Poor Urban Communities and Municipal Interface in Ghana: A Case Study of Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis

GEORGE OWUSU AND ROBERT LAWRENCE AFUTU-KOTEY

Abstract: Like many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Ghana, is undergoing a rapid pace of urbanization associated with socio-economic, environmental, and institutional challenges for urban residents and local government authorities. Under Ghana's laws, Metropolitan Assemblies (large city local governments) have overall responsibility for the development of their respective cities. This article explores the poor urban communities—municipal interface based on a study carried out in the largest (Accra) and third largest (Sekondi-Takoradi) cities. The study concludes that mechanisms for engaging poor urban communities are limited largely due to the absence of functional decentralized sub-district structures in these communities. In addition, the indirect attempt by the Metropolitan Assemblies to address infrastructure and service needs of poor urban communities through a public-private partnership centered on privatization (franchising and contracting) and community-based participation in the provision of social services has distanced the Assemblies from poor communities. This situation has reinforced the view that the Assemblies are unresponsive to community needs. The implications of limited community-municipal interface for poor urban communities and urban development in Ghana in general are also explored.

Introduction

Rapid urbanization characterized by urban sprawl and the emergence of slums and other informal settlements is a common feature of developing countries. It has been argued that developing country cities are harboring an increasing proportion of the poor and destitute.[1] Again, evidence indicates that the "bright lights" of cities and towns describe the lure of urban life and the promise that urban centers hold for individuals and groups who are hungry, jobless, ill, just curious, and so forth – fueling movements to urban centers.[2] While rural-urban migration is an important factor in the rapid pace of urbanization, the single most influential factor is natural population growth in cities and towns.[3] This situation is partly

George Owusu holds a PhD in Geography (with focus on urban and regional development) from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. Currently, Dr. Owusu is a Senior Research Fellow in the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER), University of Ghana, Legon. He is also the Coordinator of Graduate Programmes at ISSER. Dr. Owusu's main areas of research include urbanization and regional development, land tenure, decentralization and participatory approaches to development.
Robert Lawrence Afutu-Kotey is a PhD candidate in Development Studies at ISSER and holds an MSc degree in Regional and Urban Planning from the London School of Economics. He has previously worked as a Principal Research Assistant (PRA) at ISSER. His main areas of research include urban youth employment, regional and urban planning, and decentralization and local government reforms.
The authors would like to thank the residents of the poor urban communities of Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi in this study for their willingness to share information, CHF-Ghana (an NGO) for financial support, and all others who made the fieldwork possible.

http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v12/v12i1a2.pdf

ISSN: 2152-2448

due to the fact that the urban migrants are predominantly young people, and this inevitably contributes to high rates of natural increase in urban centers. Youth populations in cities are coterminous with high levels of unemployment, a major contributory factor to urban poverty. Moreover, urban poverty is equally associated with poor living conditions.[4]

In much of the developing world, especially Sub-Saharan Africa, economic growth and development have not kept pace with rates of urbanization. For instance, while Sub-Saharan African countries can match the urbanization rates of China and India (considered industrial powers of the future), they cannot boast of anything near the respective rates of economic growth of these two countries.[5] The resultant effects of this situation are increasing urban poverty and the emergence of slums and other informal settlements. The growth of urban poverty and emergence of informal settlements in cities of the developing world are largely occurring within the context of decentralization.[6] Decentralization advocates argue that because decentralization brings government closer to the governed both spatially and institutionally, government will be more knowledgeable about and responsive to the needs of urban people. Therefore, decentralization has brought to the fore issues of the structure and processes of city governance, which have important ramifications for how urban poverty is defined and addressed. This has implications for those living in poverty and how political processes may include or exclude the urban poor.

As with many Sub-Saharan African countries, Ghana is undergoing a rapid pace of urbanization with its attendant challenges. Already evident in urban Ghana are the effects of rapid urbanization manifest in socio-economic, environmental, and institutional challenges for urban residents and local authorities. Millions of urbanite Ghanaians currently live in densely populated and overcrowded unsanitary conditions often lacking access to basic services such as water, sanitation, and health care.[7] According to Ghana's development policy blue-print, the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2006-2009 (GPRS II), in 2001, the number of people living in urban slums was about five million (representing about 58 percent of the total urban population), and growing at the rate of 1.8 percent per annum.[8] The slum areas are very pronounced in the largest cities, and there is a growing incidence in the secondary cities as well. Increasing urban poverty and slums are occurring within the context of a decentralization program described as one of the boldest local government reforms to be found in the developing world.[9]

This article explores slums and municipal interface in Ghana based on a study carried out in selected poor communities in two metropolitan areas of Ghana, namely Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi.[10] It explores the effectiveness of Metropolitan Assemblies (city local governments) in Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi in engaging poor communities as well as addressing the needs of these communities.

After the introduction, the paper will examine theoretically the links between decentralization and urban governance, followed by a description of the research methodology. The paper will then look at decentralization and urban governance in Ghana. This is followed by a brief discussion of the selected communities and their development challenges. The paper then turns its attention to poor communities and municipal interface in Sekondi-Takoradi and Accra. It ends with a concluding discussion on the implications of the study for slums and urban development in Ghana.

Urban Governance, Decentralization and Urban Poverty: A Theoretical Perspective

The rapid urbanization and the increasing proportion of the world's poor who live in urban areas in many parts of the developing world have led to the recognition that poverty can no longer be regarded as primarily a rural phenomenon.[11] There is also a wide recognition of the

links or connections between poverty and governance at all levels.[12] In the case of urban governance, it is argued that technical issues of planning, infrastructure development, and service delivery are unlikely to have a significant impact on the poor unless important issues about the impact of the structure of metropolitan governance are addressed. This is because the structure of metropolitan governance has serious and far-reaching implications for those living in poverty and for how political processes may include or exclude the urban poor.[13]

According to the United Nations Development Program, a missing link between anti-poverty efforts and poverty reduction as well as other economic development strategies is governance.[14] The basic argument here is that even with well-structured and well-intended development plans and programs, the presence of unresponsive, unaccountable, and corrupt governance institutions result in failure of plans and programs. In such an environment, reform of governance institutions should be moved front and center to provide the minimum conditions for getting poverty reduction programs and other people-centered initiatives off the ground.

It has been argued that accountable and responsive governance institutions provide a platform for harnessing the energies of collective action in cities exemplified by urban social movements and organizations. According to Beall, urban social movements that are the result of urban poverty and the absence of effective channels for social change have shown that people in urban communities engage in a range of mutual support and self-help activities.[15] These initiatives provide evidence that communities are imbued with "social assets" that can be identified and helpfully engaged within policy terms. Castells has noted that these urban social movements must be built on cooperative activities at community or neighborhood level. They can only be described as successful if they achieve structural change, most notably a shift in the balance of power among urban social classes in favor of the urban poor.[16] This provides the opportunity for galvanizing middle-class and civil society pressures for governmental actions for sanitary reforms and serious efforts to address other urban challenges. This situation, however, is currently rarely the case in cities in the developing world – a condition which Chaplin has described as the "absence of threat from below."[17] Hence, the lack of government action.

The urban governance arguments have found expression in governments delegating the task of mobilizing and allocating society's resources for public purposes – decentralization of power and authority as well as resources to lower units of governments. A key constraint of decentralization is how best to translate it into practice and, more importantly the practical framework for engaging poor communities, especially in urban areas where sanitation and waste disposal facilities are in critical condition.

Promoting citizen participation in decision-making processes and the failure of urban services to keep pace with rapid urban growth have prompted urban local governments to shift from direct public services provision to public-private partnerships involving local communities, citizens, and the private sector in the provision and management of services.[18] However, it is not all that clear that governments unable to provide direct basic services to the poor will fair any better with the responsibilities of regulating the provision and management of these services by other non-state actors. These processes of engaging with poor urban communities by urban local governments have to a large extent not reduced the hostility and mistrust between them and poor urban communities.[19] This is because sanitation and waste management have witnessed little improvement. Ayee and Crook attribute this situation to the politics of patronage at the urban level, the relationship between city

government and community level groups, and the failure of regulation– three factors that reinforced each other and result in failure or limited improvement in services provision. [20]

It has also been noted that policy-makers have been over-optimistic about the willingness and capacity of poor communities to provide basic services in the face of the absence of public provision. Underlying this assumption is the romanticized notion of the social solidarity of the slum, which translates into a strong spirit of collective action on local issues.[21] However, it is argued that social and economic deprivation can be as much a force for social fragmentation as it is a point for collective action.[22]

Research Methodology

This study is part of a large study on situational analysis of five selected poor communities in Accra (Sabon Zongo, Avenor and Ga Mashie) and Sekondi-Takoradi (Kwesimintsm and New Takoradi). The analysis is based on data generated from four methods, namely secondary sources, focus group discussions (FGDs), interviews (key informants/local government representatives and experts), and transect walks. The use of multiple methods ensured triangulation of data by allowing for the cross-checking of information with the basic aim of validating answers and conclusions reached in the study.

The secondary data sources generated information on the general Ghanaian urban environment: governance structure of Ghanaian cities; key stakeholders and their influence on urban development; and city-level poverty levels. The primary data generated from interviews, focus group discussions, and transect walks included oral histories of settlements, community infrastructure/services and opportunities, social structures, and local government activities in the communities. Table 1 shows the total number of interviews (key informant, expert, and Assembly member) and transect walks conducted in the selected communities in Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi.

Table 1: Interviews and Transect Walks Conducted in Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi

City	Selected Community	No. of FGDs	No. of Key Informant Interviews	No. of Expert Interviews	Assembly Member Interviews	Transect Walk
Accra		-	-	12	-	-
	Ga Mashie	4	9	-	2	1
	Avenor	4	9	-	1	1
	Sabon Zongo	4	9	-	1	1
Sekondi-Takoradi		-	-	10	-	-
	New Takoradi	4	9	-	1	1
	Kwesimintsim	4	9	-	3	1
Total	**-**	**20**	**45**	**22**	**8**	**5**

Source: Fieldwork, June-July, 2008.

Four FGDs were conducted in each community involving adult males, adults females, the youth (between the ages of 18 and 38 years, and single), and members of NGOs/CBOs operating in the community; and nine key informant interviews (mainly traditional and opinion leaders of the community). In addition, interviews were held with elected local government representatives in each of the communities, as well as twenty-two expert interviews (mainly senior administrative/planning officers of the metropolitan local government authority, academics, and senior officers of NGOs). Aided by a local guide, a

transect walk was conducted in each community, which provided an opportunity to observe directly the community basic infrastructure and services, housing conditions, economic activities, level of income/wealth, and so forth.

Selected Poor Communities and Development Challenges

Poor urban communities of Accra (Sabon Zongo, Avenor, and Ga Mashie) and Sekondi-Takoradi (New Takoradi and Kwesimintsim) were selected on the basis of several criteria, including their migrant or indigenous status, location, age of settlement, and demographic composition. Sabon Zongo and Avenor are largely migrant communities, while Ga Mashie (comprising two communities, Ussher Fort and James Town) and Kwesimintsim can be described as indigenous communities. On the other hand, Avenor and New Takoradi are mixed, harboring multiple ethnic groups including both migrants and indigenes. In terms of location, New Takoradi and Ga Mashie are located on seafronts, hence the importance of artisanal fishing. The rest are located close to city center and are thus very accessible from all parts of their respective cities.

While the selected communities share differences and similarities in terms of their location, migrant/indigene status, and demographic composition, a clear delineation that distinguishes the five communities from other neighborhoods in their respective cities is the neglect of their basic infrastructure and services, particularly the very limited supply of sanitation, waste disposal, and drainage. As a result, an overwhelming proportion of residents rely on limited public facilities such as public toilets and bathrooms. In-house toilet, house-to-house solid waste collection, and in-house pipe-borne water supply are limited to only a few households (see Table 2).

Table 2: Adequate Sanitation and Water Facilities Used by Households in Selected Poor Neighborhoods in Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi (%), 2000*

City	Residential Neighborhood	Selected Adequate Sanitation and Water Supply Indicator			
		Water closet (WC) Toilet (%)	Collected Solid Waste Disposal System (%)	Sewerage Liquid Waste Disposal System (%)	Pipe-borne Water Inside House (%)
Accra	Avenor	24.2	30.2	2.4	28.1
	Sabon Zongo	6.5	15.1	8.4	41.8
	James Town**	11.1	11.0	6.8	35.4
Accra (city average)		**23.2**	**20.8**	**13.0**	**43.6**
Sekondi-Takoradi	New Takoradi	6.5	5.5	1.6	10.3
	Kwesimintsim	9.7	5.0	5.1	14.2
City average		**39.3**	**5.6**	**15.0**	**46.8**

*Adequate sanitation and toilet facilities such as in-house pipe-borne water, in-house water toilet, and regular house-to-house waste collection are limited. The table excludes public toilet facilities and waste disposal methods such as burning, opening/public dumping, and burial. ** James Town is part of the larger neighborhood of Ga-Mashie. Source: Ghana Statistical Service

Table 2 shows the proportion of households in the five poor communities as of 2000 with "adequate" access to sanitation and water facilities. While the city averages are not good, they

are even far lower in the five selected neighborhoods, except for Avenor.[23] These averages from the communities can be contrasted with figures from the middle and high-class areas in the two cities. For instance, in high-class residential areas of Accra such as Airport and Cantonments over 80 percent and 70 percent respectively of households had in-house toilet and door-to-door solid waste collection system as of 2000.

A key development challenge is the inadequacy of urban infrastructure and services vis-à-vis a fast growing population. Rapid urban population growth is evident in a high population concentration per hectare. For instance, in 2000, while the average population density of Accra was 140 persons/ha, it was about 650 persons/ha in Sabon Zongo. This high population on a small piece of land and the inability of local and central governments to provide adequate sanitation and water facilities means residents must queue to use public toilets, while many also use plastic bags and then dump them at open refuse dumps and other open spaces within the communities. More importantly, constructed and natural drainage systems get choked with human and solid waste. The massive increase in the use of plastic bags has further exacerbated the situation. This is generating a public health crisis with potential serious consequences.[24]

Decentralization and Urban Governance in Ghana

Ghana embarked upon a decentralization program in 1988 as a key element in the process of democratization and the search for a more participatory approach to development.[25] The decentralization program is regarded as enhancing an effective response to local development challenges and as facilitating the involvement of local people in decision-making and the development process in general. The decentralization program is enshrined in Ghana's Constitution and spelled out in the Local Government Act of 1993 (Act 462).

A local government in Ghana could be a Metropolitan Assembly (a city/large town with a population of over 250,000), Municipal Assembly (one town local government area with a population of over 95,000), and District Assembly (a local government area comprising a district capital and other small centers, and rural areas with a population of over 75,000). In all, there are 169 Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs), made of six Metropolitan Assemblies, thirty-nine Municipal Assemblies and 124 District Assemblies. The six Metropolitan Assemblies include the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) and the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly (STMA). Table 3 shows the Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies and their sub-district structures.

Table 3: MMDAs and Sub-District Structures*

METROPOLITAN, MUNICIPAL AND DISTRICT ASSEMBLIES (MMDAs)		
4-Tier Metropolitan Assembly (Population 250,000 and Over)	3-Tier Municipal Assembly (Population Over 95,000)	3-Tier District Assembly (Population Over 75,000)
1. Metropolitan Assemblies 2. Sub-Metropolitan Assemblies 3. Town/Area Councils 4. Unit Committees	1. Municipal Assemblies 2. Zonal Councils 3. Unit Committees	1. District Assemblies 2. Urban/Town/Area Councils 3. Unit Committees

*Unit committees are formed for populations of 500-1000 and 1500 in rural and urban areas respectively. Urban, Area, and Zonal councils are formed for settlements with populations above 15000, 5000-15000, and 3000 respectively.

Under the national Constitution and the Local Government Act of 1993 (Act 462), MMDAs have overall responsibility for the development of their areas of jurisdiction. In order to reach all the citizens of a local government area, the structures of the Assembly, that is the sub-district structures, go as far as the neighborhood and community levels. The sub-district structures comprising a four tier structure for Metropolitan Assemblies and three tier structure for Municipal and District Assemblies (see Table 3). These sub-district structures form the basic backbone of decentralized institutional framework. The basic aim of these structures is to take decentralization to the grassroots level by involving local people in all decision-making processes.[26]

Like all other Assemblies, Metropolitan Assemblies consist of two-thirds elected members and one third appointed by the central government in consultation with key stakeholders in the districts. The central government also appoints the Metropolitan Chief Executive (MCE), who is the head of the Metropolitan Assembly, with approval from the members of the Assembly. The elected and appointed officials of the Assembly are assisted by a team of civil servants, such as the District Coordinating Director, Planning Officer, Budget Officer, and Finance Officer, who provide managerial and technical support for the MMDAs.

In all, about 87 functions ranging from environmental sanitation to infrastructure provision have been delegated to the Assemblies.[27] Figure 1 provides a broad list of MMDA functions. In metropolitan areas, however, environmental sanitation constitutes the single biggest function of Metropolitan Assemblies. This function has tended to overshadow other equally important functions such as physical planning, development control, and investments promotion.

Figure 1: Functions of the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs)

The functions of the District Assemblies are spelled out in detail in the Section 10(1) of the Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462) and Section 2 of the National Development Planning Act, 1994 (Act 480). The functions of the Assembly are defined as deliberative, legislative, and executive. Section 10(1) of Act 462 provides details of the functions of the District Assemblies as follows:

- Responsible for the overall development of the district and shall ensure the preparation and submission through the Regional Coordinating Council;

i. development plans of the district to the National Development Planning Commission for approval and;

ii. budget of the district related to the approved plans to the Minister for Finance for approval.

- Formulate and execute plans, programs and strategies for the effective mobilization of the resources necessary for the overall development of the district;
- Promote and support productive activity and social development in the district and remove any obstacles to initiative and development;
- Initiate programs for the development of basic infrastructure and provide municipal works and services in the district;
- Responsible for the development, improvement and management of human settlements and the environment in the district;
- Cooperate with appropriate national and local security agencies responsible for the maintenance of security and public safety in the district;
- Initiate, sponsor or carry out such studies as may be necessary for the discharge of any of the functions conferred by the Act or any other enactment and;
- Perform such other functions as may be provided under any other enactment

In addition, Section 10(4) of Act 462 urges the District Assembly to take such steps and measures as are necessary to the execution of approved development plans of the district.

Slums and Municipal Interface: Sekondi-Takoradi and Accra

As already noted, to better manage the complex challenge of urban growth, the sub-structures of Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) and Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly (STMA) have been established: AMA has thirteen Sub-metropolitan Assemblies and STMA three. It is the Sub-metropolitan Assemblies and their other substructures which are tasked with the responsibility of dealing with waste management, infrastructure development, and other needs of communities within their areas of jurisdiction. The sub-structures are very important as they form the basis for problem identification and for the initiation and implementation of self-help projects at the local level.[28] Field observation in the two metropolises, however, revealed that in many communities the sub-structures (Area Councils and Unit Committees) are absent or non-functional. This is well captured in this quote by a member of the Avenor Unit Committee:

We have problems with the Avenor Unit Committee…. We were elected as members of the Unit Committee, but the Committee has not been inaugurated. So it means we have not been given any mandate to work. So either these Unit Committees are abolished or they [authorities] find some ways and means to help them work.

Attempts at addressing the infrastructure and services needs by the AMA and STMA respectively have been conceived in terms of public-private partnerships. According to Ayee and Crook, since the creation of the Metropolitan Assemblies provision of services in the metropolitan areas has entailed two similar approaches.[29] These are privatization of waste collection and public sanitation (through franchising and contracting out) and encouraging more community-based participation in the provision of local cleansing and sanitation services (mainly through engaging micro-enterprises for local waste collection and franchising management of public toilets to approved local businesses and community groups).

The indirect attempt by the Metropolitan Assemblies to provide poor urban communities with services like toilets and solid waste collection has run into difficulties. First, with weak or non-existent Unit Committees, Assemblies have delegated their role as the development agent to private enterprises and other individuals. This approach has further distanced the Assemblies from the people—a view which has reinforced the perception that the Assembly is unresponsive to community needs. Hence, the widely held view among residents of the study communities that "the Assembly has done nothing in this community." Second, the franchising and sub-contracting of public services to micro-enterprises and individuals by the Metropolitan Assemblies have enhanced and facilitated city government political patronage networks. It must be stressed that these networks go further up to the level of the national or central government. Recent events involving the compulsory seizure of public toilets in many parts of Accra and Tema by supporters of the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) following the party's victory in national elections in December 2008 and subsequent change of government in January 2009 give credence to this view.[30]

Though contracts for operating public toilet and other services are supposed to be given to entities with demonstrated capacity, in reality most frequent beneficiaries are Assembly Members and others associated with the Sub-Metropolitan Assemblies and their parent organizations (AMA and STMA)[31] as well as political party leaders and their affiliates. In Sabon Zongo, focus group discussions and key informant interviewees noted that a change in the position of an Assembly member or an official of the Sub-Metropolitan Assembly implied a change in the business entity or individual managing the public toilets in the community. As such the regulatory role of the Sub-Metropolitan Assemblies has been severely weakened due largely to conflict of interest resulting in poor services delivery – services which the poor

have to pay for either formally or informally. Thus, though public toilets have been privatized and users pay for the service, quality has remained very poor. For example, a participant in the women's focus group discussion, Sabon Zongo, stated: "The toilets have not improved. They have become worse. We have to queue to use the toilets even as early as 5 a.m. and because of the stench you need to change your clothes after visiting the place."

As the overall development authorities for Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi, the AMA and STMA are required to spearhead the development of their respective cities. However, a key weakness of the AMA and STMA is their weak development planning focus. Like much of Ghana, planning and development control have largely chased development. In large cities and towns such as Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi, however, this situation is exacerbated by the rapid pace of urban sprawl and population growth. Both AMA and STMA have a Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP), which is linked up or tied with the three pillars of Ghana's development policy framework, as outlined in the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS II). Content analysis of both cities' MTDP indicates programs of action emphasizing among others slum upgrading, improving sanitation and waste management, provision of basic services and infrastructure, sealing of roads, and construction of drains in flood prone areas. If carried out, these development programs would have both a direct and indirect impact on slum communities in Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi.

As with many development plans formulated at the national and local levels, a key constraining factor is the lack of political will and inadequate funds to implement plans. Indeed, the logframe of the MTDP of AMA on slum upgrading listed political will, and adequate financial and logistical commitments as key assumptions/risks for plan implementation. The lack of political will results partly from the absence of a comprehensive national policy framework on urban and regional development as well as the half-hearted approach to fiscal decentralization. This weak financial situation of local governments is further compounded by the lack of transparency and accountability in the disbursement and mobilization of funds by the Assemblies. In fact, annual reports of the state's Auditor-General and the Accountant General have consistently revealed a number of lapses centered on corruption and poor financial performance of the MMDAs (see Figure 2).[32]

Figure 2: Commonly Reported Lapses or Internal weaknesses in the Financial Management Performance of Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies by the Auditor-General and the Accountant-General

- Non-submission of accounts
- Misapplication of funds
- Non-deduction of 5 percent withholding tax on contract payments
- Questionable payments for uncompleted projects
- Overdue loan payments
- Goods paid for but not delivered
- Suppression of value books
- Failure to retire imprest
- Unsatisfactory performance of Revenue Collectors
- Weak internally-generating revenue mechanisms.

Source: Azeem, V. A. et al. *Financing Decentralised Development: How Well Does the DACF Works?* Accra: ISODEC,2003; PAB Consult. *Village Infrastructure Project: Project Assessment Report*, Tema: PAB, 1998.

In the context of limited fiscal decentralization by the state and lapses or internal weaknesses in the financial management of Assemblies, implementation of development plans and programs has been seriously affected. The non-implementation of development plans and programs account for the disillusionment with the performance of the AMA and STMA and their Sub-Metropolitan Councils, and hence comments such as the following from a key informant of Ga Mashie, Accra:

> What they [AMA] need all the time is making money for themselves. You know AMA goes round all over Accra collecting property rates. What are they using that money for? Recently the "borla" people [garbage collectors] complained that they have not been paid. The "borla" [garbage] was all over the place. What are they using the money for? Every morning they go to the market women to collect taxes, what are they using the money for?

As illustrated in the above quotation, questions have been raised regarding the efficient use of resources by the MMDAs. Thus, while funding may not be enough or inadequate in the light of numerous demands by various communities, questions have been raised about the way contracts have been awarded, projects funded, their total cost, and the quality of work on projects executed by the MMDAs.[33] It is also difficult to assess the various targets set out in the two cities' Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP). The MTDP covering the period 2006-2009 has now expired. Comments from top officials of the Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assemblies suggest quite clearly that actual developments in the two cities have to a large extent not been guided by their respective plans. This supports Donkor's assertion that development plans in Ghana are mere "paper tigers" drawn with ambitious rhetoric and agenda that in most cases failed to see the light of day.[34]

Even though several institutions, including traditional authorities, NGOs, and CBOs interface with the poor and slum communities, none of these institutions are better placed than the Metropolitan Assemblies. Owing to weak structures, which to a large extent are due to unclearly defined mandate and inadequate finance, CBOs tend to have a very limited impact on the overall well-being of communities. NGOs tend to be project-focused and engage urban communities during project duration and therefore have a relatively short-term impact on these communities. In addition, NGOs have been criticized for duplication of efforts. As an expert respondent in Sekondi-Takoradi noted that NGOs "waste time only to go to the communities to duplicate each others effort such that they provide similar community services every now and then."

All communities (including urban) in Ghana have traditional authorities represented by the chieftaincy institution. The powers and authority of chiefs are anchored in traditions and customs of the locality in question. However, chieftaincy disputes, centered on who were the first settlers and hence owners of the land, and by extension overlord (chief) of the community, are present in all the study communities. Therefore, the use of traditional leadership as a community unifying institution is problematic. The key informant interviews and focus group discussions conducted in Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi revealed a high level of displeasure with these disputes among residents. Respondents noted that these chieftaincy disputes have slowed community development and created disharmony among community members, as noted by a 20-year female trader and resident of New Takoradi, Sekondi-Takoradi: "there have been some general improvements in this community [New Takoradi] but not so much as expected because of chieftaincy disputes…. This problem has persisted for quite a long time now. In fact, we need unity and peace in New Takoradi."

Conclusion: Implications for Urban Development

Decentralization has been widely trumpeted as a key antidote to the challenges of metropolitan areas. This belief has been pushed on the basis of the argument that decentralization brings government closer to the governed both spatially and institutionally. More specifically, the argument has been made that decentralization enhances governance and therefore allows municipal governments to be more knowledgeable about and responsive to the needs of the urban people, most especially the urban poor. While we largely share this belief, the critical question is how to translate this belief into practice.

Ghana, like most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, is undergoing rapid urbanization, with massive growth of its metropolitan areas. The urbanization process and its attendant challenges of increasing poverty and slums development, poor infrastructure, and poor sanitation and waste management, especially in large metropolitan areas such as Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi, are occurring within the context of a decentralization program introduced since 1988. A widely shared view is that poor city infrastructure and neighborhoods are the result of poor city governance. In this direction, decentralization has been strongly advocated as a solution to the emergence of urban slums and other challenges of rapid urban growth in many parts of the developing world.[35] However, the Ghanaian case as explored in this study indicates that decentralization is unlikely to have meaningful impact on poor urban communities if it is based on mere rhetoric.

Poor urban communities in Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi are confronted by weak infrastructure and services provision. Most critical to these poor urban communities is the poor state of waste and sanitation facilities. To address this situation, AMA and STMA have conceived two approaches, namely, privatization and community-based participation in waste collection and management of public toilets. These approaches have, however, run into difficulties due to weak local institutional structures (especially local government sub-structures) to monitor the activities of private operators as well as public agitation against payment for poor services. In addition, the franchising of waste collection and sanitation has enhanced the city government's political patronage, for contract awards have become a means of rewarding political loyalists. This has further weakened the Metropolitan Assemblies' capacity to regulate private operators and ensure improved service delivery.

As highlighted in other studies, the Assemblies have not been adequately resourced in relation to the numerous functions delegated to them under the law by the central government.[36] This situation has been compounded by the Assemblies' lack of accountability in the disbursement of funds and a perception of widespread corruption. Also, the sub-district structures of the Metropolitan Assemblies, which would have given the Assemblies' visibility in poor communities as well as act as liaison structures between poor communities and top-level city and national structures, have remained absent and non-functional. Therefore the Metropolitan Assemblies have not made any significant impact on the provision of services, infrastructure, and the performance of the basic municipal functions.[37] As such, the contribution of Metropolitan Assemblies in the two cities of Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi to urban development and urban poverty reduction could be described as marginal at best.

In the absence of effective sub-district structures to actively engaged poor urban communities, the Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assemblies have attempted to address the poor municipal-community interface through the use of local FM radio stations and mobile public address systems mounted on vehicles (information vans). These are, however, ineffective. This is because in many cases the timing of these radio programs or of

announcements using the mobile public address systems; the cost of calling in to a local FM radio program; and the language or medium of communication. All of these hinder the poor from participating in such programs.

Despite the challenges hampering the smooth operations of the Metropolitan Assemblies and their sub-structures, they remained the most credible urban institution in terms of interfacing with slum communities in particular, the poor in general. Besides credibility, the Assemblies have the potential to promote pro-poor governance agendas as they are directly linked to higher decision and policy making levels. Unlike other actors such as traditional authorities, NGOs, and CBOs, Assemblies are uniquely placed in terms of influencing policy. Therefore, they have the potential to promote a pro-poor development agenda and a broad-based development process that will benefit the majority of the Ghanaian population.

For Metropolitan Assemblies to remain an effective urban development authority and a credible interface agent with poor urban communities, they must have all their sub-district structures as articulated under the Local Government Act of 1993 (Act 462) functional and operational. This will facilitate the process of community involvement and even ownership of local services. It will also improve accountability of service providers in cases where services such as toilets and solid waste collection are contracted out to private entities by re-directing services provision towards citizens' concerns and priorities, and provide voice to those concerns and priorities.[38] This envisaged strategy for the development of poor urban communities is dependant on the central government's commitment to a genuine decentralization program. This is because the extent to which decentralization results in improvements in human development outputs and poverty reduction is largely a function of the resources and systems for allocating funding, primarily by the central government.

Notes

1 Davis, 2004; UNFPA, 2007a, 2007b.
2 BBC, 2007.
3 Satterthwaite, 1996; Potter and Lloyd-Evans, 1998; Songsore, 2003; UNOWA, 2007.
4 Beall,2000a.
5 BBC, 2007, p. 16.
6 Beall, 2000a.
7 ISSER, 2007.
8 NDPC, 2005, p. 53.
9 Naustdalslid, 1992; Mohan 1996; Crook and Manor 1998.
10 This study was funded by Cooperative Housing Foundation (CHF) Ghana with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The field exercise was carried out between June-August 2008.
11 Devas, 2005.
12 UNDP, 2000.
13 Devas, 2005.
14 UNDP, 2000.
15 Beall, 2000b.
16 Castells, 1983.
17 Chaplin, 1999.
18 Ayee and Crook, 2003; Crook and Ayee, 2006.

19 King et al., 2001.
20 Ayee and Crook, 2003.
21 Ayee and Crook, 2003; see also Owusu et al., 2008.
22 Chaplin, 1999.
23 The official data on Avenor (Accra) as of 2000 from the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) in terms of households used of toilet, door-to-door solid waste collection, and in-house pipe-borne water must be accepted here with caution. This is because our field investigations (including transect walk) in Avenor in June-August 2008 indicated that only one household had an in-house toilet, with the rest of the households dependant on the only public toilet in the community. Heller (1999) has called for caution in the use of official statistics on sanitation and waste due to distortions that result from considering the population served by collective systems as being the same as the population who benefit from these services.
24 Ayee and Crook, 2003; see also Davis, 2004.
25 Ayee, 2000.
26 Owusu, 2005.
27 Ayee and Crook, 2003; Owusu, 2005.
28 Laryea-Adjei, 1998.
29 Ayee and Crook 2003, p. 14.
30 See www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage (*Ashaiman NDC akes over public toilets*, Tuesday, 13 January 2009; *NDC MP apologizes for party members' misconduct at Assembly*, Friday, 13 February 2009).
31 Ayee and Crook, 2003; Crook and Ayee, 2006.
32 There have been several newspaper articles on the level of corruption at AMA and STMA: *AMA Blames Corrupt Staff* (www.newtimesonline.com, January 27, 2006); *Ministry Smells Corruption at AMA* (www.modernghana.com, July 20, 2005); *STMA Pull Down GH¢25,000 School Complex … Five Years After Construction* (www.ghanaian-chronicle.com, December 4, 2007).
33 Owusu, 2008.
34 Donkor, 1997.
35 UNFPA, 2007a.
36 See Mohan, 1996; Crook and Manor, 1998; Razin and Obirih-Opareh, 2000; Thomi et al., 2000; Ayee, 1997, 2000; Owusu, 2005, 2008.
37 Yankson, 2000.
38 Ayee and Crook, 2003.

References

Azeem, Vitus A., et al. *Financing Decentralised Development: How Well Does the DACF Work?* Accra: ISODEC, 2003.

Ayee, Joseph R.A. "Sub-district Structures and Popular Participation: A Preliminary Assessment''. In *A Decade of Decentralization in Ghana: Retrospect and Prospects*, eds. Walter Thomi, Paul W. K Yankson ,and S. Y. Zanu (Accra: EPAD/MLG&RD, 2000): 127-56.

Ayee, Joseph, and Richard Crook. "*Toilet Wars": Urban Sanitation Services and the Politics of Public-Private Partnerships in Ghana.* IDS Working Paper, 213 (2003). Sussex: IDS.

BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation). "Dazzled by the City." *BBC Focus on Africa Magazine* (July-September, 2007): 16-19.

Beall, Jo. "From the Culture of Poverty to Inclusive Cities: Re-framing Urban Policy and Politics." *Journal of International Development* 12 (2000a): 843-56.

____. "Life in the Cities." In *Poverty and Development into the 21st Century*, eds. Tim Allen and Alan Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000b): 425-42.

Castells, M. *The City and Grassroots: A Cross-cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements*. London: Arnold, 1983.

Chaplin, S. E. "Cities, Sewers and Poverty: India's Politics of Sanitation." *Environment and Urbanization* 11(1999): 145-58.

Crook, C. Richard. "Decentralization and Poverty Reduction in Africa: The Politics of Local-central Relations." *Public Administration and Development* 23 (2003): 77-88.

_____ and Joseph Ayee. "Urban Service Partnerships, 'Street level Bureaucrats' and Environmental Sanitation in Kumasi and Accra, Ghana: Coping with Organisational Change in the Public Bureaucracy." *Development Policy Review* 24 (2006): 51-73.

____ and James Manor. *Democracy and Decentralisation in South Asia and West Africa: Participation, Accountability and Performance.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Davis, Mike. "Planet of Slums: Urban Involution and the Informal Proletariat." *New Left Review* 26 (2004): 5-34.

Devas, Nick. "Metropolitan governance and Urban Poverty." *Public Administration and Development* 25 (2005): 351-61.

Donkor, Kwabena. *Structural Adjustment and Mass Poverty.* Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997.

Heller, L. "Who Really Benefits from Environmental Sanitation Services in the Cities: An Intra-urban Analysis in Betim, Brazil." *Environment and Urbanization* 11 (1999): 133-44.

ISSER (Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research). *The State of the Ghanaian Economy in 2006*. Accra: ISSER, 2007.

King, R., Inkoom, Daniel and K. Mensah Abrampah. *Urban Governance in Kumasi: Poverty and Exclusion*. Urban Governance, Partnership and Poverty Working Paper. IDD: University of Birmingham, May 2001

Laryea-Adjei, S. George. "Civil Society Participation in District Level Planning in Ghana." *Plannews* (1998): 1, 3-10.

Mohan, Giles. "Neoliberalism and Decentralized Development Planning in Ghana." *Third World Planning Review* 18 (1996): 433-54.

Naustdalslid, Jon. *Decentralisation Policies in Ghana*. Oslo: NIBR, 1992.

NDPC (National Development Planning Commission). *Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS II), 2004-2009*. Accra: NDPC, 2005.

Owusu, George. "Mobilising Revenue for District Development: The Dilemma of Local Governments, District Assemblies, in Ghana." *Afriche e Orienti* (Special Issue II 2008): 22-37.

_____, Samuel Agyei-Mensah, and Ragnhild Lund. "'Slums of Hope and Slums of Despair'": Mobility and Livelihoods in Nima, Accra. *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift – Norwegian Journal of Geography* 62 (2008): 180-90.

_____. "The Role of District Capitals in Regional Development: Linking Small Towns, Rural-urban Linkages and Decentralisation in Ghana." *International Development Planning Review* 27 (2005): 59-89.

PAB Consult. *Village Infrastructure Project: Project Assessment Report*. Tema: PAB, 1998.

Potter, Robert B. and Sally Lloyd-Evans. *The City in the Developing World*. London: Longman, 1998.

Razin, Eran and Nelson Obirih-Opareh. "Spatial Variations in the Fiscal Capacity of Local Government in Ghana, Before and After Decentralization." *Third World Planning Review* 22 (2000): 411-432.

Satterthwaite, David. *The Scale and Nature of Urban Change in the South.* London: IIED, 1996.

Songsore, Jacob. *Towards, a Better Understanding of Urban Change: Urbanisation, National Development and Inequality in Ghana*. Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 2003.

Thomi, Walter, Paul William K. ankson, and S. Y. Zanu (eds.) *A Decade of Decentralization in Ghana: Retrospect and Prospects*. Accra: EPAD/MLG&RD, 2000.

UNDP (United Nations Development Program). *Poverty Report 2000: Overcoming Human Poverty*. New York: UNDP, 2000.

UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund). *UNFPA State of World Population 2007: Unleashing the Potential of Urban Growth*. New York: UNFPA, 2007a.

____. UNFPA *State of World Population 2007: Growing Up Urban–Youth Supplement*. New York: UNFPA, 2007b.

UNOWA (United Nations Office for West Africa). *Urbanization and Insecurity in West Africa: Population Movements, Mega Cities and Regional Stability*. Dakar: UNOWA, 2007.

Yankson, Paul William K. "Community-based Organizations (CBOs) and Urban Management and Governance in an Era of Change in Ghana: The Case of the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA)." *Ghana Social Science Journal* (New Series) 1 (2000): 97-139.