Unpacking decentralization failures in promoting popular participation in the Ketu South Municipality of Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Decentralization of governance across the globe, especially in sub-Saharan Africa was precipitated by the need to ensure the participation of the citizenry in the development planning and implementation at the local level. This is to ensure that local problems are identified by those affected and remedied through policies formulated through the participation of the citizenry at the local level. In line with this, subnational government authorities were created at the local level to ensure effective local government administration. Against this backdrop, this study investigated the challenges hindering the active participation of the citizenry in local governance in the Ketu South Municipality of the Volta Region of Ghana. A qualitative research design was adopted. The study purposively selected thirty-five (35) participants in the study area for the purposes of its primary data collection through interviews. This study investigated the fact that citizens were expected to participate in local governance through community engagement forums, budgeting, and financial planning, medium-term development planning, preparation of annual action plans, and participation in district level elections. The results of the study showed that low participation of the citizenry in local government is attributable to citizens' lack of information and education on the need for local-level participation, inadequate political structures of the Metropolitan Municipal and District Assemblies, and inadequate resources at the local government level. To ensure and promote the active participation of the citizenry at the local level, there is the need to educate the citizenry, and ensure that there are adequate and sufficient resources at the local level.

1. Introduction

Globally, decentralization of governance is connected to the call for inclusive government, improving government accountability and responsiveness, and ensuring collective development planning and implementation [1]. In the case of Africa, the decision for decentralization of governance, which meant the establishment of sub-national governments, hinges on several factors including public demand for an accountable government, the need to remedy economic hardships due to central government failures, and finding a mechanism to abolish personalized rules in many parts of the continent [2,3]. Sawaneh and Lamin [4] and Be-ere [5] argued that the policy decision by countries to devolve parts of their central government functions to local government authorities is driven by

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the desire to promote local empowerment, improve distributional equity of resources, and enable developmental planning at the local level. The desire for citizens' empowerment at the local level aims at promoting the active participation of citizens in local government administration, policymaking, and implementation processes. Karmel [6] posits that the adoption of decentralization by many countries as an administrative reform strategy is premised on the idea that it will ensure improved service delivery and economic efficiency relevant for strengthening their democratic practices. Decentralization is also seen as a panacea for local participation and articulation of local needs, which are important in addressing issues of inequality and ensuring social stability [7].

The participation of citizens in local government administration in countries that have adopted democratic governance practices are the theoretical basis for most decentralization arguments [5,8,9]. The quest to promote democracy, at least in theory, goes with efforts at decentralizing. In the development literature, there is agreement among scholars about the role of decentralization in promoting democracy. This is premised on the expectation that decentralization creates room for active participation of citizens in policy planning and implementation [10,11]. Be-ere [5] notes that decentralization makes feasible citizens' participation in democratic governance systems. He further added that decentralization deepens and makes democratic governance practices meaningful. This study seeks to ascertain the veracity of the argument that decentralization promotes democracy through its role in promoting popular participation at the local level in Ghana. Besides, the various arguments for the role of decentralization in promoting local participation hardly pay attention to the mechanisms through which decentralization facilitates popular participation. This study addresses this gap by detailing the mechanisms through which decentralization facilitates popular participation.

In developing countries, including Ghana, the majority of the studies conducted on decentralization were unable to establish evidences of improved citizens' participation due to decentralization [5]. Typical amongst them were studies conducted in China, India and Egypt by Von Braun and Grote [12], in Ghana by Adams and Taabazuing [13], in Kenya by Bulut and Abdow [14], and in both Kenya and Uganda by Devas and Grant [15]. All these studies either reported a weak opportunity for citizens' participation or its entire absence. Be-ere [5] added that citizens' participation both in Kenya and Uganda was limited to mere participation in electoral processes. Against the above background, this study investigated the manifestations of popular participation in local government in accordance with the provisions of Act 936 in the Ketu Municipality of the Volta Region of Ghana. Additionally, the study examined the factors hindering the effective participation of the citizenry in local governance and the decision-making processes in the development of their local areas.

In view of the disparity between expectations of decentralization and the outcomes, in most cases, the relevance of any attempt at understanding the effects of decentralization should be self-evident. Without constantly examining the effects of efforts of decentralization in order to determine the limitations, reforms aiming at strengthening decentralization are likely to be unsuccessful. Thus, this study sought to contribute to enhancing the understanding of the role of decentralization in promoting popular participation by examining the various manifestations of popular participation at the Ketu South Municipality. It equally paid attention to the challenges hindering popular participation. It is hoped that the evidence would provide useful policy guidance and a blueprint for policymakers on best approaches to ensure effective and active participation of the citizenry in local governance, local development planning and implementation. Two main developments provided motivation for the study. First, the outbreak of Covid-19 had seen little participation in policy response at the local level in Ghana [16]. This brings to question the effectiveness of decentralization in promoting local participation in policy formulation and implementation. Secondly, the continued references to the central government including the president, ministers and members of parliament for solutions to local development problems attest to the weak engagement and participation of the citizenry in the local government administration for development at the local level. The rest of the paper is structured as follows: the next section presents a discussion the concept of decentralization; this is followed by a description of the local government system of Ghana, the concept of popular participation, the challenges confronting decentralization of governance in Ghana, the theoretical framework, the study methodology and the presentation of the data and the discussion of the data.

2. Literature review

2.1. The concept of decentralization

The concept of decentralization as widely used in many development discourses and literature, refers to the process by which central governments transfer authority and responsibility for public tasks to subordinate, quasi-independent government agencies or the private sector. The expectations of this policy decision is to ensure greater efficiency, good governance practices, improved development, and also contribute to rapid poverty reduction at the local level [17,18]. This notion, which refers to the delegation of power, responsibility, and resources from the central government to local government authorities in the traditional sense, plays a critical role in the central and local government relationships [19]. The transfer of power and resources to local government authorities is believed to guarantee and ensure transparency and accountability in local government administration, and ensure quality public service delivery at the local level [4,20]. Arkorful et al. [21], Faguet and Shami [22] support this viewpoint by stating that the transfer of resources and power to local government authorities due to decentralization offers citizens the opportunity to have direct interactions with power-holders and policymakers in shaping decisions relevant for their local development.

Decentralization seeks to establish accountable relationships between residents, service providers, and subnational governments, as well as between local and central governments. Decentralization has two primary components: an intergovernmental transfer of authority and duties, and a market-based transfer of functions [23,24]. In addition, Böckenförde [25] opined that decentralization consists of two components: 'self-rule' and 'shared-rule'. The aspect of 'self-rule' empowers local governments to manage and direct specific activities and functions independently. In addition, the shared rule component of decentralization gives participatory powers to local government authorities in national decision-making processes. Decentralization manifests itself both politically and

economically. Political decentralization focuses on the need for citizens' participation at the local level, and the economical component offers the fiscal resource transfers from the central government level to the local government levels and the revenue mobilization authority conferred upon local government authorities [26].

Three major typologies of decentralization exist in the literature: political, administrative, and fiscal. Political decentralization refers to the transfer of governmental powers to the local populace by creating opportunities for grassroots participation. Administrative decentralization seeks to decongest the central government and distribute workload evenly across subnational entities. The workload distribution strategy endeavours to increase efficiency, effectiveness, and coordination in the delivery of public services. In the arguments of Crook [27], and Hussein [28], decentralization was embraced politically in order to foster good governance through pluralism, accountability, popular participation and engagement, and transparency. Fiscal decentralization entails transferring the authority to generate local revenues to local government authorities. The other aspect of fiscal decentralization is the timely distribution of resources from the central government to local government entities [27,28].

In the arguments of Fridy et al. [17], the successes of decentralization hinges on the active participation of both cooperate and traditional actors in its implementation. The need for decentralization of governance across the globe is to promote and ensure some degree of local participation [29,30]. Local or sub-national governments' proximity to the grassroots is said to serve as a mechanism for rapid and better response to local needs, and to match public spending to private needs efficiently. Additionally, the easy information flow between the citizenry and the local government institutions at the local level ensures a collective responsibility to solving local problems and development. It is expected that the process and implementation of decentralization would enhance the opportunities for participation through the allocation of power and resources at a point close to the local people [24,30].

2.2. Overview of the local government system in Ghana

Local government establishments, which date back to pre-colonial and colonial days, are the by-product of the broader decentralization agenda in Ghana, [30,31]. The concept of the indirect rule system underpinned Ghana's local government during the colonial era during which native authorities including chiefs and elders formed the local government authorities at the local level to steer governmental and development affairs [30]. Ghana's current decentralization and local government systems were initiated under the Jerry John Rawlings-led Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) military government in the late 1980s under the PNDC Law 207 of 1988; Legislative Instrument 1589. Even though it witnessed some structural, legal, and regulatory reforms, the architecture is still shaped by the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) Law 207 of 1988. The current architecture again got the statutory blessings in Ghana's Fourth Republican Constitution with Chapter 20 wholly devoted to its broad framework [30,32]. Debrah [32] stated that the adoption of the decentralization reform in Ghana was extensive and intended to give power to the people. Be-ere [5] added that Ghana's decentralization reform was premised on promoting participatory governance and development at the local government level.

Decentralization in Ghana has three major objectives at the time: to ensure popular participation at the local government level; promote effective and efficient public service delivery, and ensure socio-economic development at the grassroots [23,24]. Since the return to democracy, successive governments under the Fourth Republic have made claims of promoting decentralization in Ghana. Sections 40, 41 and 42 of the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) clearly provide for the participation of the citizenry in government at the local level. Specifically, Section 40 encouraged the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies to ensure participation of the citizens in activities of the assemblies and their sub-structures. Section 42 gave the modalities through which citizens could participate in the activities of assemblies at the local level. Although, the Local Government Act has provided sufficient room for grassroots participation, the history of public policy implementation in Ghana reveals that elaborate laws or policies are no guarantee of implementation [24].

The local government system in Ghana under PNDC Law 207 and the 1992 Constitution of Ghana are structured into three tiers: regional coordinating councils, which are scattered across the sixteen 16 administrative regions of the country, the Metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies (MMDAs), scattered across the two hundred and sixty administrative districts, and sub-district structures consisting of sub-metropolitan authorities, urban, zonal, town, and area councils and unit committees [21,23]. MMDAs are established as local government authorities at the various local levels to have a direct contact and engagement with the local populace. They are the true manifestation of the "bringing governance closer to the doorstep of the people" agenda of the general decentralization concept. They are mandated to play administrative, legislative and deliberative roles and to ensure the general and the holistic development of the local area [24].

Local government authorities are considered most efficient in the provision of public goods and services to the local populace than the remote central government. Due to their closeness to the local populace, it is believed that the existence of those local government authorities at the local level would promote and encourage the participation of the local citizenry in shaping the policy decision of power-holders and policymakers at the local level on maters and issues affecting them [5,33,34]. According to Ahwoi [23], Ayee [24] & Kuyini [30], MMDAs are hybrid decentralized local government units headed by an appointee of the President called a Metropolitan, Municipal or a District Chief Executive (MMDCEs), whose approval is subject to an endorsement of a two-third majority of the assembly members present and voting. The general assembly membership consists of both elected and appointed members.

Under the current structure, 70% of the members of the assemblies are elected by universal adult suffrage through a democratic non-partisan election conducted by the Electoral Commission of Ghana. Also 30% was appointed by the President in consultation with local and traditional authorities [23,24]. The sub-district structures, sub-metropolitan, urban, town and area councils including unit committee members exist at the local level to promote citizens' participation in the identification of local problems, planning and deciding on solutions deemed appropriate to solve the identified problems, and monitoring and assessing the delivery of local services.

These sub-structures at the local level are expected to serve as the conduit between the people and the assemblies [30].

The MMDAs in Ghana are funded through three major sources: the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF), Internally Generated Fund (IGF) and grants in aid [23,24]. The DACF is a statutory funding expected to be released by the central government to the various local government authorities on a formula approved by the Parliament of Ghana. The 1992 Constitution of Ghana stated a 5% allocation, but this was later reviewed to 7.5% under the John Kuffour-led New Patriotic Party administration. The DACF is expected to be released on a quarterly basis [35]. The IGF are funds generated by the various assemblies through levies and fees imposed on persons and businesses, licences, and fines. The third source of revenue for district assemblies is from donors [36].

2.3. Conceptualizing popular participation

The concept of popular participation features extensively in today's development discourse and literature. It emerged in the late 1980s as a mechanism for promoting the good governance agenda and development by western donors and agencies [37]. According to Ali [38], modern governance structures and architectures across the world are gaining recognition for pluralistic politics and broad based popular participation as ways of promoting inclusive governance agenda. Mawuko-Yevugah [39] argued that the emergence of the concept of "country ownership" under the new aid agenda meant a holistic participation of the citizenry in development planning and implementation. The promotion of local participation by development partners and donors through civil society activisms in policy planning and implementation was a response to the criticisms against the Bretton Woods Institutions (World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) due to the exclusion of the local populace in deciding policies, especially the Structural Adjustment Programmes of 1980s. Participation as an effective mechanism for improved service delivery in principle ensures the quick identification and prioritization of problems, and formulation of workable solutions through a joint process of local people and the local project officials [40].

Popular participation as a feature of decentralized systems across the globe presents comprehensive political, administrative, and economic reforms and a shift from centralised governance systems. Additionally, it serves as a mechanism for redistribution of power to the citizenry. The participation of the citizenry under decentralized systems ensures the establishment trust in the decentralized institutions and procedures at the local level [41]. The manifestation of popular participation through "community-driven development planning and implementation" and "empowerment" and "improved citizen-centric policy determination" ensure effective service delivery and rapid development at the local level. Kuyini [30] established the link between participation and development saying that, participation has been part of the broader concept of democratic decentralization, where power has been given to the local populace for the determination of their development agenda at the local level. Ahenkan et al. [42] suggest that, aside citizens' electoral participation in electoral processes, there are two major areas in which citizens participate in local governance affairs: participatory budgeting and participatory planning.

In the context of Ghana, popular participation is a constitutional right enshrined in the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, and the Local Government Act, 2016 (Act 936). Specifically, Article 240 (2) of the 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution of Ghana emphasizes the need for the participation of the local population in governance at the local level. However, Ahenkan et al. [42] argued that the participation of citizens in local governance has been tokenistic. They further stated that the manifestations of citizens' participation in local governance is restricted to their participation in the district elections. Ahwoi [23] and Ayee [43] observed that even though the participation of the citizenry in district level elections is seen as the manifestation of popular participation, it has witnessed relatively low voter turnouts in most cases. Thus, a major challenge to local governance and decentralization in Ghana is the limited participation of citizens at the local level. While popular participation is to promote consultation of the citizenry in the development planning and implementation at the local level, there is the lack of support and inactivity in its organization [23,24,30]. As asserted by Cornwall [44], the local government structures at the local level to aid effective local participation are weak and malfunctioning.

2.4. Challenges with Ghana's decentralization policy

Across the globe, the failures of decentralization have been attributed to its implementation difficulties such as clientelism, patrimonialism, and a gap between power and capacity [17,45]. Arguably, Ghana's decentralization and local governance problems stem from the continuous appointment of Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Chief Executives (MMDCEs) instead of a direct election by the people. Due to the aforementioned circumstance, there is a decline in the performance (i.e., there is lack of competition, innovation, and accountability) expected of local government authorities. This argument is supported by Ayee [24], who argued that MMDAs fall short of creating their own administration due to the continued appointments of MMDCEs and the 30% assembly members. According to Ayee [24], this negates the MMDAs' apolitical nature. The structure established by Ghana's 1992 Constitution gives birth to a "principal-agent typology" for the relationship between the central and local government bodies, whereby the local government authorities are deemed to be satisfying the interests of central government instead of ensuring the provision of efficient service to the local populace.

Furthermore, it is asserted that after three decades of decentralization implementation in Ghana, virtually little has been accomplished. Its stated objectives of establishing functional, responsive, and responsible district assemblies, as well as achieving poverty reduction and empowerment of disadvantaged and vulnerable people at the local level have remained elusive [35,46,47]. Even though decentralization is a development strategy aimed at transferring power and responsibility to sub-national levels of government (regional and district levels), most African countries, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa, have failed to transfer such power and responsibility through delegation and devolution [24,47]. Even though decentralization has been implemented for several

decades across the continent, there has been minimal impact, particularly in Ghana [35,47]. Ali [38] and Danquah et al. [48] support this claim by positing that, in top-down decentralization reforms, central governments pose the greatest threats of impediment to citizens' participation in local development planning and implementation. They explained that the introduction of public sector reform strategies by central governments were to fulfil donor requirements but not to promote local development and improved service provision; this in effect creates a scenario of disincentive for the participation of citizens in local government administration.

In Ghana, MMDAs have limited economic autonomy, resulting in an insufficient financial base to fund local development projects. Regrettably, MMDAs receive roughly 85% of their funding from the central government, largely from the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF), or from donors [46,49]. The DACF, which is the primary source of revenue for the MMDAs', faces a number of issues, including inconsistencies in disbursement, a lack of transparency, and a lack of discretionary powers for the MMDAs in its allocation, as well as a delay in its disbursement to the local government authorities [43]. Furthermore, due to the central government's absolute sovereignty over all attractive revenue sources in the form of income tax, local government bodies confront difficulties in obtaining considerable sums of money within their jurisdictions to assist in local development [46].

3. Theoretical framework

This study employed Arnstein's [50] citizens' ladder of participation as a theoretical model. Fig. 1 presented below depicts Arnstein's ladder of citizens' participation, outlining various rungs and levels of participation. The ladder of participation is a theoretical model, which offers the opportunity for the effective visualization and analysis of the participatory process of the citizenry [51]. According to Arnstein [50], the participation of the governed is considered a major cornerstone for democracy. Arnstein's framework depicts a power (re)distribution and accountability process between the government and citizens. Regardless of the political, economic and social status of the citizenry, Arnstein's framework assumes that the participation of the citizens in governance, development planning and policy decision-making is founded on the ability to delegate/cede power to the citizenry.

The ladder, which is serving as the theoretical model for this study is divided into eight (8) rungs: Manipulation, Therapy, Informing, Consultation, Placation, Partnership, Delegated Power, and Citizen Control. Manipulation and Therapy are considered as the non-participatory levels on the ladder; Informing, Consultation and Placation are considered as degrees of tokenism; Partnership, Delegated Power and Citizen Control are considered as the degrees of citizen power [50]. Arnstein described the manipulation and therapy rungs on the ladder as the non-participation level. This level of participation does not involve the citizenry in development planning, but offers the opportunity for powerholders to provide a one-way information or education to the governed. Rowe and Frewer [52] criticized this level of non-participation and asserted that, the fairness, educative, logical and inclusive participation
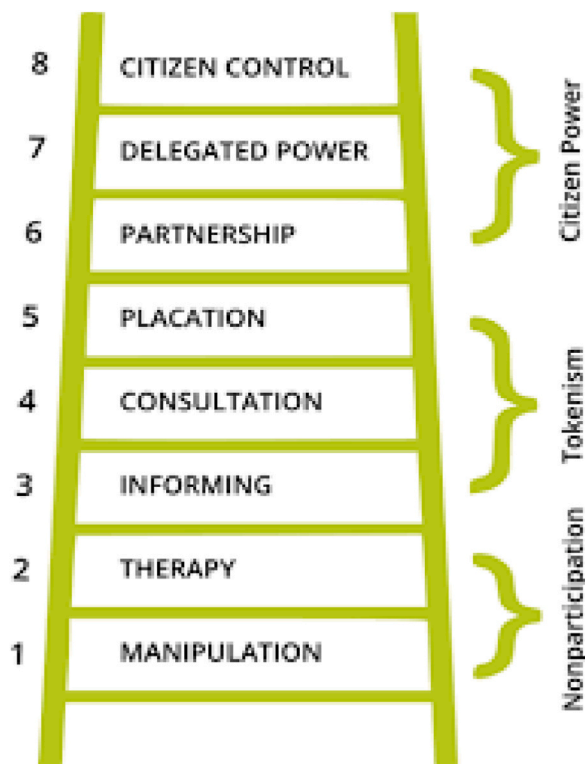

Fig. 1. Arnstein's ladder of participation.
Source: Arnstein (1969).

processes of the citizens ensure enhanced and effective governance systems and decision-making processes. The opinions of the citizenry are manipulated by the powerholders and there is the absence of citizens' influence on the decision-making processes and development planning at the local level [53].

The third, fourth and fifth rungs on the ladder: consultation, informing and placation represent the level of degrees of tokenism. The level of the degree of tokenism offers the citizenry to have their voices in development planning and to be provided with the relevant information from the powerholders. Even though this level offers the opportunity for the citizenry to be heard, there is the absence of a follow-through by the citizenry in ensuring that their contributions on development planning are heeded. The placation rung on the ladder is described as the high level of tokenism, where the citizens are offered the opportunity to advise, but the final decision-making authority lies in the hands of the powerholders. da Cruz et al. [53], argued that, despite the provision of information and dialogue forums for the citizenry, there is absolutely no assurance of the adoption of the contributions made by the citizenry by the powerholders.

The last three rungs, partnership, delegated power and citizen control represent the degree of citizens' power level on the ladder. The partnership offers the opportunity for the citizenry to engage in negotiations with the powerholders in determining development planning. Delegated power and citizens' control, the last rungs of the ladder, offers the citizenry the opportunity to take full managerial and decision-making roles in the development planning at their local areas [54].

In adopting this model, this study sought to ascertain the degree to which the political participation under Ghana's decentralized system follows the various rungs of the ladder. The rungs of manipulation and therapy offers the opportunity to ascertain the extent to which political actors including those at the district level and the level of central government attempted to manipulate the citizens instead of offering the chance for genuine political representation. Issues of manipulation of assembly members to vote for government appointees were considered at this level. At the informing, consultation and placation rungs, the study sought to identify how avenues for political engagement in the form of town hall meetings and other for a political consultation were created for citizen participation. Furthermore, the final three rungs, including partnership, delegated power and citizen control provide the understanding of the extent, which the district assembly allowed citizens to influence decisions and development. Thus, the framework gives the study a holistic framework to understand the various dimensions of political participation. This permitted a deep assessment of political participation at the local level in Ghana.

4. Materials and methods

4.1. The study area

This study was conducted in the Ketu South municipality of the Volta Region of Ghana, depicted in a map (Fig. 2) below. The Ketu South municipality is one of the administrative districts in the Volta Region. The municipality was created by an Act of Ghana's Parliament in 2007; Legislative Instrument (LI 1897 of 2007), splitting the then Ketu District into Ketu North and Ketu South districts [55]. The decision for the split of the then Ketu District resulting in the creation of the two administrative districts: Ketu South and Ketu
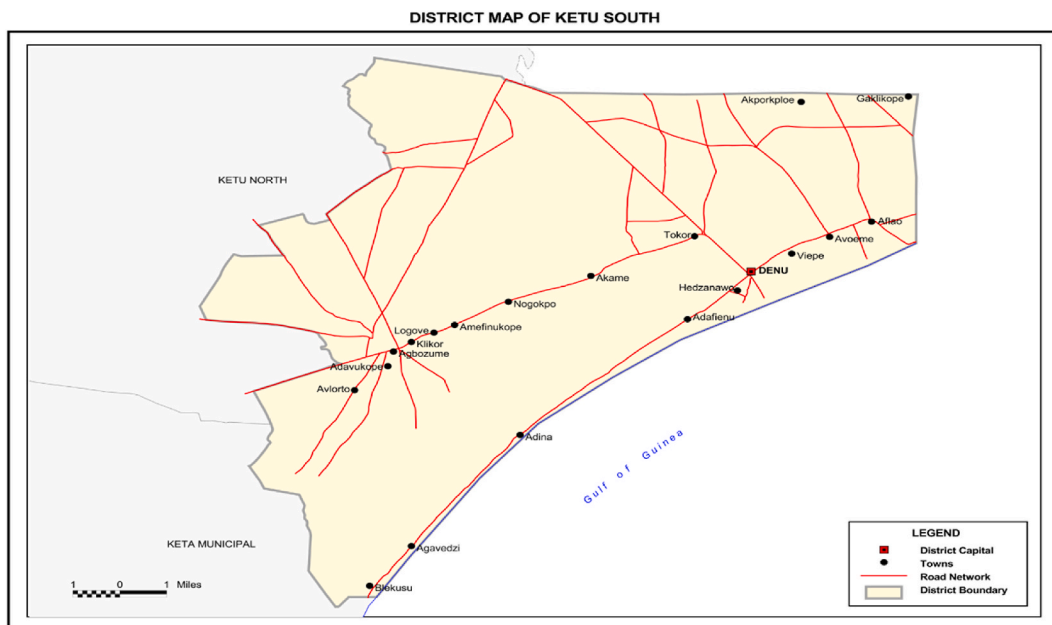

Fig. 2. District map of the Ketu south municipality.
Source: Ghana Statistical Service (2013).

North districts was given both a political and an economic justification supporting the theoretical perspective of fragmentation of administration [24]. Ayee [24], Box et al. [56] supported the need for administrative fragmentation posited the need for achieving greater allocative efficiency in the provision of public services and responsiveness to the needs of the local populace, and overall to bring governance to the doorstep of the citizenry at the local level [24].

The municipality status of Ketu South was gained in 2012 through LI 2055 of 2012 [55]. The municipality lies within latitudes 60 03 north and 60 10 north, and longitude 10 6 east and 10 11'east, and bounded to the east by the Republic of Togo, on the west by the Keta Municipality, on the north by the Ketu North District and on the south by the Gulf of Guinea. The Ketu South Municipal Assembly is the highest political and administrative authority in the municipality, comprising both elected and appointed Assembly members, a Municipal Chief Executive and Member of Parliament. The Municipality is divided into 39 electoral areas and five (5) zonal councils: Aflao Urban, Some-Wego, Some-Fugo, Aflao-Wego and Klikor. The Assembly is run on a committee/sub-committee system. There is an Executive Committee chaired by the Municipal Chief Executive, a Public Relations, and Complaints Committee and five (5) statutory sub-committees: Finance and Administration, Social Services, Works, Development Planning and justice and security sub-committees [56]. The municipality has a total population of 160,756. The people of the Ketu South municipality are originally part of the sub-group of Ewes, inhabiting parts of Togo, Benin and the Volta Region [55].

The Municipality was selected for this study for two main reasons. First, the municipality corresponds to the Ketu South Constituency, which has a consistently high voter turnout in national elections. Thus, it should be expected that residents in the area would have an active participation at the local level. This provides an ideal environment to assess participation at the local level. Secondly, the unique location of the municipality along part of the eastern border of Ghana with Togo, and sharing borders with Lome, the capital of Togo has provided the context for various engagements between the residents and the agents of the state such as the Immigration Service, the Customs Division of the Ghana Revenue Authority and occasionally the military [16,57]. In some cases, open confrontation and conflict between the people and the state were reported. Thus, it is important to find out how citizens in this area participate at the local level, which may provide avenues to avoid conflict with state institutions.

4.2. Study design, sample size and sampling procedure

This paper utilized a qualitative research approach in its investigations. The qualitative research approach aims at achieving a comprehensive understanding of a social phenomenon within the natural setting relying on the lived experiences of people. The study gathered data through semi-structured interviews. To this end, an interview guide was designed and used during the interviews. The primary data collection exercise was conducted in-person. Using the purposive sampling technique, the study focused on key informants who were considered knowledgeable on issues of decentralization and participation in the Ketu South Municipality. Thus, officials of the Ketu South Municipal Assembly including the Municipal Chief Executive (MCE), Assembly members in the Ketu South Municipality, traditional authorities and citizens were involved in the study. In all, 35 participants were selected for the study. These include 10 assembly members, the MCE, 2 traditional leaders and 23 residents of the municipality. Although, the initial plan was to interview all the 39 assembly members of the Municipality, by the tenth interview, saturation was reached so the study included only ten. The residents interviewed had spent more than ten (years) in the municipality. All the residents interviewed resided in the Municipal capital.

4.3. Data collection procedures and instrument

The interviews were conducted within a three-month period between January and April 2022. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. At the same time, key notes were taken during the process. Each interview session took between one (1) hour and one (1) hour 30 min. Contacts were made with known persons within the municipal assembly to help gain access to informants within the Assembly. Name of assembly members and contacts were obtained from the Assembly, and these individuals were contacted via mobile phone to schedule dates and time for the interview. The team of researchers then visited assembly members at their various localities for the interview. Two of them were interviewed via phone. For the residents, the study focused on opinion leaders in the district capital, Denu. By opinion leaders, the study implies those who had attained a position of influence and were holding various leadership positions in the community. The choice of these people was informed by the fact that, by their position of influence, it was envisaged that they would be in a position to be involved in various discursions and engagement between the community and the municipality. The choice of Denu for the interviews was informed by the understanding that, being the location of the municipal capital, the activities of the Municipal Assembly may be easily recognized to the people. Besides, being the municipal capital, conditions in Denu represented a microcosm of situations in other parts of the municipality.

Informed consent was sought by first informing the participants about the objectives of the study and guaranteeing them the right to decide not to take part in the process. The participants were also informed about their rights to withdraw from the interview if they felt uncomfortable at any point. In addition, they were also informed about the right to decline to answer any question they felt uncomfortable with. They were also assured of the confidentiality of the study and informed that their names would not appear in the final report. The paper used pseudonyms to ensure the anonymity of the participants in order to protect their identity.

4.4. Data analysis

The data collected by interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. The process involves first transcribing the recorded interviews into text. The text was thoroughly reviewed in order to get a general idea about the issues that emerged during the interviews.

Codes were then generated to reflect the objectives of the study. Based on the codes, various themes were identified in the data set. The themes were reviewed and redefined and careful consideration was given to the themes within the context of the data set and the objectives of the research. The redefined themes were named and used to produce the results. The results of the study were juxtaposed with Ghana's decentralization policy and the literature on political decentralization in both Ghana, within sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the world.

The validity of the results was established by ensuring consistency and coherence of the results with the research design, research questions, underlying theories and data analysis. Some participants were also allowed to validate the results by having access to their interview scripts in order to confirm their views and confirm if the emerging themes of the study reflected their perspectives. A two-member review team who were not part of the research and data collection process established the reliability of study. The review team were briefed on the purpose of the study and the methodological approach of the study. The review team undertook an inquiry audit of the research processes to ascertain if there was consistency between the results, research processes and the data. In other words, the team reviewed how the reported data supported the findings of the study.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Manifestations of popular participation in the Ketu South municipality

This section presents the findings and discussion on the manifestations of popular participation under Ghana's current decentralization. In addition, the section presents a summary of its findings in Fig. 3 below showing the decentralization and popular participation framework in the study area. The results of the study indicate that popular participation under the current decentralization sought to ensure the active participation of the citizenry in the local governance systems at the subnational levels. Popular participation manifests itself through community engagements: town hall meetings and involvement in budget preparation and financial planning, citizens' involvement and consultation in the determination of annual and medium-term development planning at the local level.

5.1.1. Community engagements

This study revealed that the Ketu South Municipal Assembly failed to promote citizens' participation in local governance affairs of
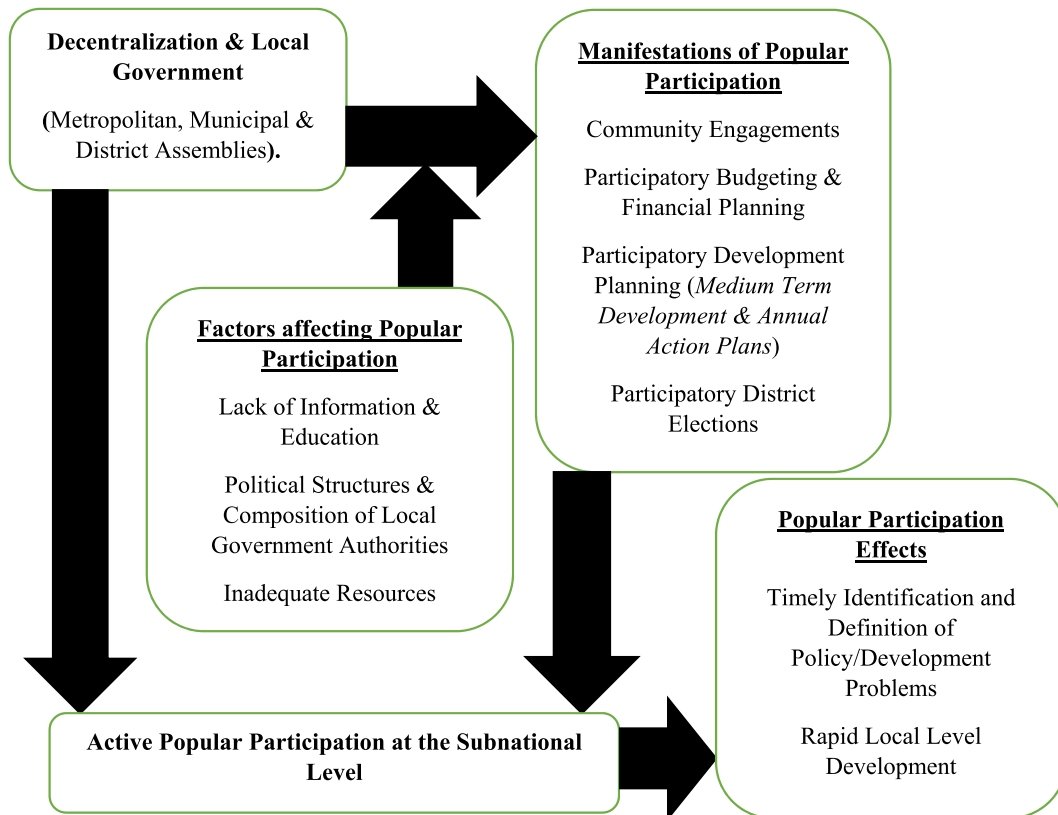
Fig. 3. Decentralization-Popular Participation framework in the Ketu South Municipality.
Source: Authors' Construct (2022).

the municipality. As expected, each local government authority must engage with its citizenry through community engagement fora/ town hall meetings. This implies that the core mandates of decentralization including bringing governance closer to the doorstep of the local citizenry and ensuring their participation in local government affairs is defeated by inactions of the municipal assembly in promoting the participation of the local citizenry in decision-making processes of the Assembly.

In addition, the views of the local populace which are necessary for local development and policy planning and implementation at the local level was sidelined, resulting in policy failures due to lack of policy-ownership by the local citizenry. A resident in the Ketu South Municipality asserted:

> I do not see the full manifestations of popular participation under Ghana's current decentralization agenda. Go to the nearby community and ask people randomly if they have ever been involved in any decision-making processes of their assembly. I know that, before our assembly members attend general assembly meetings, there is the need for the engagement of the local populace to solicit information for the assembly. That is not the case in this municipality."

An assembly member supported and stated:

> In my view, the citizens are not well informed by the assembly. As an assembly member, I do not have resources at my disposal for organizing community forums.

Community engagements are mechanisms for ensuring and promoting the active participation of the citizenry through a consultative, collaborative, informative, empowerment and involvement manner in the local development affairs. This is achieved through the organization of town hall meetings between the citizenry and the local government officials. The community engagement initiatives at the local level ensures a bottom-up approach to policy and development. The local populace, who are considered experts of local problems at the local level, have the opportunity to willingly contribute and decide in the determination and formulation of policies. Singh [58] described community engagements as traditional participatory approaches, necessary for ensuring direct touch with the local population. Mattessich [59], argued that community engagements at the local level is a major component of the popular participation agenda under the decentralization system, and a major research strategy used in gathering relevant data necessary for local development.

This study has revealed an absence of citizens' involvement and consultation by the Assembly in the decision-making or planning at the local level. This finding is contrary to the position of the Ghana National Development Planning Commission [60], which stated the need for the participatory approach in local development planning. A core staff of the Ketu South Municipality Assembly explained that community engagements and town hall meetings were expected to be organized in two ways. The first were those organized by the Assembly through the Research Unit of the Planning Department to solicit information and views from the citizenry on matters of their concerns including development. The second were those organized by the political heads of the assemblies to give accounts of their stewardship and utilization of resources entrusted into their care at the local level. Evidence suggests an absence of community engagement in its entirety. Bobbio [61] proposed two community engagement approaches: open-door arenas and mini-publics. The former represents an all-inclusive participation based on self-selection, and the latter represents where participation is subject to selection by organizers on decided criteria. The position of the author suggests that these approaches remedy the weaknesses and biases in citizens' participation.

According to Arkorful et al. [62], the promotion of citizens' participation by the local government authorities in development planning, policy formulation and implementation deepens the overall decentralization agenda. The failure to ensure and promote popular participation disempowers the local citizenry and defeats the purposes of ensuring grassroots democracy [63,64]. The predictions of Blair [65] and Ribot [66] that the decentralization of governance to the doorstep of the local populace ensures popular participation have not materialized in the case of the findings of this study. In Kenya and Uganda, Be-ere [5], Bulut and Abdow [14] posited that the involvement of the local populace in decision-making, policy formulation and implementation processes were limited to a mere participation in periodic local level elections. The studies further pointed out that, in both countries, there is a complete absence of the consultation of citizens on resource allocation and policy formulation processes in between the elections. As revealed by the findings of this study, the case is not different in Ghana.

5.1.2. Budgeting and local financial planning

The result of this study indicates that there is the absence of citizens' participation in the budget determination and financial planning processes of the Assembly. Participatory budgeting at the local level happens when citizens are consulted through community engagement forums in budget determination and financial planning of projects. A resident lamented thus:

> The assembly does not engage us when they are deciding on the programs to be implemented, how then do they involved us in the preparation of their budgets. I do not know what goes into the budget of the assembly." An official at the Ketu South Municipal assembly explained that; "we are handicapped as an assembly in the timely engagement and consultation with the citizens in determining development programs. Currently, there are inadequate resources at our disposal to engage and ensure that citizens actively participate in the development planning and determination at the local level.

The budget phase of the development planning process is where measures are taken to ensure that citizens participate in the distribution of resources, and assist to make financial decisions on the cost of projects to be implemented. Malipula et al. [67] coined and described the concept of participatory budgeting to mean a public decision-making mechanism that allows citizens in the negotiation processes for the allocation of resources. Budget preparations and financial planning processes at the assemblies form part of the fiscal decentralization component of the entire decentralization agenda, which sought to include and engage the citizenry in the

determination of all fiscal and financial matters at the local level. It is believed that participatory budgeting approaches at the local level increases the chances for discourse on governmental spending and ensure good governance through transparency and accountability [42]. The findings of Manes-Rossi et al. [68] point to the fact that engaging citizens in participatory budgeting processes is premised on the political will of powerholders to promote citizens participation. In Tanzania, Malipula [67] posited that the intentions of citizens' participation in local government budgeting and planning remains a mere rhetoric. Citizens' participation in budgeting and planning are considered a public decision-making tool permitting local citizenry in negotiating resource allocation and utilization [69]. Additionally, the promotion of citizens' participation in budgeting and planning lessens public contestations of government fiscal policies [70]. Bobbio [61] recommends an all-inclusive representation through a self-selection approach to budget/financial planning at the local level. This is to ensure equity and equality in resource allocation.

5.1.3. Citizens' participation in medium term development planning & annual action plans

The medium-term development plan is a four-year plan developed by the assemblies, serving as a development implementation plan at the local level. Additionally, the annual action plan of the assemblies constitute the breakdown of the medium-term development plan into small implementable programs and projects on annual basis. Even though these plans are drawn in line with the national development plan of the country and transmitted through the Regional Coordinating Council to the National Development Planning Commission for approval, the views of the local citizenry must be taken into account. Regarding this, a resident of the municipality stated this:

> I am not even aware there is any such thing as a Medium-Term Development Plan at the assembly.

Another resident added:

> Even though I know the Assembly works with a plan, I do not know the name of the plan and what goes into it. I have never participated in any meeting where my views were sought for inclusion in any developmental plan.

The failure by local government authorities to consult and involve the local populace in district medium-term development planning creates a situation of supply-driven development instead of a development led by demand-driven, where the views of development beneficiaries contribute to decision on their development needs. The contributions of the citizenry manifest themselves through the community engagements of the assemblies with the citizenry. As unraveled by this study, there is no direct engagement with the local citizenry in the planning of local development by the Assembly. This finding strongly corroborates those of Be-ere [5] in both the Nadowli-Kaleo and Atwima Kwanwoma districts. In the said study, Be-ere [5] revealed that there was little or no involvement, consultation or participation of the local populace in the preparation of the medium-term development plan of the studied districts. Additionally, this finding is supported by Abdul-Rahaman et al. [70], who stated that there is a non-existent of citizens' consultation and involvement in development planning of many districts in Ghana.

This finding on the failure of the Assembly to consult the local citizenry in the preparation of the medium-term development plan of the district goes contrary to the provisions made in the National Development Planning System Act 1994 (Act 480), developed by the National Development Planning Commission to make local/district development planning participatory by all citizens. It demands that the local government authorities at the various local levels guide their development plan through a disaggregated data collected from stakeholders at the local level. It emphatically stated that all ideas and views expressed by the local populace must be factored into the development plan of their localities [60]. Kuyini [30] found in a study he conducted on the accounts of the local citizenry that the low/non-participation of the citizenry during development planning engagements and durbars at the local level is due to the lack of interest and unwillingness to participate. This is attributed to the belief that the views and ideas of the local citizenry are not factored into the development plans of the district. In the same study, local government officials attributed the low participation and engagement with the citizenry to resource constraints in the form of human resources, financial challenges, and timing. Bobbio [61] supported this finding by positing that the promotion of citizens' participation in development planning is premised on the resolve to give voice to the citizenry, but in practice, it is a way to legitimize decided policies by power-holders. The failure of local government authorities to engage the local populace in development planning and implementation creates a scenario of lack of policy and development ownership. Mawuko-Yevugah [39] equates policy and development ownership to citizens' involvement, and consultation in development planning and implementation processes.

5.1.4. District level elections

Ghana's democratic systems, which transcend to all tiers of governance, seeks to ensure that there are free, fair, and transparent periodic elections including the district/local level. This study has revealed that there is a somewhat moderate level of citizens' participation in the district level elections in the study area. These elections afforded the opportunity for the local citizenry to decide who represents their interests at the District Assembly in the development planning and decision-making processes. The low citizens' participation in district level elections could be attributed to numerous factors including citizens' dissatisfaction with service delivery at the local level. In addition, many participants explained that the continued appointment of MMDCEs made it impossible and unattractive for the active participation of the citizenry. This is due to the perceived intention of the appointee to satisfy the agenda of the appointer, but not to ensure local development. A citizen lamented:

> We have been voting all the time to elect Assembly Members, but nothing changes. Why should I continue?

This finding is line with Kuyini [30] who observed the incidence of low voter turnout in district-level elections as compared to national elections. Additionally, Yeboah-Assiamah [35] and Abdul-Rahaman et al. [70] posit that, in Ghana, low citizens' participation

in local elections is attributable to the absence of accountability by the political heads of the various local government authorities to the local populace but to the central government. The continued appointment of MMDCs by successive governments instead of their periodic election by the local populace is the major contributor to low citizens' participation in periodic local-level elections.

The second factor is associated with the mistrust of citizens' representatives resulting from perceived corruption or manipulation by political actors, lack of knowledge in local governance practices, and the belief that their contribution towards local development determination and planning were not recognized. These findings are in line with those of Hajnal and Lewis [71] and Oliver [72] who attributed the low turnout and low participation in local-level elections to the fact that the assembly members elected by the local citizenry to represent them at the assembly and the policies decided by them tended to satisfy just a segment of the population. A resident stated observed:

> We have heard rumors of political parties influencing the decisions of our assembly members and women to favor them. Therefore, you wonder if these assembly members really represent our interest.

The above comment attest to the perception that elected members of the assembly do not serve the interests of the local people. In addition to this is the inability to empower and engage the citizenry in local development planning and determination processes. The position of Dufhues et al. [73] was to suggest that the participation of local populace in elections did promote empowerment and cannot be equated to participation in development. This finding also conforms to Arnstein's rung of non-participation, where manipulation and therapy are considered as non-participatory form of citizens' participation in development planning.

5.2. Factors accounting for the low/weak popular participation at the local level

The findings of the study revealed that lack of information flow to the citizenry, the political structures of the assemblies and inadequate resources at the local level were the major factors contributing to the failure of the assemblies to promote and ensure popular participation of the citizenry in the local government affairs. These factors are further explained below.

5.2.1. Lack of citizens' information and education

This study has revealed that citizens in the study area were inadequately informed on development progress of their municipality. Additionally, they were denied the needed education and information on their rights and need to actively participate in the development planning, and processes at their local areas. According to an expert in the area of decentralization and local governance administration, the refusal/inability of local government officials to provide the needed information and education to the local citizens may be attributable to the fear of being held accountable by the citizens. He opines:

> I think that some local government authorities are not comfortable with the accountability that enlightened citizens may demand, therefore they are denied public education and awareness.

The failure of the Assemblies to provide public education is also attributable to limited resource to undertake public education. A senior staff of a local government unit in the study area observes:

> As an assembly, we do not provide the relevant information for our people, and this might be due to series of reasons including unavailable resources. The effect of this is the lack of development ownership by the local populace in the municipality.

A resident confirmed the above assertion by stating:

> We are not informed about anything that goes on at the assembly. Even our assembly member who lives in the same electoral area with us do not provide any information on issues discussed during their meetings at the assembly.

This finding contradicts the position of Monno and Khakee [74], who stated that the participation of the citizenry in development at the local level is limited to consultation and information. The study found evidence to the effect that consultation and information to the local population were lacking. The findings support the position of Yeboah-Assiamah [35], Hoffman and Metzroth [46] that the aim of providing adequate and timely information on the development progress at the local level, which were part of Ghana's decentralization agenda, were unmet due to series of challenges including lack of resources, and expertise. The positions of Crawford [26] and Bawole [33] suggest that the intentions of decentralization as a means of promoting local democratization through bringing governance closer to the doorstep of the local populace was taken for granted. This is due to the belief that decentralization of governance to the local level could give voice to the voiceless, control of local resources and ensure the active participation of the local populace in policymaking processes leading to poverty reduction had not been achieved.

Kuyini [30] criticized the incidence of low information flow from the local government authorities to citizens under a decentralized system, and asserted that, low information flow translates into low participation of citizens in local government affairs. Additionally, the low/weak information flow hinders the establishment of a vibrant democratic and good governance mechanism at the local level. This is because the local people did not possess the needed information to criticize government and suggest relevant ideas for enhancing transparency, accountability and responsive government [24]. This is to suggest that information flow at the local level is very crucial for local development and effective local service delivery. In the absence of relevant information for the population, there is the likelihood of unfair distribution of resources among the various communities. In the People's Republic of China, popular participation of citizens in environmental governance is considered a policy tool for remedying information asymmetry, which characterized governance systems. Additionally, effective information flow between citizens and government through participatory systems results in timely responses to resolving environmental challenges detrimental to the citizenry [75].

5.2.2. Political structures and composition of the assemblies

This study has revealed that political interference in the formation or composition of the assemblies contributes to ineffective popular participation. A resident of the area lamented thus:

> During the confirmation of DCEs, we hear of political parties attempting to influence votes by distributing money or items to our assembly members. We sometimes also hear of threats from some political actors to our assembly members all in an attempt to influence their decisions during assembly votes.

Another resident supported this assertion thus:

> We have heard that some political actors, especially of the government in power, attempt to influence our assembly members especially during votes for government appointees. Some make promises of lobbying central government for more resources if government appointees are approved by the assembly members.

These comments show the extent of political interference in the processes of the Assembly. Assembly members who are supposed to serve the interests of the electorate at the local level became tools in the hands political parties and central government actors. This is in line with the arguments of Ayee [24] and Ayee [43] that Ghana's decentralization and local government challenges emanated from the continued appointment of MMDCEs and 30% of the assemblies' membership. This constitutes an interference as it creates a principal-agent typology between the central government and the local government authorities, resulting in a situation in which the local government authorities serve the interest of the central government instead of the local people. He further argued that the continued appointment of 30% of the assembly members and the nomination of the MMDEs defeated the non-partisan nature of the assemblies at the local level. In a study conducted by Ogunnubi [76] in Nigeria, the findings suggest that central government controlled local government through staff recruitment, allocation, promotion and remuneration are the major challenges hindering the effective participation of the citizenry as local allegiance is shifted to the center.

Additionally, the over-reliance of local government authorities on the central government for resources remain a major impediment to popular participation. The weak financial base of the assemblies coupled with the constitutional provision for a statutory quarterly financial allocation to the assemblies from the central government creates central-local government interdependency. Hoffman and Metzroth [46] asserted that the sovereignty of central government over all income taxes and attractive revenues within the jurisdictions of the local government authorities made it impossible for the assemblies to ensure local development through effective revenue generation at the local level. This invariably reduced the amount of resource available for local government authorities to promote popular participation at the local level. Be-ere [5] asserted that the intentions of Ghana's decentralization system were to bring governance closer to the doorstep of the local populace and to encourage the participation of the grassroots in issues affecting them. This notwithstanding, Be-ere [5] further stated that popular participatory structures for ensuring representative decision-making tended to hinder the realizations of Ghana's intensions of decentralization.

5.2.3. Inadequate resources

Inadequate resources in the form of low financial resources, and unqualified personnel at the assembly, in the study area was a partial contributor to the failure of the Assembly to ensure the participation of the citizenry. On financial resources, the participants explained that the Assembly, over the years experienced series of delays in the statutory quarterly allocation (District Assemblies Common Fund) from the central government to the assembly. This study was conducted in the third quarter of 2022, but at the time of the study, the assembly did not receive its first and second quarters' allocation of the District Assemblies Common Fund. An official of the Ketu South Municipal Assembly asserted:

> Our share of the DACF has delayed and I do not believe it is peculiar to only our assembly. Our counterparts from other assemblies in the region have also not received their allocation for the last two quarters.

Additionally, the study revealed the insufficiency of the internally generated fund base of the assembly due to the lack of economically viable avenues in the study area. The weak financial base of the Ketu South Municipal Assembly resulted in the inability of the local government officials to promote and ensure popular participation of the citizenry and this confirms the assertions of Yeboah-Assiamah [35], Hoffman et al. [46] who stated that MMDAs have weak authority, resulting in inadequate and insufficient financial base. They further stated that, the DACF, which was the primary source of revenue for the MMDAs, faced series of challenges including inconsistencies in its disbursement, lack of transparency and the unnecessary delays in the allocation of funds. Mwesigwa [77] summed it up well by stating that the challenges associated with popular participation were those relating to the central government's reluctance to cede power and resources to the local level. Series of studies conducted in Nigeria including those by Ogunnubi [76] and Anayochukwu et al. [78] revealed that financial resources to local government were woefully inadequate for effective running of local government including the promotion of effective citizen participation in local development planning. In addition, Ogunnubi [76] stated that there were unnecessary and undue central government control and influences over financial allocations of the local government authorities.

6. Application of Arntein's ladder of participation to study findings

Table 1 presented below shows the findings of this study as juxtaposed with Arnstein's ladder of participation adopted by the study. The ladder has three levels and eight rungs. At the level of nonparticipation, two rungs of manipulation and therapy offer the opportunity to ascertain the extent to which political actors, including those at the district and central government levels, attempt to

manipulate the citizens instead of offering the chance for genuine political representation. The findings show evidence of central government manipulation at the district assembly, which has resulted in a mistrust of the local people of local government authority. Political parties and the central government influences on assembly members in decision making has resulted in mistrust which is contributing to low participation among citizens. As discussed under participation in local elections, there is only moderate participation. This is contrary to the high level of participation in national elections in this area. Manipulation was also aided by District Assembly structures, which allowed non-elected political heads who served as the means of central government manipulation instead of offering genuine chances for local influence and participation. Although, at this level, the ladder postulates a one-way information flow to the citizens from local government authorities, the findings suggest low information flow to the citizens due to lack of resources and other constraints. Thus, while there is evidence of manipulation of decentralized structures, the study found no evidence of even the one-way communication from local authorities to the citizens. This is a major challenge of the quest to promote participation at the local level in Ghana.

At the tokenism level, the rungs of informing, consultation and placation helps to assess how avenues for political engagement in the form of town hall meetings and other forms of political consultation are created for citizen participation. The findings reveal that neither the political heads nor the elected assembly members provided regular avenues for community engagement and participation in policy formulation and implementation. In addition, the involvement of citizens in budgeting and development planning was also absent. Whereas the decentralization policy in Ghana emphasizes participatory budgeting and development planning, in practice, these are virtually non-existent.

At the third level of the ladder, three rungs, including partnership, delegated power and citizen control provide the understanding of the extent to which the district assembly allowed citizens to influence decisions and development. The failure to provide avenues for citizens' engagement at the first two levels means that there is absence of citizens' ownership and influence of policies, which is a higher form of participation at this level.

7. Conclusion

The evidence revealed by this study suggest that popular participation, which is a major component of decentralization, even though not novel, is essential for effective and efficient service delivery, and rapid development at the local level. The quest to deepen democracy at the local level by establishing local government authorities to enhance the legitimacy of government by ensuring popular participation and accountability in development planning and policymaking is to ensure efficient public service delivery through the provision of adequate and timely information to the populace.

Additionally, the participation of the citizenry in the formulation and implementation of policies ensures the quality of government development actions. It is believed that both direct and indirect participation of citizens ensure local ownership of development. This study concludes that the general motive of decentralization, which is to bring governance closer to the doorstep of the local citizenry, giving them the opportunity to decide their development needs has not materialized due to structural failures and resource constraints. This study discovered that low information flow from local government officials, ineffective political structures of the assemblies, and inadequate resources of the local government authorities were major challenges to popular participation at the local level. The quest to ensure the active participation of the citizenry is fruitless in the absence of effective governance and the structural mechanism to ensure and promote effective local governance administration. The lack of political will to cede power and resources to the local level defeats the general aim of ensuring popular participation at the local level. Relating the level of participation in Ketu South Municipal Assembly to the ladder of participation model, this study found evidence that political participation at the local level remains at the lower rungs of manipulation and therapy. Thus, instead of offering the chance for genuine political representation, there is evidence of manipulation by central government and political actors. Issues of manipulation of assembly members to vote for government appointees were noted as evidence in this regard. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that limited avenues were created for political engagement to confirm the informing, consultation, and placation rungs of the ladder.

Furthermore, higher forms of political participation in the form of partnership, delegated power and citizen control were also absent in the case of the Ketu South Municipality. It is, therefore, reasonable to conclude that Ghana's decentralization system centered on the District Assemblies' concept, provides room for political manipulation of local structure, which is meant for promoting popular participation rather than substantial participation of local people.

Table 1
Summary of findings in line with Arnstein's Ladder of Participation.

Participation Levels	Rungs	Findings
Citizen Power	Partnership, delegated power & citizen control.	Informing, Consultation & Placation development planning & implementation. Absence of policy ownership by the citizenry.
Citizen Power	Informing, Consultation & Placation	Absence of citizens' engagements. Absence of effective public participation in budgeting & development planning.
Nonparticipation	Manipulation & Therapy	Manipulation through District Assembly structures. Activities to influence elected assembly members in decision-making. Absence of communication to citizens in the form of public education. Moderate level of participation in district assembly elections.

Source: Authors' Construction, 2022

This study recommends sufficient information flow at the local level to the citizenry; this is to ensure that there is an avenue for the local government authorities to be accountable and transparent in the local governance affairs at the local level. The dissemination of relevant information to the citizens will create the awareness and education for effective and efficient delivery of public services. Frequent town hall meetings between assembly members and citizens and directly between the assembly and citizens are recommended. The assembly should make frequent use of public address systems to disseminate information to citizens. Secondly, to ensure the active participation of the citizenry in the local governance affairs, strong financial autonomy for the assemblies is required. In addition, adequate and timely central government allocation of resources to the local level would ensure that the local government authorities have the resources to timely engage, consult and inform the local citizenry at the local level.

Finally, there is the need for the political autonomy and self-reliance of the assemblies. This must be devoid of the imposition of central government's appointee for the position of MMDCEs and the 30% of the assembly members. This recommendation supports the current debate on the need to abolish the appointment of the 30% membership of the assemblies, which is a factor creating principal-agent relations between the assemblies and the central government. Consequently, there is the need for the election of Metropolitan, Municipal and District Chief Executives on a non-partisan basis. This is believed to create a non-partisan and politically autonomous local government in Ghana.

8. Limitations of the study

Various limitations associated with the study are acknowledged here. This study was conducted in one local government territory, employing the qualitative research approach, thus, resulting in the selection of small sample size. Due to this, the findings of the study are not generalizable due to its subjectivity. However, the appropriateness of the selected research approach is premised on its ability to provide answers to *why* and *how* questions. Supporting this position, in-depth interviews were employed, giving the researchers and the research participants the opportunity to delve deep into the various issues of interest to the study. For the avoidance of non-generalization of future research, the quantitative or mixed research approaches should be adopted incorporating sample surveys and interviews with large representational sample sizes and conducted in two or more local government territories.

Ethics statement

The study received ethical approval with Index number **GM/IRB/04/21** from the **Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration Institutional Review Board**.

Author contribution statement

Theophilius Kodzo Dzakaklo: Conceived and designed the experiment, Analysed and interpreted data; Wrote the paper.
Ishmael Kwabla Hlovor; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Wrote the paper.
Frederick Kwasi Dah: Performed the experiments and contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data.

Data availability statement

Data will be made available on request.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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