yirrah. “On the other hand, many of the urban poor are uneducated and do not know anything about their rights as citizens.”

Local assemblies had little to no communication with the communities pertaining to community members’ rights and responsibilities. “There were very few platforms to interact with people,” said Aidoo. “And there were some communities we had never engaged with before.”

## Tracing the Implementation Process

Global Communities partnered with the two local assemblies of Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi to implement the IncluCity project over four years. First, the partners identified the gaps in service delivery using a social audit tool known as the Citizens’ Report Card (more about this tool later). Then, Global Communities trained both the community’s and the city’s staff members. Subsequently, each participating community created development plans, some of which were funded by Global Communities through a small grants scheme.

### Creating an Implementation Team

Ishmael Adams, an urban development and project management expert at Global Communities who had led the organization’s SCALE-UP initiative, was the director of the IncluCity project. Global Communities had offices in both Accra and Takoradi, and staff members from those two offices coordinated project activities. Mohammed Abdul-Salam, a program coordinator at Global Communities, led activities in Sekondi-Takoradi, and Augustine Adams (no relation to Ishmael Adams) coordinated the Accra-based activities. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation also sent a consultant to provide technical support to the project.

Though the initiative focused on Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi, Global Communities wanted to share lessons across the country. To do so, Global Communities formed a project advisory committee to support implementation,

to share ideas and results from the two cities with other local governments, and to inform national policies. The committee was composed of representatives from the Accra Metropolitan Assembly, Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly, Land Valuation Division of Lands Commission, National Development Planning Commission, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, Regional Coordinating Councils of both Greater Accra and the Western regions, and Institute of Local Government Studies (Lamberson, Adams, and Arsenault 2016).

In Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi, Global Communities partnered with local NGOs. After asking interested local NGOs to submit proposals, Global Communities selected two NGOs as implementation partners on the basis of feasibility of their proposals and of their track record in the target communities. In Sekondi-Takoradi, Global Communities selected COLANDEF, and in Accra, Nimba Community Support Services (NIMCOSS) was selected. “We knew the communities better [than Global Communities did] since we were on the ground regularly doing the leg work,” said Yirrah, executive director of COLANDEF. “When we read the Terms of Reference and realized that the project objectives fell in the domain of what we usually advocate for, we applied and were selected based on our track record.”

### Identifying Gaps in Service Delivery

To measure the project’s impact, the project team needed pre-implementation data to compare against post-implementation data. Service delivery in the Sekondi-Takoradi area had not been formally evaluated in a long time. However, the team saw an opportunity to use the Citizens’ Report Card, a social audit tool that collects citizens’ feedback about public service delivery. The Accra Metropolitan Assembly had already used a report card in June 2010 during the SCALE-UP project, so Global Communities adapted that report card to use in Sekondi-Takoradi. The Accra report card (known as the City of Accra, Ghana Consultative Citizens’ Report Card) was based on a survey of about 3,700 households. The survey identified community priorities, performance of services, and community perceptions about service delivery; it also provided feedback to city authorities.

In 2012, on the basis of the Accra experience, Global Communities and the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly put together a team of development planners

and enumerators to adapt the Accra report card and undertake the survey for Sekondi-Takoradi. The team’s role was to guide the process and ensure that the design was technically robust and feasible. Working through the submetro councils (district-level offices of the local government), the assembly recruited and trained volunteers to serve as enumerators. The criteria for selection included a minimum of a senior high school–level education, familiarity with the local culture, fluency in the local language, and some basic experience in data collection.

Before the survey began, the team embarked on an awareness campaign to educate community members about the Citizens’ Report Card. Next, the team tested the survey materials to help enumerators become familiar with the questions. Then, the team surveyed a sample of about 800 households, carried out interviews, and held focus group discussions on an array of issues. The questions sought citizen feedback and citizen prioritization of 10 major services that were under the jurisdiction of the city government, including water supply, sanitation, solid waste management, police, health care, roads, markets, and basic education (Global Communities 2014). Performance of the assembly itself was also evaluated in the same manner as the services. Identification of the gaps in service delivery was based on five major themes: (a) availability and access, (b) user-incurred costs, (c) perceptions of reliability and quality, (d) satisfaction, and (e) responsiveness of service providers (CHF International Ghana 2012).

After the survey, the team used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze the data. The survey provided information about gaps in service delivery and gave the city authorities and public and private service providers feedback about the performance of their services from the users’ perspective—a tool relevant for budgeting and planning, while also increasing the accountability of the local government.

The results showed that the residents ranked water provision as their highest priority, followed by basic education. The survey revealed that 78 percent of residents did not have access to their desired waste management facilities and more than 90 percent of households did not have access to a standalone pipe or desirable sewerage facilities. Additionally, a majority of respondents were highly dissatisfied with public markets, management, and security. Before the results were published, the local assembly organized a series of consultative community

meetings and workshops in the various communities. It invited all service providers, community representatives, and local government staff members to validate the survey’s results. At the meetings, attendees discussed the challenges they faced and came to a consensus about a strategy to integrate service improvement plans into the city’s Medium-Term Development Plan.

## **Training Government Officials and Community Representatives**

To train both city officials and community representatives, Global Communities partnered with the Institute of Local Government Studies, a public management school established by the government of Ghana in 2003. The institute trained staff members of local governments and regional coordinating councils to enhance their managerial and administrative efficiency, and it ran postgraduate programs in local governance and related subjects. In 2012, the institute developed two manuals for training both city government officials and representatives of community-based organizations together for a bottom-up approach to planning.

The two manuals included the following: first, Inclusive Governance, which covered topics about (a) the local government system and the rights and responsibilities of citizens, (b) the framework for accountability and participation, (c) advocacy, (d) community outreach, (e) networking and engagement, and (f) conflict resolution; second, Participatory Planning and Budgeting, which covered (a) citizen involvement in planning and budgeting, (b) community mobilization and communication, (c) community development planning, and (d) participatory monitoring and evaluation. “The main aim of the training modules, besides providing [citizens and city officials] with the necessary skills for a bottom-up approach to planning and budgeting, was to bring both sides together to collaborate on implementing development projects,” said Augustine Adams, the Global Communities staffer who coordinated activities in Accra.<sup>6</sup>

The Institute of Local Government Studies, in collaboration with NIMCOSS, COLANDEF, and the National Development Planning Commission, organized a series of two-day training events and three-day immersion workshops to train the representatives of

6 Author interview with Augustine Adams, Accra, September 11, 2019.

community-based organizations, community leaders, elected assembly officials, and local government staff.

According to Global Communities, staff members of Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly, especially junior staff, were very receptive to the training. Their enthusiasm was mainly because they rarely had opportunities to attend capacity-building and training programs. Staff members of Accra Metropolitan Assembly, conversely, were more reluctant to participate. However, Global Communities held various consultations to explain the benefits of the training program and to encourage participation; the director of planning and budgeting made participation a requirement for all staff members of the planning and budgeting divisions.

Global Communities, NIMCOSS, and COLANDEF had databases of organizations they had worked with in the past, and they called on those organizations to participate in the trainings. The community-based organizations that participated included groups such as community cooperatives, fitness clubs, parent groups, religious organizations, transport associations, sports groups, market associations, and youth groups.

Topics covered during training included the rights and responsibilities of local governments and citizens, planning and budgeting, accountability and participation, data collection, advocacy and activism techniques for civil society and local government staff, land administration, preparing future Citizens' Report Cards, and observer ratings of services (Global Communities 2014). "We trained community members to have the skills and knowledge needed to demand more accountability from the assembly," said Mohammed Abdul-Salam. "We also trained them on their own roles and responsibilities as citizens. On the other hand, we trained the city staff on the skills needed in fostering stakeholder engagement in planning and budgeting"<sup>7</sup> In total, there were 18 two-day annual training events and 12 three-day immersion workshops over the course of the project.

The training used various methods of adult teaching, mentoring, and role-playing in addition to classroom activities. Because both local government staff and community members were present, participants could express their needs and frustrations and get direct replies from other participants to clear their misconceptions. "The training was really helpful because I learned the skills to communicate in such a way that my propositions

to the community were not seen as an imposition but rather as a way of encouraging them to participate," said Addy.

After the representatives of the community-based organizations had been trained, they were expected to transfer the knowledge from the training to their members and to the wider community. NIMCOSS and COLANDEF mentored the community-based organizations about how to organize community outreach and create public awareness. They then partnered with the National Commission on Civic Education—a government agency responsible for educating Ghanaians about civic matters—and helped that group organize outreach programs in the form of door-to-door education and community meetings. Additionally, they distributed more than 45,000 flyers about citizens' rights and responsibilities in participatory governance in all participating communities.

## Developing Community Action Plans

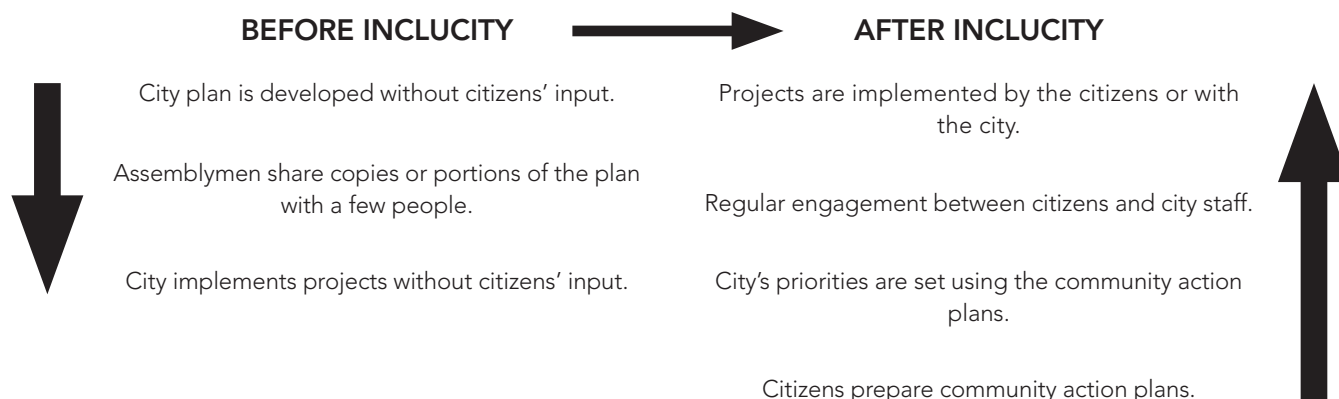
After gaining knowledge and skills through the training programs, city government officials, community-based organizations, assembly members, and community leaders came together at public meetings to develop community action plans, which were compilations of projects the community members wished to see implemented. This process was based on the National Development Planning Commission's requirement for all local governments to develop subdistrict development plans (similar to the community action plans), which required the participation of community members. While developing plans, the community members themselves, with the help of the city officials and the local partners (NIMCOSS or COLANDEF), came together to create a set of proposals that identified the major problems in the communities and made plans for resolving those problems.

"Everyone was given the chance to share their idea[s] about what the major problems in the community were," said Addy. "We then had discussions to narrow them down and listed them according to an order of priority." With the help of the city government's staff, especially the development planners, the community members were able to have development-focused discussions, and they made plans that were submitted to the assembly for incorporation into the Medium-Term Development Plans.

"We went to all the communities to guide them on how the plans should be made," said Aidoo. "We made them understand that this was not an exercise in futility

<sup>7</sup> Author interview with Mohammed Abdul-Salam, Takoradi, September 12, 2019.

**FIGURE 1. REFORMED PLANNING PROCESS**



Source: Author's own drawing (2019).

since the assembly was going to use these plans as the basis for the Medium-Term Development Plans.”

The main idea behind the activity was to flip the planning process from a top-down system to a more grassroots, bottom-up system. The plans better reflected the needs and aspirations of the community because community members were involved in designing them. “We live in the communities, so we were the best people to decide which of our problems were more pressing and needed immediate attention,” said Addy. “Therefore, these plans allowed us to tell the assembly our real problems and how we wanted them solved.”

Local governments designed future development projects on the basis of community action plans. The two metropolitan assemblies compiled all community action plans, incorporated them into the Medium-Term Development Plans, and submitted them to the National Development Planning Commission for approval and funding. This approach is referred to as the grassroots system of governance, where planning is initiated from the bottom up (see figure 1, Reformed Planning Process).

The community action plan process ensured that there was representation of diverse groups within each community. Global Communities and the local implementation partners explained to communities that if they neglected the needs of particular groups in the community, their plans would be rejected. Global Communities emphasized a strong representation of women and the disabled in discussions. Therefore, communities did their best to make plans that took marginalized groups such as women, children, ethnic

minority groups, and religious minority groups into consideration. For instance, some plans focused on children by including libraries and toilets for schools, and some plans focused on women by including sheds for women to store the produce they sold at markets.

### **Providing Small Grants for Community Projects**

To ensure continued community participation and sustainability of the community action plan process, Global Communities set up a fund to sponsor some community initiatives, and it awarded grants on a competitive basis. To prevent any conflicts regarding who received grants and who did not, the community representatives, NIMCOSS, COLANDEF, local government authorities, and Global Communities staff members came together to set the criteria for selecting projects for funding. For a community to receive funding, it had to justify need and urgency and show a strong commitment to implementation. The grants would cover only a percentage of the project's total cost, so the community had to commit to raising additional funds (cash or in kind) by signing a commitment document, which included a detailed description of the project, the costs involved, the intended impact of the project, as well as the means by which the community planned to raise extra funding for the project. This commitment document had to be endorsed by group representatives and the elected assembly member.

Representatives from the city government, NIMCOSS, COLANDEF, and Global Communities evaluated all

proposals submitted. The evaluation panel aimed to make the selection and funding process as transparent as possible; therefore, it provided each of the unsuccessful communities with reasons for why their projects were not selected for funding and how they could improve their proposals for selection in subsequent years.

Beginning in 2012, Global Communities provided small grants with a maximum of US\$2,000 per project for the communities to fund some of the priority projects in their community action plans. According to Adams, it takes time for communities to get the government's funding for projects. Therefore, to show an immediate benefit from the collaboration—and to avoid participants becoming frustrated with slow progress—Global Communities set aside funds to immediately implement some of the projects that had been selected from the community action plans and that were aligned with the city governments' development plans. The grants' aim was to sustain the community's engagement, to provide seed money for initiatives that could be expanded with funding from the assembly and other sources in the future, and to give assembly members a track record to boost their credentials. Generally, communities complemented the grant with in-kind contributions—such as land, labor, materials, or tools. In some cases, the community received additional funding from the city government.

When a community project was approved for funding, the community leaders and the assembly member worked with the staff of NIMCOSS and COLANDEF to implement the project. The grants supported close to two dozen projects each year. Some examples of funded projects were public toilets, parks, libraries, information and communications technology (ICT) centers, water kiosks, market sheds, and streetlights. Usually, the community members donated free labor while the staff of Global Communities and NIMCOSS or COLANDEF provided the technical support needed for implementation. Community leaders regularly updated NIMCOSS and COLANDEF about the progress of the project, and staff members from NIMCOSS and COLANDEF visited project sites to monitor progress and report to Global Communities.

To help communities sustain the projects, Global Communities trained and mentored selected community representatives and elected assembly members in project management and financial management. The people selected played critical roles in the development of community action plans and in the implementation of

community projects. In each community, the leaders of the various community-based organizations came together to nominate representatives plus the elected assembly member of the community to receive training. The plan was that after training, the selected individuals would serve on project management teams in charge of operations for developing projects in their respective communities. "I am a computer technician and since the project in our community was a community ICT center, I was chosen for the training," said Addy, a community representative. "I used my skills and knowledge from the training to maintain the machines and repair them when there were any faults."

### **Expanding to More Communities**

After the first batch of small grants was awarded in 2012 and work on the community-proposed projects started, the program became very popular in the participating communities as well as in nearby communities. "News of the program spread to other communities, so other organizations approached us to join the training program," said Emmanuel Asante, the program director of NIMCOSS. "Since the Institute of Local Government Studies had the capacity to train more people, we agreed to include 26 more community representatives in the training."<sup>8</sup> The project was initially designed to work with 120 community-based organizations, so the additional 26 groups increased the total number of participating organizations to 146. In 2013, NIMCOSS and COLANDEF added the 26 additional community-based organizations, some of which were located outside of the targeted communities, to the training program.

This scale-up did not strain capacity because the implementation partners and the institute had the human resource capacity to accommodate new participants. Furthermore, the scale-up did not put stress on the project's budget. The newly added community-based organizations were taken through orientation just like the others. The institute then trained the representatives using the same modules used in the initial training programs.

### **Improving Communication between Assemblies and Communities**

To enhance regular dialogue between the assemblies and community members, the project team adopted

<sup>8</sup> Author interview with Emmanuel Asante, Accra, September 10, 2019.



three strategies. The first strategy was to regularize and institutionalize meetings between the assembly and community members. Starting in 2013, there was an increase in the number of engagements from approximately 65 meetings annually before the project to about 200 constructive meetings annually between the city authorities—including assembly members—and community members. “Because of the frequent meetings, many of the community leaders know me now,” said Aidoo. “We have a good relationship, so they are able to come by our office to talk to us about their problems.”

The second strategy was to install notice boards in all 59 communities to inform the community members about the assemblies’ activities and meeting schedules. Whenever the assembly or community leaders had information about community meetings, assembly activities, or projects, they made flyers and posted them on notice boards. Furthermore, community leaders were required to post their action plans on notice boards so every community member would be able to read them. “Anytime there was a community meeting or fundraising event, we used the notice boards,” said Addy. The assemblies also used notice boards to raise awareness about the city’s action plans as well as the roles and responsibilities of the community members, including their responsibility to pay taxes, to keep the city clean, to participate in community meetings, and so on. “Previously, it was difficult to share information about our activities and plans with the communities,” said Aidoo. “However, since we mounted the notice boards, we are able to swiftly inform the communities by frequently posting our flyers on the notice boards.”

Finally, the Client Service Unit and a toll-free number were launched in February 2013. The Client Service Unit was a special unit established within the assemblies to provide staff members who would be specifically available to respond to the concerns of the citizens, including complaints about service delivery and suggestions for community and assembly improvement, among others. The staff members of the Client Service Unit were taken through a series of trainings to learn how to respond to and deal with complaints and suggestions from the community. Moreover, Global Communities helped the assemblies advertise the toll-free number in newspapers, on the radio, and on flyers. Those platforms increased communication among the two parties. On average, the personnel in charge of the toll-free number received about 29 calls per day and were able to immediately

respond to approximately 70 percent of the concerns without needing to involve other divisions.

## **Evaluating the Performance of Service Delivery**

In 2015 when the project was wrapping up, Global Communities and the assemblies once again collaborated for another Citizens’ Report Card as a follow-up to the 2012 Citizens’ Report Card. The report card assessed improvements in the 10 major services delivered in the metropolis, including performance of the assembly over the three-year period; it also identified changing community priorities.

Comparing the results of the 2012 baseline survey to the 2015 survey revealed that, although citizens’ perception of the performance of services was fairly low, it had improved significantly. For instance, the extent to which residents experienced problems with services reduced from 23 percent to 16 percent. There was a 31 percent increase in satisfaction with public security, a 12 percent increase in satisfaction with solid waste management, and a 6 percent increase in satisfaction with public markets management. The results also indicated that citizens’ satisfaction with services increased significantly in areas where residents and service providers participated in the community meetings and shared ideas about service improvement. Additionally, the survey found that citizens’ interest in the assembly’s activities increased significantly. Conversely, satisfaction with services such as electricity provision did not improve. This lack of progress in electricity provision, however, was seen as more of a national issue resulting from a nationwide electricity crisis that started in 2012 (Global Communities Ghana 2015).

## **Outcomes**

The main outcome of the IncluCity project was that the development planning and budgeting process in Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi became more bottom-up. Development planning in the two metropolitan areas became more democratic, thus allowing both community members and local government staff members to share ideas and contribute toward community development. Community members became more aware of their responsibility to hold the city government accountable for providing equitable and quality services.

By the time the project ended in 2015, the Institute of Local Government Studies had trained 1,512 participants: 723 in inclusive governance and 789 in participatory planning and budgeting, comprising 1,374 community representatives and 138 government officials. As of 2019, the institute was still independently running and marketing the courses nationally. The courses were available for both local government staff members and community-based organizations who wanted to train their employees about community activism.

The target communities' action plans generated a combined list of more than 900 projects that were submitted to the respective local assemblies. The city governments incorporated a majority of plans into their annual plans and implemented some through government funding. "The plans made our work easier," said Aidoo. "When we were making the Medium-Term Development plans for 2014–16, we had the community action plans so we just incorporated them. There was no need for us to go looking for the problems in the community and make our own prescriptions for solving them."

The community action plans were not merely to be incorporated into the assemblies' plans but also served as plans for implementation. "These plans served as the basis for implementing projects in the communities," said Lydia Sackey, a director of budgeting at the Accra Metropolitan Assembly. "They could even serve as proposals to seek funds from external donors to sponsor some of the projects."<sup>9</sup>

Of the total 908 projects submitted through community action plans, 290 were incorporated into the assemblies' Medium-Term Development Plans, 63 were funded under the IncluCity project through the small grants, and 50 were funded by the assemblies. Because of the development of plans and the increased community advocacy, some neglected communities were, for the first time, able to secure funding for their community projects. For instance, "The Alogboshie community had never had a project specifically tailored to their needs," said Asante. "However, after working with them to develop the community action plans, they were able to win the small grant and also got support from the assembly to renovate their dilapidated access road, drainage system, clinic, and a public tap; all within the space of just three years."

As a result of available plans, the communities were well prepared to apply for grants and donor support.

When there was an announcement for project funding, participating communities could easily select their priority projects and submit them to the donor agency for funding. For instance, according to Abdul-Salam, Sofokrom, one of the participating communities, was well prepared with a plan when the opportunity came for an Urban Development Grant (a government of Ghana initiative supported by the World Bank) in 2014. The community leveraged its action plan to secure the grant for a six-unit classroom block with complementary facilities to be constructed.

From 2012 to 2015, Global Communities funded 63 projects using small grants. A total of GHS270,800 (about US\$84,230 in 2015) was sponsored by Global Communities, with the communities raising a combined total of GHS655,720 (about US\$203,956 in 2015) in cash and in kind. The sponsored projects included toilet facilities, community parks, community libraries, community ICT centers, community water kiosks, market sheds, and streetlights. However, 16 of the communities could not win grants because of problems such as the inability to generate additional funds, difficulties attaining legal access to land, and lack of interest (Adabor, Boansi, and Inkoom 2015). Because of the initial agreement between all the community leaders and the grant proposal evaluation panel, there were no conflicts when some communities did not win the grant. "We made it very clear from the beginning to the communities about what was required to win the grant," said Yirrah. "Therefore, those communities which did not win the grants were aware of their shortcomings and did not protest." The evaluation panel encouraged communities that did not win grants to go back and review their proposals for possible future funding from the city government.

After 2015, when the IncluCity project finished and Global Communities stepped back its involvement, the local assemblies institutionalized the use of community action plans in their development planning. According to Aidoo, the 2014–17 Medium-Term Development Plans incorporated many of the proposed projects from the community action plans and funded them using internally generated funds. The 2018–20 Medium-Term Development Plans also incorporated projects from the action plans.

Keeping community members and organizations engaged without the project's structure and funding was a challenge, however; by 2019, participation in the process of making community action plans had dwindled. Many

9 Author interview with Lydia Sackey, Accra, September 10, 2019

early participants relocated to other areas, and some community-based organizations disbanded or changed missions. “A lot of the very active community members who received training and participated in the program are now living in other towns,” said Addy. “Also, our group is no longer as active as [it was] during the years of the implementation. We rarely meet as an organization.” However, local governments have taken measures to ensure continuity of the process, such as by sponsoring newly elected assembly members and community representatives to take the Institute of Local Government Studies courses in order to train new sets of community representatives and organizations.

Assembly members and community members committed to continuing the development of action plans. However, after the project ended, the local assembly was involved in developing action plans only at the zonal level because of limited resources.<sup>10</sup> The communities held their usual meetings with the elected assembly member and community leaders every two weeks to every three months to continue to develop annual community action plans. Then, the assembly organized quarterly zonal meetings in which communities would come together in zones to put together their plans. The zonal plans were then submitted to the assembly for incorporation into the city’s plans. The assemblies used a process and structure similar to the application process of the small grants to fund some priority projects in the action plans using their internally generated funds.

## Lessons Learned

### Collecting Data from Citizens Helped Local Governments Identify Service Gaps

With accurate data, local assemblies are better able to appropriately adjust their plans and budgets to best serve their communities. Before collecting data, local assemblies were not able to measure the success of their projects and did not know the opinions of the communities about their performance. The Citizens’ Report Card helped the city government and service providers collect the data needed to make future decisions and plans. “The results of the initial Citizens’ Report Card revealed a lot of flaws

in service delivery that we did not know of,” said Aidoo. “This helped us to know [on] which areas we needed to focus more attention and find innovative solutions to the shortcomings.”

### Grassroots Planning Built Community Ownership of Projects

Planning from the grassroots level is a way to make community members the custodians and agents of development. When people are involved in planning and implementing development in their communities, they take responsibility for the performance of the projects and become sensitive to the survival and maintenance of those projects. Because community members themselves came up with the project ideas, they were very committed to seeing the projects become successful.

“Each project was our own brainchild, so we wanted to do everything possible to make them succeed,” said Addy. “I could see that every community member was concerned about the community ICT center. As we always say, everyone wants to see his or her child succeed in life. Thus, we also wanted the project to be the best, so we put a lot of effort into protecting it.” Moreover, because the community members raised extra funding for the small grant project, they had vested interest and took ownership of the projects. They did not want their contributions and hard work to be in vain.

### Working through Local Champions Helped Ensure Sustainability

Identifying and working with a variety of local champions and leaders was a fast and cost-effective way to reach the entire community. The project mainly targeted community-based organization leaders as a conduit to get to the community members. It would not have been sustainable if the project team decided to work directly with each individual member of the community. Working with those community champions was not only a cost-effective approach but also a sustainable way of engaging the community. The representatives relayed the information and training they received to group members and convinced them to actively participate in activities of the local assemblies. “Life in the city is a very busy one,” said Abdul-Salam. “The community members needed to go about their daily routines and so did not have much time to meet us as much as we would have wanted. It would have been very tedious to get that many

<sup>10</sup> A zone comprises at least three communities. Therefore, communities have been merged into zones.

people to participate on our own. However, in every community, there were leaders and influential people who the community members looked up to. We saw it as an opportunity to work through them as a faster route to reach the community members.”

### **Financial Incentives Built Trust between Citizens and Local Governments**

Providing small grants and asking the community to commit its own resources to projects was a way to build trust and to encourage community members to participate in governance. The grants helped bring some community plans to reality. Once the communities saw that their efforts had paid off and their plans had been transformed into real projects, their trust in the process was enhanced, and they were motivated to participate even more. “We needed to give the communities a reason

to believe in what we wanted to achieve,” said Adams. “We knew if they saw immediate results, they would trust the process. Owing to the small grants, we even had other communities requesting to join the project.”

### **Training Officials and Citizens Together Facilitated Cooperation between the Two Groups**

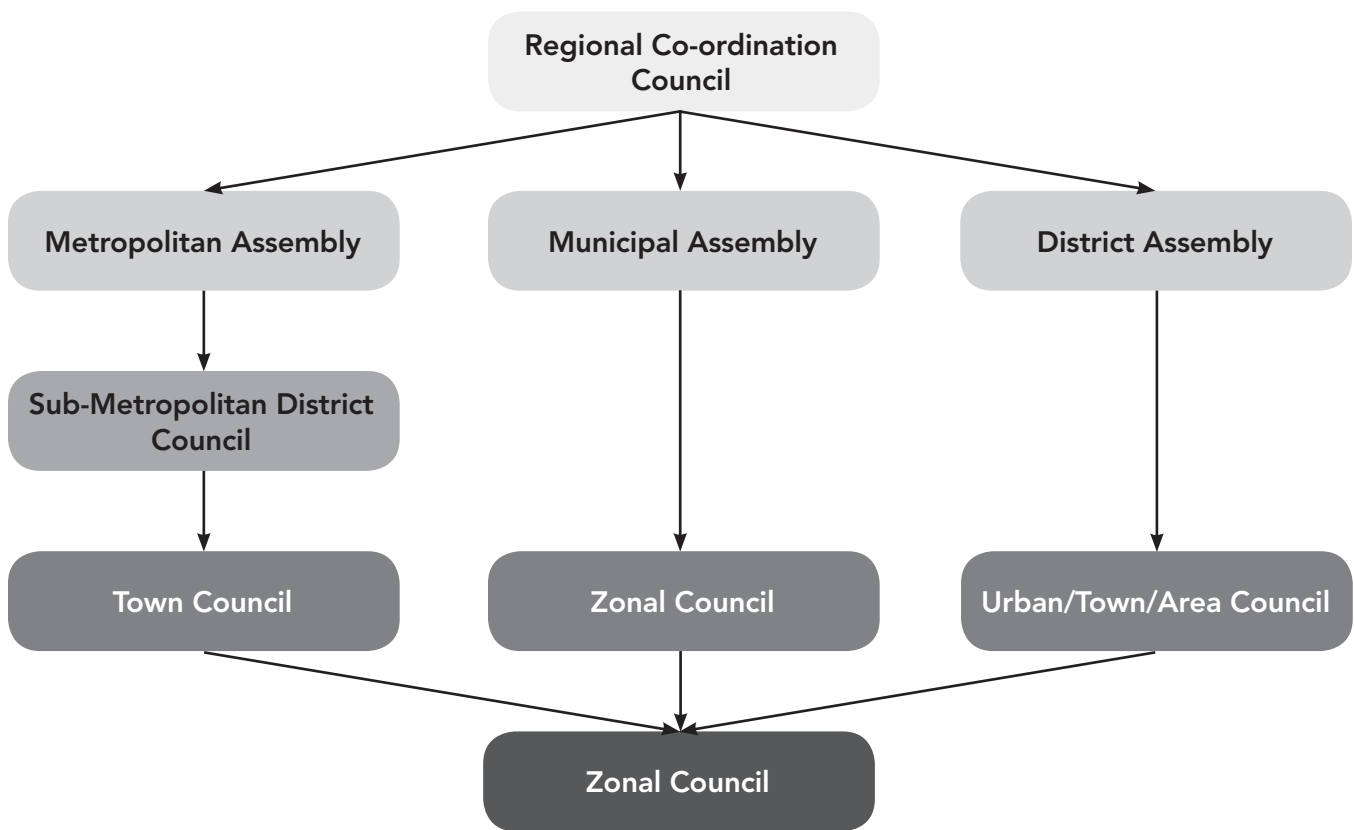
Effective engagement requires training of both citizens and officials. Training the two groups together built a common understanding of the situation and helped each group appreciate the other’s point of view. Once they had a common understanding and knowledge about participatory governance, officials and citizens could tolerate each other’s views and work together to find common ground.

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# Appendix

## GHANA LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE



Source: Ayea 2013.



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