Community Radio Broadcasting and Local Governance Participation in Ghana: A Study of Simli Radio in the Kumbungu District of the Northern Region.

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Thesis Title:

Community Radio Broadcasting and Local Governance Participation in Ghana: A Study of Simli Radio in the Kumbungu District of the Northern Region.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Westminster for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This research explores the nexus between community radio and local community participation in decentralized local governance in the Ghanaian context. It is based on a case study of the Kumbungu District in the Northern region. Ghana has implemented a local government programme under its decentralised reforms since 1988, and this was primarily aimed at stimulating the active participation of ordinary citizens in the affairs of governance and in development intervention at the local community level, yet the available evidence highlights poor community participation in district level government business. Community radio has long been established as a communication tool that amplifies marginalised voices in democratic societies that are relative to identity formation and community development. However, there are very few academic discussions that explore the contribution of community radio in addressing the concerns relating to poor local community participation in decentralized local governance in Ghana.

Employing qualitative research approaches for the data collection, a key question that this research addresses is how, and why, poor local community participation and weaknesses in local accountability in the country's decentralised reforms are linked to an inadequate flow of communication and the lack of legitimate mechanisms with which to amplify the voices of ordinary members of the community. Additionally, this research explores the question of how CR is addressing the failure of existing communication systems in the local government structures to facilitate active citizen-government dialogue and a synergy that strengthens the articulation of community voices and enhances the responsiveness of local government policies and initiatives.

The study found that the poor community participation in local governance is due to the failure of the local assembly to incorporate into their mobilisation strategies and administrative structures effective, credible and trustworthy communication systems that guarantee the best interests of the local people. The research established that the concerns relating to low community participation in local government activities in Ghana is linked to the lack of access to local government information, as the civic education campaigns of district assemblies fail to address key factors that undermine local community participation in local governance.

In the particular case of Simli Radio, the research found that the station encourages creative expressions and contributes to democratic processes at the local level through participatory programming, open access to its facilities and the stimulation of the local community's sense of identity and ownership of the station, thus enabling the local community to contribute to issues that affect their daily political and socio-economic lives. Simli Radio's open access allows local people to focus on local issues, giving voice to groups and individuals who otherwise would not have had the opportunity to express their views, to hold local authority leaders accountable and to act in the best interests of the local community.

Dedication

Inna Lillai Wa Inna Ilayhi Raji'un

(Surely, to Allah we Belong, and Verily to Him, is our Return)

To the memory of my late Son, The Prince of Peace

Amirul Shaheed-Deen

(19th May 2021 TO 25th May 2021)

Whose early and untimely departure in the course of my PhD changed my life forever!

Forever in our Hearts, Journey On! Oh Proud Commander

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Authors' Declaration

I, Mohammed Faisal Amadu, do hereby declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction and context of the research

Ghana, a country located in West Africa, is often described as a shining example and the beacon of African political and economic liberation. The country has a population of over 31 million people with distinct cultural heritage, and approximately over 100 different ethnic groups and languages spoken. Christianity and Islam are the dominant religions in Ghana and the country continue to demonstrate a long history of democracy and political stability in Sub-Saharan Africa (Boafo-Arthur, 2008; The World Bank, 2023 and GSS, 2021). Historically, Ghana gained independence from British colonial rule in 1957. Since then, the country has established itself as one of Africa's democratic success stories. The country has held 8 successive democratic presidential and parliamentary elections since 1992. Ghana operates a decentralised system of local governance since 1980 known as “the local government system”/ MMDAs (Inkoom, 2011; Awortwi, 2010; Ayee, 2010 and Ahwoi, 2010). The stability of Ghana's democracy can be attributed to its robust and flourishing media landscape, which has demonstrated resilience over time.

The media landscape in Ghana has evolved significantly since the country gained independence from British colonial rule. During the colonial era, the media was largely controlled by the colonial government and used as a tool for propaganda and promoting British interests (Asante, 1996; Ansah, 1994; Karikari, 1993 and Press Reference, 2008). During this period, the media environment was limited, and access to information and communication platforms was largely controlled by the colonial authorities. Under colonial rule, the primary means of communication were print media, particularly newspapers. The British established the *Royal Gold Coast Gazette and Commercial Intelligencer*, in April 1822 to disseminate information and promote their colonial agenda (Asante, 1996). These newspapers were often used as a tool for propaganda and to shape public opinion in favour of the colonial administration. The content of these newspapers focused mainly on news from Europe, colonial policies, and advertisements from European businesses. The local perspectives and voices of

Ghanaians were marginalised, and there was limited space for dissent or alternative viewpoints.

The early years of independence therefore saw the establishment of several newspapers, including the Ghanaian Times and the Daily Graphic which played a crucial role in informing the public about the government's policies and actions in line with the nationalist agenda of Nkrumah (Ansah, 1994; Karikari, 1993 and Ayeboafo, 2014). It is worth noting that Ghanaian newspapers predominantly used the English language, with only a limited number being published in local languages. Historically, most of the local language newspapers were established by missionaries, indicating their significant contribution in this area. However, there were a few indigenous establishments. Key amongst them include Asenta, 1935; Akan Kyerema, 1948; Amansuon established in the 1950s, Wonsuom of the School of Communication Studies at the University of Ghana in the 1960s and Nkwantabisa of the Bureau of Ghanaian Languages in the 1970s (Ansu- Kyeremeh, 1992 and Yankah, 2004). The impact of these local language papers in conveying development information and supporting the nationalists agenda was not significant due to the limited literacy levels in local languages. Consequently, many local language newspapers faced financial difficulties and eventually ceased publication due to a lack of readership and support.

The emergence of early radio broadcasting in Ghana significantly transformed the media landscape (Ansah, 1985; Twumasi, 1981; Asante, 1996; Koomson, 1994 and Heath, 1998). Radio ZOY was introduced in Ghana (then Gold Coast) in July 1935 and later the Gold Coast Broadcasting System in 1954, to control and regulate the airwaves (Asante, 1996). Similar to the print media of the time, early radio broadcasting in Ghana primarily served as a tool for colonial propaganda and the dissemination of information that aligned with the interests of the colonial administration (Karikari and Yankah, 1996; Ansah, 1985 and Asante, 1996). The programming largely consisted of news, music, educational, and content that promoted British colonial values and policies (Twumasi, 1981). According to Ansah (1985, p21), radio in pre-independence Ghana aimed to "cater to the information, cultural, and entertainment needs of the political and educated elite, including European settlers, colonial administrators, and a small group of educated Africans". This view is supported by Koomson (1994), who suggests that broadcasting was

introduced in Ghana to serve the interests of the colonial masters and settler communities.

The primary purpose of radio in this colonial context was to keep the colonial administrators informed about news from the metropolis, thereby maintaining cultural links with the imperial centre and reinforcing colonial authority in Ghana before independence (Koomson, 1994). Notably, during World War II, radio broadcasting in Ghana experienced significant expansion as it was utilised as a propaganda tool by the “Allies” against Nazi Germany. Unlike the print media however, despite its colonial control, radio broadcasting began to have an impact on the local population. It provided a platform for cultural expression, entertainment, and community engagement. Local musicians and performers were given opportunities to showcase their talents, and radio became a medium through which Ghanaian culture and music gained prominence (Ansah, 1985; Asante, 1996 and Koomson, 1994).

The emergence of early radio broadcasting also facilitated the spread of information and helped foster a sense of national identity and unity among Ghanaians. Radio allowed for the dissemination of news and updates on the struggle for independence, providing a platform for nationalist leaders to communicate their messages and mobilise public support (Asante, 1996). At the height of the push for independence and the struggle for freedom of expression, the media landscape in Ghana began to explode. During this period, the media landscape in Ghana played a crucial role in shaping the country’s democratic practice (Ayeboafo, 2014). The media has been, not only a platform for information dissemination and public discourse, but also, a means of holding the government and other stakeholders of development accountable. At independence, the government under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, the first Prime Minister and later President of Ghana, had a significant influence on the country’s media systems. Nkrumah’s government established a largely state-controlled broadcast system, with the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) enjoying absolute monopoly as the only broadcast media in the country. Deviating from its nationalist agenda, the GBC was seen as a mouthpiece for the government, promoting Nkrumah’s policies and ideologies (Ansah, 1994 and Karikari, 1993). Despite the government’s control over the broadcast media, there were still

independent newspapers that provided alternative perspectives and criticised the government's actions.

In the 1980s, Ghana experienced a protracted period of military rule, during which the media faced significant setbacks. For instance, successive military governments imposed strict media censorship and suppressed dissenting voices. Many journalists were arrested, newspapers were shut down, and media freedom was severely curtailed (Owusu, 2011; Ansah, 1994 and Karikari, 1993). However, with the return to democracy in 1992, the media landscape in Ghana began to regain its vibrancy. A vibrant media landscapes soon emerged in the country assuming key responsibility in consolidating its democratic practice. The promulgation of the country's 1992 Constitution did not only signal a return to democratic rule after prolong period of military coup d'états, but also heightened the demand for a truly independent public broadcasting system by democracy and human rights activists. Significant at the centre of debate for an independent mediaspace was the urgency for a plural broadcast media that could serve as checks on the arms of government, guard the new democracy against corruption and abuse, promote free speech and propel national cohesion and development (Ansah, 1994; Karikari, 1993 and Ayeboafo, 2014).

The new Constitution was marked as a watershed for multi-party democratic elections and ultimately, the birth of media pluralism in Ghana (Ayeboafo, 2014). As a result, the Constitution was widely recognised by the international development community and democracy scholars as a significant milestone in the country's political and democratic development. The Constitution established a number of significant legal frameworks and legislations that enhanced democratic practices, helped restore press freedom and launched a vibrant media landscape through private ownership and community participation in the mediaspace. One such framework is the guarantee of freedom of expression under Chapter 5 and freedom and independence of the press under Chapter 12 along with a National Media Commission (NMC) to insulate state-owned media from government control (Heath, 1998) and protect the freedoms and independence of private media (Kafewo, 2006).

These legislative frameworks and reforms including the introduction of a National Media Policy (NMP) in 2001 contributed significantly to the liberalisation of the media

airwaves. It is important to state that the 2001 NMP was what ushered into the country media pluralism. It was accompanied by the repel of the now infamous Criminal Libel and Seditious Law, clearing every doubt of a media repression in the country. In addition, Ghana's NMP established a three-tier broadcasting structure consisting of public, private and community broadcast systems (Ministry of Communication, 2008; NCA, 2020; Press Reference, 2008; Ghana Broadcasting Study, 2005). The National Communications Authority (NCA) classified CR under the community broadcasting system and defined them as independent, non-commercial radio that are owned and operated by local communities. According to the NCA, these stations are expected to provide platforms for amplifying local voices and to enable local communities to express their opinions on political and development issues that affect their lives and communities.

Nonetheless, while CR has been celebrated as a means of amplifying marginalised voices and providing a platform for communities that are often underrepresented in mainstream media, their presence also confirms and actually demonstrate the failure of existing communication infrastructures to adequately represent and address the needs of diverse communities (Backhaus, 2023; Manyozo, 2017; Mitchell and Lewis, 2018). In many cases, CR has emerged as a response to a lack of representation in mainstream media (Howley, 2010 and Buckley, 2011) and in other instances, a total lack of access to information and communication technologies by underrepresented communities (Backhaus, 2021; Guo, 2017 and Sow, 2014). In the larger Ghanaian context, CR emerged as part of a strong movement for a plural media ecology during the liberalisation of the country's airwaves. CR therefore emerged to serve as critical resource in promoting the tenets of good democratic development in Ghana (Kankam and Attuh, 2022 and Cammaerts, 2009) in a pluralistic media public sphere heavily influenced by Ghanaian Pentecostalism (Meyers,1998) and commercialism (de Witte, 2011). As noted previously, the Constitutional reforms of 1992 ended the state monopoly over broadcast media but also subtly introduced into the country's media ecology, a heavily commercialised Pentecostalite style broadcast media sector (Pontzen, 2018; Meyer, 2011). The new liberalised media airwaves saw an explosion of several Pentecostal churches dominating media contents in propagating the gospel against what was expected to be a secular media space (Pontzen, 2018; de Witte, 2011). However, the significant presence of Pentecostal actors and themes does not

mean that the media landscape in Ghana is entirely focused on religious matters but most likely, when tuning into a radio in the big cities of Ghana, one will come across a Pentecostal programme. There are CRS that has retained a greater focus on serving the governance and development needs of their local communities.

In this research, I explore the intersection of CR and local governance participation in Ghana. I focus on examining Simli Radio, a pioneering CRS based in Dalun in the Kumbungu District of the Northern region of Ghana, and its impact on local governance participation. Simli Radio, like many other CR in the country, was established in 2005 to promote community development through dialogue and citizen participation in local governance (Al-hassan, Andani, and Abdul-Malik, 2019). Prior to the establishment of Dalun Simli Radio (DSR), the state broadcaster, GBC Radio Savannah, was the only known media providing localised information on agriculture, health and education, and also transmitting government programmes across the northern, savanna and northeast regions. However, this information neither specifically targeted the Kumbungu District nor did it fully address the specific development needs of the local people of the District. CR emerged in this part of the country to fill this void- representation, voice, and identity. Since its establishment, DSR adopted local language broadcasting to provide the much needed identity and voice for local participation in decision making.

Today, its broadcasts covers a wide range of topics that addresses key community challenges in the District including health, education, agriculture, women empowerment and good governance. AMARC (1998) and other scholars (See for instance: Manyozo, 2016; Bresnaham, 2007; Gumucio-Dagron, 2001) argue that CR empowers grassroots communities to become co-creators of news and solutions to underdevelopment, allowing them to express their social vision and advocate for their needs. These aspects of CR highlight the connection between CR and local development. Therefore, this research explores how CRS in Ghana offer opportunities for media participation and contribute to local governance, development and community decision making processes through the direct participation of grassroots communities in CR production or their participation in CR practices at the local level.

1.2 Problematising the research context

For almost 30 years, radio broadcasting in Ghana's pluralistic media ecology has flourished along the democratic reforms of the country's political institutions beginning with the promulgation of the 1992 Constitution. Radio has seen an exponential growth and phenomenal development largely owing to media liberalisation and partly due to the growth of Pentecostalism in the country. More relevant for this study, CR, also share in the glory of plural media expansion and could compete in discussions of who drive local development agenda in the country mediaspace. To the extent that CR provides localised and community-centred news programming and participatory practices in the broadcast mediaspace, CR may be an important resource for local democratic development. However, the question remains that with wider audience reach and coverage, professionalism, robust equipment, relay partnership to the peripheries and stronger association with charismatic Pentecostalism, are commercial and state broadcasters not in the lead on discussions about democratic transformations in the country? One could argue that CR only focus on the mundane aspects of local community life, with very little influence on policy that impact the wider society usually formulated at the metropolis. In spite of CR's visibility in the country's mediaspace, there is a dearth of literature on its influence on decentralised local governance in Ghana especially related to how the medium promotes and influences grassroots communities' participation in local decision making in the country's north.

Since the emergence of radio in Africa in the 1930s, it has played a vital role in the socio-cultural and political life of Africans (Chikowero, 2014). Gadzekpo (2021, p177) argues that the "iconic image of a family gathered around a radio set" is a familiar depiction, illustrating the technology's central position in the communal lives of Africans. Chikowero (2014) argues that radio embodies multiple ideologies of power, modernity, and status, while also pointing out its controversial nature as a tool of colonial assault. Throughout its complex history, radio has been utilised by both colonial and postcolonial governments in various ways (Ansah, 1985; Larkin, 2008; Smyth, 2014; Chikowero, 2014; Akrofi-Quarcoo and Gadzekpo, 2020) serving as a "tool for enlightenment, advanced administration, education, entertainment, propaganda, modernisation, nation-building, unity, development, and democratisation" (Gadzekpo, 2021, p177). These viewpoints illuminate the diverse

roles and functions of radio within African societies. Even in the present day, radio continues to serve as the primary medium for grassroots communities to access news and information, reaffirming its status as a vital communication channel (Gadzekpo, 2020; Chibita, 2011; Wunpini, 2019). Its continued relevance highlights the enduring impact and widespread reach of radio in African communities.

While radio may have lost some of its communal engagement power in other parts of the world today, it remains an invaluable resource for marginalised communities in the Global South, including Ghana (Chibita, 2011; Diedong and Naaikuur, 2012; Ogola, 2011; Olorunnisola, 2002). It serves as a vital medium for information, education, and entertainment. The significance of radio lies not only in its extensive geographical coverage but also in its ability to provide programming in indigenous languages (Wunpini, 2019). Apart from its wide audience reach, the access to information in indigenous languages plays a crucial role in promoting democracy by allowing underrepresented groups to engage with the public sphere (Ansah 2008). Ghanaians who primarily speak indigenous languages heavily rely on radio as their primary source of information about national issues and governance (Wunpini, 2019) despite its Pentecostalite influence on programming (Meyer, 2011; de Witte, 2011). Unlike many TV programmes, print media and digital online news that use English as the language of transmission, radio stations located in close proximity to their communities (Chibita 2011) have achieved an audience reach that these media have never been able to accomplish (Wunpini, 2019).

Despite the proliferation of CR in recent times, low levels of citizen engagement in local governance remain a significant challenge in developing countries. Contemporary scholarship on communication theory argues that effective communication is an essential prerequisite in efforts to promote governance in the context of social development (Manyozo, 2016; Tufte, 2017; Gumucio-Dagron, 2001; Melkote and Steeves, 2001). A basic argument common to this scholarly literature is that communication remains a fundamental milieu for effective government-citizen engagements in the practice of good governance and community development. Communication incentivises the flow of information between local communities and their governments. Communication spurs dialogue and promotes constructive debates among citizens. Citizens' access to information improves local civic engagement

(Asuman and Diedong, 2019; Media Foundation for West Africa-MFWA, 2014, 2020; Agomor and Obayashi, 2008; Gyimah-Boadi, 2001). Previous literature has established that the availability of credible information inspires confidence in the development process, positively influences local participation and enhances accountability. It improves service delivery and fosters community consciousness, identity and ownership (Fobih, 2008; Agomor and Obayashi, 2008; Stiglitz, 2002).

The centrality of communication in the governance and development discourse is a product of a paradigm shift in the discourse on development communication. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 3, the governance and development trajectories that were pursued during colonial and post-colonial independent African states were characterised by centralisation (Crook and Manor, 1997; Olowu and Wusch, 2004; Oxhorn et al., 2004). Following the emergence of the modernisation paradigm in development discourse, virtually all decision-making on development was exclusively controlled by a few colonial government functionaries. This trend was continued by the governing elites of the post-independent nations who, like the colonial administrators, were largely unaccountable to ordinary citizens (Waisbord, 2001; White, 2008). While communication was considered essential, it's approach to information dissemination around the 20th century was top-down, aiming to get citizens to passively accept development interventions that were proposed or initiated by their governments (Melkote and Steeves, 2001). State-owned media, including radio, tv and the newspapers, were immediately restructured to follow the modernists' thinking, as agents for the diffusion of modern culture in many parts of Africa, including Ghana on its independence. The media not only dictated what modern culture should be, but also determined the extent of a modern society (Everett, 1962; 1983; Waisbord, 2001).

Following the extensive failures and criticisms of modernists' thinking about development, more recently, the concepts of good governance, participation and sustainable development have become key elements in development discourse. For instance, early writers such as Freire (1970) and Illich (1973) questioned the dominant development paradigm, highlighting the importance of empowering communities and fostering local participation in decision-making processes. They argued for a shift from a paternalistic and technocratic approach towards a more participatory and human-centric model. Scholars such as Chambers (1997) and Kabeer (1994) further

contributed to the critique of modernist development and emphasised the need for participatory approaches that include the voices of marginalised groups and local communities. They highlighted the limitations of the modernist approach in addressing the diverse needs, aspirations, and knowledge of communities on the ground. Tuurosong and Kendie (2014) also identified the widespread disregard for local knowledge and the lack of participation of grassroots communities in development processes as a significant problem in the modernist's approach. This orientation led to a failure to address the communal aspirations of the grassroots communities in development policy processes. I argue that these failures have led to the paradigm shift in development orientation, from the earlier top-down approaches that assumed development emerges from the top, mostly consisting of experts, and then trickles down to the bottom, thus involving ordinary citizens. I conclude that the core elements of community ownership, access and control of development interventions were dismissed in the modernisation approach of communication for development.

Nonetheless, the discourse around participatory development has significantly shaped development practice and policy, emphasising the importance of grassroots participation, inclusivity, and ownership. In recent years, there has been an increased recognition of the value of participatory approaches in development practice. The work of scholars like Chambers (1997), Guijt and Shah (1998) and Hall (2016) has further advanced the theory and practice of participatory development. Additionally, contemporary scholars have expanded the scope of participatory development beyond the local level to include transnational and global dimensions. For example, in the context of indigenous rights, scholars like Li (2010) and Escobar (2018) argue for participatory approaches that challenge the power dynamics inherent in development processes and support the self-determination of indigenous communities. Conversely, the new paradigm, which champions a bottom-up approach, emphasises the tenets of democratic governance, the decentralisation of government institutions and participatory approaches that offer greater roles for civil society groups and the local community in development decisions. Subsequently, the practice of decentralised local governance was embraced as a significant part of political and administrative reforms in many developing countries, including Ghana, from the late 1980s (Crawford, 2004). This, in part, was in response to the growing need for the greater participation of the local community (Zamboni, 2007).

By the 1990s, many countries in the Global South had begun to restructure their governance system to reflect decentralisation as a core aspect of good governance. Generally, decentralised reforms were aimed at transferring decision making powers, local resource management and accountability to local areas. This meant that local communities were to assume the management of their development with rights to engage and participate fully in development policy decisions, to demand the accountability of duty bearers for their stewardship and ensure that there was responsiveness to their collective needs. This was aimed at improving citizens lives and livelihoods (Crook and Manor, 1998; Olowu and Wusch, 2004; Oxhorn, Tulchin and Selee, 2004). The works of local governance experts, such as Olowu and Wunsch (2004), Mansuri and Rao (2013), and leading governance and communication scholars, especially Servaes (2009), suggest that enhancing communication between the government and the local community should be a considerable major driving force behind decentralisation. A core argument by the decentralists is that decentralised reforms would present viable potentials for bridging the gap between citizens and authorities at the local level, in order to enhance communication flow. Local people can communicate their needs and preferences to local government authorities for action. In turn, they can have better access to information on local governance so as to monitor the activities and conduct of government officials for the purpose of accountability. For Servaes (2009), such a communication routine between rightsholders and dutybearers is imperative in catalysing the citizens' contribution to the development process, including service delivery and responding to the legitimate concerns of local communities' development needs.

However, some scholars have raised concerns about the apparent failure of the media in relation to development and good governance, especially at the peripheries of many developing countries. Santi (2012) concludes from his studies in Uganda and the Philippines that limited information on local politics were constraining factors on the effective functioning of decentralised reforms in those countries. Local community members heavily rely on local community opinion leaders for information concerning national issues, rather than the countries' media (Santi, 2012), a situation that results in the distortion of information on local government issues. White (2008) also notes the lack of attention to local governance issues by the national media. He noted that the national media from the metropolis, in most democratic African countries, are

holding central governments to account through routine reporting on government inefficiency in relation to the citizens' problems. However, the same cannot be said of the media's reporting on local governments in the local communities of these countries.

In the Ghanaian context, the country's fidelity to the canons of good democratic governance is often attributable to the presence of a robust mediascape to its governance and policy processes. While the presence of a plural, vibrant and independent media is often credited for the country's consolidated democratic credentials (McNeil and Carmen, 2010; Norris, 2010; Addaney and Nyarko, 2017), the place of local media, in its local governance has been a controversial and much neglected subject, relative to discussions on how CR contributes to local community participation in local governance processes. With a complex socio-political system that includes national and local governments, the country's local governments are charged with a responsibility of providing essential services to local communities clustered under what is known as District/ Municipal/ Metropolitan Assemblies. Such mundane services include education, health care, and infrastructure development. However, the participation of citizens in these local governance decisions making process is often limited, and there are systemic challenges to increasing community participation at the local level. Scholars such as Oquaye (2001) and Debrah (2009) argue that, on account of weak accountability frameworks within the new local government administration, decentralisation has not achieved its prescribed outcomes.

Despite elaborate constitutional mandates requiring the decentralisation of decision making to afford more participatory governance at the local level, the evidence so far shows a recentralisation of governance. The Constitutional provisions that provide for the retention of some level of control in central government by Executive appointment, renders the model non-participatory (Ayee, 2004; Ofei-Aboagye, 2008; Ahwoi, 2010). Arthur (2012) described the model as being more "political control than political commitment". The model is designed in a top-down fashion to facilitate central government control of key decision-making processes, and to recapture local resources, thus leading to recentralisation. This approach limits the decision-making powers of local assemblies more than it empowers them. Ghana's decentralised

model in its current form, renders the independence of its local government units primarily rhetorical and, largely, untenable.

Decentralisation, according to (Blair, 2000) has not only failed to produce the anticipated community participation in local governance, but also, failed to strengthen accountability measures at the local level, and has failed to improve service delivery. This demonstrate that devolving authority to local government institutions without strengthening grassroots communities' participatory mechanisms may not improve development outcomes. Instead, it may lead to situations in which a few influential local elites annexe power to satisfy their parochial self-interests, rather than to meeting the collective interest of the broader grassroots communities. The result is the recurrent and enduring story of marginalisation among rural populations in Ghana, who still lack access to basic amenities like water, electricity, roads, quality education and good health care systems, despite over three decades of decentralisation, and over sixty years of political independence (Opare et al, 2012; Egbenya, 2010; Crawford, 2004; Adamolekun, 1999). Structural reforms of the decentralisation programme in Ghana since 1988 have failed to yield any significant results, since participation is still very low (Crawford, 2004; Robinson, 2007; Conyers, 2007; Ayee, 2000, and Ahwoi, 2010).

Evidence from civil society and key researchers indicate that the media's role in nurturing the core tenets of democracy and good governance under the current decentralised local government (DLG) arrangement in Ghana is fundamentally weak. The questions that arise from this analysis, which forms part of my research's focus, is how the poor local community participation and the weaknesses in local accountability in the country's GLG reforms, are linked to the inadequate flow of communication and the lack of legitimate mechanisms to amplify the voices of the marginalised. My research is also concerned about whether CR can improve local community participation in Ghana's local governance system. Is CR well positioned to encourage local community participation in Ghana's decentralised governance administration? What are the channels or media of information dissemination that are available to district assemblies? How do local government institutions incorporate community-based communication facilities into their development activities in Ghana? How do local government authorities in Ghana engage community-based

communication facilities, such as CR, in eliciting local level participation in its development actions? How are community media leveraged to meet the information and communication needs of grassroots communities in the decentralised government system in Ghana? These questions also point to key theoretical and empirical gaps in the field of communication and local governance about which my research will attempt to contribute to deepening our understanding and knowledge of the situation.

Theoretically, the contribution of communication that is anchored at the community level to improve governance and to support decentralisation, has been overlooked. Understanding how CR cater to the diverse needs and perspectives of marginalised communities which would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between CR and local governance participation is under explored. Additionally, understanding the complex power dynamics and their influence on participatory processes that is crucial for a nuanced analysis of CR and local governance participation is underrepresented. Finally, understanding the enabling or constraining policy and regulatory frameworks that influence participation with CR and local governance is missing. To address these theoretical gaps, my research examines the intersectionality and the amplification of marginalised voices through CR in the context of local governance participation in Ghana using the theories of participation and development communication. It further explores the inherent power relations in decentralised local governance structures in Ghana and their impact on the effectiveness and inclusivity of participatory communication initiatives. The research also investigates the institutional and policy context in which CR operates.

Empirically, there is a gap regarding the scarcity of localised case studies on the relationship between CR and local governance participation in the specific context of Ghana. Again, there is a gap arising from a limited assessment of the impact and outcomes of CRS on local governance participation in Ghana. There is no evidence of a systematic exploration of the impacts of CR on local governance. So far, what is indisputable is the volume of literature that is available on DLG in Ghana, but very little academic literature exists on the communication perspective. To address these gaps and to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between CR and local governance participation in the specific context of Ghana, my research assesses the impact of DSR broadcasts on participation in local government

processes in the KDA focusing on the unique dynamics, challenges, and opportunities specific to this case study. By doing so, I hope to address the poor community participation in Ghana's decentralised local governance administration and the failure of local government reforms to integrate social communication systems into the decentralised structure.

1.3 Research questions

The conceptual basis of this research is rooted in the decentralisation policy framework adopted by the Ghanaian government in the 1980s, which aims to transfer decision-making powers and local community development responsibilities from the central government to the local government level. This policy was implemented with the objective of promoting community participation and involvement in the decision-making processes and service delivery in Ghanaian local communities. The objective of the policy reform reflects the broader global development agenda of promoting citizen participation in democratic governance. As I noted in the previous subsection, the 1992 Constitution for example, emphasises the importance of promoting citizen participation in local governance processes as a means of promoting accountability, transparency, and inclusive development. The idea of community participation was to ensure that the decisions made by local authorities are reflective of the needs and aspirations of the local communities they serve, thus promoting sustainable and inclusive local development.

Based on this premise and an acknowledgement of the important role of participatory communication in facilitating the process of empowering grassroots communities, there is a need to explore the various forms and levels of community participation in local government activities, identify the factors that facilitate or hinder community participation, and assess the impact of community participation on local development outcomes. It is important also, to examine how specific features of CR can make it an effective tool for social communication, and how these features can be leveraged to drive participation in local governance. These will provide insights into the nature of community participation in Ghana's DLG system and the opportunities for CR to amplify local voices, provide representation and identity for marginalised grassroots communities that could inform policy reforms, good local government practice and the

attainment of inclusive local development. Using qualitative case study, this research explores DSR in Ghana as a way to answer the following research questions:

i. What is the nature of community participation in the decentralised local government administration in Ghana?

ii. Why is CR significant in supporting community participation in decentralised local government in Ghana?

iii. How is CR addressing the low participation in Ghana's decentralised local governance administration?

1.4 Structure of the thesis

My thesis is structured into 8 chapters. In Chapter One, I introduce the research and argue in relation to the context of my study. I analyse the key research areas arising from the contextual analyses and highlight the problem statement of my research. I present the key research questions that my research seeks to address. The structure of the thesis and a conclusion to the chapter is outlined. In Chapter Two, I analyse the literature on CRB and local governance in Ghana. I drew on the concepts of citizen media of Rodriguez and radical media of Downing to analyse the concept of CR. The chapter also examines the concept of community within the broader CR ecological framework. The chapter also analyse the media landscape and regulatory framework in which CR operate. The chapter emphasised on the physical, technical and organisational framework that support the proper functioning of CR in Ghana. I analyse the CR ecology and infrastructural dynamics from two interrelated context: contents and systems, to foster a nuanced understanding of the effect of CR for local communication and development support. The literature review in this chapter highlights the nuanced concepts of decentralisation and local governance by first tracing the conceptual contours of decentralisation, and local governance. Chapter two also analyse the structure and functions of Ghana's DLG system and the challenges arising from the present local governance arrangement. Finally, the chapter examines the historical context of DLG in Ghana and how the practice of decentralisation has shaped the current practices of local government in Ghana.

In Chapter Three, I will draw on participatory and development communication (PDC) as theoretical model for examining the complex interrelationship between CR, participation, and local governance in Ghana. The chapter will examine earlier theoretical propositions that have been applied to modelling the concept and practice of development around the world, especially in developing economies such as Ghana. I will analyse a decolonial critique of the modernisation approach to development practice and use that to explore the power dynamics and inequalities in participatory and development practice. In chapter 3, I examine participation as empowerment and analyse Freire's dialogical pedagogy and its relevance to local media and engagement with respect to local governance. I also analysed the place of participation in Ghana's DLG development model and the challenges to participation in development processes.

The methodology of my research is highlighted in Chapter Four. The chapter examines the design that I have adopted in my research. My methodology was to analyse a case study. I examined the factors that I considered in relation to the case selection used in my research and highlighted the profile of DSR. I examined FGDs, in-depth interviews, observation and document analysis as the key data collection procedures, methods and tools used in my research. Key challenges I encountered during my fieldwork are discussed briefly. In this chapter, I examine the processes of analysing my field data, present the results, and analyse the findings to draw conclusions that address the key research questions of my study. I analyses the key ethical considerations and the data protection relating to the governance protocols to which I adhered while conducting my fieldwork. Finally, I present the key requirements and indicators of data validity and the reliability of my research.

In Chapter Five of my research report, I examine the research findings related to community participation in DLG in Ghana. I analyse my research findings on the state of local community participation in the local government decision-making process and argue the key issues affecting local community participation in Ghana's local governance system. This chapter highlights significant findings, including the bottom-up approach used by decentralised governance, the tiered structure of Ghana's local government administration and local level stakeholder collaborations. Chapter Six focuses on presenting the findings on the potentials of DSR as a participatory

communication tool for local community engagement in DLG in the Kumbungu District. In particular, the chapter presents the perspectives of the local community on the concepts of “community” and “community radio” and on how local people identify with DSR. I explore the avenues of local community participation and discuss the limitations of DSR’s participatory potentials for community engagement.

In Chapter Seven, I present my findings on how DSR addresses the challenges of low community participation in DLG in the Kumbungu District. The key findings the chapter addresses include how DSR is promoting citizen participation in local-level socio-economic and political decision-making. Other areas include how DSR broadcast enhances local level accountability and improves the local authority’s responsiveness to local community needs. Finally, Chapter Eight presents an analysis of the key findings emerging from the research. It makes some recommendations for the future, before drawing conclusions on the major findings of this research.

1.5 Conclusion to the chapter

The chapter focused on illustrating the context of the research. Challenges arising from the contextual analyses are highlighted, and the research areas that emerge from that context are also discussed. The most notable argument that I have made in this chapter is that local community participation continues to be low in Ghana’s DLG programme following its implementation in 1988. I argue, further, that subsequent reforms to the policy have not achieved the desired local participation. I note that because of the failures in the existing structures to engender the needed local level participation, policy makers are seeking reforms that will enhance local level participation in the decentralisation programme. I argue, however, that there is a gap in the policy, and in the literature, on the linkage or relationship between DLG and CRB. I have demonstrated that, in theory, both concepts are rooted in local participation and might propel the development of local communities, in practice, however, they operate at opposite ends of the pole. I therefore argue that there is a need for empirical examination of the intersections among CR, local community participation and DLG, and that this is relevant. It is important to examine how the participatory potentials of CR might be leveraged to promote the efficient participation of the local community in Ghana’s local governance model. This, I note, will be executed by using DSR in the Kumbungu District as a case study.

CHAPTER TWO

COMMUNITY RADIO BROADCASTING AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN GHANA

2.1 Introduction to the chapter

A core assumption of the fields of community media studies and especially the discourse on development communication is the question of how local radio could facilitate a dialogic platform for local community participation in local decision-making processes. The use of radio for social development has undeniably gained remarkable traction among social development scholars researching in the Global South. Nevertheless, uncertainties still exist regarding the empirical impact of CR to local governance in the sub-region. An emerging perspective of CR evolution is that its presence confirms and demonstrate the failure of existing media infrastructures to adequately represent and address the needs of diverse communities. In this chapter, I draw on the concepts of citizen media and radical media as popularised by Rodriguez (2001) and Downing (1984) respectively to examine the concept of CR. To foreground our understanding of CR, I analyse the notion of "community" within the broader CR framework. I examine the media landscape and regulatory environment in which CR thrive and the physical, technical, and organisational elements that support their functioning in the context of Ghana. Examining the CR ecology and infrastructure dynamics in Ghana from two interconnected perspectives of contents and systems, foster a nuanced understanding of the powerful effect of CR for local communication, empowerment, and community development. The chapter also analyse the concepts of decentralisation and local governance. In this context, I trace the conceptual contours of decentralisation, and local governance. I also analyse the structure and functions of Ghana's DLG system and the challenges arising from the present decentralised arrangement. Additionally, the chapter discusses the historical perspective of decentralised local governance in Ghana and how the practice of decentralisation has shaped the current practices of local government in Ghana.

2.2 Conceptualising community radio

In this section, I draw on Downing's (1984) radical media and Rodriguez's (2001) citizens media theories to analyse the participatory nature and role of CR in community development. In radical media, Downing (1984) makes a departure from the dominant view of alternative media such as CR, as coming second to an existing media and rather argued alternative media as varied media forms that espouses alternative development perspectives to hegemonic approaches. Central to his radical media ideology are the issues of media representation, media power and particularly, participation of empowered citizens in community decisions. Downing emphasises the importance of media representation, which involves ensuring that various social groups and perspectives are accurately and inclusively portrayed in the media. Mainstream media often tends to prioritise certain dominant narratives and voices while marginalising others. Alternative media, on the other hand, strives to challenge these power imbalances by providing a platform for underrepresented groups to share their stories and perspectives. Downing also recognises the inherent power dynamics within the media landscape. Mainstream media, controlled by dominant institutions and elites, often perpetuates and reinforces existing power structures. Alternative media, in contrast, seeks to challenge these power dynamics and provide a space for marginalised communities to voice their concerns and aspirations. By subverting traditional power structures, alternative media empowers citizens to participate in shaping the media agenda and influencing social change.

Particularly relevant to this thesis is Downing's emphasis on the active participation of empowered citizens in community decisions and media production. He argues that alternative media should be participatory, allowing individuals and communities to have a say in the content creation process. By encouraging contributions from as many interested parties as possible, alternative media outlets can reflect a broader range of perspectives and experiences, thus highlighting the diverse realities of social life. Downing argues that mainstream media often presents a limited and skewed view of social life, ignoring or downplaying alternative perspectives and experiences. Alternative media, by incorporating contributions from diverse stakeholders, aims to represent the "multiple realities" of society. This includes giving voice to marginalised groups, challenging dominant narratives, and promoting a more nuanced

understanding of social issues. By prioritising media representation, questioning media power dynamics, and promoting citizen participation, Downing's radical media ideology recognises the central role of CR in building a more inclusive, democratic, and diverse media landscape. It positions CR as a key resource for amplifying marginalised voices, challenging dominant power structures, and reflecting the complexities of social life.

Inspired by the theory of radical democracy and citizenship of Chantal Mouffe, Rodriguez (2001) coined the term citizen media to denote small-scale media outlets that are controlled by ordinary citizens for the purposes of enriching their community life and fostering a communication culture that disrupts dominant power relations in society. Citizen media outlets are often driven by grassroots initiatives and community engagement and often focuses on hyperlocal or community-specific concerns, reflecting the unique interests and needs of the communities they serve. They provide platforms for community members to actively participate in media production, distribution, and consumption. Rodriguez (2001) asserts that citizen media is often guided by democratic principles, such as transparency, inclusivity, and diversity. It seeks to provide a space for multiple perspectives, encourage dialogue and deliberation, and promote democratic participation at the local level. These outlets address local issues, facilitate civic engagement, and promote social change.

Of particular emphasis to citizen media is its ability to knock down barriers to active media participation and in the promotion of structural transformations in the local community. Rodriguez (2001) argues that by giving a voice to marginalised or underrepresented groups, citizen media seeks to disrupt traditional power relations and promote diverse perspectives. She emphasised that the goals of citizen media align with principles of media democratisation, community empowerment, and social justice. Citizen media plays an important role in challenging the dominance of mainstream media and providing alternative narratives and perspectives. It fosters a communication culture that prioritises community involvement, grassroots participation, and collaboration. She concludes that by giving ordinary citizens the means to produce and share media content, citizen media aims to empower communities, promote social equity, and contribute to a more inclusive and participatory media landscape.

The concept of CR can be linked to these ideologies and its ubiquitous role in meeting the communication and development needs of rural, deprived, and marginalised communities. The CR concept is widespread, its practice universal, yet it remains under-represented in media literature and in terms of scholarly enquiry about its purpose, function, and outcomes (Fox, 2019). A deeper understanding of CR's capacity to propel participation in DLG structure is largely unexamined. In the previous chapter, I argued that the participation of grassroots communities is an imperative dimension of community development and of the primary objective of Ghana's DLG programme. In this section, I will provide an overview of CRB and argue the place of CR as a participatory tool for community development. I will put forward the point that CR contributes, not only to the political but also to the socio-economic and cultural dimensions of community development, through the participatory channels inherent to the medium. I will further demonstrate that CR provides socio-economic and political empowerment for the exercise of the rights of grassroots communities that are in pursuit of community building, by making the individual lived experiences a shared reality.

Community media literature argues that despite the surge in online media platforms, CR remains a popular participatory media (Asuman and Diedong, 2019; Amadu and Alhassan, 2018; Diedong and Naaikuur, 2012; Milan, 2009, and Lingela, 2008) in most developing countries in Africa and Asia. It has equally been argued that CR, in principle, is designed to provide access and equity to marginalised groups who have long lost their voices in the so called "dominant media" space (Fox, 2019, and Milan, 2009). Such access and equity contribute to the participation of grassroots communities in democratic processes in society. What remains unclear from my analyses of the literature, is how CR relates to DLG institutions in Ghana. How is CR able to provide access to marginalised groups in the Ghanaian democratic space? What kind of content is produced by CR in Ghana, and how does it impact on broader social change in the Ghanaian context? There is also the question of how CRB contributes to improving participatory governance processes in the country. What are rural Ghanaian radio listeners' experience in relation to CRB's content, relative to their own participation in the country's local government affairs? How do CR programmes evoke participation in local government in Ghana? These key questions are under-represented in previous research on CR in Ghana, yet they remain fundamental in

addressing the participatory gaps in the country's local government administration. Nonetheless, these underlying issues form some of the questions that my research will be addressing by using empirical data from my fieldwork. In addressing these questions, I will also be responding to calls by media scholars, including Karikari (2000), Tuurosong (2012), and CSOs that include the MFWA (2014, 2019 and 2020) and the Star-Ghana Foundation (2018), for scholarship to be developed around how local media broadcasting supports local government activities in Ghana.

I posit that the nature of CR makes it impossible to subject it to a single strict definition. Yet all of the sources agree that, in defining CR, the concept largely incorporates the elements of participation: access, communal ownership, a sense of belonging, openness, it is non-profit oriented and community centeredness (Coyer, Dowmunt and Fountain, 2007). CR exists to serve the local community's news, entertainment, and information needs. "It is radio run for its own sake, for the benefit of the community, rather than for the profit of station owners" (Coyer, Dowmunt and Fountain, 2007, p113). Hochheimer (1999), adds that the cardinal reason for a CR station is the desire of community members for a communication facility that represents their identity, their voice, and their aspirations. Considering Hochheimer's assertion, Dunaway argues that, by owning a community communication medium, it is like saying "we may be citizens of a country, but we are residents of a locality" (2002, p76). It is the medium that "balances these multiple identities in their programming choices" (Dunaway, 2002, p76). The foregoing arguments around CR indicate that the medium links together the various sectors of the community's social structure for the promotion of total community life in a participatory way.

CR, as a participatory medium of communication, is a critical part of a community's life. AMARC[1], for instance, recognises this participatory relationship of radio with its community by emphasising the involvement of grassroots communities in its programme production and distribution. AMARC defines CR as:

> *…a station that responds to the needs of the community which it serves and that contributes to its development in a progressive manner promoting social change. It promotes democratisation of communication*

[1] "The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) is the international umbrella organisation of community radio broadcasters founded in 1983, with nearly 3,000 members in 110 countries".

> *by facilitating community participation in communication. This participation may vary according to the context in which the radio operates (AMARC, 1994).*

AMARC's definition of CR re-emphasises its participatory principle and underscores the vital place of CR in meeting the core dimensions of community development in Ghana, and this includes local participation in decision-making.

CR serves as mobiliser and promoter for local community support for community action and self-help initiatives. Banda (2003, p125), for example, describes CR as:

> *…a communicative tool that can be used to mobilize communities in support of development initiatives, either those started by the government, the international aid agencies, or the local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's).*

Banda considers CR to be an important communication element in Zambia's development planning cycle, since his analysis focuses on the objectives of the communication facility, rather than on the ownership status of the medium of communication. Furthermore, Lingela (2008) argued that CR in the Southern Africa Development Community, including Namibia, South Africa, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Malawi, is a reservoir of great potential in building a sense of the community ownership of development interventions, of promoting good governance, of enhancing transparency, and of seeking accountability. The significance of CRB in enhancing local government is brought to the fore when Lennie and Tacchi argue that "… CR provides an avenue for local governments to improve practices, learn from citizens and help achieve sustainable development through engagement of people on the ground" (2013, p5).

To conclude, I have argued in this section that, although CR is an interactive medium with the potential to broaden the participation of grassroots communities in democratic processes, there still exist gaps in the CR literature, especially in regard to how the medium can contribute to local community participation in Ghana's local government development model, which is the focus of this present study. In the next section, I will analyse why CRB is important in democratic processes.

2.2.1 Justification for community radio broadcasting

From the experiences of the miners' radio stations in Bolivia and Radio Sutatenza in Columbia, in 1947, the CR movement gained sustained recognition, becoming a worldwide concept by the 1990s for its inherent potential to serve the communication needs of its community (Gumucio-Dagron, 2001; Fraser and Restrepo, 2001; Myers, 2000; Girard, 2007, and Bresnahan, 2007). Although recent CRB concepts may have evolved markedly, Bolivia and Colombia's experiences, nonetheless, provided a motivation, and the much-needed inspiration, that have shaped the current CR model. The experiences of the two stations set the pace for today's CR's overall structure. The struggle against unequal power relations; the demand for better and improved living conditions; the promotion of community consciousness and solidarity; the championing of a bottom-up approach to development decision-making, and the integration of community needs into overall development plans (Fraser and Restrepo, 2001) are some of the basic tenets of most CRBs in developing countries today. These underlying motivations and objectives of the two pioneer CRs remain the core vision of most of today's CR in Sub-Saharan Africa. The pioneering efforts and early educational broadcasting style of Radio Sutatenza, for example, was "basic to the idea of public service and marked the birth of community media in Latin America" (Roncagliolo, 1995).

CR emerged in Africa to further deepen the democratisation process that started on the continent around the 1990s (Lingela, 2008, and Fraser and Restrepo, 2001). On independence, much of Africa inherited and maintained a monopolistic broadcasting structure that was largely under the control of government. In countries such as Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Ghana, where other forms of media (private commercial radio, tv and even newspapers) were authorised to participate in the mediaspace, the government still managed to muzzle the media with extreme policy restrictions, citing the 'national interest' (Karikari, 1994; Tayman, 2012; Mukhongo, 2010; Dimbleby, 2005). This development ultimately made it difficult for CR projects to be established until the late 1980s onwards, when some governments started to lessen resistance to media pluralism. The lifting of restrictions on independent media in most parts of Africa is attributed, in part, to the influx of new media information sources, such as the internet,

that are “undermining all the efforts of repressive regimes to control and condition the information that their people receive” (Fraser and Restrepo, 2001, p6).

In addition, the crusaders against coups d’état and the devotees of the institution of democracy and human rights in Africa found, in the mass media (especially radio), a potent weapon for mass mobilisation, advocacy, and consciousness (Karikari, 1994, Tayman, 2012, and Ayeboafo, 2014). Mass protest, in the case of Ghana, and in other instances, the requirements of an IMF structural adjustment programmes’ support for ailing economies in the Sub-region compelled many governments to open discussions for the participation of the privately owned press and, as was later noted, CR emerged with many great potentials for public service, local community mobilisation and decentralised development planning.

A key argument emerging from my analysis of the literature about CR in Ghana is that CR emerged as part of the wider movement that arose from civil society groups, human rights and media advocates, opposition political activists, and other donor agencies, including the World Bank and the IMF, for pluralistic media in the country. These agitations and pressures resulted in the introduction of a three-tier broadcasting structure consisting of state-led public, privately owned commercial, and CRB services (see: Ayeboafo, 2014; Press Reference, 2008; Ministry of Communication, 2004; Attorney General and Ministry of Justice, 2001; Ghana Broadcasting Study, 2005; Heath, 1998; Diedong and Naaikuur, 2012; GCRN, 2003; and Quarmayne, 2006). Despite this classification of broadcasting in the Ghanaian context, there is still uncertainty about CR. For instance, the concept has assumed different euphemisms from various scholars and practitioners. While not exhaustive, key taglines used to describe CR are “citizen”, “alternative”, “grassroots”, “participatory”, and “social movement” radio (Rodriguez, Ferron and Shamas, 2014, p151). “Radical”, “autonomous”, “self-managed”, “tactical” and “independent” radio (Pagnik and Downing, 2008, p7). Other terms are “civil society” and “rhizomatic” radio (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2008, pxiii) and “democratic” and “emancipatory” radio (Atton, 2007, p18). Yet there is often the question of what CR actually is, and what, or who, the community in a CR is in discussions about CRB in the Ghanaian mediaspace?

2.2.2 Towards a definition of community radio broadcasting

This section highlights the question of 'community' to clearly delineate the boundaries of discussions on CR and to navigate a workable conceptualisation and definition of CR. One critique of CR which, in my analysis of the development literature, I have established, is the question of, or discussion on, the community. It is often asked, who or what is the 'community' mentioned in definitions of CR? I would argue that the term 'community' continues to be a highly contentious notion among social science disciplines. The various disciplines in social science stand divided on what constitutes a "community" and, by extension, its usage. According to Cohen, "the term community has proved to be highly resistant to satisfactory definition in anthropology and sociology, perhaps for the simple reason that all definitions contain or imply theories, and the theory of community has been very contentious" (1985, p10).

Karikari (2000) observed that the term community, when used in communication dialogues, suggests either 'spatial' or 'social' constructs, or both 'spatial' and 'social' constructs. According to him, spatial constructs of community refer to "specific geographical territory of or within or under a particular political entity" (2000, p44). I would argue that this classification limits the community to specific locales of either administrative jurisdictions or traditional boundaries. As with Karikari's views, Opubor argues that a "community still retains a strong physical reference to people in a geographic proximity, with frequent, if not continuous contact" (2000, p12). On the other hand, Karikari relates his social constructs of a community to "shared interest, taste and values" and, in some instances, to "demographic" or "psychographic" units. Viewed from this perspective, I would argue that a community, in CR, means a consortium of likeminded individuals, and it may include people who share similar ideological orientation or who, at best, recognise themselves to have very similar views on a wide range of social issues. In the social construction of community, therefore, my argument is that geographical space is not an essential consideration of community, as Opubor (2000) claims, as members may come from, or reside in, different spaces. I would argue that a community could simply be physical space or cyberspace (and thus virtual).

With elaborate reviews of the concept of community from sociological, anthropological, and political theorists' perspectives, Diedong and Naaikuur (2015) conclude on two

major categorisations to conceptualise the term “community” in CR, to include the “contemporary” and the “traditional”. The authors argue that the contemporary definitions of community lean towards a more complex social phenomenon, rather than viewing a community as a specific geographical area or a social unit. They drew on the notions of Cohen’s 1985 *‘…. symbolic construction of community’* to argue further that a community, and all that is included in it, “has symbolic dimensions” and that the “symbols of community are mental constructs”, which afford people with the agency to construct meaning. In the traditional sense of community, Diedong and Naaikuur (2015) argue that there is an element of physical attachment and identity with the group to which one belongs, and these reflect the culture, character and value of the group

AMARC’s view of “community” contradicts that of Diedong and Naaikuur (2015), discussed above. AMARC argues that a community, in CRB, is “a geographically based group of persons and/or a social group or sector of the public who have common or specific interests” (AMARC,1998, p13). In the specific example of Ghana, the NCA[2] (2019) argues that identifiable geographical spaces, cultural sustenance that is in line with traditional values, and the existence of a physical structure that facilitates social interactions, are the key benchmarks defining the “community” of CR (2019). I would argue that this view narrows the concept of the community in CR to only physical spaces, thus further disapproving of Diedong and Naaikuur’s (2015) arguments. However, it also eliminates the possibility of virtual interest groups acquiring a CR licence in order to enhance their engagement.

Whilst this definition generally appears to be limited in scope, I find it relevant to the objectives of my research for three reasons: first, the reference points of this present study are MMDAs, and localities within these MMDAs, in which the local government system is practised. Ghana’s decentralisation concept is not practised in social or abstract communities but, rather, in identified geographical spaces with physical boundaries. Secondly, the evidence so far reveals that the CRs in Ghana are allocated frequencies that are based on physical presence in specific geographical locations or spaces. Finally, Ghana’s development models have so far been targeted at improving

[2] “The National Communications Authority (NCA) of Ghana is the Government of Ghana’s agency responsible for the licensing and authorisation of spectrum to media houses and media organisations in Ghana”.

the wellbeing and livelihoods of people within specific geographical locations that fall under political administrative zones which are known as MMDs. Based on these arguments, I am unable to agree with Cohen's symbolic construction of community, as it is espoused by Diedong and Naaikuur (2015), in the context of my research.

Furthermore, in the context of Ghana, both the NCA and the GCRN, a long-standing member of AMARC, agree on one definition, which contradicts the arguments of Diedong and Naaikuur (2015). They define CR as *radio which:*

> *…is about, for, by and of a specific, marginalized community, whose ownership and management is representative of that community; which pursues a participatory development agenda, and which is non-profit, non-partisan and non-sectarian" (GCRN, 2003; NCA, 2009).*

This definition is particularly relevant to my research as it espouses the role of radio stations to the development of the community, as well as enhancing the capacities of the community to be both active media audiences and active participants in media content creation. It is also relevant because my research focuses on evaluating how CR can mitigate existing communication gaps arising from Ghana's DLG system, the pivot of the country's rural development agenda. The GCRN, in its guidelines on the operation of CRs, recognises the need to:

> *…build the capacity of and enhance the use of CR in enabling marginalised communities and groups to generate and share knowledge and experience, participate in discourse and decision-making at every level, develop the richness of their culture and to strengthen their communities as part of the national and global family. (GCRN, 2003)*

and thus to encourage broadcasting with the objective of community development.

The definition also presents CR in Ghana as operating differently from mainstream media. First, is the idea that CRs are owned, managed and operated by the community, to varying degrees, and second, the notion that CRs treat audiences as the subjects and participants of programming content, whereas other types of radio broadcasting view audiences as bundles for the advertising markets (Lewis and Booth, 1989). This definition, thus, points us to some key principles and functions that CRB have to perform while serving their specific community, in part, to achieve their objectives, and also to uphold their relevance in the community building processes.

2.3 Community radio ecology and infrastructural dynamics in Ghana

In this section, I examine the media landscape and regulatory environment in which CR thrive and the physical, technical, and organisational elements that support their functioning. Examining the CR ecology and infrastructure dynamics in Ghana is crucial for fostering a nuanced understanding of the powerful effect of CR for local communication, empowerment, and community development. Within the broader media landscape, broadcasting policies and regulatory frameworks has significant impact on the ecology of CR, influencing its operations by either enabling or restricting its functions. These policies and regulations spell out ownership structures, funding requirements, and institutional mechanisms that shape the functioning of CR broadcasting in the media ecosystem (Fairchild, 1999; Doyle, 2002; Sylvia, 1998). Regulatory frameworks are influenced by political ideologies, sociocultural and economic factors (Bell and McNeil, 1999; Fairchild, 1999; Curran and Park, 2000; Doyle, 2002; McQuail, 1997).

A well-regulated broadcasting system in the context of democratic states, promotes content pluralism and diversity while protecting local programming from an excessive influx of foreign content or dominance. An effective broadcasting regulatory regime nurtures a multi-party democratic state. It allows for fair and equitable allocation of broadcasting spectrum, encourages the development of local content, and ensures ethical standards in broadcast content (Kupe, 2003). Licensing regimes acts as regulatory tools by imposing legally binding terms on licensees at the point of access. The Ghanaian broadcasting regulatory framework requires CR architecture to focus on amplifying the voices of minority, marginalised and underprivileged citizens who have been historically neglected. This way, information flow becomes multidirectional and development decisions from the local level, inclusive. Several reasons account for the need for a broadcasting policy and regulatory framework including the finite nature of spectrum, promoting human rights through free expressions, promoting a viable broadcasting industry, promoting public interest accountability, adhering to international protocols, and ethical broadcast contents.

In the context of Ghana, media policy and regulatory framework can be analysed from two interrelated features: contents (programming) and systems (infrastructure). In this

research, however, I analysed 6 key regulatory and policy features related to CR contents and systems. First, I examine CR ownership and structure.

2.3.1 Community radio ownership/ organisational structure

A review of the literature put forward ownership, organisational structure and control as key aspects of CR ecology. Analysis of media ownership and control are inherently related to the notion of power, and they remain fundamental in understanding the established structures of CR in Ghana. In ideal CR practice, the listening community exercises greater control over the station's resources (Fairbairn, 2009, and Fraser and Restrepo, 2001). The sense of ownership of the radio facility by a community alone fosters sustainability (Gumucio-Dagron, 2001) and this reflects the community consciousness of identity. Regardless of the formal ownership status, the decisions on editorial policies, programming structure and operational mechanism of CR are the obligation of the community it serves (Bosch, 2014; Gumucio-Dagron, 2001; Fairbairn, 2009; Fairchild, 2002; Fraser and Restrepo, 2001; Open Society Foundation, 1999, and Van Zyl et al., 2003).

The most widely recognised ownership model in CRB, based on a review of the literature, involves the community itself contributing resources to establish the station through a legally recognised association in order to meet its communication and information needs. This model represents true community ownership. However, it should be noted that this ownership structure is not universally applicable. Other researchers, including Myers (2009), Lush and Urgoti (2012), Jallov (2012), and Van Zyl et al. (2003), present dissenting views on community ownership and control and what defines a truly community-owned radio station. Their argument centres around the idea that a non-governmental organisation, a union, cooperative, or non-profit-oriented group, acting on behalf of the community, can mobilise resources, establish a station to advance community communication, and transfer formal ownership to the community.

In the context of Ghana, the regulatory framework assigns CR as typically community-owned and operated. They are established by local communities or non-profit organisations with the aim of serving the specific needs and interests of the community. These stations are governed by management boards or committees

comprising community representatives who make decisions about station policies, programming, and finances. These management boards also oversee the fulfilment of the station's overall mandate to the community rather than to the original sponsors and external donors. In some instances, the listening community has been disadvantaged by ownership structures in which the interest of sponsors or donors have been prioritised, rather than functioning as a communal resource project (Jallov, 2012; Fairbairn, 2009; Fairchild, 2002; Fraser and Restrepo, 2001). In analysing the Ghanaian media ecology, the regulations recognise CR as fundamental to democratic processes and therefore requires CR projects to exercise a high level of autonomy in its governance structure (GCRN, 2003; NCA, 2022). This analysis leads to the conclusion that concerns regarding the principles of community ownership and control in CR projects represent an ideal state rather than the reality in many countries in the Global South.

2.3.2 Community radio access and participation

Access and participation are fundamental elements of CR ecology in the Ghanaian public sphere. The Ghanaian Constitution of 1992 and other laws on media operations in the country recognises that citizens' right to true, accurate, and timely information is inherent in any democratic society. To uphold this right, it becomes a public interest of CR to integrate the elements of access and participation (Fraser and Restrepo, 2001). Access refers to the availability of broadcasting services to all citizens, while participation involves citizens actively engaging in planning, management, and the production of broadcasting programmes (Fraser and Restrepo, 2001). These principles align with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UN, 1948), which emphasises people's right to freedom of opinion, expression, and access to information through the media.

Freedom of expression and access to information are universally recognised as essential elements of democracy, good governance, and human rights. The ability for people to freely express their thoughts and access information is crucial for participation, democratic governance, transparency, and accountability. In the context of decision-making, access to information and the freedom to express views are prerequisites for meaningful participation. Without these, individuals cannot effectively contribute to decision-making processes. Participatory communication scholars

(Chiliswa, 2012; Bessette, 2006; Chambers, 1983; Cornwall and Scoones, 2011; Melkote and Steeves, 2001 and Thomas, 2008) emphasise that communication at the community level is a vital requirement for community development.

The twin principles of access and participation in CR ecology ensure that broadcasting services reach all community members, and that the community actively participates in all aspects of the station's operations. Community participation extends to content generation, broadcasting styles, programme production, policy planning (Tabing, 2002) and even management approaches. CRB projects provide a platform for marginalised and socially excluded members of the community to be heard and participate in democratic processes (Girard, 2007). Participation allows listeners to identify with the community, instilling a sense of value and honour, and ensures that programming content reflects the community's interests, needs, and aspirations (Wigston, 2001). The literature emphasises that the audience is central to CRB. Therefore, involving the listening community in the entire programme production chain validates the existence of CR. Building on this analysis, I conclude that participatory CR programming can be enhanced through the broadcasting of public fora, community gatherings, and the establishment of programmes that facilitate horizontal community dialogue sessions.

2.3.3 Community radio programming and broadcast content

Within the Ghanaian media ecosystem, CR is mandated by the law establishing it, to focus on providing relevant and localised programming that caters to the specific needs and interests of their target communities. This includes news, current affairs, cultural programming, educational content, health information, and entertainment that is specific to the community. The use of local language in CR broadcast is encouraged to reach a wider audience and to ensure inclusivity in programming. It is worth noting that the programming aspect is by far the most complex and demanding responsibility of CR in an increasing Pentecostalite Ghanaian media landscape (Meyer, 2011; de Witte, 2011 and Pontzen, 2018), yet there is a gap in the literature about CR programming style, particularly in the Ghanaian context.

Content generation is the heartbeat of CR. It is an important element that attracts the community to the station. It embodies the collective desires, aspirations, trust, and

identity of the local community. It is, therefore, important that every effort is made to engage as many members of the community as possible in content generation. The community assumes the roles of actors in production, with technical support from the CR staff. Content is not limited only to local culture and traditional music/dance, it extends to issues of local governance which involve the local authority responding to concerns expressed by the rightsholders. The participation of grassroots communities in CR brings about healthy debates, sound reasoning and, eventually, better resolutions to community concerns (GCRN, 2005; Fraser and Restrepo, 2001).

Participation in CR is encouraged at the onset of the establishment of the station. Participation involves community consultative processes that discuss the most critical needs of the local community. This consultation process involves various audience groups, including the marginalised and socially excluded. Community needs, preferences and habits are key areas and there must be wide consultation in relation to these areas. These areas constitute the foundation for broadcasting content, programme formats and activity scheduling decisions during programme design (Fraser and Restrepo, 2001). The regulatory framework recognises that CR programmes are not static, and they will change when the need arises, and this change is often preceded by episodic appraisals and feedback from the community. Programming in CR commences at the ideation stage, and decisions about programming content runs through the station's life cycle. Who are better placed to tell the stories of deprivation, poverty, and the lack of development in the community than the marginalised community members themselves?

2.3.4 Community radio funding mechanism

In pursuit of meeting its operational costs and remaining viable, CRs rely on a diversity of funding sources ranging from government grants, donations, sponsorship, subscriptions, contribution from listeners as well as internal fund-raising events to operate. However, they are designated as non-profit entities. The non-profit status of a CR is a crucial element that sets it apart from other forms of public service or commercial broadcasting within the Ghanaian media ecosystem. The primary purpose of a CR in most legislative frameworks is to serve its community rather than prioritise profit-making through broadcasting. The non-profit status is aimed at protecting CR from external control resulting from excessive reliance on advertising, which can divert

its focus from community service orientation (Buckley, 2011). By avoiding excessive dependence on a single funding source, especially from large corporations, CRs can mitigate the undue influence of advertisers and donors over media content (Howley, 2010). This ensures that a CR station remains closely tied to its roots - the community, with its programme styles and choices shaped by the community's lifestyle.

Regulatory frameworks recognise the need for ideal models of CR to maintain editorial and operational independence from external sources and advertising agencies (Fraser and Restrepo, 2001; Buckley, 2011; Howley, 2010; Lewis and Jones, 2006 and Girard, 2007). In Ghana for instance, the National Media Policy (2001) sets CR as independent of not only governments, but also of donors, advertisers, and other institutional control. However, this does not preclude CR from establishing mutually beneficial relationships with external institutions (Fairbairn, 2009) as long as they adhere to strict principles of transparency and guard against any compromise of editorial integrity or conflicts of interest (Wigston, 2001, and Mtimde et al., 2000). CR advertising is seen as support for the community and an investment in improving the quality of life for its listeners (Lewis and Jones, 2006) rather than the standard advertising or Pentecostalism found in commercial media corporations in Ghana.

Nevertheless, a commercial tendency has been observed in the architecture of CR (Thompson, 1999; Ford, 2011 and Mhagama, 2015). Some CR stations that refrain from advertising, such as those in Malawi, struggle financially (Mhagama, 2015) and find it challenging to cover operational costs. On the other hand, stations that rely heavily on NGO-sponsored programmes and Pentecostalite preaching, fare better in terms of financial sustainability. This has been described as the "NGO-ification[3] of CR," (Gilberds and Myers, 2012 and Manyozo, 2009) or Pentecostalism of the airwaves which raises concerns about potential compromises to community identity and culture. In Ghana, many CRs have followed the trend of commercial broadcasting, particularly in terms of advertising (Alhassan, Odartey-Wellington and Amadu, 2018) whereas others resort to Pentecostalism (Meyer, 2011; de Witte, 2011 and Pontzen, 2018). However, the literature highlights the risk of advertisers and donors dictating and influencing the station's agenda, which may conflict with the community's

[3] **"**NGO-ification of CR is a term Gilberds and Myers (2012) used to describe a situation in which CRs are overly dependent on NGOs' programme sponsorship to survive."

communication and development needs. Such influences undermine the model of CR established for the vested interests of the community, jeopardising editorial independence and community control over programming. This leads to a top-down approach to programming as espoused by modernisation theorists, instead of a bottom-up approach (Myers, 2011; Manyozo, 2009; Howley, 2010 and Alhassan, Odartey-Wellington and Amadu, 2018).

2.3.5 Community radio technology and technical infrastructure

CR require the basic infrastructure to broadcast its programmes. This includes radio transmission equipment, studios, recording facilities, and reliable power supply. The infrastructure may vary depending on the size and resources of the station. In recent years, there has been a growing shift towards digital broadcasting technologies, enabling stations to reach wider audiences and improve signal quality. The surge in digital technology has rather opened more participatory opportunities not only for legacy media but also, for CR. An analysis of the digital media landscape links technical and technological infrastructure developments in the Ghanaian media ecology to the democratisation of communication processes.

The advent of digital media has democratised communication processes by providing CR stations with tools and platforms to engage with their communities in innovative ways. Digital technologies have expanded the possibilities for content co-creation, distribution, and audience interaction. CR stations can now leverage social media, websites, mobile applications, and streaming platforms to extend their reach and foster greater community participation. With the growth of internet access and mobile phone penetration in Ghana, digital media has become more accessible to a wider population. This accessibility has enabled CR stations to connect with their audiences beyond the limitations of traditional broadcasting, allowing for real-time feedback, user-generated content, and interactive programming. Listeners can now engage with CR stations through online platforms, submit content, participate in discussions, and even contribute to programming decisions.

CR represents the democratisation of communication in the Global South (Mtimde et al., 2000 and Manyozo, 2017). CR has become a platform for people to participate in democratic processes, especially following the wave of change that swept across the

African continent in the 1960s. The expectation was that democracy in newly independent African countries would facilitate development through the active involvement of citizens in policymaking. One way to achieve this civic consciousness is through CR's focus on controversial government projects within the community. The concept of good governance, an integral part of democracy, emphasises the importance of citizens' access to information. CR architecture responds to the demands of marginalised, oppressed, voiceless, and socially excluded members of a community by providing them with access to information and the ability to critique government policies at the central or local level. CR serves as a voice for those whose perspectives are often unheard in the planning and development processes, championing their cause and promoting accountability from duty bearers. By acting as a community watchdog, CR can raise civic consciousness among local authorities.

Aligned with the principles of democracy, which aim to decentralise governance and bring development to local communities, CR facilitates broader dialogues and consultations through independent platforms (Girard, 1992). This allows for discussions on matters that are of primary concern to the local community, extending beyond the community itself to include governmental bodies and stakeholders. CR provides the diversity in broadcasting that is essential for democratic societies to advance, especially in communities heavily reliant on profit-oriented Pentecostalite or state-controlled broadcasting. CR empower people, nurturing local knowledge rather than imposing standardised solutions (Girard, 2007). They serve as voices for civil society and remain rooted in and accountable to, the communities they serve (Fraser and Restrepo, 2001). The regulatory framework governing CR ecology does not restrict its use of digital tools and platforms for community development and empowerment. On the contrary, Ghanaian media policies and regulatory frameworks recognise the significance of technical and technological infrastructural advancements in expanding democratic frontiers and fostering inclusive communication.

2.3.6 Community radio licensing and regulatory framework

The laws provide for a National Media Commission (NMC) as a content regulator and an insulator of the state media against government abuse, and the National Communications Authority (NCA) to oversee the authorisation and licensing of radio and television stations in the country (Republic of Ghana, 1992). This means that the

NCA's jurisdiction primarily covers frequency allocation rather than content regulation, which falls within the domain of the NMC. Although the lack of clarity regarding the specific roles of these two institutions, coupled with the absence of a comprehensive broadcasting law, has contributed to the overall weakness of the broadcasting regulatory system (UNESCO, 2023), nonetheless, the country's licensing and regulatory framework is well established. In his subsection, I examine how licensing authorisation, the Electronic Communication Act and networking as key technical infrastructural features related to CR systems, shapes the overall development of CR in the Ghanaian media ecosystem.

The availability of licenses specifically for CR allows for legal operation and recognition within the broadcasting landscape. The licensing and regulatory framework outlines the requirements and procedures for obtaining licenses, ensuring that CRS comply with certain standards and regulations (LI 1719- National Communication Regulation, 2003). Though the MFWA argues on the spirit and letter of the Constitution under article 162 (3) that no media house in Ghana requires a licence to operate (MFWA, 2019), CRS as well as any broadcast media including TV require access to frequencies (spectrum) for broadcasting (ECA, 2008). The availability and accessibility of spectrum play a crucial role in facilitating the establishment and sustainability of CR. The law mandates the NCA to allocate specific frequency bands for CR, ensuring that these stations have designated radio space on the national spectrum. The regulation stipulates that CR is restricted to only a 5km radius (UNESCO, 2023).

This restriction according to the NCA is to allow CR to broadcast its content within respective geographic boundaries and to reach its target audience effectively. It was to also create space on the national spectrum for other applicants and to foster media pluralism and diversity in the ecological framework of media development. However, CR advocates argue that this restriction limits CR coverage and influence and also undermine historically neglected communities' access to the media (Diedong and Naaikuur, 2012; GCRN, 2003). When CR restricted coverage is compared to other media operating in rural areas with a 25km radius, CR is further disadvantaged (Quarmayne, 2006). To be eligible for a CR license and a spectrum allocation in Ghana, CR must demonstrate the station's non-profit character, define its geographic coverage and meet the technical requirements for broadcasting (NCA, 2019). In case

of non-compliance or violation of regulations, the NCA has the authority to impose penalties, sanctions, or even revoke the license of a CR (ECA, 2008).

The NCA draws its authority from the National Communications Regulations, 2003 (L.I.1719) and the Electronic Communication Act (ECA) of 2008. Both the NCR (2003) and the ECA (2008) are significant pieces of legislation that governs Ghana's communication and broadcasting sectors. The key differences between the two legislations lie in their scope and level of detail. The NCR 2003 (L.I. 1719), primarily focus on the technical and operational aspects of the communications industry, providing guidelines and standards for licensing, and quality of service. In contrast, the ECA 2008 (Act 775), is a comprehensive legislation that covers a broader range of topics, including licensing, spectrum management, consumer protection, competition, and dispute resolution. It establishes the legal framework for the regulation, licensing, and oversight of electronic communications services in Ghana, while also addressing issues such as cybersecurity, data protection, and universal access to telecommunications services. Overall, Act 775 provides a more extensive and updated regulatory framework, reflecting the evolving nature of the electronic communications sector in country.

One of the key infrastructures of Ghana's CR subsector is the Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN) which is privately established but nationally recognised as an umbrella organisation for CRS advocating for its interests and facilitating collaboration and networking among member stations (GCRN, 2003; 2005). The network help in coordinating efforts, sharing resources, experiences, and best practices and addressing common challenges faced by CR in Ghana. Internally, the network facilitates information exchange, advocacy efforts, and joint initiatives among CRS, strengthening their overall impact and influence in Ghanaian policy making. For instance, the network has successfully mobilised its members and collaborated with civil society actors to establish the "Coalition for Transparency of the Airwaves" to get the NCA to adopt policies that are more supportive of community media, including the issuance of additional authorisations for CR and expanded coverage.

GCRN has also been actively engaged in advocating for policy formulation related to local language codes and broadcasting laws, positioning itself as a leader in these efforts. For instance, it has argued that the lack of clarity of what defines "marginalised

community" in the Broadcasting Bill (2014) is grounds for excluding communities of interest such as what Brigit Meyer describes as "Pentecostalite" communities who view religion as not only personal development but contributing to society's transformation, from applying for license. Additionally, internal collaborations with local organisations, NGOs, Ghana Journalists Association, and training institutions have allowed the network to highlight the overall community development challenges within the CR ecology. Externally, these partnerships results in financial support, technical expertise, training opportunities, content sharing, and community engagement initiatives. Collaborative efforts strengthen the sustainability and impact of CR by tapping into broader networks and resources such as the UNESCO programme of support for CR which focus on financing studio equipment, skills acquisition, journalism ethics, and station management. Access to suitable studio spaces enables CR to co-create high-quality content and effectively engage its audiences.

2.4 Conceptualising decentralisation and local government

2.4.1 An overview of decentralisation

The widespread recognition of decentralised policy reforms has not only attracted the attention of many developing countries to the practice of decentralisation, but also there has been a remarkable amount of scholarship on the topic. For instance, the concept and, largely, its practice also, has been described as the *"fashion of our time"* (Manor, 1999, p1) and as the *"quiet revolution"* (Campbell, 2001, p4), demonstrating the relative importance of the concept in academia, as well as in development praxis. Decentralisation, over the period, has become a buzz word in development discourse around the globe. Yet, there is no convergence of literature on its definition, its drivers and, to a large extent, its approach/practice.

Decentralisation, as evidenced in the literature, is multidimensional and interdisciplinary in approach and, together, this makes the concept complex to unpack. Development scholars, as well as development actors, thus define the concept and, largely, its practice, to suit their circumstances. In recent decades, decentralisation has emerged as a crucial strategy for strengthening local democracy and improving the provision of social services to communities. Although decentralisation is not a new concept, it has gained significant traction as a political and administrative reform in

many developing countries since the 1980s (Crawford, 2004). This is due to its perceived potential to enhance democracy and drive development at the local level, especially in impoverished communities. However, the literature on decentralisation acknowledges its complexity and elusive nature (Smoke, 2003). As a result, scholars and practitioners have provided various definitions and interpretations of the concept (Rondinelli, 1981; Mawhood, 1993).

The difficulty in establishing a universally accepted definition of decentralisation is partly influenced by the theoretical perspectives adopted in different disciplines. Smoke (2003) argues that economists tend to focus on the fiscal and economic implications of decentralisation, particularly in terms of political interactions and power dynamics. Neo-liberal political economists, on the other hand, are concerned with shifting power relations away from failed centralised state apparatuses. Political theorists conceptualise decentralisation in relation to accountability, elections, and representation (Smoke, 2003). Proponents of decentralisation advocate for expanded government mandates to address local needs and preferences. Autocratic regimes view decentralisation as a means to gain local support and legitimise their authority. Public choice theorists emphasise the delivery of goods and services (Hope and Chikulo, 2000; Rondinelli, Neils and Cheema,1983). Scholars in public administration focus on strengthening institutional structures and increasing local-level functions. Advocates of community development see decentralisation as a means to achieve community goals (Smoke, 2003). Despite these diverse perspectives, all these scholars ultimately emphasise the importance of local community development in their arguments. Therefore, regardless of the preferred definition, the central aim of decentralisation is to stimulate development in local communities.

Previously, decentralisation has been conceptualised as a means to empower local communities and make them the driving force behind local development. Local institutions were considered better equipped to understand and respond to the needs and aspirations of their communities. Manor (1999) notes that most of the purported benefits of decentralisation rely on the existence of democratic mechanisms that allow local governments to discern the needs and preferences of their constituents while ensuring accountability. This notion is commonly expressed by local authorities who believe their close connection to grassroots communities provides them with key

information and makes them easily accountable for their actions or lack thereof. I argue that accountability at the local level is crucial when conceptualising decentralisation with a community focus. Previous research has shown that when decision-makers and implementers of local development plans are accountable to the beneficiaries, it leads to fairer distribution of benefits, increased productivity, efficient service delivery, and reduced corruption (Prud'homme, 2001; Brinkerhoff, 2001; Therkildsen, 2001; Olowu, 2001; Blair, 2000; Agrawal and Ribot, 1999; Crook and Manor, 1998; Shah, 1998 and Ribot, 1996).

2.4.2 An overview of local government

The pursuit of a more participatory governance approach has led to the establishment of governance structures at the local community levels. Mawhood (1993) asserts that these establishments laid the foundation for a more integrated governance system. In Africa, this system has been labelled differently, such as the “People's Executive Councils” in Sudan, “Development Committees” in the Republic of Tanzania, and “District Assemblies” in Ghana (Arthur, 2012). The primary responsibilities of these local authorities include engaging with the community and local actors in the design and implementation of development plans, raising funds through local taxation for local development, preparing development budgets, and providing services that address the collective needs and priorities of the local community.

According to Olowu (1998), local government, as discussed in comparative literature, refers to all sub-national structures that operate below the central government. Olowu suggests another approach to defining local government, which involves considering key attributes such as legal personality, specified powers to perform various functions, substantial autonomy in budgetary and staffing matters (with limited central control), effective citizen participation, and a focus on localness (Olowu, 1998). While Olowu's definition appears comprehensive, it fails to capture the diversity of local governance systems across different countries. This raises important questions about the effectiveness of citizen participation in local governance, how it is measured, and the channels through which it occurs. These gaps in understanding local government, stemming from Olowu's definition, are relevant to my research questions, which I will examine and analyse within the Ghanaian context in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

The concept and practice of local government represent an organically established sub-administrative structure of the central government, operating within defined geographical boundaries. It operates under a legally devolved mandate to coordinate, plan, and implement activities based on a budgetary allocation and within the laws of the state. This highlights the importance of local needs, interests, and priorities, emphasising local participation, access, control, and the well-being of the local population. This perspective informs my research questions outline in Chapter 1. Next, I will examine the concept of decentralised local governance in the Ghanaian context.

2.5 Decentralised local government in Ghana

Decentralisation is upheld as being a significant development model that is expected to strengthen democratic tenets and improve service delivery significantly in so-called developing countries. From a global viewpoint, decentralisation was amongst other things, expected to scale down the colossal influence of the state; to redistribute political and administrative responsibilities; and to promote the discovery of new technologies in order to facilitate developments (Therkildsen, 2001) as part of the world bank/ International Monetary Fund (IMF) promoted structural adjustments and economic recovery programmes (SAP/ ERP) in Africa (Sakyi, 2008; Oquaye, 1995; Boafo-Arthur, 1999, and Olowu, 1999).

As a result of these prospects, several African nations adopted decentralisation with a view to, and emphasis on, addressing their socio-economic and political challenges and, above all, to drive national development (Ayee, 2010; Ahwoi, 2010). The desire to achieve rapid socio-economic and political development in this context, firmly re-establishes the need among nations, especially those with developing economies, to obliterate the huge influence of the state and to promote decentralised reforms for local governance (Sakyi, 2008).

Ghana's experience of decentralisation is no different from the above scenario. Since 1988, Ghana has implemented a local government programme under its decentralised reforms. It is claimed by some writers, that the primary purpose of Ghana's decentralisation programme was to elicit the participation of grassroots communities in the affairs of government, and to reform and empower local government authorities

as the focal points of the country's rural development (Koranteng, 2011; Couttollenc, 2012; Awortwi, 2011, and Ahwoi, 2010).

One cardinal objective of Ghana's decentralisation programme, from my analysis of literature on governance in Ghana, was to elicit the full and rigorous participation of grassroots communities in the affairs of government and in development actions (Inkoom, 2011; Awortwi, 2011, 2010; Ayee, 2010, 2000; Ahwoi, 2010; Robinson, 2007; Conyers, 2007; Crawford, 2004; the Local Government Act (LGA) of Ghana, 1993, and the Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992). Ghana's eventual adoption and implementation of decentralisation may primarily also have been motivated by the tenets of political decentralisation, in which power and authority from the central government is devolved to constitutionally mandated local authorities at the community level. This is evident in the LGA of 1993; Act 462, and the revised LGA of 2016, Act 936, in which decentralised institutions are mandated to co-ordinate the participation of grassroots communities in the development of local communities (Ahwoi, 2010).

The objectives of Ghana's decentralisation programme were to "result in the localisation of development" through active local community engagement in decision-making processes and the district assemblies' enhanced role (Kokor, 2004) in community development. Based on my review of the literature on decentralisation in Ghana, I would argue that DLG did not occur lineally in Ghana. The practice of DLG took on different shapes, forms and objectives, depending on the kind of regime in place at the time. The next section will examine the occurrence of decentralised governance reforms in Ghana.

2.6 An epoch of decentralised local governance in Ghana (1944 to 2016)

Ghana's experience with decentralisation is multifaceted. I argue that decentralised local governance became a top priority on Ghana's government development agenda since it was expected to be the focal point for local development initiatives. This development path was expected to enhance efficiency in public service delivery, to cut down on bureaucratic bottlenecks, to bring governance closer to the local people and to make the community central to decisions that affect them (Inkoom, 2011; Ayee, 2010; Awortwi, 2010, 2011; Ahwoi, 2010; Conyers, 2007; and Crawford, 2004). This,

however, does not hold true for all the reforms that preceded Ghana's decentralised local governance policy in each regime, whether that was democratic civilian rule or military rule, because the literature suggests that there are contrasting accounts of Ghana's attempts at decentralisation during different time periods. I shall now examine these reasons during the following three epochs: pre-Ghana's independence; immediately after independence, and from 1988 onwards.

2.6.1 The pre-independent decentralised local government arrangement

The historical narrative clearly demonstrates that British colonial administrators first governed Ghana (then the Gold Coast Colony) like all other West African British colonies, through a system that Crawford (2004) and Guri (2006) described as "indirect rule", in which local authorities were mostly composed of chiefs deemed loyal to the Crown, who served as local administrators on constituted local councils (Hoffman and Metzroth, 2010). For close to 70 years, between 1878 and 1944, this system of rule by the chiefs dominated the colonial government structure. My analysis of the literature shows that this system of government replaced the top-down accountability approach of the traditional chieftaincy rule, with a bottom-up accountability approach in which chiefs were more concerned with the colonial interests than that of their subjects (Hoffman and Metzroth, 2010; Nkrumah, 2000).

One objective of the system of British indirect rule was to reform the traditional chieftaincy institution to fit the 'modern' governance structure, in which chiefs could exercise local government functions. The system was to transfer greater reverence to the position and power of chiefs, as representatives of the Stool, (Ayee, 1994, p14). However, Kessey (1995, p58) viewed this position as untenable, arguing that chiefs in the colonial administration interpreted the confluence of the traditional and modern "to mean an additional authority for taxation".

It is the common understanding of writers in this discipline that, by 1945, there was rising agitation against colonial rule and in favour of Ghanaian independence, leading to the infamous 1948 Christiansburg Riots in Accra, where many civilians and members of the security forces lost their lives. The relationship between the traditional chieftaincy institution and the colonial administration deteriorated, and the indirect rule system of governance was no longer either sustainable or appealing (Hoffman and

Metzroth, 2010; Ayee, 1994; Kimble, 1963). Earlier, in 1947, the colonial administration had proposed the replacement of indirect rule with an “efficient and democratic system of local governance in each British dependency” (Kasfir, 1993, pp26-27), following a review of the recommendations of the *Watson Report* by Sir Henley Coussey.

In line with this proposal, the local government ordinance of 1951 ushered in a new wave of decentralised governance, which was intended to provide opportunities for the majority’s participation in governance, and to broaden the scope of lower level decision making authorities (Kessey, 1995; Boafo-Arthur, 2001). The four-tier system of local government, under the local government ordinance, had councils at the lower levels of the rungs that were made responsible for mobilising local resources for communal and self-help development projects. Kessey (1995), however, argues that it was a deliberate policy attempt by the colonial administration to avoid ethnocentric conflicts and power contention with the traditional councils. In practice, the changes to the local government policy did not improve matters. The system failed to function properly and remained thus until the end of colonial political rule and Ghana’s independence in 1957.

2.6.2 Ghana’s attempts to decentralise government before 1988

Ghana gained independence from colonial rule in March, 1957. Nkrumah, and his Convention Peoples’ Party (CPP), formed the first post-colonial government with Nkrumah as Prime Minister. Nkrumah’s government continued with the search for a better local government system. Thus it was with successive governments after Nkrumah. It is, however, widely claimed in the literature that a concern for decentralisation by these successive governments, including that of Nkrumah, was not to enhance the socio-economic and political advancement of the country, instead, it was a ploy to recentralise political power (Asibuo, 1992; Kessey, 1995; Oquaye, 1995; Crawford, 2004). Kessey, for example, claims that Nkrumah’s government immediately reorganised the 70 multi-purpose councils that existed prior to independence, into 183 municipal and local councils, and attempted to abolish the reserved seats for traditional authorities on district and local councils (Kessey, 1995).

Hoffman and Metzroth (2010) add that Nkrumah deliberately abolished the reserved seats for chiefs because he believed that the most powerful chiefs supported the opposition party, the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) (*see also:* Adjaye and Misawa, 2006; Asibuo, 1992). Crawford (2004) also asserts that Nkrumah later adopted the old-fashioned colonial trick of manipulating the chieftaincy institution to achieve his selfish desires, despite reforms that were enacted to democratise the local government structure. For instance, Nkrumah resorted to the appointment of paramount chiefs who were loyal to him to head elected municipal and district councils. Nkrumah's one-party socialist state policy was critiqued for weakening local government efforts in the newly independent country (Hoffman and Metzroth, 2010).

The 1966 overthrow of Nkrumah's CPP by the National Liberation Council (NLC) re-established the position of the chiefs as an influential traditional institution whose role was crucial to governance. This position was reflected in the 1969 Constitution, when the country returned to constitutional democracy. While Busia's Progress Party (PP) was not able to fully implement the NLC's recommendations, the PP government enacted the Local Administration Act (Act 359) in 1971 which, according to Ahwoi, "attempted to balance a system of quasi-autonomous elected councils and administration by agencies of central government" (Ahwoi, 2010, p23). Dr. Busia's government promoted rural development and was receptive to the tenets of decentralisation, in principle, Asibuo (1992) argued that Dr. Busia's government failed to demonstrate enough political commitment to make the system work. The PP government was also accused of attempts to recentralise and control the local government system when it subjected local government institutions to the general supervision and command of the Minister of Local Government, and the appointment of the Chairperson of the District Council by the Prime Minister.

The ousting of the Busia PP government led to major reforms of local government structure, which showed a complete departure from all previous reforms. For instance, the National Redemption Council (NRC) amended Act 359, eliminating the thin line between central and local government and further abolishing local council elections. The NRC thus became the appointing authority for more than 65% of the representation on District Councils, with the remainder being reserved for appointment by the traditional authorities. The NRC also replaced the Chairman of the District

Council with a District Chief Executive (DCE), a position that remains today (Hoffman and Metzroth, 2010; Ayee, 1994). This disposition meant the collapse of the accountability to, and the participation of, the local levels in the country's governance structure.

The Supreme Military Council (SMC) replaced the NRC in 1975, but was shortly overthrown by SMC-II, before it could implement any further local government reforms. The new government commissioned a review of the DLG system thus far, but did not last long enough to implement its recommendations before it was removed, through another military coup, by Rawlings' Armed Forces Revolutionary Council. Rawlings was a junior military officer at the time. Prior to its removal from office, it managed to conduct district level elections in 1978, although they were poorly attended. The elections, however, had a profound impact on both DLG and national politics. As Ayee (1994) observed, the election was indicative of General Akuffo's government's support for political decentralisation. The AFRC that succeeded SMC-II did not focus on local governance but was concerned with returning the country to constitutional rule. Hence, in 1979, the third Republican Constitution was promulgated. The new constitution made provision for DLG under Article 7. It states that it would:

> *"Decentralise the administrative machinery to the regions and districts in order to permit, to the extent… consistent with sound and effective administration and control the transaction of government business at the regional and district levels" (Republic of Ghana, 1979).*

The Peoples' National Party (PNP) government of Dr. Hilla Limann that emerged in the 1979 elections thus announced the creation of additional districts, but could not inaugurate them before it was removed from government, barely two and half years into its administration, again by Rawlings' PNDC, in 1981. The PNDC continued to explore mechanisms for enhancing DLG when it assumed the reins of government in the coup.

"Power to the people" was the popular mantra with which the PNDC government demonstrated its commitment to the introduction of popular democracy and efficient local government, right from the beginning of its revolution in 1981. Through a Public Administration Restructuring and Decentralisation Implementation Committee (PARDIC), the PNDC government began to review all decentralised policies put in

place since independence, in order to provide a blueprint for the establishment of a sustainable local government framework. Oquaye (1995) and Mohan (1996), however, argue that these reviews were set in motion as part of the measures and conditions of the ERP of the1980s. Another reason assigned to the PNDC's show of interest in local government was that it wanted to appease grassroots communities and gain their favour for deposing a constitutionally elected people's government that had barely settled into office (Oquaye, 1995).

2.6.3 The big push to decentralising governance in Ghana (1988 onwards)

The promulgation of a Local Government Law in 1988, PNDC's Law 207, meant that it put in place the "critical building blocks for the construction of true democracy" (Ahwoi, 2000, p1), and it has since expanded the frontiers of local governance in Ghana. The current manifestation of Ghanaian local government is anchored on PNDC Law 207. This 1988 Law had the character of both political and administrative decentralisation, with an emphasis on participatory governance. I argue that the PNDC government was merely yielding to civil society and international pressures to return the country to constitutional rule, and to cut back on government influence. Whatever the intention, the PNDC government demonstrated, at least on paper, its commitment to participatory democracy across all local levels.

The Local Government Law, (Act 462) of 1993, replaced PNDC Law 207 when the 1992 Constitution came into force. However, the new constitution incorporated the doctrines of PNDC Law 207 under Chapters 6 and 20. The Directive Principles of State Policy, under Chapter 6 of the 1992 Constitution, thus states that it will:

> *"Make democracy a reality by decentralizing the administrative and financial machinery of government to the regions and districts and by affording all possible opportunities to the people to participate in decision-making at every level in national life and government" (Ghana, 1992; Article 35: 6d).*

Chapter 20 of the 1992 Constitution spells out the following five key principles of the operationalisation and decentralisation of local governance in Ghana:

a. the Ghanaian parliament should enact appropriate laws to facilitate the coordinated transfer of functions, powers, responsibilities, and resources from the central government to local government units.

b. the Ghanaian parliament should instigate processes suitable for enriching the capacity of local government authorities in planning, initiating, coordinating, managing, and executing policies that affect the local people.

c. The Ghanaian parliament should establish for each local government unit, a sound financial base with adequate and reliable revenue streams.

d. local authorities should exercise control over the personnel of the local government unit.

e. local authorities should provide ample opportunities for popular participation in the decision-making processes of the local area.

These provisions, enshrined in the Constitution, give legal status to the implementation of DLG in Ghana. I argue that the DLG policy of Ghana was designed to empower communities to be able to effectively participate in the decision-making processes that firstly affect them, and secondly, those decisions that relate to the overall management and development of the rural areas. Yet these objectives have eluded the country since the upscaling of the policy in 1988 (Ahwoi, 2010; Ahwoi, 2000; Ayee, 1997; Oquaye, 1995; Hoffman and Metzroth, 2010; Crawford, 2004).

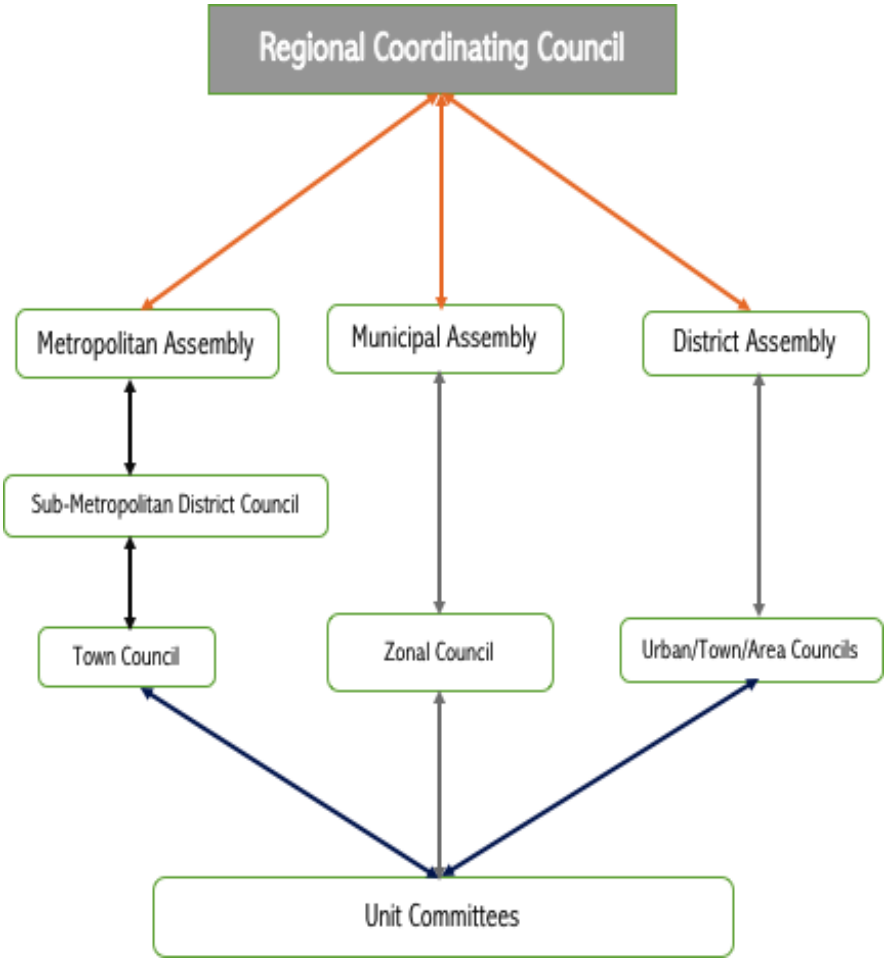
2.7 The structure of Ghana's decentralised local government system

The LGA of 1988 (PNDC Law 207) was enacted to regulate the country's local government programme. The Act established a four-tier metropolitan, and a three-tier municipal and district, assembly structure, as the highest political authority in a local government area. Figure1, below gives a summary of the structure of Ghana's DLG administration. This structure is informed by the programme's objective to devolve government machinery to the local level (Ayee, 2010; Ahwoi, 2010; Oquaye, 1995; Constitution of Ghana, 1992; LGA, 1988, 1993).

At the top of the structure is an un-elected Regional Coordinating Council (RCC) that is tasked with the responsibility of coordinating the activities of all District Assemblies in the region. It is headed by a regional minister, who is appointed by the Executive President of the Republic of Ghana. Below that structure are the Assemblies that are designated MMDAs, which have planning and rural development functions. Further beneath the Assembly are the sub-structures designated Town/Zonal/Urban/Area Councils. The lowest organisations in the structure are the Unit Committees. The

Assembly remains an important unit in Ghana's DLG structure, due to its ascribed roles and the functionaries involved.

Fig.1: ***Structure of Ghana's Decentralised Local Governance Administration***



Source: *Local Government Act of 1988 (PNDCL 207).*

2.7.1 The District Assembly model of decentralised governance in Ghana

The District Assembly is essentially the nerve system of Ghana's DLG development model, and has "planning, deliberative, legislative, and executive powers" (Article 245, 1992 Constitution). A central function of the District Assembly is its responsibility to ensure the overall development of the local area through local participation (Gyimah-Boadi, 2009, and Ahwoi, 2010). The Assembly is comprised of a Chief Executive, appointed by the Executive President of the Republic of Ghana; Assembly Members, 70% of whom are elected by universal adult suffrage to represent small communities that are known as electoral areas. The Executive President appoints the remaining 30% of Assembly Members in consultation with traditional rulers and interest groups

in the district. The member(s) of parliament as ex-officio members. A civil servant designated as Coordinating Director is appointed by the local government council and serves as the Secretary to the Assembly.

The District Chief Executive is the political and administrative head of the Assembly. His functions are enshrined in Section 20, Act 936 of the LGA 2016. Primarily, the DCE is the chief representative of the central government in the Assembly. He presides over meetings of the Executive Committee of the Assembly and oversees the day-to-day operations of the Assembly's executive and administrative functions.

The Assembly Member (AM), whose duties are spelt out in Act 936 of the LGA 2016, is the central focus of the local government structure since its objective, as stated earlier, is to promote local community participation in governance. Anaafo (2019, p13) argues that the "assembly members are at the centre of the decentralisation process of Ghana", because "they are the link between the district assembly and the various communities or electoral areas that make up the district". The AM is the direct representative of the local people in the Assembly. He carries the voice and sentiments of his people to the Assembly for redress. He is entrusted with the mandate of the people in his electoral area in order to look after their welfare, to link them to both social and economic opportunities that are available from both government and non-governmental organisations in the district.

As a constitutional mandate, the AM is expected to maintain close ties with his local communities and to actively participate in influencing local policies that will be of practical benefit to his constituents. Consultation with local communities on key matters of importance to local community development is at the heart of Ghana's participatory democracy, and this is demonstrated through the local governance system. Assembly Members are to serve as the bridge between the Assembly and the local community, and should constantly consult with the community on major public policy issues (Gyimah-Boadi, 2009; Ahwoi, 2010; Tettey, 2006, and Ofei-Aboagye, 2009). Through these routine consultations, the AM is expected to articulate the views and position of his communities on such policies at Assembly meetings. The AM is expected, by the dictates of LGA 2016 (Act 936), to be a civic educator and the courier of local government policies and programmes.

Assembly Members also perform a watchdog role as the people's representatives at the local Assembly. They are the chief monitoring and evaluation officers of local government projects in their electoral areas. They should have full knowledge of the projects that are being undertaken in their communities and of the quality that is expected. They organise the local communities to take particular interest in projects, and raise objections about poor quality jobs, delays in starting and completing projects and, to a very large extent, to ensure that there is local content in project executions.

Ghana's local government administration places emphasis on participatory democratic governance. The Constitution of the Republic of Ghana (1992), the LGA 462 (1993), and other statutory legislation provide for active community participation in both local and national development and, in particular, in the decentralised governance process (Ahwoi, 2010, and Awortwi, 2011). To emphasise governments' commitment to the decentralised governance system in Ghana, a District Assembly Common Fund (DACF) was created by law, in 1993, to allocate financial resources from the country's consolidated funds to the MMDAs for their development planning, administration and activity implementation (Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992). This, however, has yet to be seen, as civil society groups and governance scholars continue to highlight low citizen participation in Ghana's DLG system, the partisan politicisation of the District Assembly, and the President's prerogative to appoint members to the local assembly, as some of the key factors affecting the proper functioning of the decentralised local governance administration in Ghana. By extension, this impacts on the country's rural development efforts (MFWA, 2014; Ayee, 1997, 2000, 2001, and Crawford, 2004). In the next section, I will examine the challenges that arise from the present decentralised arrangements in Ghana and how these undermine the participation of grassroots communities in local government programmes.

2.7.2 The challenges arising from the present decentralisation arrangements

Ghana's DLG administration was modelled on the bottom-up approach in order to provide decision-making powers to local communities. The policy framework establishing local government in Ghana sought to promote citizen participation in decision-making at the local level through the devolution of power, the deconcentration of functions and the delegation of responsibilities to local administrations (Ahenkan, Bawole and Domfeh, 2013; Ahwoi, 2010; Ayee, 2010; Awortwi, 2011; LGA 462, 1993,

and LGA 936, 2016). DLG was seen as an efficient catalyst for rural development, as the structure was expected to play significant roles in the administration and development of Ghana's rural areas (Ahwoi, 2010; Ayee, 2010; Awortwi, 2011). That is to say, DLG was to facilitate the development of Ghana's rural areas and to improve the local socio-economic conditions of the country's peripheries. Yet, after 3 decades of implementation, the extent to which Ghana's DLG system reflects the participation of grassroots communities in practical terms is still unclear. To a large extent, it is unclear what level of success Ghana's DLG programme has achieved in effectively engaging with local participation for the socio-economic development of rural communities. These topics are worth highlighting for the following reasons:

i. Although the PNDC Law 207 emboldened Ghana's efforts at DLG, it fell far short of completely devolving power to grassroots communities. While it significantly improved the system under the 1974 reforms through the introduction of local elections, only two-thirds of the Members of the decentralised Assembly (MMDAs) are directly elected on a non-partisan basis at the polls that are conducted every four years. The remaining one-third of members are appointed by the central government.

ii. The local community has no power to elect, to appoint or to remove the head of the local Assembly, the Chief Executive. Elected members cannot appoint one of their own to this position. Rather, the position is reserved for nomination by the Executive President, and put up for confirmation by both the two-thirds elected members and the one-third appointed Members of the Assembly.

iii. Contrary to the participatory goals of the decentralised system, there are no social communication systems and strategies that effectively connect the local government administration to grassroots communities so as to enhance efficient communication flow at the local level. This tends to alienate grassroots communities and to underutilise local potential. It also disempowers grassroots communities from effectively participating in local decision-making.

These arrangements in the local government reform of 1988 have implications for the participation of grassroots communities in the local government administration in Ghana. What is yet to be seen from the literature is the level of success of the DLG

system in Ghana, and how the policy's overall objective of enlisting the participation of grassroots communities in development initiatives for rural development purposes has progressed thus far. My research will, in part, therefore, examine this gap. The argument I make is based on my analysis of the literature, and it is that political capture of the local government administration, low voter turnout and the lack of an effective system of communication are the key limitations to Ghana's attainment of its DLG policy objectives. I shall now examine these implications in detail.

First, contrary to arguments that the reservation of one-third of appointments to the MMDAs will allow the President to appoint technical people with the needed expertise to the Assembly, to balance out the representation of minority and marginalised groups, including women and chiefs in local government affairs (Ayee and Dickovick, 2010), evidence from the practice so far indicates that the arrangement is only an opportunity for the governing party to reward its loyalists. The one-third of appointments to the Assembly go to political party agents and cronies, rather than experts and minority groups. Consistent with this view, an Executive President has always appointed the MMDCE from amongst the bigwigs of the governing party at the local level. In most instances, the position is used to appease a failed parliamentary candidate from the ruling party. This has resulted in situations where the central government has had subtle control of local politics and development outcomes at the local level (Crawford, 2010). This has further weakened the governance sub-structures that are set up to promote the participation of grassroots communities at the local level.

Second, in practice, elections are one of the important vehicles by means of which citizens exercise their right to participate in governance, yet local level elections in Ghana have consistently recorded low voter turnout, if compared to presidential and parliamentary elections. This is an indication that grassroots communities are not confident of the benefits that emanate from local level decision making processes, hence, voter apathy in local elections. Again, contrary to the Constitutional provisions barring partisan political participation in local government elections, the reality today in Ghana is that the DLG system, as practised, is more partisan in character. Behind closed doors, political parties sponsor candidates for local elections, electorates subtly vote for candidates on partisan lines, due to political party involvement (Ghana News

Agency, 2015). Even the election of a presiding member from amongst members is carried out with partisan considerations. The reasoning behind this is that political parties are more concerned about their political fortunes at the local levels, and, for this reason, they have contrived strategies to evade the Constitutional provision of nonpartisanship, while at the same time avoiding the political consequences of an explicitly partisan electoral system (Abdulai, 2017; Adamtey, 2014).

Finally, the apparent disconnect between grassroots communities and the local government administration is largely due to the lack of an effective mechanism or of systems of social communication to facilitate interaction and to enlist the participation of grassroots communities, has greatly undermined the achievement of the goals of Ghana's decentralised government programme. Contrary to evidence that community media foster social cohesion, incentivise local initiatives, promote social mobilisation and contribute to community building, the decentralised policy framework has, from the outset, failed to identify the inherent potentials of community media and to integrate it into the local government structure. The results of this omission of appropriate communication channels to encourage the participation of grassroots communities are the gaps and disparities that we encounter in policy formulation and implementation by MMDAs. The participation of grassroots communities in the decision-making processes, at the local level, continue to be low and their needs and aspirations are often not attended to.

2.8 Conclusion to the chapter

In this chapter, I examined the concept of CR drawing extensively from the arguments of citizen media and radical media. I argued that CRs have great potential for the mobilisation of grassroots communities, dialogue and information sharing, which together lead to the empowerment of grassroots communities in the development process. I analysed the concept of "community" as applied in CRB, which helped me to arrive at a conceptual definition of CR for the purposes of this study. I examined the Ghana's media ecosystem and analysed key features of CR ecology and infrastructural dynamics. I argued that within the broader media landscape, broadcasting policies and regulatory frameworks has significant impact on the ecology of CR, influencing its operations by either enabling or restricting its functions. I noted that a well-regulated broadcasting system in the context of democratic states,

promotes content pluralism and diversity. The chapter established a link between CR and the concept of decentralisation and local governance. I critiqued the conceptual debates in search of an appropriate definition of decentralisation. I examined the concept of local government and how the type of decentralisation that is practiced in Ghana has an impact on its local governance functions. An historical perspective of DLG in Ghana is analysed in three historical periods, which are pre-Ghana's independence (colonial rule), immediately post-Ghana's independence (civilian and military regimes) and the big push from 1988 until recently. I examined the structure of Ghana's decentralised local government administration and went on to analyse the functions performed by some of the key functionaries, including the Assembly Member and the Chief Executive of the Assembly. Through these analyses, I highlighted the key challenges arising from the present decentralised governance arrangement and their implications for the participation of grassroots communities in local government decision-making processes at the Assembly. I argued that Ghana's current decentralisation arrangement encourages recentralisation of governance, rather than being a complete devolution of decision-making authority to local communities.

CHAPTER THREE

PARTICIPATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction to the chapter

This research draws extensively on participatory and development communication (PDC) as the theoretical model for examining the complex interrelationship between CR, participation, and local governance in Ghana. Participatory development theories provide a framework that recognises the active role of communities in shaping governance processes and the transformative potential of communication in development contexts. The choice of PDC as a theoretical framework for this study is largely informed, firstly by the theory's emphasis on the implication of understanding local context, communication systems and cultural practices in development practice. Secondly, PDC theory examines inherent power dynamics within traditional societies and explains how communication processes addresses systemic injustices in development practice and bring about social change in local communities. Finally, PDC challenges dominant theoretical approaches to development practice including the modernisation paradigm and critiqued its apparent failure in bringing about development that meets the needs of the local communities.

In this chapter, I will examine some earlier theoretical propositions that have been applied to modelling the concept and practice of development around the world, especially in developing economies such as Ghana. In particular, the chapter considers a decolonial critique of the modernisation approach to development practice and explores the power dynamics and inequalities in participatory and development practice. The chapter also examines participation as empowerment and analyse Freire's dialogical pedagogy and its relevance to local media and engagement with respect to local governance. The place of participation in Ghana's DLG development model is examined and the challenges to participation in development processes argued.

3.2 Overview of the modernisation theory of development

The emergence of modernisation theory coincided with the Western world's fascination with technology and its economic achievements shortly after World War II. As the conflicts of war subsided, a Cold War ensued between the Soviets and the West. President Harry Truman who recognised the political advantage of extending financial assistance to poorer nations, devised a comprehensive aid package to help Western Europe recover from the devastating effects of the war. Truman's aid programme aimed to secure the allegiance of leaders in developing countries by providing them with monetary support and technical assistance from the United States. However, this aid was not without conditions, as it was disguised as a means of promoting development but came with various stipulations attached. Consequently, the Western model of development was introduced to the developing world (Escobar, 1995 and Chambers, 1997).

Early advocates of modernisation theory perceived a dichotomy between traditional and modern societies (Lerner, 1958). Traditional societies, characterised by their rural lifestyles, were viewed as fatalistic and superstitious. It was believed that individuals within these societies simply assumed predetermined roles and carried out daily tasks in the same manner as their ancestors, without any inclination for change or innovation. Lerner (1958) associated modernisation with the concept of 'westernisation' and proposed that development encompassed the following elements:

i. A core group of adaptable individuals who possessed a psychological inclination that facilitated their acceptance of rapid changes in both their personal lives and the broader social system.
ii. A powerful mass media system that reinforced and expedited societal and individual transformations by disseminating new ideas and attitudes conducive to development.
iii. The interconnections between key indicators such as urbanisation, literacy, media exposure, and economic and political participation, establishing a modern society akin to the Western model.

In traditional societies, power was inherited and dispersed, with a focus on practical matters and the present moment (Rostow, 1960). In contrast, modern society was characterised by an increasingly urban social structure, where individuals were open

to new ideas and could prioritise matters beyond immediate relevance, including future-oriented thinking. Modern individuals were regarded as rational, shedding superstitions, and having a strong belief in humanity's ability to shape the world, resulting in a heightened sense of personal control over their lives. The proponents of modernisation theory believed that in modern societies, people exhibit greater empathy towards one another and are more inclined towards democratic values (Inkeles and Smith, 1974). Despite waning popularity in the 1950s and 1960s, modernisation theory persisted in its efforts to transform the mindset of individuals in traditional societies through the influence of enlightened members within those societies, often referred to as change agents or the modernising elite.

Modernism, as postulated by Harrison (1988), posited that individuals in traditional societies were integral to a unified nation-state and that culture and economics were closely interconnected. Rostow's (1960) prediction of societies progressing towards modernity, characterised by increasing urbanisation and government investments in transportation, mass communication, and education to facilitate capital expansion, greatly influenced modernisation theories. While these ideas faced challenges over time, Lerner's (1958) concept of mass media as a crucial component of modernisation persisted, with the belief that it served as a medium for disseminating new ideas and attitudes. It is from this perspective that the early conception of mass media broadcasting took root, particularly radio, which colonial and post-colonial governments viewed as a means to transfer new ideas and attitudes nationwide, aiming for rapid social change.

Critics of modernist theory highlighted inherent cultural biases, such as the assumption that the Western model of life was ideal, a linear and narrow vision of progress, and the existence of a modernising elite. These factors served as evidence that modernisation theory was not suitable for all societies. The elites, as exemplified in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, demonstrated their capacity to establish repressive regimes under the guise of modernisation (Harrison, 1988). In fact, increased industrialisation, as advocated by modernism, did not universally lead to democracy and economic benefits. Instead, it often resulted in authoritarian rule and exacerbated the wealth disparity both within nations and globally (Agunga, 1997; Mowlana and

Wilson, 1990). This approach was deeply offensive to many in the Third World who found the notion that tradition was inherently backward to be highly objectionable.

One frequently criticised aspect of modernisation theory was the perception among development organisations, typically staffed and based in foreign countries, that they possessed superior knowledge and capabilities as development actors. This belief stemmed from the notion that development involved teaching impoverished groups the wisdom of the affluent. Consequently, Third World countries became reliant on developed nations for social and material support during their pursuit of development. In response, dependency theorists emerged, advocating for Third World nations to regain control over their own destinies and break free from dependency on external assistance (Agunga, 1997; Mowlana and Wilson, 1990).

3.2.1 The dependency theory of development

The dependency theorists form a distinct group of economists whose ideas have gained prominence in the field of development theory. They argue that Third World countries become dependent on developed nations, often under the guise of development. One way this dependency is established is by transforming the middle class within these countries into the comprador bourgeoisie, leading them to rely on the West for guidance and assistance instead of seeking solutions domestically.

According to the dependency theorists, many countries are not in a state of development but rather underdeveloped due to external factors, including unfavourable terms of trade that afflict most Third World nations. This school of thought asserts that international forces work to create systems of poverty, which are essentially institutions that serve the interests of the industrialised world and perpetuate the poverty and reliance of the Third World. As a result of this economic analysis, the political implication is that the benefits of growth do not distribute evenly throughout the economy, as classical economists believed. Moreover, due to conflicting interests within societies, those in power utilise growth to further their own agendas. Consequently, terms of trade, production choices, and investment patterns all reinforce the interests of certain societal groups at the expense of others (Bryant and White 1982).

The humanist approach views development as liberation from poverty and an expanded self-perception. Humanists posit that development involves improving one's self-esteem and capacity to make choices about the future. Building on Denis Goulet's ideas, Todaro (1977) identified several fundamental values of development. Firstly, there is the concept of life sustenance, which encompasses the ability to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, health, and protection. Secondly, self-esteem refers to an individual's sense of worth and self-respect, as well as the ability to avoid being exploited by others for their own purposes. Lastly, development entails freedom from servitude.

These core values articulated by Todaro (1977) hold particular relevance for developing communities in their pursuit of development. For these communities, development must involve breaking free from alienating material circumstances of life and social subjugation to nature, ignorance, other individuals, misery, institutions, and dogmatic beliefs. It necessitates the intentional utilisation of communication methods in their daily communal life to empower them and harness their strengths and indigenous knowledge for the betterment of their community. This viewpoint aligns with the perspective of development communication advocates.

3.2.2 Development communication theory

The practice of development communication has its roots in the 1940s, but it gained popularity after World War II as a means to address developmental issues arising from the war. Early communication theorists like Wilbur Schramm and Daniel Lerner proposed that radio and television could be utilised in the most disadvantaged countries to bring about significant progress. They drew inspiration from the perceived success of wartime propaganda, disseminated through publications and films. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, development communication as a theoretical framework became widely recognised, with the works of Lerner (1958), Schramm (1964), and Rogers (1962, 1969) highlighting the importance of communication in meeting the development needs of Third World countries.

However, by the mid-1970s, the initial enthusiasm surrounding the “modernisation theory of development communication” put forth by Lerner (1958), Schramm (1964), and Rogers (1969) began to wane. Development practitioners and researchers grew

increasingly disillusioned with the outcomes of numerous development interventions that employed a top-down communication model. In certain Third World countries, socioeconomic and political factors hindered the acceptance of “modernised” changes by the masses. Moreover, the approach of development thinking resulted in imbalances and perpetuated inequality, benefiting only a particular segment of the community- the “haves”- while marginalising the “have-nots”. This led to deep-rooted poverty and persistent inequality, with the voiceless and non-educated members of society being disregarded in decision-making processes (Riley 1994, pp16-21).

Over the years, various definitions of development communication have emerged. Rajasunderam (1981, p7) defines it as “the discipline and practice of communication in the context of developing countries”, while Quebral (1973, p25) describes it as “the art and science of human communication applied to the rapid transformation of a country from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth, enabling greater economic and social equality and the fulfilment of human potential”. These groundbreaking ideas on development communication espoused by Prof. Quebral seems to go beyond the notion of simply imparting information or knowledge to people with the aim of influencing their attitudes, practices, or adoption of new technologies. It signifies a deeper process of unravelling and addressing the underlying factors that contribute to structural inequality, marginalisation, and disempowerment, ultimately hindering individuals and societies from making substantial improvements to their well-being and quality of life.

McPhail (2009) perceives development communication as the systematic or strategic process of intervening with media (print, radio, telephony, video, and the Internet) or education (training, literacy, schooling) to bring about positive social change. This change can encompass economic, personal, spiritual, social, cultural, or political aspects (McPhail, 2009, p3). Bessette (1999) defines development communication as “the process by which people become leading actors in their own development”. Bessette emphasises that through communication for development, individuals who were previously regarded as mere recipients of development information, often from external “development experts”, become the initiators of their development priorities. Bessette recognises the pivotal role of the community in sustainable development interventions, highlighting that without the involvement of the community, efforts to

improve their standard of living and well-being will fail to achieve desired objectives. Involvement from the community, starting from identifying their development challenges to conceiving strategies and implementing solutions, is crucial for significant socio-cultural, political, and economic advancements (Bessette, 1999, p9).

From various critical perspectives, several schools of thought have emerged regarding the use of communication for development purposes. Manyozo (2006) advocates for the classification and discussions of development communication under six distinct schools: the Bretton Woods paradigm, the Latin American school, the Indian school, the Los Baños school, the African school, and the Participatory Development Communication (PDC) school.

The Bretton Woods paradigm of development communication originated after World War II, when there was a pressing need for a Marshall Plan for development. This led to the establishment of the Bretton Woods institutions, namely the WB and the IMF, in 1944 (Manyozo, 2006; Melkote and Steeves, 2001; Kumar, 1994; Servaes, 2008). Daniel Lerner, Wilbur Schramm, and Everett Rogers were key proponents of the Bretton Woods School. Proponents of this paradigm advocated for the wholesale introduction of development practices into indigenous and less developed societies. They associated communication with the modernisation perspective of development, viewing it as a powerful tool for transmitting messages to promote modern societies (Manyozo, 2006; 2012; Escobar, 1995). They argued that communication takes the form of market research, aiding in decision-making regarding development goals, and promoting development ideas and associated technologies to target audiences (Mowlana,1985; Escobar, 1995).

The Latin American School of development communication dates back to the 1940s when Radio Sutatenza in Colombia and Radios Mineras in Bolivia employed participatory and educational rural radio approaches to empower marginalised communities (Diaz Bordenave, 1977; Gumucio-Dagron, 2001). These initiatives are considered among the earliest models of participatory broadcasting in the world. In the 1960s, Paolo Freire's theories of critical pedagogy and Miguel Sabido’s enter-educate method gained popularity and became integral components of the Latin American development communication scene. Other researchers who have

contributed to this school include Juan Diaz Bordenave, Luis Ramiro Beltran, and Alfonso Gumucio Dagron (Manyozo, 2006).

In the 1940s, India's efforts in development communication included rural radio broadcasts conducted in indigenous languages such as Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, and Kannada. In the 1950s, the country intensified its utilisation of communication to expedite community development projects initiated by the central government. Guided by the socialist principles outlined in the country's constitution, the first generation of politicians launched large-scale development programmes nationwide and employed field publicity to educate the predominantly non-literate population (Manyozo, 2006). Government publicity efforts encompassed interpersonal communication as well as the use of radio for mass education. Universities, particularly those focused on agriculture, along with other educational institutions and international organisations under the UN umbrella, undertook developmental communication experiments and further expanded the theoretical foundations (Mowlana 1985).

In the Philippines, the systematic study and practice of development communication commenced in the 1970s, largely influenced by the pioneering scholarly work of Professor Nora C. Quebral. In 1972, Professor Quebral coined the term “Development Communication” at a Symposium of the University of the Philippines College of Agriculture (UPCA). Her inspiration stemmed from the works of Alan Chalkley, Wilbur Schramm, Daniel Lerner, and other earlier communication scholars (Manyozo 2006; Jamias 1975; Mowlana 1985). The adoption of the term “development communication” by UPCA aligned with the institution's efforts to bridge agricultural research with farmers and other users of agricultural data in the Philippines (Bessette and Rajasunderam, 1996; Lent, 1977). The college's experiments in agricultural communication became the foundation for the emergence of the concept of development communication as both an academic theory and a field of practice in the Philippines and across Asia at large.

The African school of development communication originated from the post-colonial and communist movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Inspired by the effective use of communication in agricultural development demonstrated by the Los Baños School and supported by the Bretton Woods Institutions to drive rapid development in emerging independent states, Africa employed radio in its development agenda. In

Anglophone Africa, development communication involved the use of radio and theatre for community education, adult literacy, health education, and agricultural extension. Meanwhile, radio was being developed as a tool for promoting rural development in Francophone Africa with sponsorship from the Bretton Woods institutions (Mowlana 1985). It is worth noting that while the intention was to pursue a people-centered development approach in Africa, the use of broadcasting as a tool followed the perspective of modernisation proponents like Rogers. Development information was disseminated to rural dwellers seen as passive recipients without any knowledge of a modern system. This approach led to many development projects failing to achieve their desired objectives. The equating of development with “modernisation” and “westernisation” was identified as a contributing factor (Moemeka 1999). In the 1970s, there was a widespread recognition that the prevailing models of development, based on modernisation and strong centralised states, were not only ineffective but also resulted in significant injustices and human rights violations worldwide. The next subsection analyses key critiques of the modernisation paradigm of development.

3.2.3 Critique of the modernisation theory of development

Scholars in the field of development communication criticised modernisation for its narrow focus on economic growth at the expense of other important factors. One crucial aspect overlooked by modernisation was the role of democracy and governance (Manyozo, 2017; Chambers, 1997; Kabeer, 1994 and Escobar, 1995). The belief that economic growth, education, and urbanisation, facilitated by communication, would automatically lead to democratic governance was proven wrong. Scholars such as Manyozo (2006; 2017), Escobar (1995), Hyden et’al. (2002) and Okigbo and Eribo (2004) argue that development encompasses more than just economic growth and requires attention to social, cultural, and political issues for optimal outcomes. Therefore, the neglect of governance considerations by the modernisation approach significantly contributed to its failure, as it paid little attention to establishing and maintaining institutions and promoting appropriate public policies.

A related issue to the lack of focus on governance was the centralised systems of development, which excluded citizen participation in policy design and implementation. Development programmes were often devised by local elites in capital cities under the guidance of foreign specialists, leading to a lack of ownership

and ultimately failure to achieve objectives (Manyozo, 2017; Chambers, 1997 and Gumucio-Dagron, 2001). Local communities in developing countries either reacted passively or rejected many development interventions. For instance, in the areas of agriculture and family planning programmes, the transfer of technology from developed to developing countries often failed because decisions were made without considering the knowledge and preferences of the farmers themselves. Additionally, the extension model overlooked contextual differences (Escobar, 1995). Unlike Europe and America, where institutions supporting agriculture, such as credit, transportation, and marketing systems, were well-developed, colonial countries lacked such infrastructure.

Paolo Freire, a Brazilian educationist and philosopher, criticised development programmes, particularly in agriculture, from a liberation perspective. Freire (1972) questioned the value judgment of early development theorists who considered agricultural practices in developing countries as backward and obstacles to development. He argued that persuading people to adopt new ideas without considering existing cultures amounted to domesticating them.

Despite significant financial injections from the West, many development programmes failed due to corruption and embezzlement by local elites. The centralised allocation of national resources in state-controlled economies facilitated corruption, as those in power controlled the government machinery. Gumucio-Dagron (2001) lamented that involving beneficiaries in development projects would have significantly improved the lives of people in developing countries. Consequently, scholars like White (2009) argue that modernisation sowed the seeds of bad governance by establishing authoritarian systems with one-party governments in post-colonial countries. Independence movements led to the creation of states on the foundations of colonial governments, granting enormous power to Europeanised colonial elites and reinforcing existing systems of class, caste, racial discrimination, and peasant oppression. Consequently, chronic political instability and high levels of poverty-based crime plagued many post-colonial countries in Latin America and Africa.

These circumstances contradicted the arguments of development theorists who believed that only the educated elites were capable of governing, while the rural and urban poor were incapable of self-governance. The evidence of mismanagement,

corruption, and inefficiency in governance provided by the governing elites themselves, particularly during the political crises of the 1980s, disproved this argument. It became evident that the governance of the elites only served to enrich themselves without leading to meaningful development or improving the conditions of the masses living in poverty, both in rural and urban areas. As a result, the participatory development paradigm emerged, seeking to prioritise the involvement of community members in development planning and governance decision making processes.

3.3 Overview of the participatory development theory

Mefalopulos (2003) notes that although there is a broad consensus on participatory approaches, they have not led to a unified paradigm. Instead, they have given rise to several well-intentioned models that are not always harmonious with each other. Mefalopulos goes on to identify various fragments of the participatory paradigm that have emerged in the development discourse at different times.

These fragments include the “multiplicity paradigm” proposed by Servaes (1991), the “autonomous development” paradigm presented by Carmen (1996), the “another development” approach advocated by Melkote (1991) and Jacobson (1994), the “empowerment approach” formulated by Friedman (1992), the “liberation approach” discussed by Freire (1997), and the “dialogue approach” articulated by Guba (1990).

Regardless of their differences, all these participatory schools share essential characteristics. They place a strong emphasis on people, adopt an indigenous perspective on development, and address power imbalances within the social structure of a community. Advocates of this development paradigm seek to fundamentally transform traditional approaches. They advocate for a development model where dialogue between development agents and beneficiary communities is central, and information flows horizontally across all segments of the population. To understand the nuanced and complex fusion of the participatory theory of development, first, I analyse attempts at defining the concept of participation in development practice.

3.4 Attempts to define participation

Over the years, scholars and development practitioners have emphasised the various ways in which participation can enhance development interventions in both rural and urban communities. However, the implementation of this concept has led to different interpretations, resulting in its ambiguity. Finding a universally accepted definition for participation in community development is challenging. Discussions on the concept revolve not only around its interpretation but also the key actors involved in participatory processes, the timing of participation in community development initiatives, the beneficiaries of participatory actions, and the underlying interests and expected levels of participation (Agrawal, 2001; Chambers, 1997 and White, 1996).

These concerns reflect the acknowledgment that rightsholders are not a homogenous group, necessitating special consideration for minority and disadvantaged groups. Nevertheless, a common thread among the various definitions of participation is the essential role of the community in decisions that affect them. This notion is evident in definitions that are often criticised for being narrow or simplistic (For example, Ndekha et al., 2003; Prince and Mylius, 1991; Michener, 1998; UNESCO, 1979; The UN, 1981 and The WB, 1994). Some scholars link participation with power relations and define it accordingly (See: Oakley, 1995; Parry, George, and Neil, 1992; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995).

Based on my analysis of participatory literature, I argue that while participation is a broad concept, its application varies depending on the context. However, a consistent theme across the aforementioned literature is the importance of grassroots communities' concerns as the foundation of participatory programmes. Therefore, any attempt to conceptualise participation should prioritise the involvement of grassroots communities. In this context, I propose that participation is a deliberate and systematic process that actively engages grassroots communities as central elements with significant power, control, and influence over all matters impacting their lives. This approach ensures that local communities play an integral role in decision-making regarding their progress. They are not passive recipients of development messages; rather, they are key actors who contribute their indigenous knowledge, local experience, and expertise to identify and address local issues.

The absence of a universally applicable definition for participation leads to power dynamics and inequalities shaping its practice. In this context, I define participation as a dialogic process of interaction between local authorities and rightsholders, facilitated by appropriate social communication techniques. This process enables the flow of relevant information for the empowerment of citizens in addressing their concerns, needs, and aspirations. In the next subsection, I will explore power dynamics and inequalities in participatory processes within the development discourse and practice, enabling me to discuss the varying degrees of interest, power relations, and power dynamics inherent in Ghana's decentralised local government structure.

3.4.1 Power dynamics and inequalities in participation

In the preceding subsection, I presented the notion that participation is a broad concept with diverse definitions and imprecise practices. I highlighted how the lack of a clear definition of participation gives rise to tensions in participatory approaches. This section now delves into an examination of power dynamics and inequalities within participatory processes, as they significantly shape development practices. Understanding these power dynamics is crucial for comprehending how they are assessed in the context of my research. While there are numerous typologies in the literature that explain the evolving power dynamics in participatory practices, this research focuses primarily on Whites' typology of interest and Arnstein's ladder of participation. These two typologies are employed to analyse the power dynamics in the relationship between community representatives and local governance in the context of this research. Whites' typology of interest aids in identifying the varying degrees of interest in local-level participation within the district administration. On the other hand, Arnstein's ladder provides a framework for exploring and explaining how these degrees of interest influence local community members' perceptions of effective local governance and development outcomes.

To begin with, the analysis starts with Sarah White's (1996) typology of interest. This choice is made because White's analysis offers insights into the dynamic power relations between dutybearers and rightsholders. Moreover, her typology provides a standard against which the form of participation practiced under Ghana's decentralised local governance (DLG) system can be evaluated. To address the nature of local participation in governance, it is crucial to analyse the distinctions and

commonalities between the concerns of dutybearers and rightsholders. White (1996) categorises participation into four forms: nominal, instrumental, representative, and transformative. Each form serves different functions, with dutybearers and rightsholders holding contrasting views and interests within each form. Nominal participation involves dutybearers using the process to legitimise development interventions, while rightsholders desire inclusion in the process. White concludes that this form of participation does not bring about significant change, as its purpose is merely symbolic.

In instrumental participation, White (Ibid.) argues that community participation is sought only as a means to an end. Dutybearers use the local capabilities of rightsholders to realise an intervention. Limited financial resources for local development interventions, resulting from conditionalities imposed by structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s and 1990s, necessitated certain countries to demand local co-creation as counterpart funding. Representative participation, according to White, revolves around granting grassroots communities a voice in decision-making and implementation processes of interventions. Dutybearers' interest in this form lies in the sustainability of their interventions, while rightsholders aim to influence the nature and form of the intervention. Finally, White (1996) argues that transformation participation leads to the empowerment of grassroots communities and brings about modifications to existing systems that marginalise and exclude them from decision-making processes. This analysis indicates that dutybearers consider participation in all forms but are generally unwilling to disrupt the status quo for rightsholders, except in the case of transformation participation, where the interests of both dutybearers and rightsholders align.

Sherry Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (1969) offers a comprehensive framework for understanding different levels of participation in development literature. Arnstein's typology consists of eight levels: manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power, and citizen control. These levels are categorised into three major forms of participation: non-participation, tokenism, and citizen power. Arnstein advocates for the redistribution of power to include marginalised groups, referred to as the "have-nots," who have been historically excluded from decision-making processes. She argues that citizen participation is a

means for these groups to challenge the social order and bring about significant reforms that allow them to benefit from the existing power structure.

At the lower end of Arnstein's ladder, manipulation and therapy are described as forms of “non-participation”. These levels are not intended to facilitate genuine participation but rather serve as avenues for those in power to educate or “cure” the supposed ignorance of the target beneficiaries regarding proposed development interventions. Manipulation often involves the inclusion of socially elite individuals on committees or boards without meaningful engagement with grassroots communities, using them as mere rubberstamps to legitimise interventions. Therapy, similar to manipulation, aims to adjust beneficiaries' expectations to align with predetermined objectives set by development agents. Arnstein criticises these bottom rungs of the ladder as not only excluding grassroots communities but also disregarding their local experiences and indigenous knowledge, which often prove valuable in addressing development challenges.

In the middle of the ladder, Arnstein discusses three levels of participation collectively referred to as “tokenism”. While tokenism allows grassroots communities to be heard and express their concerns, they lack control over the decision-making process, limiting the actual impact of their participation. Informing is considered the first step towards participation, while placation represents a higher order of tokenism, where grassroots communities can advise but have limited influence as power remains primarily with the authorities or development experts. Arnstein emphasises that consultation alone, without other forms of participation, cannot guarantee that grassroots concerns will be considered, as representatives from the community are often outnumbered and outvoted by external actors. Consequently, participation at this level fails to achieve its intended objectives, merely serving as evidence that participation has taken place, without substantial benefits reaching grassroots communities.

At the top of the ladder is “citizen power”, which Arnstein views as the most desirable form of participation for holistic community development. In this form, the actual control of the development process is partially or entirely ceded to grassroots communities. Arnstein identifies three levels within citizen power: partnership, delegated power, and citizen control. Partnership involves a significant redistribution of power, with

grassroots communities having equal decision-making authority on boards and committees determining development interventions. Decisions are made through negotiated consensus, reinforcing the importance of grassroots communities. Delegated power occurs as a result of ongoing negotiations between grassroots communities and powerholders, granting communities greater control and accountability over projects and programs. In cases of disagreement, external parties engage in dialogue with the community to resolve conflicts.

The highest level is “citizen control”, where the community retains absolute power over all decisions related to community interventions. Grassroots communities hold managerial positions and control essential policies, remaining accountable to the community and project donors without intermediaries. This level harnesses local resources, indigenous knowledge, and existing expertise according to the community's needs. Rightsholders assume full control over the intervention's terms and determine the extent to which external actors may influence it. This sense of collective ownership promotes sustainable community development, enabling greater access to interventions, control over benefits, and ownership of outcomes.

3.4.2 Participation as empowerment

As White (1996) argues in her typology of interests, one form of participation is reflected in the empowerment of grassroots communities. Melkote and Steeves (2001) have established that the benefits of participation include empowerment. When grassroots communities are offered platforms for participation in decision-making, they are, in effect, exercising their inherent powers. The term “empowerment”, however, is widely used in international development literature, yet it is hardly ever defined (Oxaal and Baden, 1997). The term thus invokes multiple and varied notions across user agencies and, sometimes, within the same institution. As a result, the definition of the term is still unclear within international development institutions (Wong, 2003). Despite the apparent lack of a clear and standardised definition of the term when it is applied to the concept of community development, the meaning of empowerment reflects the deliberate and planned socio-economic and political transformations that enable marginalised and socially excluded individuals, or groups, to exercise a right of choice over decisions and matters that affect their collective development aspirations or individual needs (Aslop, Mette and Jeremy, 2006, and Eyben et al., 2008).

Participation as empowerment is an approach in which the ‘so called’ beneficiaries of a programme retain absolute and complete power over, and are fully in control of, the programme and institutions that are set up for the purposes of the programme (Melkote and Steeves, 2001). For the authors, the aim of empowerment is to achieve their human potential by people becoming subjects in their own world, rather than objects in other people’s worlds. Ford (2011) had previously established that popular participation at the community, or on the local level, was essential in articulating the deep aspirations, felt needs, and in mobilising people’s energies for development.

Originally, empowerment connotes power, a situation in which individuals become the agents of their own development and gain control over the processes that lead to the actualisation of such aspirations. Any sustainable and impactful empowerment programme requires significant changes in power relations, both at the agency and structural levels (Pettit, 2012). Pettit notes that agency relates to the ability of individuals and groups to think and act in their own interest, whereas structure conforms to the formal and informal institutions, the rules, norms and beliefs that enable and constrain thought and action. I would argue that the theory of power, and good empowerment practices, hinge on both agency and structure and the interplay between them. I would further argue that measures of empowerment are centred on indicators such as women’s access to services, employment and education, and little focus is put on political mobilisation or participation.

Analyses of the development literature traces the concept of empowerment to Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in which he argues that for every society, two set of forces exist, and he likens these forces to the “Oppressor” and the “Oppressed”. In this pedagogy, Freire (1974) is opposed to “dominated consciousness” which, according to him, emerges in societies where a small group of people exercise control over the masses. He favours “critical consciousness” and advocates the implementation of an active teaching model that will conscientise and enhance the capacity of the individual to attain self-recognition and to develop the “instruments that would allow him to make choices” and that turn out to be “politically conscious” (Freire, 1974). In Freire’s view, therefore, “the role of the educator is not simply to transmit knowledge to the student, but to seek alongside him the means to transform the world that surrounds him” (1974, p9). In recent decades, however, the concept of

empowerment has been extended across various disciplines and it has attracted both academic and donor discussions. For instance, Simon (1994) and Cornwall and Brock (2005) argue that empowerment takes its roots from feminist studies, Black Power Movements, Freudian psychology and Gandhhism.

Nonetheless, as Freire's views gained recognition across disciplines, criticisms about the failures of development policies and programmes in international development circles also grow. For instance, as noted at the beginning of this chapter on discussions on development, in around 1960, the dominant paradigm, which equated development to economic growth was no longer appealing to practitioners or even to donor organisations. Copious campaigns and advocacies for understanding and for incorporating into development policies and practice the social dimensions of development, grew stronger across most developing countries and within development agencies (Tommasoli, 2004). This meant the promotion of new development paradigms that account for bottom-up approaches in which the recipients of development aid actively participate in development decisions that impact upon their lives, as opposed to the top-down system of central planning, knowledge transfer, vertical information flow and decision-making processes. The establishment of the International Foundation for Development Alternatives (IFDA), in 1976, therefore recognised the many setbacks of the dominant paradigm, in which "political and economic power drifts away from the people" and in pursuance of alternative development paradigms that serve the needs of the local people and the "primary community, whether geographical or organizational" (IFDA, 1980, p11). The IFDA programme aimed to widen "improved forms of political decision-making: facilitating people's access to power and resources both locally and nationally" (IFDA, 1980, p20). In this way, the local people can regain independent control over their lives.

In the World Development Report, which was dubbed *Attacking Poverty*, the WB discusses the concept of empowerment, alongside "opportunity and security", as being one of the key dimensions in the global struggle against poverty. In this report, "empowerment means enhancing the capacity of poor people to influence the state institutions that affect their lives, by strengthening their participation in political processes and local decision-making" (WB, 2001, p39). The report identifies "voicelessness and powerlessness" as core features of poverty (WB, 2001, p112),

thus indicating that the empowerment of the poor cannot be excluded from mechanisms that are aimed at alleviating poverty. In keeping with the ethos of “good governance”, the Report recommended that advancing empowerment entails “making state institutions more responsive to the poor” (WB, 2001), often through the practices of “democratization, decentralisation, the development of associations for the poor, and collaboration among communities and local authorities” (Calvès, 2009).

In the development literature, the concept of empowerment is noted as being complementary to the concept of participation. White (2004) argues that the focus of people’s participation in development programmes is, first and foremost, targeted at the less empowered, the marginalised and the poor, who are often socially excluded from any community’s life. For researchers such as Melkote and Steeves (2001), empowerment relates to grassroots communities gaining control over socio-economic factors and conditions around them. To put it loosely, empowerment relates to creating an enabling environment in which the capacities, knowledge and strengths of the beneficiaries of development programmes are enhanced to allow them to locate their development challenges, or impediments, and to implement processes that will bring the desired change to their lives.

I would argue that empowerment is an active, complex, multidimensional, and interdependent process of change in a social structure that allows individuals or a group of individuals to attain self-recognition and to gain power over all spheres of their life. From this viewpoint, empowerment exemplifies a sense of control, of participation and of decision-making (Karl, 1995). This means that empowerment denotes the ability of individuals and groups to exercise control over affairs that affect their life, their ability to demonstrate a right to competently participate in choices, and their ability to make informed decisions (Simon, 1994). I would argue that, in local government processes, without empowering the poor or marginalised, their participation is at best a political gesture and a mechanism for re-asserting power relations; and without the popular participation of the poor and marginalised, their empowerment remains a charade, a bundle of unfulfilled promises. Viewed from this perspective, empowerment can be described as both a process and an outcome of a process that is intrinsically related to the goals and benefits of participation. I will now analyse other benefits of participation in community development in order to argue

why the participation of the marginalised and local communities in local level decision-making is not only important, but also necessary so that local development can occur.

3.4.3 Freire's pedagogy and its relevance to community media and engagement in local governance

Paulo Freire's work on dialogical pedagogy and participatory education is highly relevant when considering media and engagement with local governance. Freire's seminal work, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", emphasises the importance of dialogue, critical thinking, and active participation in the process of education. He argued that traditional education often perpetuates oppressive structures by promoting a banking model of education, where knowledge is deposited into passive learners. Instead, Freire advocated for a pedagogical approach that promotes critical consciousness and active participation, enabling individuals to become agents of their own liberation. When applying Freire's ideas to media and engagement with local governance, several key points emerge.

Firstly, Freire emphasised the importance of dialogue as a means to foster understanding, critical reflection, and collective action (Leonard and McLaren, 1992 and Freire, 1970). In the context of media, this means moving away from one-way communication models where information is simply disseminated, towards more interactive and participatory approaches. In the context of media and governance, Freire's work emphasises the importance of creating spaces for dialogue and engagement that enable individuals to participate actively in decision-making processes. This approach recognises that media can play a key role in shaping public opinion and promoting democratic participation, but it also highlights the need for critical reflection on the role of media and its potential biases. This is particularly relevant in relation to local governance, which often involves complex and contested issues that require input and collaboration from diverse stakeholders. I argue that by fostering dialogue and collaboration, individuals can work together to develop innovative solutions to local problems and build stronger, more inclusive communities. By promoting dialogue between media producers, citizens, and local governance actors, it becomes possible to foster a more inclusive and participatory decision-making process.

Secondly, Freire's work highlights the significance of empowering marginalised communities and giving voice to those who have traditionally been excluded from the decision-making process (Diemer, et'al., 2016; Leistyna, 2004; Leonard and McLaren, 1992 and Freire, 1970). In the realm of local governance, this means ensuring that media platforms and channels provide space for diverse perspectives, particularly those of marginalised groups. By amplifying their voices and facilitating their participation, local governance becomes more responsive and accountable to the needs and aspirations of the entire community. Freire's work also emphasises the importance of empowering marginalised communities to participate in governance processes, which is particularly relevant in the context of this study. By providing individuals with the tools and knowledge to engage in critical reflection and dialogue, Freire's approach can help to promote more inclusive and democratic forms of governance at the local level.

Moreover, Freire's emphasis on critical consciousness aligns with the need to foster media literacy and critical engagement with information (Leonard and McLaren, 1992; Freire, 1970). In an era of increasing media consumption, it is crucial for individuals to develop the skills to critically analyse and interpret media content, discerning between different perspectives, biases, and interests. This empowers individuals to engage in informed debates and participate meaningfully in local governance processes. Freire's work emphasises the importance of participatory democracy as a means of promoting social justice and empowerment. He argues that individuals must be actively engaged in the political process in order to ensure that their voices are heard, and their needs are met. This is particularly relevant in relation to local governance, where individuals have a direct stake in the decisions that affect their daily lives. By engaging in participatory democracy, individuals can help to shape the policies and practices of their local government and work towards a more just and equitable society. This is where participation intersect with governance.

3.5 Participation and decentralised local governance in Ghana

The active involvement of local communities in development decisions has become a crucial benchmark for assessing both good governance and sustainable development (Kardos, 2012; Colantonio, 2007). Consequently, addressing participation-related issues is of paramount importance for local community initiatives aimed at upholding

the principles of good governance and sustainability. Ayee (2005) emphasises that effective citizen participation in local government is central to the success of development actions. Development actors promote popular participation as a significant indicator of good governance and as a means of empowering local individuals (Kumi Kyereme, 2008). Recently, the concept of participation has been further elaborated as a critical prerequisite for both good governance and sustainable development. Development actors, including the World Bank (Leeuwis, 2000; Taylor, 1994; Cherdpong and Flor, 2014), argue that the lack of local participation in development projects/programmes hampers the sustainability of interventions in most developing countries.

Active participation in decision-making processes fosters civic consciousness and political awareness among citizens. Chapter 20, Clause 2(e) of the 1992 Constitution explicitly states that “to ensure accountability of local government authorities, people in particular local government areas shall, as far as practicable, be afforded the opportunity to participate effectively in their governance”. This indicates that the foundation for participation is firmly established in Ghanaian laws. Ahwoi (2010) aptly defines participation as satisfactory citizens’ involvement in and influence over local governance. In addition to the 1992 Constitution, other legal provisions such as the LGA of 1993 (Act 462), the Local Government Establishment Instrument, and the National Development Planning Act of 1994 (Act 480) confer legal status and identity to decentralisation and local government, while outlining various mechanisms to promote citizen engagement and participation in local government.

Based on my literature review, I have identified information sharing, stakeholder consultations, access to basic services, representation, programme inputs, and elections as forms of participation that provide citizens with opportunities to engage in local-level discussions and contribute to local decision-making processes. However, the literature has yet to account for how CR facilitates the engagement of grassroots communities in local governance. Addressing this gap in the literature is a key aspect of my research. For instance, unresolved questions remain regarding how the Ghanaian local government system incorporates community participation into its development programmes. How do local government authorities in Ghana utilise participatory channels to stimulate local-level engagement in development initiatives?

How can the inherent potential of participatory media be leveraged to meet the information and communication needs of grassroots communities within a decentralised government system? Answering these questions empirically is essential to fill the gaps and provide insights for future policy reforms in the local governance system. Therefore, my research will focus on addressing these questions.

Furthermore, Ghana's legal framework acknowledges that development ideas should not be confined to a select group of privileged elites. The planning of development actions necessitates substantial efforts to engage all parties interested in the decision-making process. Traditional rulers, members of the private sector (including small, medium, and large corporations), elected representatives such as Members of Parliament, civil society organizations (CSOs), community-based organisations, and, importantly, citizens (residents of a local area) are recognised as key participants in Ghana's DLG system. The LGA 936 (2016) mandates citizen participation not only in elections but in all other activities related to the development of the local government area. It also mandates local authorities to employ all available means to ensure broader citizen participation in the affairs of the Assembly or local area.

Although efforts to involve grassroots communities in development decisions within Ghana's decentralised governance structure are still uncertain (Crawford, 2004; Robinson, 2007; Conyers, 2007; Ayee, 2000), I argue that the media literature provides ample evidence to suggest that the media play a crucial role in fostering participation, enhancing accountability, and promoting effective service delivery. Blair (2000), for example, posits that the media serve as instruments for advancing accountability, acting as carriers of public service information and complementing efforts to disseminate news and information to a wide audience. He highlights the potential of local radio as a cost-effective medium with significant audience reach. Based on this perspective, I conclude that the media have the potential to expand the scope of community participation in local government affairs and uphold the principles of accountability. However, the development literature lacks clarity on how community media can promote these ideals within Ghana's DLG institutions. Hence, a part of my research will address how local media can facilitate the accountability and responsiveness of local government authorities to the local community.

3.6 Outcomes of participation in community development processes

In the previous sub-section, I discussed the importance of empowering grassroots communities in the participatory process as a goal of participation. While the outcomes of community participation are diverse, some researchers argue that it has no impact on development processes. However, my analysis of the participatory literature highlights increased civic consciousness, community ownership of development projects, community learning, and the sustainability of development projects as key outcomes of local community participation in decision-making processes. In this subsection, I will explore how these outcomes underscore the relevance of participation by providing local communities with access and a platform for interaction, as well as fostering community resilience in addressing the challenges of underdevelopment.

Firstly, community participation leads to increased civic consciousness among local community members. By engaging in community-level development projects and programs, individuals develop the capacity to make informed choices and handle complex decisions affecting their community (Barasa and Jelagat, 2013; Chamala, 1995). In this context, civic consciousness refers to the growing awareness within local communities of their social, global, and environmental challenges, and their responsibility to address them in the best interests of the community.

Chamala (1995) suggests that involving the beneficiary community at all stages of the development process effectively resolves resource constraints in development interventions. As community members recognise their significance in the development process, they have the opportunity to make choices based on the community's needs, promoting local engagement and development. Development policies aligned with local conditions and circumstances not only reflect the local economy and social systems but also succeed by involving grassroots communities (Curry, 1993). When communities can influence or shape their community's policy agenda, they become more enthusiastic about its implementation. Additionally, Golooba-Mutebi (2004) emphasises that participation enhances civic consciousness and political maturity, holding those in power accountable.

Secondly, community participation fosters a sense of community ownership of the development process. This feeling of recognition, identity, and belonging enhances the effectiveness of development interventions and facilitates dialogue between external agencies and the community in project design and implementation (Kelly and Van Vlaenderen, 1995; Kolavalli and Kerr, 2002). Price and Mylius (1991) attribute the sustainability of development interventions to the strong sense of community ownership. When grassroots communities have a say in shaping their development path, they achieve more than the stated objectives. Participation has inherent value for participants and serves as a catalyst for further development. It encourages responsibility and ensures that felt needs are addressed. Furthermore, participation seeks to liberate people from dependence on others' skills, making communities more aware of the causes of poverty and empowering them to take action (White, 1994).

Thirdly, participation creates an enabling environment for continuous community learning processes, which drive behavioral change among community members. Kelly (2001) highlights that when participation is encouraged in development processes, more community members have the opportunity to learn through information and idea sharing, local knowledge exchange, and experiences. This enhances understanding of development processes and facilitates better facilitation of development actions. Improved understanding and access to project information leads to changes in behavior and attitude.

In conclusion, the participation of grassroots communities fosters civic consciousness in decision-making and community ownership of development interventions. These outcomes, combined with local knowledge and skills, are vital for community development and the long-term sustainability of interventions. Despite these significant benefits, there are still limitations in the practice of community participation. In the next subsection, I will critically examine the challenges posed by participation in the development process and the obstacles it faces in community development.

3.7 Challenges to participation in community development processes

Given the socio-political and economic context, participation in development processes faces varying perspectives and challenges. The implementation of participation differs due to institutional, cultural, knowledge, and financial constraints

(Campbell, 1991, and Kumar, 2002) identified in the literature. Historically, development paradigms in centralised political states did not prioritise the involvement of grassroots communities. The top-down development model of the modernisation school considered development as a set of commodities to be delivered to uninformed communities at the periphery. This model, characterised by a concentration of power and decision-making among a group of experts, restricted the empowerment of grassroots communities (Kumar, 2002).

Shifting towards participatory development models has proven to be challenging. Administrative institutions, primarily designed for control, often overlook the perspectives and concerns of grassroots communities, who are the intended beneficiaries of development interventions (Kumar, 2002). Power dynamics play a significant role in discussions surrounding grassroots community participation, particularly at the local level. Local government officials in many developing countries perceive mechanisms empowering grassroots communities as threats, accusing them of sabotage or derailing external development efforts. These dynamics restrict the full participation and commitment of grassroots communities (Hogg and Vaughan, 2011; Wilcox, 2002; Addae-Boahene, 2007). The institutional constraint on grassroots community participation is closely linked to the belief that these communities lack the necessary knowledge and skills for self-directed development. Labelling them as “illiterates” and passive recipients of benefits demotivates their participation (Kumar and Corbridge, 2002).

Furthermore, certain cultural factors impede the effective and inclusive participation of grassroots communities. Marginalisation and exclusion affect women, the poorest, non-elitists, and disabled individuals. Exclusion diminishes self-esteem, disrupts a sense of belonging and communal identity, and prompts existential questioning (Nezlek et al., 2012). Gender dynamics, prevalent in many developing countries, assign specific roles based on gender, often side-lining women from decision-making processes (Bekele, 2000). Consequently, women are underrepresented in political offices and have limited opportunities to engage in community discussions, meetings, and elections. As a result, their concerns are less likely to be considered during policy formulation (Bratton, Matte, and Gyimah-Boadu, 2005), hampering efficient participation.

To achieve meaningful development at the local community level, it is crucial to address the challenges faced by grassroots communities in participating in development processes. Empirical approaches are necessary to overcome low participation in Ghana's DLG system and unlock the full potential of the policy for community transformation. Thus, this research aims to tackle the obstacles identified in this review and explore the role of local community participation within Ghana's decentralised governance policy framework. Understanding the importance of local community involvement will facilitate collaboration with local authorities to drive progress (IPU, 2000).

3.8 Conclusion to the chapter

In this chapter, I have critically analysed the concept of development and explored the criticisms surrounding prevailing development approaches. I have delved into the concepts of DevCom and PDC as key theoretical frameworks for this study. Moreover, I have argued how the evolution of these concepts has influenced the notion of participation. I conducted a comprehensive conceptual analysis of participation, focusing on its practical implementation in local governance and community development in Ghana. Furthermore, I analysed Freire's pedagogy and explored its relevance to local media and community engagement in the context of the Ghanaian local governance structure. I also evaluated the power dynamics and inequalities of participation and delved into the perspective of participation as empowerment. By critically analysing the benefits and challenges of participation in development processes, I provided a well-rounded view of its implications. Finally, I thoroughly investigated the role of participation within Ghana's DLG system. Throughout the chapter, I argued that participation is a pivotal aspect not only within Ghana's decentralised governance programme but also in community development as a whole. However, its actualisation within Ghana's decentralised policy framework remains elusive. Moving forward, the subsequent chapter will conceptualise CRB and local governance in Ghana aiming to identify the potential of this medium to drive and enhance the participation of grassroots communities in decentralised governance and overall local development in the Ghanaian context.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction to the chapter

The conceptual and theoretical gaps presented in the preceding chapters provide the grounds from which to delve deeper into the relationship between CR, as a community-based communication facility, and the local community, and how this relationship impacts on the local community's participation in local governance. This chapter provides an analysis of, and reflections on, the ways in which the overall research process, including the research design, case selection, data collection methods and data analysis and presentation, all evolved for this study. The chapter examines how the issues of ethics in a COVID-19 restrictive data collection environment were managed. Finally, the indicators of data validity and reliability will also be examined, and a summary of the chapter presented.

4.2 Research design

This study adopted a flexible research design approach that allowed the use of direct participant observation, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews in the collection of data. These data collection methods are related to the tradition of qualitative research. Several points of view shaped my choice of a qualitative approach for this study. For instance, the use of a qualitative research approach enables a researcher to generate rich, detailed data that leave the participants' perspectives intact and provide multiple contexts within which to understand the phenomenon being studied. The entire process of qualitative inquiry is also naturalistic, emergent and purposeful. This means that qualitative research approaches allow for the study of social phenomena as they evolve naturally and without manipulation or control of the process by the researcher. It generally avoids rigid designs that may eliminate responsiveness, and it pursues new paths of discovery as understanding deepens. The subjects of the study are usually selected because of their rich knowledge and depth of information, and not simply for empirical generalisation (Lohr, 2019).

For these reasons, the approach has several advantages when correctly applied to social inquiry. Of interest to this study is that a qualitative research method allowed me to obtain a more realistic view of local community participation in decentralised local governance, which I might not have been able to understand or experience using a statistical approach. It also supports the description of existing phenomena and current situations and lends itself to the application of flexible means in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data.

4.3 Case study as an approach

When examining relatively intricate social phenomena within a particular context, the utilisation of a qualitative case study approach proves valuable. Baxter and Jack (2008) contend that case study research allows researchers to examine a social phenomenon from various perspectives, thereby uncovering multiple facets of the phenomenon. According to Yin (1994), the case study research method is defined as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are indistinct, and when multiple sources of evidence are employed.

Rashid et al. (2019) assert that case study research facilitates a thorough examination and analysis of empirical data pertaining to the context and process of a specified social phenomenon, collected over an extended period. Similarly, Yin (1994) argues that case study research is a preferred strategy when researchers possess limited control over events, and when the focus lies on contemporary phenomena embedded in real-life contexts. Yin (1994) previously categorised case studies into exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory.

Critiques of the case study approach centre around claims that the examination of a limited number of research participants provides an insufficient basis for scientific generalisation (Yin, 1994; Tellis, 1997). However, Yin (1994) and Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin (1993) refute this notion, contending that in case study research, the construction of parameters and the establishment of objectivity hold greater importance than conducting broad statistical surveys for the purpose of generalisation.

Several compelling reasons justify the adoption of the case study approach in this qualitative research. First, data examination is conducted within the context of its utilisation (Yin, 1994). Second, the multi-approach nature of this studies permits qualitative analysis of the data (Block, 1986; Hosenfeld, 1984). Lastly, this research offers a detailed qualitative account that explores and describes data within a real-life environment, providing an understanding of the relationship between CR and local governance.

4.3.1 Case selection

This study follows the purposive case study approach, since the primary objective was not to attain representativeness in both its case and sample selections but was, largely, to draw out features in the studied district that enrich our understanding of the intersection between participation, CR and DLG. In so doing, this study purposively sampled DSR in Dalun, in the Kumbungu District of Ghana. The selection of DSR as a case study was driven by the considered fact that it is the single oldest CR established in the Northern region of Ghana. It is also a founding member of GCRN, and the only CR in the region whose legal ownership rests with the community. In addition, the Station is located in a District considered to be among the poorest in the region and the country as a whole[4]. Having established, in previous chapters, that the emphasis of Ghana's local governance programme was to elicit the full and rigorous participation of grassroots communities in the governance process, it was important to explore how this plays out in the poorest areas of the country.

4.3.2 Profile of Dalun Simli Radio in the Kumbungu District

Simli Radio, established with the mission to stimulate social, economic, and political change in line with the aspirations of its constituent communities, is the first CRS to broadcast in the Northern region (GDCA, 2019). When it was established in 1995, the only radio station in the regional capital, Tamale, was the state-owned Ghana

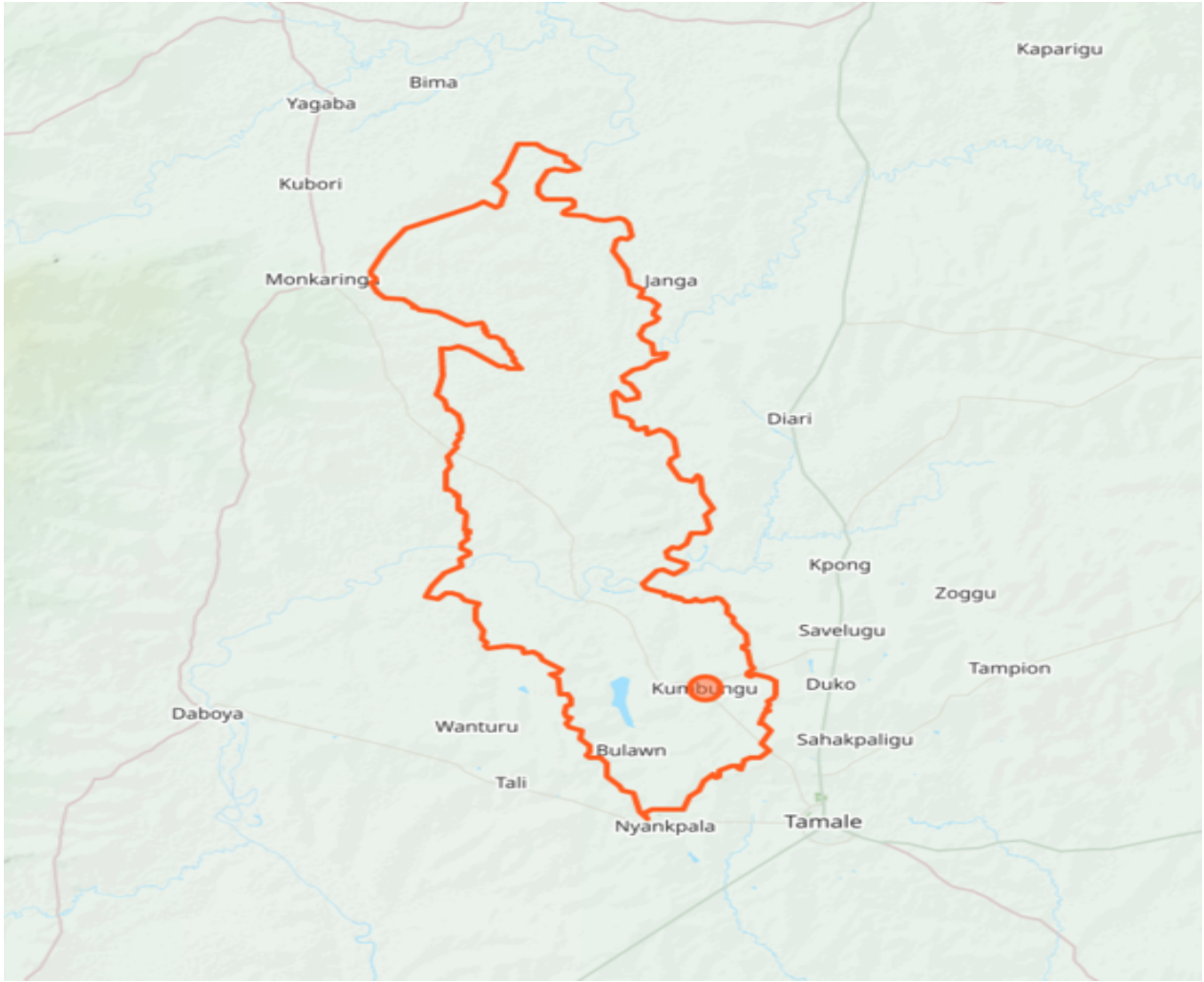
[4] The ***Ghana Living Standards Survey*** (GLSS) "provides information for understanding and monitoring living conditions in Ghana. The survey provides timely and reliable information about trends in poverty and helps identify priority areas for policy interventions that aim to improve the lives of the population. It has, over the years, served as one of the primary tools used in monitoring progress on poverty reduction strategies in the country. The survey provides the required data at the regional and urban/rural levels for examining poverty and associated indicators for households and the population. The data also allow for the decomposition of poverty changes between different groupings: urban/rural, locality, region, and socio-economic status".

Broadcasting Corporation's Radio Savannah (NCA, 2019). Originally a subsidiary of the non-governmental organisation Ghana Developing Communities Association (GDCA[5]), DSR became an officially registered and recognised CRS in the Northern region in 2005, acquiring its own broadcasting frequency 95.3MHZ (NCA, 2019). Prior to this registration, DSR operated through Radio Savannah as part of a development-focused relay station in support of GDCA's programmes. The core strategy of DSR has been to utilise radio as a means of information and communication, empowering marginalised communities and groups to share and generate knowledge and experiences. The Station operates based on eight core values, which include being non-profit, non-partisan, non-ethnicity biased, transparent, accountable, non-sectarian, and upholding probity and honesty. Its primary objective in broadcasting is to empower every household within the constituent communities served by DSR, enabling them to contribute to the development of the communities they aspire to live in (GDCA, 2019). The station is situated at the Simli Centre in Dalun, a farming community in the Kumbungu District.

Picture 1: *Simli Radio Station, Dalun (**Source:** Researcher)*

[5] **GDCA is an acronym for Ghana Developing Communities Association**. A non-government organisation implementing projects and programmes for more than 35 years in Northern Ghana. The organisation has adapted to, and developed with, the various trends in development work and, at the same time, has expanded in terms of the thematic areas in their portfolio. As an umbrella organization representing several other subsidiary organisations, they have contributed to bringing positive changes in various areas. They established Dalun Simli Radio in 1995, as a subsidiary, to provide a platform for local community voices to be heard, as local people contribute to debates on national issues.

Simli Radio has gained recognition for its commitment to participation-driven and community-centered development programming, which has been broadcast in the northern region since its establishment (GCRN, 2005). The fundamental principle behind DSR's operation is to amplify the voices of the marginalised and ensure equitable access to information, which is crucial for meaningful participation in development processes (GDCA, 2009). In accordance with this principle, DSR has evolved into a vital communication and information platform for rural residents, not only in the Kumbungu District but also in neighbouring districts such as Tolon, Savelugu, Nantong, Sagnarigu, Mamprugu-Moagduri, Daboya/Mankragu, and the Karaga Districts across the Northern, North-East, and Savannah regions. It is estimated that DSR's broadcast services reach over 400 communities in these districts, fostering community engagement through innovative programming, through the establishment of listener clubs that offer training opportunities in the communities.



Picture 2: *Map of Kumbungu District (**Source:** Google Maps)*

4.4 Data collection- procedures, methods, and tools

4.4.1 Focus group discussions (FGD)

One of the primary data collection methods for this study was FGD. In FGD, the aim is to elicit high quality data in the social context of a phenomenon that is under investigation (Patton, 2002), which fosters an understanding of the specific social phenomenon, mostly from the perspectives of the participants in the research (Khan and Manderson, 1992). According to Anderson (1990, p24), a focus group "comprises of individuals with certain characteristics who focus discussions on a given issue or topic. An important feature of FGD is that it provides the environment for a reasonably homogenous group to reflect, dialogue and discuss a set of questions, asked by an investigator, on a social phenomenon that is being investigated. In this research, I conducted a total of 6 FGDs comprising of 9 members of the Tunteiya radio listener club (RLC) in Zangbalung[6] and 11 members of the Dahinsheli RLC in Dalun[7]. I also engaged two community groups (CG); 11 members each of Mabilgu in Gbullung[8] and

[6] **Tunteiya Radio Listener Club** located in Zangbalung, a peri-urban community in the Kumbungu district comprises a total membership of 50 women and 22 men whose occupations are farming and extractive Shea Butter trading. The group was formed as a RLC by Simli Radio in collaboration with GDCA in 2013 as part of the Station's advocacy efforts in inclusive governance. Simli Radio rely on this group to provide tailor made community focused programming on local decision making. The group is noted for producing the station's award winning and most popular audio drama, Batoro, in 2018 which advocates for inclusive local decision making processes across Dagbong patriarchal societies.

[7] **Dahinsheli Radio Listener Club** was formed in 2015 as part of GDCA's Empowerment for Life programme's objective to enable local participation in the monitoring of capital development projects in selected District and to encourage civil society engagement in district revenue mobilisation and in the effective utilisation of public services. The group is made up of representatives of identifiable groups including active youth groups, CBO's, disability groups, farmer unions, local trade unions, etc. in the Dalun electoral area. Since its formation, Simli radio provides training and skill development sessions for it and cooperatively work with the group to whittle blow on issues of corruption and abuse of office.

[8] **Mabilgu Community Group** is an association of former head porters (kayayie) who have returned to Gbullung, a farming community located in the Kumbungu District. The term '**Kayayei'** refers to both male and female porters who migrate from rural areas to urban cities in search of employment. These individuals carry heavy loads on their heads using head pans and traverse the streets on foot to deliver goods to their clients. The group started with 3 members but has now grown to include over 20 members. They collaborate with local NGOs in the region to discourage the migration of young girls from rural areas. One of their key strategies involves sharing their own distressing experiences through community outreach efforts. By doing so, they aim to raise awareness about the challenges faced by these young girls and advocate for a responsive local authority structure that addresses the specific issues faced by the community.

Sonŋsim B□bu in Vo□gu[9]. Two Assembly Member[10] focus groups were also held in Nyankpala[11] and Kumbungu[12] respectively.

4.4.2 In-depth interviews

An in-depth interview is a conversation that is designed to elicit depth, or detailed information, on a topic of interest or one that is under investigation. It usually involves an experienced interviewer probing an expert interviewee in a conversation about a social phenomenon. The most significant advantage of an in-depth interview is that it is multidisciplinary, easily adaptable to changing field circumstances and it results in both depth and breadth of information and the understanding of the subject under investigation (Guest, Namey and Mitchell, 2013).

This study used in-depth interviews, in combination with other techniques, to gather primary data. A total of eleven (12) interviews were conducted, 9 in-person, and 3 through Microsoft Teams. These interviews provided interesting insights into understanding the phenomenon under investigation. Each interview session lasted an average of 2 hours, with intermittent breaks for reflection. At DSR, the Station Manager (SM), the Programmes Coordinator (PC), and the Board Chairman (BC) were interviewed. Both the Station Manager and Programme Coordinator served as main producers of every broadcast programme on the Station, except for those that were pre-recorded by other partner organisations. I therefore did not find it relevant to interview staff who hosted programmes with some local government components.

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9 **Sonŋsim B□bu Community Group** is a local development group formed in Vo□gu in 2010 by the Vo□gu Development Association to advocate for women access to agricultural lands from their chiefs in pursuit of community development. The group comprises of both male and female farmers, petty traders, extractive workers and the unemployed. The group exist to promote personal growth and community transformation through the equitable access and allocation of economic lands.

10 An **Assembly Member** is an "elected representative at the Assembly. His/ her duties are similar to a Councilor in European jurisdiction. He/ she represents an electoral area and is the main link between the DA and the grassroots communities he/she represents. Some assembly members are appointed by the central government".

11 This Focus Group consisted of 9 elected Assembly Members, who did not chair any of the Standing Committees of the Assembly. The discussion with this group was held at the DAAD Conference Hall of the University for Development Studies in Nyankpala on Thursday, 25th March 2021

12 This Focus Group was made up of 7 Assembly Members, both elected and appointed, who serve as Chairpersons of the various Standing Committees of the Assembly. Discussions with this group were held at the DCE Conference Hall in Kumbungu on Tuesday, 30th March 2021.

At the Assembly, I interviewed the Presiding Member (PM[13]), the District Coordinating Director (DCD[14]), the District Planning Officer (DPO), and the Electoral Commissioner (EC). The perspectives of these senior civil servants made up for the absence of other sampled officers, except in a few instances where questions on some allegations or unproven claims against the DCE could not be responded to. Outside the community, interviews were conducted with the Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN), the GDCA, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA[15]), the National Media Commission (NMC) and the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralisation and Rural Development (MLGDRD[16]). These are institutions external to the community, but with vested interests in either CR operations or the functioning of the Assembly.

4.4.3 Direct participant observation

Observation is a significant element of qualitative data collection. It is most impactful when used in case study research. Observation, as a data gathering technique, permits the researcher to collect data first-hand, through observing a phenomenon in its natural environment (LeCompte and Schensul, 2010). Berger (2000, p161) describes observation as "a qualitative research technique that provides the opportunity to study people in real-life situations". One advantage of using observation in case study research is that it allows for the gathering of detailed, or in-depth, data. However, Payne and Payne (2004) argue that this technique may lead to observer bias, since the researcher observing the phenomenon may see or hear only what they want to see or hear, and thus decide not to hear or see what they do not want to hear or see. According to Becker and Geer (1957), in observation, a researcher can

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[13] "A 'Presiding Member' is an elected chairperson of the Assembly. The PM serves as the Speaker of the Assembly and is responsible for overseeing its proceedings and ensuring that the business of the assembly is conducted effectively. The PM is elected by the Assembly Members from among themselves. They are chosen based on their experience, leadership qualities, and ability to facilitate discussions and decision-making within the Assembly".

[14] "A District Coordinating Director (DCD) is a senior civil servant responsible for coordinating and managing the administrative affairs of the Assembly. The DCD is appointed by the Local Government Service and serves as the chief administrative advisor to the DCE and the assembly".

[15] The MFWA is a civil society actor with interests in promoting media development, defending media freedoms, and ensuring good governance through free expression in the media in West Africa.

[16] the MLGDRD is the sector ministry with oversight responsibility for decentralised local government institutions, including KDA.

participate covertly or overtly within the natural settings. I chose to make my observations as a researcher open, since I had no reason to hide the considered fact that I was a researcher on a mission to understand how the local community participated in their own governance processes, and how their CR granted access to them to participate in their own development aspirations. This enabled me to ask questions for clarification whenever it was necessary for me to do so.

I used qualitative methods across the primary data collection phases in this research. At DSR, primary data was first gathered through direct participant observation involving the monitoring of the station's broadcast for 14 days continuously from Gumo, a nearby community in the District. I chose to first monitor DSR broadcasts for two weeks, because I found it necessary to gather a firsthand general overview of the nature of programmes and how the community participated in the station's broadcasting. Throughout my field days in the District, I tuned in to occasionally monitor a few programmes, especially those that emerged as containing thematic areas for the analysis. In this study, I observed both in-studio broadcasting procedures and the in-field production of some broadcasts, especially those involving the focus groups. While in-studio, I took notes of critical questions that emerged from phone-in segments, and later probed the producers for clarity on these.

I also spent 42 days of my fieldwork conducting direct participant observation and interactions in 6 communities in the District, all aimed at understanding the participatory and radio consumption behaviours of my hosts during the broadcasting of programmes that focus on local governance issues. I would normally engage my host for about 15 minutes each time a broadcast was over so as to get an insight into their perspectives on the content and other matters in the broadcast. I was also offered the opportunity to observe the proceedings of an ordinary session of the meeting of the Assembly. This was the first meeting held since the December, 2020, General Elections. Though the meeting was held at a time when I had ended my fieldwork, I found it necessary to attend when I received the invitation, since I was still in Ghana. The meeting proved very insightful for the research outcomes as it helped me to understand some of the key procedural matters in the Assembly.

4.4.4 Document analysis

Another data collection technique employed in this research is document analysis. This method refers to “an integrated and conceptually informed method, procedure, and technique for locating, identifying, retrieving, and analysing documents for their relevance, significance and meaning”: (Altheide, 1996, p2). Documentary analysis was effectively carried out in this research, as the analysis provided further information which informed my further probing during interviews and FGDs across all levels. It provided the background information which enhanced the nature and style of interactions with the sampled respondents. It afforded research replicability, since sources used are readily available for crosschecking by other researchers in the field.

The document sources used in this research were limited to DSR broadcasting schedules, broadcast production scripts of local government centred programmes, listener complaints and feedback reports, annual operational reports, including financial statements. Other documents sourced from the KDA included the DCE sessional addresses to the Assembly, the District Planning Guidelines and Procedures, Community Action Plans, the Standing Orders of Assembly Meetings, the complaints logbook and the procedures for calling for District Assembly meetings. All documents considered for analysis were identified due to their relevance to the overall objectives of the research and how easily accessible they were. Document analyses were also carried out in line with the pre-existing themes that emerged from the other sources of data. This ensured that documents obtained “provided other specific details to corroborate information from other sources” (Yin, 2009, p103).

4.5 Data analysis, presentation, and discussion of findings

The data analysis for this research was carried out using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), involves searching across a dataset to identify, analyse, and report on repeated patterns in qualitative research. It is a method of searching for recurring themes that align with the research objectives of the social phenomenon under investigation. According to Rice and Ezzy (1997), thematic analysis requires a researcher to carefully read and re-read the data to identify themes. The emerging themes that adequately address the research objectives become the main categories for analysis and reporting. Kiger and Varpio

(2020) argue that thematic analysis is a practical data analysis approach for qualitative researchers, emphasising the importance of clarifying its proper and effective application. This can help other researchers understand its use, versatility, and power.

This research adopted the guidelines outlined by Braun and Clarke (2020, 2013, 2006) for analysing and reporting field data that addresses all three research questions. Transcription of the field data was done daily. This approach helped to expedite the data analysis process since a significant portion of the field data was recorded in Dagbanli. All FGDs were recorded in Dagbanli, while all data from the in-depth interviews conducted were recorded in English. The initial phase of analysis involved carefully reading through each transcript and simultaneously listening to the corresponding recordings to ensure accuracy and consistency in alignment with the research questions. The dataset was edited and cleaned during this process. Subsequently, the deductive approach, with flexibility for an inductive approach, was applied to the transcriptions to analyse and report the findings addressing the research questions outlined in Chapter 1.

The deductive approach in thematic analysis requires the researcher to use pre-existing theories or frameworks to identify themes that adequately respond to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2020; 2006; Varpio et al., 2019). Conversely, the inductive approach determines the themes for analysis based on the researcher's dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2013; 2006). This research employed the deductive approach in accordance with Yin's (2009) recommendation that thematic analysis in qualitative case study research should rely on theoretical assumptions. Yin argues that the original objectives and design of the case study are likely based on such propositions, which in turn reflect a set of research questions (2009).

The subsequent phase of the data analysis process, following my familiarisation with the transcribed data and notes, involved coding. Coding refers to the categorisation of data in a meaningful and coherent manner (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). Initially, I applied coding to all the FGDs and subsequently to the in-depth interviews. To initiate the coding process, I carefully re-read the transcripts, reflecting on each component of the transcribed data. I assigned code numbers to significant comments that aligned with the research objectives. During this stage, I excluded any data that did not

contribute to the research objectives. If research participants deviated from the main discussion points, I labelled such information as “not applicable”. This initial coding stage exclusively focused on the respondents' reflections and narrations related to the three research questions of this research.

In the second stage, I employed the latent coding technique by examining selected original narratives to understand the content, relevance, and inferred meanings (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). This process proved to be laborious due to the substantial number of transcripts. To streamline the process while ensuring validity, I followed Krueger's recommendation (1998) to consistently reflect on the research objectives. Doing so allowed me to derive guidance on themes, areas of comparison, and the overall analytical focus from the research objectives. Since my aim was to address specific research questions, I focused the data analysis on theoretical themes that initially emerged from these questions. However, I employed open coding to analyse the data, progressively developing abstract conceptual categories to synthesise, explain, and understand (Charmaz, 1995). I did not rely on predetermined codes, but rather developed and modified codes as I progressed through the coding process (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). As each transcript was coded, new codes were generated, and earlier codes were adjusted.

Another phase of the analysis involved identifying themes and subthemes. As mentioned earlier, a theme represents a pattern that captures something significant or interesting about the data and/or research questions (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). After completing the coding process, I proceeded to evaluate the codes to identify patterns that could be grouped into themes. I organised the codes into preliminary themes and subthemes that directly addressed specific research questions, although they predominantly remained descriptive in nature.

The subsequent phase of the analysis entailed reviewing, developing, and defining themes and subthemes based on the preliminary themes identified in the previous step. The major themes that emerged from this process largely aligned with the key themes in the research questions, including the local community's participation in local governance, the role of community radio as a communication facility, and DSR’s impact on community participation in local governance. Several subthemes arose from

these major themes, such as local government structures, avenues for community participation, women's marginalisation in local participation, community ownership and control, community access, non-partisanship, non-profit status, sustainability, local language programming, DSR's broadcasting formats and styles, DSR's participatory broadcast programmes, and DSR's community outreach and local collaborations for community development. As stated previously in this section, the research questions and data collection in this study were guided by key assumptions. To facilitate the field data collection process, a framework was previously developed as a guiding tool. This approach was instrumental in addressing the challenge of focusing the research questions and analysing the abstract and broad nature of the research.

Once the themes and subthemes were established, supporting the overall research objectives, the interpretation of the results commenced. According to Hesse-Biber (2010, p73), data interpretation involves "meaning making and theory building". During this process, significant attention was given to insightful verbatim quotations extracted from the transcripts, which were then categorised under relevant themes and subthemes. These statements were extensively quoted throughout the respective chapters reporting the findings. Furthermore, the observation notes and documentary materials collected during the data collection phase were taken into consideration at this stage. The relevant notes and materials were carefully decoded and interpreted alongside the data obtained from the FGDs and interviews.

Since the data originated from multiple sources, a data integration process was carried out to synthesise the analyses, ensuring consistency, coherence, and factual accuracy. As Yin (2009) argues, utilising multiple sources of evidence offers the advantage of developing converging lines of inquiry through triangulation and corroboration. In the presentation of the findings, the key issues pertaining to each research question were addressed. The choice of statements to constitute the findings chapters were guided by the research objectives, theoretical frameworks of development communication and participatory development, and the unique results obtained from the data analysis. The research objectives generally aimed to identify gaps in CR and local participation in decentralised government in Ghana.

By analysing the collected data, patterns and themes emerged that shed light on the identified gaps and provided insights into the opportunities for CR to drive local community participation. The theoretical frameworks informed the interpretation of the findings, allowing for a deeper understanding of the underlying dynamics and potential solutions. The selection of statements prioritised the most significant and relevant findings that directly addressed the research objectives and contributed to the existing knowledge gap, highlighting the unique contribution of my research to the field of local government, development communication and participatory development in the Ghanaian context. The findings were organised and discussed across three chapters, with each chapter focusing on a specific research question. This structure aligns with Hesse-Biber's suggestion (2010) that the writing process should be closely linked to the research question(s) of the study. The discussions connect the findings with relevant theories, the literature review, and other pertinent issues (Kvale, 2009), utilising descriptive formats enriched with detailed narratives to report the findings (Patton, 2002).

4.6 Ethical considerations and data protection governance

Ethical considerations in research encompass various aspects, such as ensuring participants are fully informed about the research project's purpose, granting them the right to accept or decline participation, and respecting their privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity. It is crucial for researchers to prioritise adherence to the principle of informed consent, diligently follow research protocols, and engage in thorough preparation, explanation, and consultation before collecting any data (Bell, 2005).

To align with the ethical standards, this study adhered to the protocols established by the DCDI Research Ethics Committee of the University of Westminster. These protocols necessitate researchers and affiliates to obtain participants' consent for conducting interviews and assure them of the confidentiality of the gathered information. Consequently, I sought and obtained ethical clearance to conduct face-to-face fieldwork during the COVID period since my research required field data for completion. As a prerequisite, I obtained an introductory letter from the University through my Director of Studies. This letter served as an assurance to the participants that I was a doctoral researcher engaged in academic research. Participants who possessed reading abilities were provided with a consent form outlining my research

purpose and the relevant assurances. For participants who could not read, I personally read and explained the contents of the consent form to them.

Emphasising the voluntary nature of participation, I made it clear that no individual or group was compelled to take part against their will. Furthermore, participants who volunteered were informed that their identities would be protected if they chose not to disclose them. Participants were explicitly informed that they had the freedom to withdraw from the research at any point without consequences. They were also assured that they were not obligated to respond to any questions that made them uncomfortable. During the interviews, utmost care was taken to avoid using any methods that could harm or potentially harm the participants. Throughout the fieldwork, no significant ethical challenges were encountered, except for a few instances where some of the key staff initially selected for the study declined to participate due to personal reasons.

4.7 Data validity and reliability

Ensuring the validity and reliability of the data throughout this research project was crucial. Precautions were taken to address these concerns. The first aspect of validity in this research was following Kvale's argument (1996, p.241) that “validity is determined by examining the sources of invalidity. The more falsification attempts a proposition withstands, the more valid and trustworthy the knowledge becomes”. To enhance data validity, I utilised multiple data collection sources that complemented each other, as demonstrated in previous sections. By crosschecking, cross-referencing, and verifying respondents' statements with other information sources, the validity of the obtained data was further strengthened. This aligns with the concept of user-member checking, as described by Creswell (2009), which ensures trustworthiness, consistency, and accurate findings (Kuada, 2012).

Moreover, I implemented Creswell’s (2009) approach of including ‘verbatim quotation of respondents' perspectives’ to enrich the narrative and ensure data accuracy from both the researcher's and participants' viewpoints. This method is evident in all the chapters where I reported the findings. Providing detailed descriptions of the research setting, including multiple perspectives on various themes, adds realism to the results.

It allows readers to immerse themselves in the research environment and provides a sense of shared experiences (Creswell and Miller, 2000).

Reliability was also a consideration to ensure that if other researchers were to adopt the same approach used in this study, they would obtain consistent findings. Similarly, if the study were replicated with the same researcher and participants, the results would be reproducible. This enables future researchers to compare the findings of this study with subsequent studies, determining the generalisability of the results across different contexts (Meyer, 2001; Creswell, 2009). Following Kuada's (2012) recommendation, I provided detailed descriptions of the study's context, including the geographical location, names of stakeholder institutions, designations of their representatives as participants, and the socio-cultural and economic characteristics of the study location.

4.8 Challenges encountered during the field work

Originally, my fieldwork was scheduled to take place from November 2020 to March 2021. I was concerned that my community FGDs could be misinterpreted as political gatherings due to an impending general election in Ghana. Any misrepresentation could have significantly skewed the data that could impact the study. Therefore, I commenced the fieldwork in January 2021, after the elected President's inauguration and the reconstitution of the Assemblies.

In addition to the postponement, I encountered operational challenges at the Assembly. Since the Assemblies needed to be reconstituted following the December 2020 elections, they were not actively engaged in their usual activities. Although the President announced that the DCEs should continue to provide services in acting capacities until substantive appointments were made, the limitations associated with acting capacities, along with some grievances against certain DCEs, including the DCE for Kumbungu, hindered effective functioning. Assembly meetings were not held during this period until September 2021 when the President's nominated candidates were presented to the assemblies for confirmation, in accordance with statutory regulations.

Lastly, the restrictions imposed by COVID-19 meant that face-to-face data collection was not possible unless absolutely necessary, and alternative methods were not fully suitable for my research, especially at the community level. Therefore, I strictly adhered to COVID-19 protocols for physical gatherings. During the focus group discussions, respondents had to maintain a distance of at least 1 meter apart and wear face coverings. This situation limited the observed group dynamics during data collection and posed challenges to the clarity of expressions. Some participants struggled to speak clearly while wearing face coverings, and others found it difficult to hear their colleagues' arguments. To ensure clear capturing of voices, I provided multiple voice recorders for each group discussion.

4.9 Conclusion to the chapter

This chapter has discussed the approach I used for conducting the research. In the chapter, I examined the research design and discussed case study as a method. I reflected on how the case was selected, providing guidance and a justification for its selection. I provided brief profile of DSR, as the case for investigation. The chapter also discussed the detailed approach I used when collecting data, with an emphasis on the four key methods: the use of FGDs, interviews, observation, and document analysis. I highlighted a few challenges I encountered during the data collection phases, and I discussed how I navigated the challenges. I discussed in detail how I used thematic analysis in the data analysis process, and how the findings are presented and discussed. Finally, I discussed the factors I took into consideration to ensure adherence to the highest research ethics, in accordance with the requirements of the University of Westminster. Data validity and reliability were also discussed. In the next chapter, I will present and discuss the research findings on community participation in DLG in the Kumbungu District.

CHAPTER FIVE

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN DECENTRALISED LOCAL GOVERNANCE

5.1 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter is the first of three chapters that present the empirical findings from my fieldwork. In this chapter, I will examine the nature of community participation in decentralised local governance in the Kumbungu District. The chapter assesses the extent of local community engagement between the local community in the District and their local government representatives at the Assembly. The chapter evaluates the issues affecting community participation in the local governance system and attempts to answer the question: why is community participation low in the District?

In this chapter, I relied on the empirical evidence I gathered through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), document analysis (DA) and observation during my field work, for my analysis. The analysis of my findings identified low community participation/engagement in the assembly. Ghana's decentralised local government (DLG) system, which was established on the foundation of a rural development model, is deficient and ineffective, due to the failure of local structures to broaden local community engagement in development decision making processes. The model has also failed to enhance local people's access to core local government information by using appropriate social communication channels. The low community participation is also, in part, a result of the structural gaps between what the DLG laws proposed, and what is being practiced across many Assemblies in Ghana. In this chapter, my research addresses the reasons why DLG structures in the District have failed to achieve local community participation in governance decision making processes. I would argue that this failure is attributable to the inherent weaknesses and structural gaps in the local government system, including its failure to integrate DSR's output to encourage local community engagement.

5.2 Community participation in local government decision-making

This section argues that Ghana's local governance system, as a rural development model, has failed to deliver on its mandate to devolve power from central government

to the local level. It has failed in ensuring diversity in development decision-making processes. It has failed to nurture a democratic culture in the local community, and it has yet to lead to an increase in direct participation by the local community in the governance processes of their own affairs. The model has neither delivered on its rural development promises, nor has its mantra of "power to the people" been realised. The system is characterised by structural deficiencies and general disinterest from the local community.

Ghana's DLG system was designed to facilitate the devolution of both political and administrative powers from a central government to the local people through an established and functional Assembly structure, in order to support rural development. The model was also meant to enhance holistic rural development through the popular participation of local communities in the decision-making process relating to their own affairs. The model was thus to provide local community members with a voice in matters that affect them at the local level and, more specifically, to empower them to decide on the best course of action to lead to the kind of development that they envisaged (Republic of Ghana, 1988; 2016).

The evidence from the fieldwork, as discussed in the subsections below, however, suggests that the promise of DLG to propel development at the country's peripheries, remains largely elusive after over three decades since its implementation. The findings show that the interest of the local community in participating in decentralised governance continues to wane, and the country's rural development agenda has yet to be achieved at the district level.

5.2.1 Decision-making from below (Bottom-up approach)

The process of decision-making relating to local development is supposed to be owned by the people. The bottom-up concept of decision-making, which is a core approach of the community-oriented development model, is central to the proper functioning of local government structures. It thus reflects the notion of local communities owning the process of their development. It is the local community that decides on the best course of action to guarantee the progress that they desire. Legislation on Ghana's local governance provides for an established structure to promote efficient, broader, community participation in development decision-making processes at the local level. The Assembly, which is the primary coordinating agency

for development initiatives in the decentralisation structure, is mandated to facilitate the development decision-making processes at the local level **(DA: Republic of Ghana, 1988 and 2016)**. However, what is unclear is: to what extent do local government authorities in the decentralisation structure encourage development decision making from below?

The common argument that emerged from separate interviews with key senior civil servants of the KDA, is that development decision-making in the Assembly is largely guided by the provisions of the National Development Planning Act, 1994 (Act 480). The Act provides that local Authorities use relevant participatory channels and approaches, including community fora, traditional and emerging media, to engage stakeholders and, thus, the local community, when drawing up various development plans for their respective districts. I would argue that relying on the procedures of Act 480 when engaging stakeholders in decision-making should result in community ownership of the development decision-making processes. However, what the data has established, is that only a few officials at the Assembly determine what development interventions are needed, and in which communities they are most needed. For instance, during an in-depth interview, the District Coordinating Director (DCD) argued that the lack of resources, including money, the requisite personnel, and the inability of the Assembly to fully implement previous development plans, compel the Assembly to circumvent the rigorous processes of community engagement that are outlined in Act 480 of the Constitution. The Presiding Member (PM), agreed with the views of the DCD. On his part, he argued that a lot of the development decisions in the Assembly are at the discretion of the District Chief Executive (DCE). The PM argued:

> *…the decision of what project or intervention to undertake and even the communities to benefit from such projects or interventions, are largely determined by the key political actors of the district assembly* ***(Interview: PM, Gumo, 30/04/2021)***.

This view of the PM suggests a breach of the requirements of the NDP Act, 1994 (Act 480), the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936), Chapter 20 of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana (Act 240), and even of best practices around the world. However, the views aptly reflect the scholarly arguments of Ofei-Aboagye (2000); Pretty (1995), and Agarwal (2001). For instance, Pretty (1995) and Agarwal (2001)

both argued that development decisions at the district level were taken over by powerful political and bureaucratic actors, such as the DCE. But beyond this, the views also clearly demonstrate the political undercurrents that stifle local level decision-making structures. I would argue, based on my research data, that KDA meetings are neither interactive nor consultative fora for decision-making but, rather, are platforms which reinforces top-down decision making processes in development. This position is supported by data from FGDs **(FGDs-5, 25/03/2021** for example**)** where participants reveal that political party executives are usually given the prerogative to decide on the types of interventions that will win them votes, and these suggestions are then documented as the district development plans. Decision-making is the preserve of a few privileged government officials at the Assembly, and of key local party executives in the communities.

This study argues that local government authorities are usually keen on the rhetoric of participation, as a matter of procedure; and, in most instances, as an attempt to satisfy the participatory requirements of the relevant Acts establishing the decentralised governance system. The Assembly do not adhere to the bottom-up approach requirements of the decentralised governance structure. The local authorities do not engage the local community so as to have their inputs turned into the decisions of the Assembly. Community level FGDs reveal that the Assembly does not have any direct form of engagement with the communities **(FGDs-2, Vo□gu, 16/01/2021; FGDs-3, Zangbalung, 20/02/2021)**. This affirms the notion that local government authorities do not employ the process of engagement because they truly trust that it is the best process to guarantee the interests of grassroots communities are met. They thus do not place emphasis on bottom-up development decision-making processes.

In addition, Assembly Members disclosed that their meetings are not genuinely participatory, since their members are not given the opportunity to interrogate and debate issues brought before them, both at the plenary and sub-committee levels. They argued that Assembly Meetings are often erratic and when they do convene a meeting, members are often presented with a list of decisions that have already been reached, and sometimes implemented, by the key political and bureaucratic actors of the Assembly. Assembly Meetings therefore become procedural, since decisions are merely confirmed. An Assembly Member argued:

> *Decision-making in this, our Assembly, has no resemblance to this bottom-up approach! Our meetings are only for informing us about decisions reached by some powerful elements in the Assembly* ***(FGDs-5, AM Participant, Nyankpala, 25-03-2021)****.*

This kind of community participation, as alluded to by the Assembly Member participant, can best be described as "non-participatory" (Arnstein, 1969). There is so much talk from local government authorities about the impact of participation on community development, and efforts by the Assembly to enhance community participation in the decision-making processes of community interventions are often referred to, however, Arnstein (1969, p217), points out that the "real objective is not to enable people to participate in planning or conducting programmes, but to enable powerholders to educate or cure the participants".

To conclude, the implication arising from my research evidence is, that community participation in development decision-making at the local level is limited, as the assembly fails to effectively engage the local community. It is also inferred in the evidence argued in this subsection, that the relevant legal provisions require the use of a bottom-up decision-making strategy and, indeed, there is adequate knowledge of these laws and procedures to engage the local community, at all levels of the decentralised structure, on community development issues. Based on the data from my research, however, political expediency, limited financial resources and, to a limited extent, low staff capacity, make the full implementation of engagement procedures impossible at the District level. The next subsection explores Ghana's tiered structure of DLG to identify the weaknesses that contribute to low community participation in local governance.

5.2.2 The tier-structure of decentralised local government

In this subsection, I analyse the tier structure of Ghana's DLG administration. The structure was established by law to promote bottom-up decision-making processes at the local level, and to enhance local community participation in DLG (LGA 936, 2016). I explore the structure to identify how it contributes to citizens' low participation rates in the decentralised governance decision-making process. Data from my research reveals recurring references to community-based structures that have been created by law to facilitate popular participation by the local community in DLG processes. Ghana's DLG development model is operated on a 3-tiered structure, comprising of

the District Assembly, Area Councils and Unit Committees. However, contrary to the legislative expectations that these tiered structures would amplify grassroots community voices in local level decision-making processes, findings from my research indicate that there is widespread disinterest amongst local community members in relation to these structures.

One of the fundamental questions I raised during the data collection was: why is there low engagement in the local level structures which the law says should actualise the 'power to the people' mantra and promote broader participation of local communities in their own governance? My research showed that the reasons argued are multidimensional, but 3 are germane to my study. Structures which are not really autonomous, structures which are not responsive to local needs and inadequate knowledge of the functions of the local structures, are the key reasons identified by my research that cause disinterest in the structures. I will now examine each of these causes below.

5.2.2a Local level structures are not genuinely autonomous

Firstly, the study argues that local level structures are not genuinely autonomous, in many respects. The current arrangement of the local government model, through the tiered structures, contradicts the earlier expectations of many Ghanaians that the decentralisation of government structures would transfer decision-making powers to local people to enable them to participate in governing themselves. The present data, however, suggests that local government decision-making powers are still very centralised. For instance, it emerged from the study that District Assemblies do not have decision-making powers in regard to staff recruitment. This critical function is usurped by a central government controlled public agency. In addition, the findings indicate that local level structures lack the legitimacy to impose sanctions or to apply disciplinary actions. A Senior Civil Servant of the Assembly, noted:

> *Even where the Assembly receives and investigates any complaints about any of its staff, the Assembly cannot punish the liable staff. We only recommend that the local government service in Accra apply action. The District has no choice in who it can best work with, since all staff are recruited and managed by that central agency* ***(Interview: DCD, Kumbungu, 12/04/2021)***.

This sentiment implies that critical decision-making processes, such as those related to the bureaucracy management that largely determines local government performance, is undertaken by a central agency that is located far away from the community. This account contests the theoretical claims that local governments are better placed to deal with local issues (Smoke, 2003; Manor, 1999), given their proximity to the local people, and their access to indigenous knowledge and information, which is better than is possible for the central government.

This study has also observed that local level decision-making structures are further limited in financial decision-making processes at the local level. Financial resource availability and the unrestrained discretional application of these resources are supposed to contribute to the proper functioning of local level structures. However, the District Assembly Common Fund (DACF), which is a special purpose vehicle established under Section 125 of the LGA 936 (2016) to allocate financial resources from the consolidated fund to DLG structures, is also influenced by central government. Additionally, the findings reveal that central government agencies exercise control over the application of the limited funds to the Assemblies. The data reveal that while central government fund some priority projects under its flagship programmes, some government agencies determine other projects for all District Assemblies, which are often charged to the Assembly's share of the common fund allocation. The DCD disclosed:

> *Some projects are disguised as central government intervention, but the cost is often charged to our allocations and deducted at source. Even local government training needs and programmes for staff are often determined by a central government agency and are paid for by the District Assemblies* ***(Interview: DCD, Kumbungu, 12/04/2021)****.*

This assertion contradicts the established laws, including Section 12 of the LGA 936 (2016), LGA 455 (1993), NDPS Act 480 (1994) and Article 252 of the Constitution of the Republic of Ghana (1992). The limitation placed on financial decision making of district assemblies does not guarantee effective local governance. The actual decision-making powers are still very much centralised, and the people still do not have the power to govern themselves. This position is affirmed by other contemporary scholars including, Yeboah-Asiamah (2016), Crawford (2004) and Ayee (2001).

5.2.2b Local level structures are unresponsive to local needs

Secondly, my research points to the argument that local government decision-making processes that are put through local level structures are more tokenistic, if not non-participatory, rendering the structures unresponsive to community needs. I argued, based on my research data, that local level structures are ineffective, weak and unresponsive to local needs. For instance, decentralised structures have failed to amplify the silent voices of ordinary members of the local community. It is evident that local community members have developed a lack of trust, credibility and general apathy for the local government system because the structure have failed to meet local community development needs **(FGDs-4: Gbullung, 23/02/2021; FGDs-1: Dalun, 14/01/2021)**.

Knowledge of local community involvement in decision making at the Assembly is limited. At one of the FGDs, I observed that most respondents expressed disbelief when I read to them portions of Act 936 and Act 480, to emphasise the point that the Assembly are by law, required to involve the local community directly in decisions about their community's development. A participant abruptly asked:

> *Do we really have all these structures [Unit Committees, Area/Town Councils/ Assembly Member] in this District? Who are they? What do they do? Apart from the Assembly man who only comes here when we have a funeral, outdooring, a wedding or a social event, I have neither heard nor encountered any of the rest of the members of the district structure physically. We hear and talk to the district authorities, including my assembly man on Simli Radio, during Assembly Kpamba Saha* ***(FGDs-4: Mabilgu, Gbullung, 23-02-2021)***.

The view expressed above is a clear demonstration of the inertia local community members have in regard to local level structures. The overriding assertion amongst research participants was that local level structures in the District do not directly hold community fora to afford the local community the opportunity to have an input into local development plans and other decisions. Where such fora are organised, they are often limited to some unknown representative membership of the decentralised structure. Interventions arising from such skewed decision-making processes often do not reflect the local community's needs.

While this evidence may hold true for the Kumbungu District, I must caution that this may not be the same across all Districts in Ghana, especially in areas where a ruling government has a huge political following and will want to implement interventions that have an impact on its electoral fortunes. Nonetheless, my argument is that evidence of this sort confirms the views of critiques of local governance (Naaikuur and Diedong, 2021; Anaafo, 2019), that local level sub-structures are generally dysfunctional and weak, leading to very limited local influence in community decision-making processes at the local Assembly.

One other argument from the data is that local communities have generally lost interest in district level participation, owing largely to fatigue and the lack of direct results from their limited participation via the structure. A Communication Expert, and Chairman of the NMC, argued that community members closely observe and measure how their involvement in local government decision-making processes yield tangible, direct outcomes for their communities, and where they observe that their opinions, suggestions and needs are not reflected in development plans and local government interventions, they simply opt out of future engagement **(Interview: NMC Chairman, 07/04/2021)**. My argument is that community members will resort to other avenues to express their frustrations when the system continue to suppress their voice and expressions.

5.2.2c Low level of knowledge about the composition and functions of local level structures

The final reason for the high level of apathy in local level structures is the limited knowledge of the composition and functions of the 3-tiered structures amongst local community members. This study argues that the relatively high levels of illiteracy and the lack of concerted efforts by the Assembly to empower local people to develop a civic conscious is a disincentive for local community participation in the District. Local community members are not well informed about the functions of the 3-tiered local level structures, and they therefore lack the capacity to constructively engage with the structures so as to advance local government decision-making. The field data analysed suggest a contrast in the local community's level of knowledge of the existence of decentralised local level structures, and the level of knowledge about the structures' composition and functions.

The Assembly, as a local level structure, for instance, is perceived to be an extension of the central government institutions by the local community, rather than as a distinct local government structure through which the local community can exercise control and ownership over decision-making processes. The Assembly, in this case, is seen as an agency that is external from local community institutions, and therefore the local people, do not identify with the Assembly and its services. This view explains why the local community is very remote from the local Assembly's engagement. This notion is firmly held by the local community **(FGDs-1: Dalun, 14/01/2021; FGDs-2: Vo□gu, 16/01/2021; FGDs-3: Zangbalung, 20/02/2021; FGDs-4: Gbullung, 23/02/2021)** and this is indicative of a limitation in their knowledge of the functions of the Assembly, and according to (Inkoom, 2011; Awortwi, 2011; 2010) this affects the nature of the engagement that grassroots communities have with the Assembly. In terms of the composition of the Assembly, participants demonstrated that Assembly Members, whom they elect in a four year election circle, are members of the Assembly. The DCE is regarded as being a representative of the central government to its decentralised institution, with control over all decisions at that level. Beyond this, however, participants could neither tell which other members made up the Assembly, nor how the Assembly functions, in terms of the services it offers and the level of engagement the local community can have with the structure.

Additionally, the study observed that there was a lack of knowledge of the functions and composition of the remaining 2 tiers that make up the local government structure in the District. The Area Councils and the Unit Committee are supposed to be the nearest structures to the local communities, but it seems, from the data, that knowledge of these structures was rather lacking. For instance, local community members could neither tell what functions area councils perform in the decentralised structure, nor the membership of their Area Councils **(FGDs-4: Gbullung, 23/02/2021)**. I argue that the lack of knowledge of these local level structures creates a gap for effective engagement in development decision-making at those levels.

I argue that there cannot be any meaningful community engagement when local community members are not empowered with the knowledge of these 2-tiers of the local level structures. The Area Councils and the Unit Committee are the key links between the local people and the Assembly (Republic of Ghana, 1988; 1992; 2016).

They are the main system units for civic education and community engagement in the local communities. They are mandated to play key roles in community mobilisation and awareness creation on local government programmes and activities in the various locales. Area Councils and Unit Committees are also charged with the mandate to directly oversee the regular maintenance of all local government funded community projects in their neighbourhoods. There seem to be very poor knowledge of these structures in the District and this creates apathy in the structures and leads to a low level of engagement in local government decision-making. There is the need to promote civic education, capacity building and awareness creation related to the functions of each of the tiers of the local level structures through mutual partnership with other interest groups in community development in order to enhance community engagement. The next sub-section will examine the nature of local collaborations between the local media and the local assembly.

5.2.3 Local level stakeholder collaboration

I argue, in this subsection, that the failure of the Assembly to strengthen local collaborations with DSR further weakens community participation in local governance. My primary research into the legislations and regulatory data relating to local government administration in Ghana revealed that several provisions have set up elaborate channels to ensure effective and efficient community engagement in local governance (LGA 936, 2016).

Contrary to these express provisions, however, I would argue that the Assembly has neither fully operationalised these relevant provisions, as indicated above, nor utilised the channels of mass communication to afford the communities the opportunity to resourcefully participate in its governance processes. Prior to the fieldwork, I expected that, given the scope of these provisions, the high illiteracy rate, and the presence of a pioneering CR in the District, the Assembly would engage DSR to improve the participation of the local community in governance processes. That was not the case, as findings from the field research reveal that the Assembly has no official partnership arrangement with the radio station **(Interview: PM, 30/04/2021)** *per se*, but the Station has been committed to highlighting and reporting on the activities of the Assembly **(Interview: SM, 25/01/2021)**, and to empowering their constituent communities to participate in its decision-making processes.

My research discovered that the CR in Dalun is more interested in amplifying the voices of rural communities, especially with regard to their challenges, and to bringing those to the attention of local government authorities in the District, and to other development actors within their constituent communities. Simli Radio's core mandate has been to expand access to community participation in the public sphere and to ensure that its constituent communities are empowered through its programmes, to thus enable it to contribute effectively to the development of the community in which they aspire to live. The Station Manager, argued:

> *Simli Radio seek to offer the opportunity for our listeners to engage in their own development aspirations. In doing this, we explore participatory approaches to provide our constituents [with] the most effective platforms to engage, debate and stimulate socio-economic and political change that meet the aspirations of the local people* ***(Interview: SM, Dalun, 25/01/2021)****.*

The statement above suggests that DSR recognises that its constituent communities have a better knowledge of their communities and a greater appreciation of their challenges and potentials as a community. Providing them, thus, with the right platform on which to engage, not only demonstrates constructive collaboration with all spheres of the community, but also a clear commitment to community development.

This research further noted that DSR broadcasts have brought the activities of the Assembly closer to the communities in Kumbungu and other adjoining Districts than any local level decentralised structure in the District. Simli Radio continues to provide broadcast platforms and space for elected representatives of the local communities to directly engage with their constituents on a regular basis in order to bring them up to date with issues at the local Assembly. An Assembly Member noted:

> *I find Simli Radio is bridging the participation gap in local governance through their well-designed broadcast that target community inclusion in the very things that affect our people* ***(FGD-5: AM Participant, Nyankpala, 25/03/2021)***.

Nonetheless, my review of primary documentation, as part of this research, reveals compliance gaps when it comes to the Assembly fostering mutual partnership with the CR for the purposes of enhancing local accountability, promoting civic engagement, and encouraging community participation. The study found no evidence to suggest

that the Assembly engages the CR in giving meaning to Section 46 (2) of the LGA 936 (2016), as argued above. The analysis further revealed that the DCE consistently failed to comply with Section 45 of the LGA Act 936 (2016), which requires him, as the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Assembly, to report on stakeholder participation in the assembly's activities **(Interview: DCD, 12/04/2021)**.

In response to a question as to why the Assembly has no formal partnership arrangement with the CR to amplify the Assembly's activities and to involve the larger community in its decision-making processes, the DCD noted that the Assembly lacks the financial resources to do so **(Interview: DCD, 12/04/2021)**. However, Assembly Members and the grassroots communities contest this position, arguing that the only justifiable reason why the DCE and the Assembly failed to cement its relationship with the CR is the fear of been held accountable by the local community on radio. The data show that DSR sits at the heart of the local community and is a credible power source of information for the local community. An Assembly Member suggested:

> *…they are running away from being exposed for their corruption and misuse of our resources. They cannot sit on radio and spew lies; they will be exposed. People will embarrass them with evidence they cannot deny publicly* ***(FGD-6: AM Participant, Kumbungu, 30/03/2021).***

A radio listener FGD participant argued:

> *… the district assembly authorities are afraid of accounting to the local people. They know Simli Radio is the peoples' favourite medium of communication in the district. Simli Radio will not help them to hide their corrupt practices, neither will the radio condone their ineptitude. That is why they do not engage the local community through Simli Radio* ***(FGD-1: Dahinsheli, Dalun, 14/01/2021)***.

The data suggest that both reasons are germane when arguing that there is a lack of efficient institutional collaboration between the Assembly and DSR. However, what is obvious from these assertions is an acknowledgement of the critical role of the institution of the media in governance processes. I argue that CR is fundamentally a pillar of local accountability, with rights that enable it to act as a check on the dutybearers in a democratic space. Information acts as the fuel that propels citizens to participate more meaningfully in a democracy. Where the local community do not have adequate access to credible information, their participation in governance

processes will be undermined. CR cannot be overlooked as a critical platform, for the dissemination of information, the promotion of local community voices and accountability in local level structures. It promotes a broader dialogue on local government development issues, including the views and perspectives of traditionally marginalised groups, leading to more inclusive development outcomes.

So far, the evidence shows an extension of central government control on local level structures rendering those structures dysfunctional and potentially unresponsive to local community needs. This section has argued that DLG structures have not resulted in the much-touted devolution of power to the local community from the central government. This has not led to the needed diversity in development decision-making processes at the local level, and it has failed to increase the direct participation of the local community in their own governance processes. The next section looks at the issues affecting community participation in the DLG structure in the KDA.

5.3 Issues affecting community participation in local government

This section draws on the platforms for the expression of local community participation in DLG and discusses the constraints and challenges inherent in the system. Using the data collected from the fieldwork, this section argues that DLG structures are vexed by the multiplicity of challenges which have rendered the structures largely unresponsive to local community needs and unaccountable to local people. These weaknesses make local level structures unable to mobilise and generate the needed community support and interest in local government affairs.

The section therefore discusses the partisan political control of the local level structures, particularly mirroring the heavy central government representation on important local level structures. This section examines the consistently low voter turnout in local level elections as being a key challenge to building a resilient local government system. It also draws out the contrasting legal and constitutional provisions that make certain implied participatory decision-making functions of the structures at the local level, problematic. The section also examines the key socio-cultural factors from the field data analysis that militate against the active political participation of women and persons with disability in local government affairs in the District. Finally, the section discusses the failure of the Assembly to integrate DSR, as

a communication resource, into the decentralised structures to broaden the scope and avenues for community participation in governance issues.

5.3.1 Partisan political control of local level structures

My research findings show the continuous partisan political control of key local level structures in the DLG system as being an example of demotivation for local community participation in local government decision-making processes **(FGD-6: Kumbungu, 30/03/2021)**. As I have argued elsewhere in this chapter, the local government model was designed to oversee the transfer of local decision-making powers from central government to local people, to enable them to manage their own affairs. The system was intended to be politically and administratively independent of the central government. It was designed to enhance the capacities of local people to effectively participate in decision-making and to manage their own development trajectory. It was to also ensure that the local political leadership of district level structures were directly accountable to the local community.

Based on my research data, I argue that these objectives are yet to materialise, partly because of the highly partisan control of the local level structures. I argue further that local level decision-making powers have neither been genuinely entrusted to the local people, nor has district level political leadership become accountable to the local people. Rather, there is a heavily influenced central government representation on the District Assembly. The Assembly, by the provisions of the law, is at the apex of the decision-making and implementation structure of the District. This study has observed that local community members of the district do not have a say in who becomes the political head of the local Assembly. The influence of the local people's representatives at the Assembly is undermined by the appointment of a DCE and a 30% central government representation mostly made up of political party followers to the Assembly. This politicisation of decentralised governance structures dissuades local political actors' from showing accountability to the local community.

The primary data analysed reveal that the standard practice, in which most of the assembly's decision-making processes take place at the sub-committee levels before being reported to the plenary for debates and approval, have been abused by the political leadership of the Assembly **(FGD-5: Nyankpala, 25/03/2021; FGD-6: Kumbungu, 30/03/2021)**. This practice is limiting the influence of Assembly Members

in the local level decision-making processes. More worrying is the situation where political appointees to the Assembly, or elected Assembly Members who have an allegiance to a ruling political party, are often favoured to occupy the headship of the various critical Assembly sub-committees (Adamtey, 2014, p79). I argue that as a result of this contrasting arrangement, decision-making processes in the Assembly are skewed to favour the agenda of the central government, rather than promoting community interests.

For instance in **(FGD-5: Nyankpala, 25/03/2021)** it was revealed that 3 of the 5 persons occupying the Chairmanship positions of the Executive Committee of the Assembly were central government appointees, and the remaining two, although elected to the Assembly, owe allegiance to the governing New Patriotic Party (NPP). As a result, critical matters are not often discussed during Assembly meetings but are merely reported to the plenary sessions, since the executive committee has the power to take decisions on behalf of the Assembly when it is in recess. I will argue that in the same way, dissenting opinions do not get heard at the sub-committee level and will not be heard at the plenary in instances where the Presiding Member of the Assembly is on the government side.

Additionally, because election is one of the direct ways of measuring participation, the district level elections offer one of the most practical opportunities for local community participation in local governance. The local community has an opportunity to go to the polls every four years to elect an Assembly Member and the Unit Committee Members to represent their interests on various decentralised structures. However, the data show that this avenue of local community participation is poorly attended to. For instance, voter turnout in the last 3 local level elections in the District have been consistently low **(Interview: EC, 30/04/2021)**. Local communities in the District do not only show high apathy in the process, but also have a suspicion that their votes at the local level have very little impact on the performance of the local government administration **(Interview: NMC Chairman, 07/04/2021)**. I would argue on the strength of these data that the weak partisanship in local level structures makes it difficult to mobilise local community members to vote in local level elections. District level electoral processes will lack credibility because it has become an extension of partisan political activity.

The local community legitimately questioned the validity of the emphasis on their participation in the decentralisation model and the ownership of local level structures in local governance decision making processes when the most powerful office holder in the Assembly structure remains an appointee of the central government. A participant at one of the focus groups, queried:

> *Are we serious about this local government business? The DCE is supposed to serve the interest of we the local community, yet, we do not have the right to decide who should be our DCE? How will a DCE appointed by a ruling party show urgency to our needs over his party campaign manifesto? How will such an officeholder account to the local people* ***(FGD-3: Tunteiya, Zangbalung, 20/02/2021)?***

My research findings indicate that central government retention of 30% stake in the local assembly through the appointment of assembly members further limits the drive, efficiency, influence, and accountability of local level structures. A participant noted:

> *We are told that 30% of assembly member seats are reserved for the appointment of traditional leaders and other marginalised groups to provide them voice and a balance in local governance. That is good! But what is happening now in our district assembly? Those seats are given to very known political party agents as compensations for their support and loyalty to their party* ***(FGD-2: Sonŋsim B□bu, Vo□gu, 16/01/2021)?***

While these are legitimate concerns lingering in the minds of many dissenting local community members about the decentralised model, the Director of Policy Planning at the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralisation and Rural Development (MLGDRD) attempts to explain why the Central government appoints the DCE to the local government. He argued:

> *The central government still need to demonstrate relevance at the local level through conscious efforts at realising its political objectives. The appointment of the DCE by the President as his representative is to maintain the linkage between the central government agenda and local government priorities. The local government still retains greater representation and control. The President's nominee to DCE needs the prior approval of two-thirds of the Assembly Members present, and voting to be confirmed* ***(Interview: DPP-MLGDRD, MS Teams, 17/02/2021)****.*

I not only find this explanation fundamentally weak, but it practically contradicts the '*power to the people'* catchphrase in the letter of memorandum that accompanied the

decentralised LGA 462 (1993). I argue that if the emphasis of decentralisation is on the local ownership of decision-making processes, then the local community should have absolute control over the structure. However, successive governments have not demonstrated enough commitment and political will over the years to relinquish the appointing powers of the President to allow for genuine local ownership and control of decentralised governance processes **(Interview: MFWA, 16/02/2021)**. I argue that the closest to such an attempt was in April, 2017, when the President of the Republic of Ghana, His Excellency Nana Addo Danquah Akuffo-Addo, announced his government's intentions to amend two entrenched provisions of the Constitution. In a surprise turn of events, however, in just two weeks before the much talked about scheduled referendum, the President announced the withdrawal of the Bills and Motions of amendment from Parliament, citing what he referred to as a *"lack of broad national consensus among key stakeholders and the populace"* (Graphic Online.com, 2019), apparently referring to national political actors who extended their influence and control over the DLG system.

It is worth noting that there is overwhelming support from civil society, media, local non-profit organisations, and academia, for the amendment of the relevant provisions (Article 243-1[17] and Article 55-3[18]) of the 1992 Constitution to allow for the direct elections of DCEs and all forms of local political representation by the local community. The next subsection will examine how the lack of social accountability within local level structures dissuades the local community from participation in local governance.

5.3.2 Flow of accountability in local level structures

This sub-section unpacks the flow of accountability in local level structures in the DLG system. Accountability is not only germane to effective local community engagement, but the lack of it creates mistrust among local community members in regard to the viability and reliability of local level structures. The 1992 Constitution of the Republic

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17 Article 243(1), 1992 Constitution: "There shall be a District Chief Executive for every district who shall be appointed by the President with the prior approval of not less than two-thirds majority of members of the Assembly present and voting at the meeting".

18 Subject to the provisions of this Article, "a political party is free to participate in shaping the political will of the people, to disseminate information on political ideas, social and economic programmes of a national character, and sponsor candidates for elections to any public office other than to District Assemblies or lower local government units".

of Ghana had long recognised the importance of social accountability in stimulating community participation in local governance when Article 240(e) provided that:

> *To ensure the accountability of local government authorities, people in particular local government areas shall, as far as practicable, be afforded the opportunity to participate effectively in their governance* ***(DA: Republic of Ghana, 1992).***

Despite this clear provision of law, however, my research found that local level structures promote vertical accountability, in which appointed local government authorities feel less accountable to the local community but, rather, owe allegiance to the appointing authority. As argued by an FGD participant, quoted below, an appointed DCE feels more accountable to the President of the Republic, and the 30% appointed Assembly Members feel accountable to the DCE and the ruling political party, since they do not represent any electoral area. They see themselves as representing the government and have arrogated to themselves the title “government appointees”.

> *The Assembly structure is saddled with corruption and the authorities do not account to we, the ordinary people, because they say we did not put them in those positions.* ***(FGD-3: Tunteiya, Zangbalung, 20/02/2021)***.

My research respondents argue that there was no need to become involved in a system that does not guarantee the necessary assurances that their concerns and input are important to the overall outcomes of decentralised decisions. A participant in a FGD remarked:

> *….. since they continue to do what they want and not what we, the local people, want, we have also decided to withdraw from any local government issues. We will work with the NGOs that come here to help us to address our concerns. They are better than our District Assembly* ***(FGD-3: Tunteiya, Zangbalung, 20/02/2021).***

Based on my research findings, and evidenced by the views of the FGD participant, quoted above, I would argue that the decentralised governance structure in the District has no mechanism in place to ensure social accountability to the local community and to deal with the growing perception of corruption. Germane, in particular, to the discussions on local government accountability are several allegations of the abuse of public office and corruption, especially the entrenched culture of elite capture among key government appointees and their cronies in the Assembly, which have not been

investigated **(FGD-4: Gbullung, 23/02/2021)**. The lack of a system that promotes local accountability fuels the perception of a fundamentally weak and unproductive local government administration, governance and development model that work for only a few. The deeply held view of corruption in the 'system' dissuades community participation in the local government system **(Interviews: NMC Chairman, 07/04/2021: MFWA, 16/02/2021)**. This is particularly so when the, so-called, "government appointees" appear to be so powerful in decision-making processes, more so than the peoples' elected representatives. The next subsection draws out some of the contrasting legal and constitutional provisions that undermine the local accountability of decentralised structures and the influence of true local representation on decision-making structures of the local government system.

5.3.3 Unclear legal/ constitutional provisions

In this section, I will highlight how key constitutional and legislative inconsistencies contribute to the weaknesses and abuse in the local level structures of the DLG system. The philosophy triggering Ghana's decentralised model of local government is that local community participation in development decision-making processes is fundamental to the sustainability of development outcomes due to the local ownership of development interventions. This philosophy found expression in the country's 1992 Constitution and other enabling legislation, including the LGA, 936 (2016); the LGA, 462 (1993); the National Development Planning System Act, 480 (1994); the District Assemblies Common Fund Act, 455 (1993); the Local Government Service Act, 656 (2003); and the District Assemblies Elections Act, 473 (1994).

Conversely, my examination of the above cited legislations, which forms a major part of my research, has unveiled key legal and constitutional inconsistencies that hamper effective community participation in decentralised local governance. Chapter 20 of the 1992 Constitution for instance, sets out the parameters of DLG in Ghana. In Article 241 (3), the District Assembly is established as the "highest political authority in the district" with "deliberative, legislative and executive powers", and further commits to a non-partisan local government system in Article 248. The letter and spirit of these provisions is to ensure that Ghana's local government development model was truly decentralised and owned by the local communities. Yet, in Article 243(1), the Constitution establishes the office of the DCE, who is appointed by the President of

the Republic. In Article 243(2c), the DCE is described as the “chief representative of the central government in the district” and is assigned the responsibility of overseeing the “day-to-day performance of the executive and administrative functions of the district assembly”.

These provisions are not only inconsistent with the spirit of Chapter 6, Article 35(6d)[19] of the same Constitution, but also contradict the provisions of the LGA 936 (2016), in which the Assembly, according to Section 12(1), exercises political and administrative authority in the District, and in Section 12(2) states that it performs deliberative, legislative and executive functions. I argue that the implication of the lack of precision regarding the authority and functions of an appointed Chief Executive and the elected representatives of the people, is a functionality gap in the decentralised system that is often abused for political expediency by the central government.

This functionality gap clearly plays out in the District in terms of resource control and allocations for the purposes of carrying out specified Assembly functions. The DCE, who is the chief representative of the central government at the local Assembly, controls all the resources that are meant for the local people, whereas Assembly Members who represent the local communities are starved of resources, which eventually limits their impact on the governance structure **(Interview: DPO, 13/04/2021)**. The lack of resources limits the capacities of Assembly Members to mobilise and effectively engage their constituents so as to give validity to popular participation in local government affairs **(FGDs-5: Nyankpala, 25/03/2021)**. Assembly Members operate under very stressful economic circumstances. The lack of dedicated resources for Assembly Members weakens community mobilisation efforts, which have an impact on community participation in DLG in the District. I analysed the overall impact of the lack of allocated resources to Assembly Members on the operational efficiency of the local government system under section 8.3 in Chapter 8.

The inadequate access routes linking the various communities to the District capital emerged as another factor that further weakens the Assembly Member-Community

19 Chapter 6 of the 1992 Constitution is entitled “The Directive Principles of State Policy”, and Article 35(6d) states that the Constitution should “make democracy a reality by decentralising the administrative and financial machinery of government to the regions and districts and by affording all possible opportunities to the people to participate in decision-making at every level in national life and in government”.

contact that is required by law. A first time Assembly Member, who was elected at the 2019 district-level elections, noted:

> *They say we should do voluntary work in service to our community. But when the DCE is visiting communities, you see the kind of funfair, pomp, and pageantry at those gatherings. It makes our work very difficult. Can you organise community members without providing them, at least, with water during a programme? Since my election, I have not been provided with a motorbike. Only the old members have motorbikes, from their previous tenure. How can I move around my communities to do my work? We are not paid a monthly salary, and we have no budgets* ***(FGD-5: AM Participant, Nyankpala, 25/03/2021)****.*

The sentiment expressed above is an indication that the Constitution and the enabling legislation on local governance places greater emphasis on a partisan central government that functions at the local level to achieve the desired participation in local governance. I would argue that this practice is problematic, and it partly explains why the local community has remain dissociated from effectively participating in the local governance process. The dominance of the political factor in local governance, as enshrined in the Constitution and the enabling legislation, further renders the structures of local governance weak. It leaves room for political manoeuvring in local level decision making and development interventions. I posit that this practice will provide an opportunity for local political functionaries to engage in selective participation in favour of their preferred Assembly Members and those communities where development interventions can impact on central government political fortunes. The next subsection explores some of the socio-cultural factors in the District studied that militate against inclusive community participation in decentralised governance.

5.3.4 Socio-cultural factors against inclusive participation

This sub-section argues about how the cultural marginalisation of women contributes to their low participation in local government decision-making in the District. Recent influences of modernisation, such as Western education, has not completely erased the impact that socio-cultural factors have on inclusive participation in local governance in the Kumbungu District, particularly with regard to women, young people and people with disabilities (PwDs). Community participation in DLG in the District has been much lower for women. Of the 3 women who were among the 75 AM candidates in the 2019 district-level elections, none was elected in the polls **(Interview: EC,**

30/04/2021). Only 2 women are currently serving in the 38 member Assembly as government appointees **(Interview: DCD, 12/04/2021)**. No woman is an elected Chairperson of a sub-committee of the Assembly and there are no PwDs in the Assembly, either as elected or appointed members **(Interview: PM, 30/04/2021)**. At various FGDs, I observed the firmly established cultural notion that men are supposed to make decisions, while women manage the home **(FGDs-4: Gbullung, 23/02/2021)**. It emerged that the Kumbungu District is typically a conservative Dagbong society, in which cultural norms and traditional values are highly revered.

In this research, I observed the hesitancy with which women in the district contributed to group discussions in Vo□gu and Gbullung, where community group FGDs were held. The oft-repeated Dagbanli phrase *'niŋ mi ya ma gaafara*[20]*'* was used to crave the indulgence of their husbands (male participants) before making any point. I was later to learn that the continuous use of this phrase by women during such discussions was to ensure that they were not seen as offending the conspiracy of the silence protocols established in the community. During one of the FGDs, in Dalun, a middle-aged woman and a mother of 5 male children, expressed a dominant view of participants, of what Dagbong customs and, to a great extent, many Northern Ghanaian ethnic groups' views of women in predominantly traditional societies are. She asserts:

> *Dagomba women, living in Dagbong communities, cannot claim wisdom over men, neither can we be superior in leadership to our husbands. Women, in Dagbong culture, are supposed to submit to their husbands and take care of the children* ***(FGD-1: Dahinsheli, Dalun, 14/01/2021)****.*

I called this "the dominant view" because almost all the participants in the various FGDs held the strong view that the place of a rural woman in their communities is in the kitchen and in 'the other room'- referring to women meeting the sexual needs of their husbands. This traditional society, which is structured on a patriarchal system, creates a particularly male dominance. There is a strong socially constructed notion that men are natural born leaders, who should lead decision-making, both at the family and the community levels. Women, essentially, play second fiddle to men in this

[20] A traditional customary diplomatic term, which can loosely be translated as "please forgive me", and which is used mostly during conversations with those from different demographics when a younger person, or women, are trying not to sound offensive to older persons or to men in the group.

society, and this is reflected in low women's participation in the local level structures of the local governance system.

Other factors limiting the active participation of women that came to the fore during my discussions were: the perception held by women that politics is time demanding; the financial constraints of rural women who, by the structure of a traditional society like that in Kumbungu, cannot own land or property; and, finally, the lack of formal education which has been created by the preference for male children; early marriages; child betrothal and child fosterage, which are common cultural practices in traditional societies. For instance, in Gbullung, an uneducated middle-aged woman and self-employed Shea Butter extractor lamented how her lack of formal education and literacy had become a barrier to her involvement in local politics. She argued:

> *I should have contested in the last Assembly election in 2019, but when I started my consultation, people told me I have no formal western education, how can I engage in assembly deliberations when I cannot speak, read, or write English? Because of the lack of education on my part, I pulled out* ***(FGDs-4: Mabilgu, Gbullung, 23/02/2021).***

Beyond the cultural implications, the account of this woman participant reveals the inadequacies of legal frameworks governing the conduct of local government business in Ghana. For instance, while the requirements set out in Section 7 (1a-d) of the LGA 936 (2016), precludes any educational status being a qualification when contesting in an Assembly election, Section 5(4) of the same Act 936 requires the Assembly to conduct its business in English. This brings to question, why the laws have failed to provide for local language use in a system that envisions local participation as an essential requirement or component of community development? This quite explains the rhetoric of local participation in the Ghanaian legislative framework on decentralisation and community development.

Overall, I argue that the exclusion of women from decision-making processes undermines their political, economic, social, and cultural evolution in the community. It denies them the means and opportunities to reconstruct the narratives that go against their agency and to influence the actions and decisions that impact upon their livelihoods. The evidence from the data suggests that women's exclusion from communal-level decision-making often leads to gaps in community development

plans, programmes of action and activities as interventions tend to exclude women specific needs because they are not on the decision making table. In the subsection that follows, I will examine the impact of the lack of access to local government information on community participation.

5.3.5 Lack of access to information

Grassroots communities access to information has a significant impact on their participation, as it stimulates community trust in local level structures, promotes downward accountability and creates awareness about local government programmes. I observed that, while the enabling legislations on DLG outlines diverse channels of making information easily accessible to grassroots communities, the Assembly has failed to utilise these channels **(Interview: PM, 30/04/2021)**. The Assembly's failure to deploy the mechanisms to make local government information accessible to the local community in the District has further alienated the grassroots community from important decision-making processes.

My observation of the information sources in the District, and the information-seeking behaviour of the local community in the district, reveal that the Assembly has no live website, no active facebook account, no twitter presence, and apart from the administration block of the Assembly there were no public notice boards in the communities and no public information centres. The district has neither held any town hall meeting nor any public engagement, e.g., budget preparation and validation fora.

Nonetheless, the District plays host to one of the pioneering CRS in Ghana, DSR. Simli Radio is one of the most credible sources of information, of civic education, and media used as public engagement platforms in the District (GSS, 2021; GDCA, 2019 and Al-hassan, Andani and Abdulai, 2011). There is mutual relationship between the CR and the local community, as the local community easily associates with the station and the station operates in fulfilment of community information and development needs **(Interviews: SM, 25/01/2021; DCD, 12/04/2021)**. However, the Assembly has yet to take advantage of this relationship to improve its information dissemination and to enhance its engagement with the local community for participatory local governance. Next to the radio station were the local community representatives, thus, the Assembly Members. The local community rely on their Assembly Members for government information from the Assembly **(FGDs-2: Vo□gu, 16/01/2021; FGDs-1:**

Dalun, 14/01/2021; FGDs-5: Nyankpala, 25/03/2021). However, for central government information, political party leaders were identified as major sources of information to the local community. Recognising that access to information is an essential requirement for participation in governance and development programmes, increasing local community participation will remain a challenge to the Assembly if it fails to improve on its information dissemination procedure and civic engagement activities.

5.4 Conclusion to the chapter

In conclusion, this chapter has presented empirical findings on the state of local community participation in DLG in the Kumbungu District. My research data, presented in this chapter, demonstrates that community participation is not only low, but also that decentralised local institutions lack the capacity to drive their mandate of promoting direct popular participation in the decision-making process and in improving sustainable local development across these communities.

I argue, based on the evidence that emerged from an analysis of my research findings, that community level decision-making and planning processes in the District are still centralised to a few politically powerful people in the local government structure. I have established several instances of systemic weaknesses and failures in broadening the platforms for local community participation in the Assembly. The decentralised Assembly, for example, recognises the critical importance of radio to information dissemination, civic education and the amplification of marginalised voices, but has failed to enlist DSR for the same purposes, even when constitutional provisions mandate them to do so.

In this chapter, I argued that the weak community participation in local government in the Kumbungu District also emanates from weaknesses in local level structures that are not genuinely autonomous in their functions. I demonstrated, through my research, that Assembly meetings are not genuinely participatory and, hence, Assembly decisions have failed to achieve the desired inclusive development outcomes. The lack of inclusivity in local decision-making results in the prolonged unresponsiveness of the Assembly to local community needs.

I have further argued in this chapter that constraining local community access to information breeds mistrust amongst citizens and heightens their suspicions about the value and importance of participating in any development endeavour. The chapter also demonstrated that the lack of local stakeholder collaboration, especially between the Assembly and DSR, impacts on local participation in the development decision-making processes of the Assembly. The next chapter analyses and presents empirical research findings from my research on the potentials of CR to improve local community participation in local decision-making and planning processes in the KDA.

CHAPTER SIX

COMMUNITY RADIO POTENTIALS FOR ENHANCING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN GHANA

6.1 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter addresses the second research question of the study: *Why is CR significant in supporting community participation in decentralised local government in Ghana?* The chapter begins with an analysis of the local community's perceptions on the concepts of community and CR, before examining their perspectives on the question of whether their local radio, DSR, the ideals of CR. In this Chapter, I also examined the structural construction of CR's community identity with a focus on the values and tenets which make the local community identify with DSR as being a key resource for internal communication. The process of exploring the CR architecture provides insights into how the Station establish its relevance within the community and the impact of policies and regulatory frameworks on these efforts. In another view, the examination of CR ecology helps to shed light on the Station's role in fostering community participation, facilitating dialogue and strengthening local community bonds through its programming and engagement approaches. I argue that these processes of community identity are part of local efforts to improve democratic processes and promote community development within the broader Ghanaian media ecosystem. This Chapter, empirically, also identifies and explores the avenues of community participation on CR programmes that are dialogic, participatory, facilitative, inclusive and contributes to a sense of belonging among the constituent community. Finally, the Chapter recognise the key limitations of DSR's participatory potential for community engagement in the local level structures of DLG in the District.

The Chapter affirms the centrality of local community participation in CR which has long been established (Girard, 2007 and Jordan, 2006). But beyond this, the key argument, in this chapter, is that CR has emerged not just as a medium of information, but also as a place of belonging and identity in grassroots communities in the Global South. Based on DSR's example, I argue further that CR exemplifies a resilient communication medium that contributes to local democratic processes. I assert that

CR should be a part of communication processes that contribute to social change, as it facilitates the inclusion, participation and empowerment of historically marginalised communities. First, I examine grassroots community perception of ‘community’.

6.2 Understanding the ‘community’ of CR from a respondent’s perspective

This section focuses on understanding the notions of the ‘community’ of a CR from the local community perspectives. The section argues that local community’s notions of the concept of “community” as applied in CR, foster a sense of belonging and identity which drive local participation in the station’s programming and outreach approaches. Analysis of my research data shows that an appreciable understanding of the concept of the ‘community’ of CR exists amongst the local community of the District.

To begin with, I argued in Chapter 2 that the concept of community is nebulous, due to its multidimensional nature. Nonetheless, community groups **(FGDs-1: Dalun, 14/01/2021; FGDs-2: Vo□gu, 16/01/2021; and FGDs-5: Nyankpala, 25/03/2021)** description of the ‘community’ of DSR, approximates to what I believe is a geographical space of people who are bonded by a sense of oneness, which is reflected through the diverse cultural ties, political interests, economic conditions, societal values and religious beliefs. However, this view is contrary to the regulator’s conception of ‘community’ as use in CR. The NCA as I argue in Chapter 8, limits the ‘concept of community’ only to defined physical spaces without taken into account, communities of interest such as church association, farmer groups or even, digital/ virtual communities, who may be dispersed across boundaries (NCA, 2019).

The notion of ‘community’ espoused by the research respondents does not only link the establishment of CR to local identities and social structures, but largely demonstrates the core values of the shared socio-cultural and political solidarity which anchor CR operations. While recognising the diversities inherent to the character of DSR’s community, I would argue that the ‘community’ is both culturally homogenous and geographically sparse across the District. What this means is that the ‘community’ of DSR is primarily affiliated by geographical, socio-cultural and political connections, which, together, complimentarily foster a sense of identity and belonging.

By geographical bonds, the 'community' of DSR occupies most traditional localities in the North-Western part of the Northern region. While the radio facility is established in Dalun, a peri-urban area of the Kumbungu District, I found out, through interviews **(SM, 25/01/2021)** and document analysis **(GDCA, 2019; GSS, 2021)**, that DSR's geographical boundaries transcend Dalun to include all of the localities of the District, parts of the Savelugu District which are bounded to Kumbungu to the East, parts of the Tolon District, which borders the Kumbungu District to the West, and parts of Sagnarigu Municipality, which borders the Kumbungu District to the South. In the far North of the Kumbungu District, DSR broadcasts are received in parts of the Mamprugu/Moagduri District of the North-Eastern region (GDCA, 2019). A common economic feature of these communities is that a majority of the population are engaged in subsistence farming for household consumption (GSS, 2021). My research also reveals that the Simi Radio community is largely rural, with common features of a traditional society still being very visible, despite the heavy penetration of Western education and Islamic religious scholarship in the District. The areas that receive DSR's broadcast today, are characterised by deplorable roads, limited infrastructure, and the lack of access to basic social amenities, including electricity, water, and good healthcare facilities (GSS, 2021).

With regard to cultural conception of 'community', two main ethnic groups make up the community of DSR; the Dagbamba[21] and the Tampulma[22]. However, the Dagbamba (Dagombas) constitute the majority broadcast community of DSR, with a few Tamplinsi (Tampulma) from the North-Eastern region making up the remaining broadcast community by cultural coverage. These two ethnic groups are dissimilar in language. Despite this language difference, the research revealed that the two ethnic groups are united by a common identity - Simli Radio – and other socio-political, religious, and economic connections. Among the Dagbamba and the Tamplinsi, there are no dialectical differences in their respective languages, as they trace their existence to a common ancestry, however, one will find clans that are based on hereditary trades in the Dagbamba clan system. Regardless of the observed

[21] An ethnolinguistic tribe of the ancient Mole-Dagbani State who presently occupy vast lands in the present day Northern and North-East regions of Ghana.

[22] An aboriginal tribe from northern Ghana who occupy some communities along the White Volta, mainly in the Daboya/Mankragu District of the Savannah region. They speak the Tampluma (Tamplim) language, which belongs to the GUR group of languages.

categories, as well as any other latent differences, my research indicates that the sense of belonging to one 'community' is never lost on the local people.

The community of Simli Radio is also politically differentiated from other communities. The KDA was inaugurated in June, 2012, and is headed by an appointed Chief Executive, with Kumbungu as its administrative capital. The communities forming the present Kumbungu District until 2012, were part of the, then, Tolon-Kumbungu District. It forms part of the 16 administrative districts under the Northern Regional Coordinating Council. The other administrative and political community is the institution of chieftaincy. The Kumbungu District has a chieftaincy structure in line with the customs and traditions of Dagbamba. Almost every town has a Chief called "Na" enskinned according to Dagbong culture. The Kumbungu Na is traditionally referred to as the "Army Commander" of the Dagbong Kingdom. I observed that while there are seemingly political tensions and unequal power relations in this categorisation of community, the local people possess a sense of belonging to one community and they described themselves in that manner throughout the data collection **(FGDs-1: Dalun, 14/01/2021).**

Overall, the notion of a 'community', in the understanding of respondents, serves as a vehicle for mobilising the local people to support local initiatives that guarantee social inclusion and the improvement of community life. In this research, the data indicate that community-ness is manifest in people looking out for one another, caring for the wellbeing of each other and coming together to seek a common goal. Yet, this research also points to an emerging community of interest in the way 'community' is conceptualised by grassroots communities, which is completely overlooked by the regulatory framework in defining the 'community' of CR in Ghana. For the purposes of this research, "the community of Simli Radio" refers to the geographic areas where DSR broadcasts are received, and the people identify with the station as a tool for community communication and development.

6.3 The structural identity construction of Simli Radio's community

Local communities who, recognising the need to promote their cultural values, advance their political advocacy and address key concerns about their communities, use CR to express these sentiments. However, the question remains, why the use of CR for such an enterprise? Why does CR easily come across as the ideal

communication medium for rural peoples' communication needs? In this section, I shall use empirical data from my research on DSR to argue, from the perspectives of the local people, that CR reflects the inherent identity of its listening community. Key themes that have emerged from the analysis of my research, such as the fundamental values of community identity, will be addressed in subsections. I will argue that the integration of DSR as an internal organ of the local community is because the Radio provides its community with the platform from which to reflect on their wellbeing and to build a common identity, which is essential for cohesion and inclusion in a diverse community. First, I focus attention on how communal ownership and control, as indicators of community identity, are manifest in DSR's structural identity construction.

6.3.1 Communal ownership and control as a potential

This subsection analyses community ownership and the control of DSR as a potential for local community mobilisation and engagement in decentralised local governance in the Kumbungu District. The radio was originally established as an offshoot of the Ghana Developing Communities Association (GDCA), a non-governmental community development-oriented organisation which started off in the Kumbungu District. Until the station formally joined the Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN) as a pioneering member, GDCA exercised jurisdiction over the facility. It has since ceded ownership and control of DSR to the local community.

A recurrent theme in the FGDs and interviews conducted was a sense amongst participants and interviewees that DSR is a unique radio platform that stands out due to its communal ownership and control structure. Unlike traditional radio stations that are typically owned and operated by a single entity or organisation, DSR embraces a more decentralised and participatory approach. The communal ownership and control structure of DSR means that it is collectively owned and managed by a community of individuals who are involved in various aspects of the radio station's operations which include content co-creation, programming decisions, financial management, and overall governance **(Interview: SM, 25/01/2021)**. The view of participants, that DSR is communally owned and controlled, suggests that the radio was well positioned as a significant communication tool for effective community mobilisation **(FGDs-1: Dalun, 14/01/2021; FGDs-3: Zangbalung, 20/02/2021)**. I argue, based on the views of participants that one of the key benefits of DSR communal ownership model is that it

promotes inclusivity, diversity of voices and in particular, community identity. This helps to ensure that the content and programming of the CR reflect the interests, values, and perspectives of the local community it serves. By embracing communal ownership and control, DSR aims to foster a sense of belonging, collaboration, and empowerment among its broadcast community.

I argue that CR ownership structure, if properly organised, provides an alternative to the more centralised and top-down models of traditional radio stations, allowing for the sense of a more inclusive and democratic approach to media ownership and representation. Simli Radio's identity can be seen in how local community members express their connection to the radio. My FGDs participants argue that DSR had a commanding role in mobilising the local community to action because of the community's sense of connection to the Station. I observed, during FGDs, how participants take pride in calling the station "our own", symbolising an expression of identity. When they talk about DSR, they do so with so much gratitude and passion that this demonstrates a genuine sense of connection. A participant at one of FGDs remarked, to spontaneous cheers and excitement from her colleagues:

> *If a radio station is established in my community that speaks for me, provides me with the space and platform to express my fears and joy, to hold dutybearers accountable for their management of our collective resources, which are entrusted to their care for my community's development, I can proudly call that radio station my own! It becomes a community property! It represents our collective voices, the voices of the community! And, as members of the local community, we feel proud to call it our own* ***(FGDs-1: Dahinsheli, Dalun, 14/01/2021)****.*

This view by local community members confirms the assertion of other scholars and in particular, the Station Manager, that the only media presence in Simli Radio's constituent communities prior to the station's establishment did not cater for the specific needs of the local people **(Interview: SM, 25/01/2021)**. Radio Savannah, as the premier radio station in the area, generally broadcast to a heterogenous community across the then Northern region. I argue that Radio Savannah did accommodate the different languages of the different ethnic groups in the region, but it failed to address the specific needs of the people of Kumbungu District. This also explains why there is that strong bond between DSR and the local community,

perhaps, the new radio provided the community an ‘identity’ and a voice. For a long time, the constituent communities of DSR demonstrates ownership, and exercised control, over its operations and activities **(Interview: SM, 25/01/2021)**. The significant acceptance of DSR by the local community is attributable to routine engagement and participatory approaches **(FGDs-1: Dalun, 14/01/2021; FGDs-3: Zangbalung, 20/02/2021)**.

Beyond this community interaction, however, I was interested in understanding how community ownership and control is manifested in DSR’s identity? It emerged from the FGDs **(FGDs-1: Dalun, 14/01/2021; FGDs-3: Zangbalung, 20/02/2021)** that DSR’s identity, strongly shaped by its ownership and control structures, is evident in four key dimensions: physical location of the radio, localising radio staff, responsiveness to listeners’ needs and content co-creation. Firstly, research participants argued that the physical presence of the DSR facility within their ‘defined community’ is a direct manifestation of its identity as a CR. The physical location of the structure of the Station in Dalun, and the establishment of SCC in various locations within the defined community, significantly contributes to the local community’s sense of ownership of the radio. Participants argued that local community members are quick to point to these physical structures to justify why DSR is “our own”.

Secondly, participants at the FGDs point to the local composition of the staff of the Station to argue their sense of connection to DSR. The Station follows a model where management, board members and staff are recruited from the communities it serves. I argue that by this approach, the Station is representative of its community and afford the community the opportunity to define and shape the overall programming and content to reflect local needs. This fosters a sense of representation and shared ownership of the Station. Akpojivi, (2012) argues that this model is customary in CR practice in Ghana because it is a regulatory requirement.

Thirdly, DSR takes great pride in curating its broadcast programmes to cater to the preferences and needs of its listening community. The station understands that its success relies on providing content that resonates with its audience **(Interview: PC, 25/01/2021)**. As a result of this, the Station resort to the use of an iterative bottom-up approach to engage, research and design programmes that mirror community life. Even when news is produced, it is focused on the local community, and that creates

an immediate effect of there being a personal connection to what is being broadcast. This increasing closeness of DSR's broadcasts to the everyday realities of the local community, fosters a sense of attachment and ownership among its listeners. However, beyond radio programming addressing the felt needs of the local community, I argue that the practice of routinely incorporating listener feedback into programming decisions, allows CR to be relevant, engaging and reflective of community's interests and concerns. This view is also shared by other CR researchers including E López, et'al. (2020) and Al-hassan, Andani and Abdul-Malik (2011).

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, it emerged from my research that DSR embraces a community-driven model of media content creation **(Interview: PC, 25/01/2021)**. In giving effect to the operational vision of DSR, to empower its listeners through participatory programmes to enable them to contribute towards attaining the "community they aspire to live in", the station's approach has been to convert its listeners into producers of broadcast content. This empowering process amplifies the voices of the local community in all aspects of CR's operation (E. López, et'al., 2020; Diedong and Naaikuur, 2012; Asuman and Diedong, 2019). I argue that as co-creators of media contents and listeners, the local community is demonstrating, in clear terms, that they are in control of the station's affairs. Refer to section 8.4 in Chapter 8 for more empirical and policy analysis about how community ownership of CR influences participation and identity construction of local communities.

Simli Radio, in turn, enjoys broad popular support from the community in progressing its development- oriented agenda **(Interview: SM, 25/01/2021)**. This empowerment drive is yet another way that DSR reflects the identity of its community. In the accounts of FGD participants in this research, DSR, through this approach, has enabled the local community to articulate its concerns, to support the radio in mobilising for local action, to link local community groups to external development agencies, and to help the communities to appreciate, and take advantage of, government programmes and initiatives, which the district assembly has not been able to do for them **(FGDs-1: Dalun, 14/01/2021; FGDs-3: Zangbalung, 20/02/2021)**. This process strengthens community bonds and fosters a sense of shared ownership and control. The emphasis on the local community having ownership and control rights is linked to issues of access to the radio facility and the ability to participate in all facets of the Station's

operation. The next subsection thus focuses on community access and participation structures as a potential for local community mobilisation.

6.3.2 Community access and participation for local mobilisation

Access and democratic participation in CR, as mentioned in the literature review in Chapter 2, are fundamental elements of the CR ecology in Ghana. The result of this study indicates that access and participation in DSR are important identity markers of the Station. However, unlike ownership and control structures, providing access means that historically excluded and marginalised members of the local community, are now given the opportunity for their voice to be heard. It seems plausible to argue that the concepts of access to radio, and its related media content, espouses the tenets of social inclusion and community identity, whereas participation mean all members of the community have equal rights to media content and broadcast decision-making processes if they wish to do so. The concepts of access and participation, when applied to the CR regulatory framework, would mean that DSR provides the environment for local participation in all aspects of its broadcast.

Contrary to expectations of this regulatory requirement, this research did not find uniform local participation in DSR. Data from the interviews and FGDs show divergent opinions on whether DSR's operations reflects these core tenets of access and participation. For instance, on the management front, FGD participants revealed that there are no structures that allow their democratic participation in electing members to the Station's Board[23] **(FGDs-1: Dalun, 14/01/2021; FGDs-3: Zangbalung, 20/02/2021)**. FGD participants, however, recognise that members of the Station's Board are their relatives from various parts of the listening communities. These assertions are affirmed by both the Station Manager and Programmes Coordinator during separate interviews who noted that members of the board are selected through some type of consultative processes.

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23 Simli Radio has a 7 member governing board. Three of its members are often appointed by GDCA, and the rest are appointed in consultation with the founding traditional authorities whose signatures appears on the documents for the granting of the operational licence. Other key staff of the Station including the Manager, Programmes Coordinator, Accounts Officer, and a technician, are appointed and paid by GDCA while the rest of the staff are volunteers from the listening communities.

> *Although Simli Radio is for the community, GDCA retains some limited control of its management decisions. GDCA facilitates the appointment of paid staff and the selection of community members to the station's board. This arrangement helps in easing financial burdens on the station, while guaranteeing the best sense of community identity* ***(Interview: SM, Dalun, 25/01/2021).***

My research also found contrasting views among FGD participants on the community's access to DSR and its related facilities. For Radio Listener Clubs (RLCs), there is a general feeling of unfettered access to DSR and all its production facilities **(FGDs-1: Dalun, 14/01/2021; FGDs-3: Zangbalung, 20/02/2021)**. This finding is not surprising, because participants drawn from RLCs are generally engaged by the radio station as the primary producers and core listener groups of radio contents. Simli RLCs are recognised as co-creators of media contents and would therefore view this as access and participation at the highest level. The statement of a 37 year old female shea butter trader, who is a member of the Tunteiya RLC in Zangbalung, below, illustrate this proposition:

> *I have lost count of the number of times the women of my community have gathered around the microphones of Simli Radio to speak about their predicaments in every sphere of life. If our life has improved today, it is because of the efforts Simli Radio has put into empowering us by giving us access to the microphones to reach out. When we meet, we don't ask who is coming from where* ***(FGDs-3: Tunteiya, Zangbalung, 20/02/2021)***.

The implication of this assertion is that, irrespective of one's social background, DSR provides the platform from which all interested parties can participate in its programming. The station's programmes and activities, by the account of the members of RLC in this study, are reflective of the local community's aspirations. Similar to the views of RLCs, the accounts of Assembly Members in this study also reflect the tenets of access to DSR claims. The findings indicate that some assembly members even refuse invitations to the station, for fear that they may be humiliated by their constituents if they fail to justify their stewardship to them by properly accounting for their representation on the Assembly. Nonetheless, the study observes that most Assembly members take the opportunity to engage their communities on various matters that are of interest to them:

> *The station provides access for effective community engagement. I am a regular representative on their local government programmes. My frequent appearance on the programme has made me popular around this area* ***(FGDs-6: AM Participant, Kumbungu, 30/03/2021)****.*

Conversely, the dissenting viewpoints on the issue of DSR's access were expressed by community groups who are not recognised clubs of the Station. The general view among this set of participants is that they feel left out on the Station's broadcasts. They disclosed to me that the only time they get to participate in DSR's broadcasts is when there are phone-in segments to broadcast programmes.

> *I don't even know I can walk to Simli Radio to talk into the microphone for others to listen. We struggle to reach their phone lines when they are doing programmes that we need to contribute to. They don't also come to us* ***(FGDs-2: Sonŋsim B□bu, Vo□gu, 16/01/2021).***

This contradictory assertion indicates that ordinary members of the local community may have limited access to the Station. That notwithstanding, the present findings seem to be consistent with other research which argue, that the use of RLC is a most reliable approach to the tackling of issues of access to a CR facility (Banda, 2006; Manyozo, 2012; 2005). I argue that in response to the growing complexity of community development processes owing to rapid urbanisation, the expansion of rural areas and political polarisation, the use of RLCs as broadcast hubs can better provide access to the local community. In the case of DSR, there is good enough access to the station, since the RLCs, under their own programmes, are accessible and free to join **(Interview: SM, 25/01/2021)**.

Besides these RLCs, I have also observed the frequent use of the Simli Connect Centres, which I analysed in great depth in Chapter 7, by local community members, who can access DSR by placing their voice recordings on the live programmes of the station. Nonetheless, the need to expand local community's access to all facets of DSR broadcasting is critical if the objective is to deepen community engagement and mobilisation. For more empirical/policy evidence about CR access and participation, see section 8.5. The next subsection therefore explores the use of local language in broadcasting as an example of an identity source, and to demonstrate an example of how CR expands access, and guarantees, local community participation.

6.3.3 Local language broadcasting as an identity construct

Local/ indigenous language broadcasts, from the literature analysed in Chapter 2, is a major identity construct that distinguishes CR from its commercial and public service counterparts (Salawu, 2021; Chikaipa and Gunde, 2021; Ndlovu, 2011; Akpojivi and Fosu, 2016). I would argue that the authentic use of indigenous languages on CR serves as a structural means for rural populations to distinguish between the medium and other media types. By using indigenous languages, a CR caters to the specific linguistic needs of the local community, creating a unique and culturally relevant platform for communication. Indigenous languages on radio symbolise the cultural expressions of the listening community. As I argue in Chapter 8, it is plausible to suggest that CR's use of exclusive indigenous language which aims at building a local identity and consolidating local peoples' sense of belonging, actually, constitutes a significant contribution to the ongoing efforts to decolonise radio broadcasting and to democratise communication in the Global South.

To begin, my research has established from the FGDs, and interviews conducted, that the exclusive use of local or indigenous languages as the primary broadcast languages on DSR means that the station is accountable to a specific audience, who may be diverse in composition yet are considered a homogenous group in character due to their 'community-ness'. For instance, in Dalun, the majority view of FGD participants is that the deliberate use of Dagbanli and Tamplinsi on the station's broadcasts attracts listenership, builds solidarity and increases the credibility and trust of the local community in the station.

> *Simli Radio talk to us directly. It speaks the language that every member of the community understands and can identify with. And that language is our identity, as a people and a Community, we are* ***Dagbamba (FGDs-1: Dahinsheli, Dalun, 14/01/2021)***.

Here is the voice of a 54 year old farmer, the head of a household, Mba Sheini. He is not educated and can neither speak nor understand any other language apart from his native language, Dagbanli.

> *I keep tuning the dial of my radio set until I hear voices of people speaking Dagbanli, then I know I have arrived at my favourite station-Simli Radio. I have never got that wrong because I easily recognise the voices of our own people* ***(FGD-1: Dahinsheli, Dalun, 14/01/2021)***.

Similarly, a 42 year old housewife, mother of 6 children and a FGD participant in Gbullung, Mma Adizatu, describes the significance of indigenous language use on DSR, when she argued:

> *It is the use of our local language on radio that helps me differentiate Simli Radio from the rest of the stations broadcasting from Tamale, the regional capital* ***(FGDs-4: Mabilgu, Gbullung, 23/02/2021)****.*

The argument that arises from these assertions is primarily centred on promoting a sense of inclusion and belonging. The study asserts that DSR is an influential voice and a resource whose emphasis on the inclusion of the marginalised communities in the communication ecology is noticeable. The findings indicate that broadcast programmes of DSR are localised by the use of the languages of the dominant ethnic groups of their catchment communities. The findings suggest that DSR's programming reflects a localisation strategy that prioritises the languages of the dominant ethnic groups in its catchment communities, with a focus on Dagbanli and a smaller representation of Tamplinsi. This approach allows the station to connect with its audience, promote inclusivity, and ensure its content is culturally relevant and accessible to the local community. This localisation strategy is evident in the distribution of programming, with approximately 90% of the programmes in Dagbanli and the remaining 10% in Tamplinsi.

The second remarkable impact of local language broadcasting on DSR is that it symbolises an expression of the cultural values and heritage of the Dagbamba and Tamplinsi, who constitute the ethnolinguistic community of DSR. An examination of the collective views of FGD participants, demonstrate, that the local community feels connected to DSR because the station speaks their language, which symbolises their community culture, establishes a communal identity and creates a sense of belonging to a community and a sense of pride in that community **(FGDs-2: Vo□gu, 16/01/2021; FGDs-4: Gbullung, 23/02/2021)**. It also shows recognition that DSR is contributing to efforts to sustain and promote the cultural values and heritage of its listening community through broadcast programmes that reflect local folk music, dance, drama and indigenous knowledge sharing. Justifying local language broadcasting, the NMC Chairman asserts:

> *When local people speak on radio about their stories in their local languages, they tell it all. They provoke emotional feedback and reflect deeply on their cultural values. When indigenous music is played, when folk stories are told, when social vices are localised and dramatised, it resonates with the community and there is an immediate connection to reality. People begin to question aspects of their cultural practices, and we see reformation to practices that violate human rights and practices that are inimical to their progress as a community* ***(Interview: NMC Chairman, Kumasi, 07/04/2021).***

I assert that the argument of the NMC Chairman quoted above, is expressed as an acknowledgement that CR itself is, first, a representation of a community cultural identity and, second, a cultural enterprise in which cultural practices are critiqued to ensure they are in harmony with social justice, human rights and the rule of law. These viewpoints agree with the findings of other studies, in which CR projects work with their communities to reflect deeply on their past and to construct better approaches to a more fulfilled future (Akpojivi and Fosu, 2016). As part of the community's reflections, cultural practices that stand in the way of community progress are reformed through the collaborative efforts of strategic programming with the local community's cultural gatekeepers. For instance, FGDs participants and interviewees argue that child betrothals, leading to early marriages, and male-child preference leading to the poor treatment of female-children, such as the failure to put the girl-child into formal education are two of the key common practices that DSR has helped to overcome in patriarchal communities in the Kumbungu District **(FGDs-2: Vo□gu, 16/01/2021; FGDs-3: Zangbalung, 20/02/2021; FGDs-6: Kumbungu, 30/03/2021; Interview: DCD, Kumbungu, 12/04/2021)**.

Another significant impact of the use of local languages in DSR broadcast which emerged from my FGDs data is that it positions DSR as a preferred medium of communication for the local community and for deepening local democratic participation. By this approach, CR is contributing to the decolonisation of radio content and the democratisation of the communication public sphere, particularly in developing countries in the Global South. By decolonising radio's public sphere, my argument is that DSR is dismantling the colonial language barrier that had long held back many of the local communities from meaningfully engaging in media discourse, especially in terms of content generation, dissemination and consumption, because they could not speak English or other foreign languages, prevalent on the media. By

prioritising authentic indigenous language use and minimising foreign language broadcasts, DSR opens the doors of broadcasting to ordinary people who were previously excluded. The arguments of Jilima, a 32 year old woman, a mother of 4 children and a farmer with no formal education from Vo□gu, illustrate this position aptly during a FGD.

> …*speaking Dagbanli on Simli Radio has opened the doors of broadcasting to us, the ordinary people, who neither have any formal education nor speak any other language apart from our native language of Dagbanli* ***(FGDs-2:*** **Sonŋsim B□bu,** ***Vo□gu, 16/01/2021)***.

I find the argument above pertinent, since it conveys the sentiments of a majority of people who previously perceived radio to be the preserve of only the educated elites. By broadcasting in exclusively local dialects, CR breaks the notion that held people back from participating in radio broadcasts. My research found that by this inclusive and participatory approach, DSR's reach and coverage permeates many linguistically challenged communities who are now actively involved in not only the consumption of media content, but also in news production in their own language.

One of the critical focuses of CR broadcasting has been the empowerment of its local community to appreciate and participate in local level decision-making processes. Data from various FGDs in this research suggest, that DSR reflects the diversity and plurality of its community, and it positions itself as a critical medium that addresses the barriers to effective community participation in local level decision-making processes. CR bridges the gap between the governed and the government and creates equitable spaces for inclusive debates. Afa Adam, a 67 year old retired roadside motor vehicle mechanic and a Tamplima, resident in Zangbalung, demonstrate how local language use on DSR satisfies the deep aspirations of minority and marginalised sections within its listening communities. Recalling how the voice, concerns and perspectives of his kinsmen, were previously silenced and overlooked in national politics in Ghana because they were considered a minority and landless, he noted:

> *For me, and my Tamplima kinsmen, Simli Radio is more than just a talking box! Since Tamplinsi was first broadcast on Simli Radio, we have suddenly gained recognition in the political space. Tamplimas were not regarded as important in community decision-making, because we were considered a minority without a voice in both local and national politics.*

> *We are proud that our language is spoken on air* ***(FGDs-3: Tunteiya, Zangbalung, 20/02/2021)***.

Afa Adam's assertion show how indigenous language use on radio creates a common identity and provide the platform from which to address long-silenced voices in governance. By providing a platform for minority groups to be heard, DSR addresses a long-standing lack of representation for the Tamplinsi in local community decision-making processes. The fact that DSR is the first radio station in Ghana to broadcast in Tamplinsi further emphasises its pioneering role in giving the Tamplima community a platform to address their long-silenced voices in the Ghanaian political space. This is an important step toward political inclusivity and participation for marginalised groups. I would argue that DSR's emphasis on local language use represents a medium of communication suitable for deepening community participation in local governance much more than its commercial and state-owned counterparts do. Indigenous language has value in its own right, broadens community participation, improves responsiveness to local needs and guarantees effective local level decision-making processes. For detail empirical/policy evidence about the impact of language on identity construction and local participation, see section 8.6.

6.4 Avenues of community participation on Simli Radio broadcast

In the previous section, I argued that DSR represents the fullest expression of diversity in its community since it pays attention to representative community voices through inclusive participation, and it reflects its community's wellbeing. In this section, I examine the avenues of community participation on DSR. Based largely on participant observation data made available through fieldwork, I would argue that community participation on DSR is most remarkable in terms of its broadcast programming, and it promotes a sense of identity, belonging and inclusion among the local community. I would argue that community participation is an indispensable attribute of CR and that, irrespective of the formal ownership status of a CR, strong participation by its listening community in content production and consumption are most critical to its broadcast objectives.

To expand the frontiers of participation in its programming, DSR engages technology-friendly and community-centred participatory platforms and approaches for grassroots communities to express their opinions on fundamental issues that are pertinent to their

community and wellbeing. This approach broadens the scope of participation and enriches the discourse on local governance in the Kumbungu District. Based on my analysis of the research data, several significant avenues for community participation on DSR have emerged, including Radio Listener Clubs (RLCs), phone-in segments, Simli Connect Centre (SCC), local panellists, and outside broadcasting. In this section, I will explore the impact of each of these avenues on the overall effectiveness of local community participation in decision-making at the community level. Taken together, I assert that the demonstrated effectiveness and innovative nature of these avenues highlight the immense potential of DSR in broadening the scope of community engagement within local governance processes.

6.4.1 Community-based radio listener clubs (RLCs) as participatory avenue for media contents co-creation and consumption

Research on RLCs have often focused on how it provides opportunities for media access to historically marginalised groups in local communities (Heywood and Ivey, 2021; Manda, 2015: Manyozo, 2012). In this subsection I argue that the activities of Radio Listener Clubs (RLCs) not only provide media access but also improve group dynamics, empowers and builds the capabilities of ordinary community members to meaningfully engage in media discourse and, relatedly, community development dialogues. For DSR, RLC as a participatory approach to broadcasting, was designed to promote active participation and foster engagement in the production of media contents centered on development discourses that directly reflects local community's lifestyle. Simli radio defines its RLCs as clubs or groups composed of different individuals with a shared interest in radio programming and development issues from the communities they serve **(Interview: SM, 25/01/2021)**. By creating a network of RLCs, the aim is to empower individuals to voice their opinions, exchange ideas, and contribute to the production of radio programmes that address relevant development challenges.

Findings from the FGDs I conducted in this research reveal that Simli RLCs empower participants by directly involving them in the production process. Participants argued that this participatory approach to generating media contents encourages their active engagement, self-expression, and the sharing of local knowledge and expertise **(FGDs-1: Dalun, 14/01/2021; FGDs-2: Zangbalung, 20/02/2021)**. According to Mr.

Larweh, a training office and GCRN lead facilitator, RLCs allows individuals to shape the narratives and themes discussed on their CR, fostering a sense of ownership and agency within the community **(Interview: GCRN, MS Teams, 24/04/2021)**. Another interviewee pointed out the significance of Simli RLCs to innovative programming and community participation and the overall impact of this approach to the Station's robust broadcasting ecology.

> *We rely on our RLCs, whose compositions are more representative of the communities for all our local governance and community development programmes. They are trained in group dynamics and understand how to convey community challenges with powerful effect for redress. There is no better way to grant community access to the station than what we do here in Simli Radio* ***(Interview: SM, Dalun, 25/01/2021).***

Another significant finding from my research is that RLCs are evolving in response to changing community dynamics. The present findings confirm previous studies (Heywood and Ivey, 2021; Backhaus, 2021; Mhagama, 2015) that RLCs are not static entities. My study discovered that Simli RLCs demonstrate fluidity and dynamism as they take on new objectives and challenges as issues of interest emerges. For instance, about 15 Simli RLCs that were formed to tackle issues of HIV/AIDS had moved on to co-produce and discuss Ebola, fistula disease and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. These RLCs continue to explore topical issues relevant to community health even though they were primarily established to create awareness on HIV/AIDS and dissuade its stigma through audio drama **(Interview: SM, 25/01/2021)**. My research indicate that DSR has over 40 RLCs spread across its operational areas and members of these RLCs are co-creators and consumers of its broadcast content **(Interview: PC, 25/01/2021)**. Membership to these RLCs is open to anyone who shares in the ideology of the specific club of interest. Some RLCs are general purpose, whereas others have specific objectives. RLCs that have specific objectives means that they have dedicated programmes that they co-produce and contribute to its post-production discussions. Each RLC formed by DSR receives periodic tailor-made training specific to the clubs' objectives and aims to build their capacities to facilitate discussions and increase their competence in engaging in insightful debates on broadcast content.

The findings about RLCs impact on media contents, access, empowerment, and voice opportunities from this study, is consistent with previous research (Heywood and Ivey, 2021; Backhaus, 2021; Mhagama, 2015). However, it contradicts the findings of Chirwa (2005) who reported that RLCs set up by Malawi's Radio Dzimwe had no influence on the Station's programme structure and content. This variation is expected because, regulatory frameworks have evolved in response to emerging understanding of participatory media productions, especially, in a heavily commercialised and Pentecostalite media ecosystem. I argue that through the participatory co-creation of radio contents that reflects local needs, RLCs also creates the space for dialogue and interaction within the community. RLCs fosters local connection, trust, and internal collaboration through the exchange of ideas, and they bridge gaps between different groups within the community.

I have established, through observation and interactions, that Simli RLCs engagement enhances media discourse and encourages diversity of opinion on the variety of broadcast content produced. The RLCs also facilitate direct feedback on broadcast programmes, which is critical for media credibility and impact assessment. It is plausible to suggest, based on the data analysed, that since their formation, Simli RLCs have grown to become the nucleus around which the local community is able to question local authorities and demand accountability and social justice. It emerged from the study, that Simli RLCs that focus on local governance in the area have been able to influence some local government decisions and actions by co-producing programmes using a combination of traditional talk show, panel discussions, radio drama series and listener phone-ins. The next subsection examines the contribution of phone-in segments to community participation on DSR.

6.4.2 The phone-in segment as an avenue for community participation

Phone-in segments are another example of local community participation but, in contrast to RLCs, they bring the audience on air as part of the broadcast production. Like radio itself, the ubiquity of the mobile phone in rural Ghana is not in doubt. The massive penetration and adoption of mobile phones in Ghana has brought in its wake a digital disruption whose impact is felt in almost every sphere of the local economy (see eg.: GSMA, 2020[24]). In this context, I argue that phone-in segments address the

[24] *https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/blog/the-state-of-mobile-in-ghanas-tech-ecosystem/*

fundamental questions of inclusion, exclusion, and the participatory gap of ordinary citizens in media broadcasts. The data from this research demonstrates that agrotechnology firms have leveraged the surge in mobile phone ownership among rural farmers to impact the growing agriculture population in rural Ghana **(Interview: GDCA, Tamale, 09/03/2021)**. For instance, mobile platforms that connect smallholder farmers to wider online markets, thus allowing farmers to monitor market prices in real time, to negotiate delivery services, to engage in digital payments, are, amongst other things, already in place in rural Ghanaian communities (*See:* Issahaku, Abu and Nkegbe, 2018; GSMA, 2019[25]). This suggest that local communities in Ghana are familiar with mobile phone usage for engagement.

An analysis of my research data suggests, that DSR had leveraged the opportunities that new technology in mobile telephony presents, to integrate key rural friendly aspects of that technology to expand the participation of grassroots communities in its broadcast. According to the Station Manager, phone-in segments are integrated into over 90% of DSR broadcast including traditional music, folk storytelling, civic education and governance programmes **(Interview: SM, 25/01/2021)**. The data analysis indicate that listeners are given space to call into the live show, either to seek clarification, to provide feedback, or to further share their experiences which, together, enrich the quality of the programming and foster a genuine sense of inclusion and belonging in the CR public sphere.

The most salient impact of this approach of local community participation on radio broadcast programmes, which emerged from further analysis of the data from my research, is that phone-in segments further contribute to the structural transformation of the linear, one way communicative approach of radio broadcasting, to demonstrate a more dialogic and interactive approach. What this means is that DSR acknowledges the importance of community input and recognises that the audience plays an integral role in shaping the content and direction of its broadcasts. This shift promotes a more democratic and inclusive media environment, where local voices and concerns are given prominence, and the community becomes an active participant rather than a passive recipient of information.

[25] *https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/AgroCenta-Empowering-smallholder-farmers-through-finance-information-and-market-access.pdf*

Further to this, I argue, that the dialogic nature of phone-in segments in CR broadcasts encourages a sense of community ownership and involvement. It allows for diverse perspectives to be heard, fostering a rich exchange of ideas and enabling the exploration of different viewpoints. This approach not only empowers grassroots communities but also strengthens the relationship between the radio station and its audience, establishing a more meaningful and interactive connection (Avle, 2020; Mhagama, 2015; Coker, 2012). I have had the opportunity to observe how the programmes that are broadcast are turned into interactive and engaging fora to such an extent that one wonders who the host is, and who is the listener.

On a typical phone-in segment, a caller is normally given up to a minute or two to contribute to the programme. Some community members struggle to catch the attention of the host, due to the numerous calls coming in during some of the programme. An example is the daily “community development” programme, which dedicates one hour to callers so that they can contribute to the issues of the day *(I have extensively analysed this programme in Chapter 7.4.2)*. Since this programme is more of an open forum, callers have a field day in addressing the matter before the house, devoid of any abusive or derogatory comments. The host only interjects when unkind words are used. Participants during FGDs note that this programme is very engaging, and often emotionally charged when very controversial topics are put up for discussions **(FGDs-2: Vo□gu, 16/01/2021; FGDs-4: Gbullung, 23/02/2021)**. When I asked what the impact of people calling in to contribute to a discussion on radio was, beyond having a sense of personal satisfaction, it came to light that the issues discussed on these programmes become the basis for further engagement with appropriate local level authorities. It allows government authorities to measure their progress in terms of their commitment to addressing local community needs, and in rolling out policies that meet these needs **(Interview: DCD, Kumbungu, 12/04/2021)**. It was revealed that development agencies use key discussions from the phone-in to justify development interventions in their operational areas **(Interview: GDCA, Tamale, 09/03/2021)**.

In conclusion, I recognise that the convergence of digital technologies, particularly mobile telephony, with CR broadcasts holds great potential for facilitating dialogic local knowledge sharing and enhancing the contribution of CR to rural development

outcomes as well as supporting the inclusion of rural communities in the country's mediascape. However, with the inevitable socio-economic and technological challenges in rural communities in Ghana, this could make the effective use of mobile phones difficult for some segments of the population. This limitation of mobile telephony in rural Ghana requires CR to institute more participatory mechanisms to enable more local people to participate in the media. One of such avenues that emerged during the analysis of the data is the Simli Connect Centres. The next section explores the contribution of SCC to participation on DSR.

6.4.3 Simli Connect Centres as avenues for community participation on Simli Radio

In recognition of the apparent challenges of income inequality and the inadequacies of rural infrastructure to support the uninterrupted participation of the community through phone-in segments on DSR, the station established 14 satellite social hubs, which are called "Simli Connect Centres" (SCCs), in some of its hard-to-reach communities. These enable its listeners to conveniently participate in its broadcast programmes. It is important to note that the SCCs initiative is tackling the underrepresentation of the least voiced and dismantles the barriers to equality of access to, and inclusion in, media production and consumption. This further contributes to the process of democratising communication in local communities.

A little context is important to appreciate the novelty and impact of these SCCs. Generally, income inequality often leads to disparities in access to resources and opportunities (see eg. IMF, 2015[26]; Cingano, 2014) including access to media platforms especially in rural communities. In many instances, within the ecology of legacy media, content production and consumption have been dominated by a few powerful entities, limiting the diversity of voices and perspectives (Dussel and Dahya, 2017). Therefore, when hubs like these are setup, they do not only provide platforms for participation, but primarily, the radio is addressing a fundamental issue of unequal access to communication technologies and media occasioned by intersecting income inequalities and the lack of state-investment leading to inadequate or poor rural infrastructure in rural communities. More broadly, one can argue that by these centres,

[26] https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/sdn/2015/sdn1513.pdf

CR is contributing to the broader framework of democratising communication in local communities (Wasserman, 2020).

During my field visit to some of these SCCs, I observed the traditional architectural design of the hubs which is reminiscent of the Northern Ghanaian sense of cultural solidarity and familihood. These hubs are fitted with internet boosters, smart phones, and a radio set, each managed by 2 trained DSR volunteers. The centres aid those people who wish to contribute to live discussions on the radio, but who neither own a mobile phone nor have the airtime to enable them to do so. The volunteers help interested members to record a minute long instant voice message on the topic under discussion, this is pushed to the programme host in the studios in Dalun, through WhatsApp voice messaging. The host plays the recorded voice on air, as if it were a phone call made into the programme. This approach of instant voice messaging is an effective mechanism for increased community participation in live broadcasts on CR.

At separate interviews with the Station Coordinator and the technical advisor at the GDCA, both argued that the hubs are becoming popular avenues of participation among the local community, and that community members are excited about the innovation that it presents in the broadcast landscape **(Interview: PC, 25/01/2021; GDCA, Tamale, 09/03/2021)**. In order to assess at first-hand how these pioneering hubs impact on community participation, I visited one of the centres in Logshegu, a predominantly farming community in the Kumbungu District, on two occasions. Here, I spent time interacting with fans of the hub and observing how the hub operates.

My first visit was the Logshegu SCC on a Monday night in August 2021. On this occasion, I participated in the 7pm "Yelvuhi Courtu[27]" broadcast, in which the phone-lines were opened for public discussions on an impending presidential announcement of MMDCEs. The focus was the rumoured re-appointment of the DCE for Kumbungu. At the hub, I met Azindow, a middle-aged farmer and resident of Logshegu. Azindow's message had just been recorded and pushed through WhatsApp, by the hub assistant, to the host in Dalun. As I sat near Azindow on the wooden benches, while observing our social distancing protocols, and waiting to hear his voice on the radio set that hung

[27] A dagbanli term loosely translated as "Court of Public Opinion", which is used to describe a social environment within which people are free to voice their opinion about any matter that is of public interest. They say it as it is, without any fear of being attacked, or of favouring a defaulting person.

over the branch of a shady Mango tree, I observed the attention with which Azindow, and others, listened to the conversation on the radio. Approximately 10 minutes later, Azindow's voice was being played on the live programme on air from the studios in Dalun, and the excitement on his face tells it all. Shortly after the night's broadcast, Azindow told me how he feels, having been able to contribute to an important discussion on who becomes the next Chief Executive for his District. According to Azindow, many people, like himself, find SCC the best approach to allow them to be included in community decision-making through radio. For him, if the media have any influence over community level decision-making, then, he is assured that his voice will make an impact. Beyond that, however, he feels recognised, and he has a sense of belonging to the DSR family, and that was worth everything to him **(Personal Interaction: Azindow, Logshegu, 30/07/2021)**.

I returned to Logshegu SCC the following Saturday morning at 7a.m., where I observed community participation practices on the morning show "Tinkpansi Lebgimsim Saha[28]". Based on my observed group dynamics are the SCC, I would argue that the hubs' approach of DSR is not only seen as a novelty in CR culture, at least in Ghana, but largely expands local community participation in programme broadcasting. In addition, the most fascinating of the hubs' approaches is the sense of responsibility that the local community have developed about their community. I argue that the local community recognise that they are central to improvements in both their own livelihood and those of their community **(Personal Interaction: Logshegu SCC, 30/07/2021)**. They therefore mobilise and take an interest in issues that are being discussed on DSR. The community members become sources of information and, in most instances, volunteer as community journalists (CJs) for DSR broadcasts **(Interview: SM, 25/01/2021)**. The next section discusses DSR's concept of community journalism and how it expands access to DSR and promotes local community participation in programme broadcasting.

[28] A term in Dagbanli that can be translated as "Community Development Hour". The broadcast is dedicated to issues of local community development. It rallies the diverse community support to drive local socio-political and economic transformation.

6.4.4 Community journalists as local access to community radio broadcasts

Existing research on CR ecology in Ghana failed to examine the application of journalism within this field and its effects on media credibility, representation, and participation. In contrast, Meyer and Speakman (2019) have outlined two significant differentiators between community journalism and other journalistic forms. They posit that the focus on “information connected to everyday life” and the development of “a closer, more intimate connection to the community” are distinct characteristics of community journalism within the broader media landscape. In this section, I reflect on the exclusive use of non-media professionals, who serve as volunteers on DSR, as journalists and sources of development information and news. Findings based on field interviews and FGDs indicate that DSR use non-media professionals as Community Journalists (CJs) for news generation and co-production. Participants in this research argued that this approach helps to establish a credible and trustworthy local voice within the community. I would argue that, taken together, the news gathering, and programme broadcasting techniques of DSR strengthen its relationship with the community and democratise the institution of the media. By connecting the many unrelated aspects of the local community through these community journalism approaches, it firmly establishes, within the community, a credible and trustworthy local voice.

According to the Station Manager, CJs are selected from a pool of volunteers and trained on newsgathering and production techniques. He noted that, as part of their training, CJs are provided with the necessary skills needed to be able to align media content to community needs. One of the key advantages of using local volunteers as CJs “*is the inherent connection they have with the local community* **(Interview: SM, 25/01/2021)**. The head of programmes at the MFWA argued that as members of the community themselves, CJs are likely to have a deep understanding of the concerns, and perspectives of the people they serve. *“This local knowledge and connection can be invaluable in ensuring that the content produced by us is relevant, relatable, and resonates with the community*” **(Interview: MFWA, MS Teams, 16/02/2021)**.

The general view of participants at the FGDs reflect the positions expressed above and further suggests that CJs nurture the civic consciousness of local community

members through their continuous reportage on critical everyday issues that impact upon the community's overall development. Mma Balima, a 62 year old woman, who described herself as retired fishmonger, in Zangbalung, stated:

> *These CJs are people we know and live with every day. They know our troubles and our joy. We like to talk to them, because we trust that they will report exactly what we say to them, because they see it every day, too. They don't say what the government want but, rather, how and what we, the community, feels and wants. If it is good, we are together, and, if it is bad, as it is now, we are with them. We can trust them, because they are not strangers to the community* ***(FGD-3, Tunteiya, Zangbalung, 20/02/2021)****.*

The implication of this statement is that building trust is a fundamental element in news production and consumption within local communities. It is pertinent to note that in local communities, when people see their own stories, concerns, and achievements being represented in the media, they are more likely to trust and engage with the content produced (Wunpini, 2021; Naaikuur and Diedong, 2014). I would argue that by the approach of using CJs, CR can tap into a diverse range of voices and perspectives that may not be represented in traditional media outlets (Manyozo, 2009). This diversity of sources and viewpoints can contribute to a more inclusive and comprehensive coverage of local issues, promoting a more nuanced understanding of the community's experiences and challenges. CR will then be seen, to be prominently addressing the structural gaps in the so-called mainstream media's coverage of local communities (Harte and Matthews, 2021; Meyer and Daniels, 2011) especially in the global South. Because of CJs familiarity with, and knowledge of, the social structure of the local communities, they are able to place emphasis on news and activities that have immediate relevance to their listeners.

The local community are not only involved as CJs for newsgathering purposes but are also used as resource persons for discussions during programme broadcast. The next section will examine this approach as an avenue for local participation in CR that addresses both the coverage and participation gaps in local communities.

6.4.5 Panel discussion as an avenue for local community participation

Simli Radio's use of local community members as panel discussants during live and pre-recorded broadcasts is yet another significant illustration of how the station

provides access to local community participation. However, in contrast to CJs, community members are brought into the studios to provide local perspectives and to provoke insightful conversations on pertinent broadcast content. Analysis of the findings from FGDs and interviews, suggest that the use of the local community as panellists for radio discussions deepen community engagement and provides legitimacy to community issues, as these local panellists understand and appreciate the diverse social dynamics and cultural protocols of their community. Local panellists balance sensitive discussions, ensuring that external experts' views do not offend the cultural norms that undermine the community's culture.

The Station Manager disclosed during an interview, that DSR's use of local community members for panel discussion is informed by three overarching reasons: first, to provide an inclusive platform for local voices; second, a demonstration of the Station's empowerment drive and third, to elicit feedback on community broadcast contents **(Interview: SM, 25/01/2021)**. Panel discussions often involve indepth conversations and debates on pertinent topics. When community members discuss their own community issues, it stimulates critical thinking, promote dialogue, and encourage listenership and most importantly, community members are more likely to perceive the station as authentic, relevant, and genuinely invested in addressing local issues **(Interview: NMC Chairman, Kumasi, 07/04/2021)**. The use of local community members shows that local community opinions and perspectives matter, and that the local community have a role to play in shaping the discourse on community issues. This recognition can foster a sense of ownership and engagement among community members **(Interview: SM, 25/01/2021)**.

Based on the findings, I will argue that panel discussions are another way that CR provide avenues for local community participation. The structure of the discussions tends to reinforce the natural authority and special knowledge that is inherent to the community. The approach, as my research shows, has increased the convergence of the critical mass of the community who are pushing for change in diverse ways within the community. It emerged that changes that arise from radio discussions with these local 'experts' are often embraced, since the community view this approach to be an internal solution, not an external imposition. Additionally, DSR grants access to its listening community through the outside broadcast approach. This approach is a

mechanism for establishing strong community engagement. The wider community of DSR are able to participate as content co-creators and consumers of radio broadcasts through this approach. The next section therefore examines this approach as an avenue for local community participation.

6.4.6 Outside broadcast service (OBS) as avenues for better community engagement

My research findings from interviews and FGDs reveal, that DSR integrates outside broadcasts service (OBS) as part of its broadcast culture, which enables the radio to be physically present at local events, community gatherings and initiatives. The versatility of its physical presence at different locations at different times, demonstrate the station's commitment to local issues, this helps in building trust, rapport and stronger connection between the station and the local community.

Participants insist, during various FGDs, that DSR's approach of broadcasting live from other physical locations outside Dalun, offers local community members opportunities to contribute to the development of media content and, in the process, to shape policy discussions essential for the transformation of the local community within the framework of participatory governance **(FGDs-3, Zangbalung, 20/02/2021; FGDs-4: Gbullung, 23/02/2021)**. The Programmes Coordinator of the Station asserts that DSR's OBS approach is not only to show the physical presence of the radio in other communities, but as a means to empower and offer opportunities to grassroots communities to tell their stories, as it provides diverse output that reflects its listenership and makes them feel connected to reality **(Interview: PC, 25/01/2021)**.

Another important discovery about the OBS approach from the interviews conducted is that DSR utilises facebook feed to livestream pertinent community engagements and news coverage. This, according to the younger members of the various FGDs, enable them to follow DSR activities in various local communities. The convergence of facebook and local radio has been a subject of recent scholarship on the changing media landscape in the global South (Ajetunmobi and Lasisi, 2022; DW Akademie, 2015[29]). Ajetunmobi and Lasisi (2022) for example, argue, that it no longer valid to describe radio as a "blind medium" in contemporary times because, the growth of

[29] *https://akademie.dw.com/en/the-effect-of-social-media-on-local-radio/a-18772178*

digital technology in non-Western nations has transformed the walled radio newsroom into public arenas, through facebook livestreams. Loar (2019; 2020) concluded from his studies in Israel that radio was becoming prominent in the digital space. I would argue, that where CR takes advantage of the vast potentials of social media to create an impact and to ensure media inclusion, the results are often unprecedented. Simli Radio's coverage of live protest in the Kumbungu District has frequently added some positive effect to the protests. On one occasion, for instance, DSR's extensive coverage of a mass protest against government officials for their handling of a water pollution case, attracted the attention of a bipartisan parliamentary visit to the District, which preceded a widescale enquiry and compensation payments to affected community members **(Interview: GDCA, Tamale, 09/03/2021; PM, Gumo, 30/04/2021)**.

Taken together, OBS provides a platform for the mutual exchange of ideas and experiences that demonstrate CR's recognition of the competence of the local community as co-creators of knowledge, rather than as unintelligent consumers of media content. It is a demonstration that the decision about which programmes will best address community challenges, emerges from the listeners, rather than from the station's management. The OBS approach not only grants wider access, but also demonstrates CR's commitment to local content and promotes dialogue between the station and its publics or communities, as programmes with a local identity often stimulate strong community interest, involvement, and reaction. My argument is that the approach creates a sense of belonging among the local community, which is indispensable for participation and mobilisation. Despite these significant implications of OBS and other participatory approaches for community engagement processes examined, there remain a considerable number of limitations to CR's participatory potential for local community engagement.

6.5 Limitations to Simli Radio's participatory potentials for community engagement

In the previous section, I analysed the diverse avenues of community participation in CR which, I argue, provides unfettered access to local community members and promotes a sense of belonging and identity among them. I demonstrated how DSR, for example, use the diverse avenues of participation to empower its listening

community, to create impact and to enhance media inclusion. In this section, I have identified that there are limitations to CR's potentials as a participatory medium for community engagement. Data from my research shows that socio-cultural factors, entrenched mistrust and limited staff capacity are the key factors. However, I will focus on examining how socio-cultural factors contribute to limiting CR's participatory potentials in local level decision making.

The foremost limiting factor to DSR's participatory potential that emerged from my research, are the widespread socio-cultural beliefs, including the myths and spirituality[30] surrounding community engagement. I previously described the community of DSR, as being sociologically conservative. In line with this, my research found that the element of spirituality is a major limiting factor to community engagement in DSR's catchment area. I would argue that, in as much as spirituality is difficult to scientifically prove, oral evidence from my research suggests that the myths surrounding it cannot be overlooked when discussing community engagement in an African traditional system, such as this study community. For instance, participants at various FGDs, disclosed to me, that most of them are hesitant to get involved in some community engagements because of the fear of spiritual attacks from 'bad elements' in the society **(FGDs-1: Dalun, 14/01/2021; FGDs-2: Vo□gu, 16/01/2021)**. There is an entrenched notion among the local community that being vocal at community gatherings is seen as exposing oneself to 'the evil eye' and that if one unfortunately disagrees with the opinion of an unforgiving person, one might become the target of spiritual missiles **(FGDs-5: Nyankpala, 25/03/2021; Interview: PM, Gumo, 30/04/2021).**

To avoid this, some community members withdraw from participating in community engagement processes at the community level. The findings show that this fear of spiritual attack is not limited only to members of the local community, but also, the staff and management of DSR. The Board Chairman of DSR, who is a prominent Chief of one of local communities, argued, that the myth about spirituality influences the nature of the station's community engagement processes:

[30] Spirituality is used here to describe the African concept of "**juju",** from which people firmly hold the belief that "some people" have supernatural powers that they can use to harm others. Such elements are feared in the community, and most people generally avoid any form of social interaction with them.

> When some people come to community engagement programmes and see some faces, they either simply turn away or refuse to talk during the engagement process. It is often attributed to accusations of witchcraft and, in some instances, to the belief that some people are 'spiritually powerful' and can bewitch others. Such elements are always feared in the community and people tend not to disagree with their opinions or, simply, they refuse to engage with them ***(Interview: Board Chairman, Dalun, 25/01/2021)***.

While the accusation of "juju" can neither be scientifically verified nor critiqued, research on community engagement in sub-Saharan Africa often highlights the phenomenon as a factor that limits effective community participation. In Zambia, for instance, Gwaba (2013) notes that young people responding to her research questions were concerned about speaking at public gatherings because of fears of been bewitched by "powerful men". In Ghana, Cobbinnah (2011) researched the barriers to community participation and highlights similar concerns from young people in Ghanaian communities.

Existing account on the practice of juju illustrate its complexity and multifaceted nature in African societies, encompassing various belief systems, practices, and rituals. Witchcraft accusations in Africa are not solely driven by individual malice or personal conflicts but are deeply embedded within broader social relationships and power dynamics. In the African context, the notion of juju and spirituality serve as powerful cultural forces that foster a sense of belonging, cohesion, and collective responsibility within traditional societies (Geschiere, 1997). The belief in juju provides a framework for moral guidance, ethical behavior, and accountability, encouraging individuals to act in the best interest of their community. I would argue that when the belief or practice of juju intersect with local governance, it creates tension. Superstitions and the belief in supernatural powers have a tendency of overshadowing rational decision-making and hindering democratic processes in such communities.

The implication is that, whether the belief in the African notion of spirituality is true or not, the widespread myth around it potentially weakens the enthusiasm of local community members to freely engage in the development of their community. That notwithstanding, the notion of "juju", during community gatherings in parts of Africa, reinforces the need for local government authorities and key development agencies to allow decision-making processes to be handled by the local people themselves.

Cultural gatekeepers understand key community protocols and how to moderate communal discussions to avoid hurting egos and stepping on the toes of perceived 'powerful people'.

Additionally, participants at various FGDs were unanimous in asserting that there were gender inequalities and bias against women in the District. The findings show that uneven power relations within the local communities are limiting the participatory potentials of DSR, particularly relating to women, people with disabilities and, sometimes, young people. In Vo□gu and Dalun, participants argued that socio-cultural viewpoints in traditional societies, that the woman's place is in the kitchen and caring for the children, is restrictive to effective community engagement as women were largely ignored with regard to local decision making. A middle-aged mother of 5 children lamented:

> *When development agents come here to talk to us and to help us with credit facilities, our husbands are always seated behind us, or hiding behind the walls and trees, making it very difficult for us to openly express our opinions. Some of the men forewarn their wives, sisters and daughters of what not to say, and what to say, during women only meetings. Given this, how can we talk when we are in a meeting with our husbands? Count yourself lucky, as a woman, when you get to attend village meetings* ***(FGDs-2: Sonŋsim B□bu, Vo□gu, 16/01/2021).***

Interviewees at DSR confirmed these assertions and further noted that as a result of the deeply established cultural protocols in the community, DSR have resorted to empowering women to actively participate in community engagement through the Simli RLCs **(Interview: SM, 25/01/2021)**. I would argue that the observed group dynamics in some of Simli's RLCs indicate that the station was empowering local women to make meaningful contributions towards community development processes. This approach can have a significant impact on overcoming the limitations to women's participation in local level decision making.

Reflecting on the concept of juju, which is often associated with witchcraft, magic, and sorcery in African contexts, I find that it is deeply intertwined with gendered notions of power and control. The accusations of witchcraft or juju mostly target women, particularly the elderly, widows, and other marginalised individuals. These accusations are often rooted in gendered norms, social inequalities, and the perception of women

as threatening to established social order. In many African societies, witchcraft accusations often serve as a means to maintain gender hierarchies and control female agency. Discourse on witchcraft becomes a mechanism for enforcing gender norms and exerting social control over women (Geschiere, 1997). Juju is often employed to explain the perceived extraordinary powers of women who rise against prescribed gender roles in traditional communities and to legitimise their marginalised position within the society. At the same time, juju is also used by women to resist these patriarchal norms and reassert their own agency. Thus, the concept of juju contributes to the gendered nature of witchcraft beliefs by reinforcing notions of female power as inherently dangerous or unnatural.

Geschiere (1997) argues that witchcraft accusations are not a throwback to pre-modern beliefs, but rather a product of the social, economic, and political changes that have taken place in Africa since colonialism. He suggests that witchcraft accusations are often used to address underlying tensions and conflicts in communities, and that they reflect the changing ways in which power and authority are negotiated in postcolonial African societies. When examining the relationship between juju and gender, several important aspects come into play. Firstly, juju practices and beliefs often intersect with social and cultural dynamics, including gender roles and power relations. Secondly, women are disproportionately targeted and accused of practicing witchcraft, which can result in social stigmatisation, violence, and marginalisation. Thirdly, gendered power imbalances can exacerbate accusations of juju or witchcraft, as women who challenge societal norms or assert agency may be more likely to be accused. Therefore, gendered interpretations of juju can shape individual and collective understandings of power, spirituality, and social order.

6.6 Conclusion to the Chapter

This chapter has relied on empirical evidence gathered from my fieldwork to demonstrate how DSR exemplifies a resilient communication medium that contributes to local community democratic processes. The chapter focused on examining the potential of CR for improved local community engagement in local governance. I argue in this chapter that CR reflects the fullest expression of diversity in its community, and it pays attention to representative community voices through inclusive participation. Its primary focus is the wellbeing of its defined listening community. I further argued that

the listeners of DSR are viewed as co-producers of broadcasts, rather than as mere recipients of media products. This weaves, in the local community, a sense of identity, belonging and inclusion in local decision- making processes. It is pertinent to reiterate that, irrespective of the legal ownership arrangement, community participation is a deliberate attribute of CR. I argued that by its ownership and organisational structure, DSR potentially empowers a community identity construction process. It also emerged from my research that DSR is well integrated into local community lifestyles, as the community discovers the platform from which to reflect on its wellbeing and develops a common identity that promotes community cohesion and inclusion through it.

This chapter also calls attention to the use of local languages in local radio broadcasts as a significant identity construct. The evidence from the fieldwork suggests that the use of local languages not only symbolises an expression of the cultural values and heritage of the local people, but builds in them a sense of belonging, a community culture, and establishes for them a communal identity. Simli Radio, through its local language broadcast policy, sustains and deepens cultural ties and also significantly facilitates the decolonisation process of radio broadcasting for the linguistically challenged in the local communities. To put it bluntly, DSR speaks their language. This further provides access and participation for a majority of local people.

I argue in this chapter that CR is democratising the communication landscape in the global South and amplifying the voices of the marginalised through the many participatory avenues it provides for its listeners, so that they can participate in their activities. In particular, my examination of SCC show that they are not only social hubs for information dissemination but, most significantly, they serve as platforms that are expanding local community access to communication mediaspace. I concluded that the approach tackles the raging concerns of inequality and under-representation, which further shrinks local community participation in the mediaspace. In addition, DSR's community journalism concept is firmly establishing source credibility and trust for DSR's broadcasts. The use of local people as volunteer community journalists not only addresses apparent structural gaps that have been observed in media coverage of rural development, but also, fundamentally confirms DSR as a home-born solution to the numerous development challenges confronting local communities in the District. I argued that the transformational impact of the convergence of radio and social media

is becoming evident in CR ecology. Finally, the chapter identified socio-cultural beliefs and practices as key limiting factors to CR participatory potentials.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ADDRESSING LOW PARTICIPATION IN DECENTRALISED LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN GHANA

7.1 Introduction to the chapter

In this chapter, I analyse the ways in which CR addresses the low community participation in local governance in the Kumbungu District. I relied on Ghana's decentralised local government (DLG) policy framework, which I analysed in Chapter 2, to argue that CR's broadcast promote citizen participation in local-level socio-economic and political decision-making processes. In addition to examining how CR broadcast trigger local authority accountability to the local community, I will analyse how it stimulate institutional responsiveness to local community needs. The chapter also relies on qualitative data, obtained through focus group discussions (FGDs), interviews, document review and direct participant observation.

In analysing the data and presenting the results in this chapter, I took note of the traditional critical role of the media, which is described by Donohue et al. (1995, p118) as "being a forum for discussion, investigators of impropriety, an adversary of monopoly over power and knowledge, and defenders of truth, freedom, and democracy". The building of community civic consciousness, the promotion of institutional accountability, responsiveness to local needs, and the fostering of local community collaborations for community-led development, are key themes that emerge from an analysis of the findings on how CR is addressing the issues of low community participation in DLG.

Taken together, I would argue, on the basis of the various case studies I examined, that CR's broadcast provide the local community with the requisite space, platform and tools to engage in DLG practices at the local level. The design and outline of DSR's broadcasts encourage the inclusion and participation of all members of the listening community, irrespective of status or ability.

7.2 Building the civic consciousness of the local community

The critical role of the media in promoting community participation through the provision of fora for public deliberations of government policies, the articulation of multiple voices on government actions, and the expression of dissent to government omissions as a civic duty, has long been established (Oje, 2005; Norris, 2006). Active community participation in local level decision making leads to the process of civic consciousness and the political alertness of the local community. CR is often noted for its contribution to enhancing the capabilities of grassroots communities to effectively participate in local level decision making processes, by providing the forum for public deliberations on government policies, the articulation of multiple voices on government actions, and the expression of dissent in relation to government omissions, as a civic duty. In this section, I analyse CR news agenda relating to presidential speeches, national budgets, parliamentary legislation, and other central government policies that are of public interest. The focus here is on CR programmes (broadcast contents) which relates to how national policies and regulatory frameworks impact local level policies.

Through my research, I have discovered compelling evidence that demonstrates how DSR effectively supports and encourages community participation in these policy discussions. I argue that one significant way in which DSR enables listener participation is by providing a platform for open and inclusive debates. The findings show that DSR offers various programmes and talk shows that focus on policy issues, allowing listeners to call in, share their opinions, and engage in meaningful discussions. By facilitating dialogue between community members and policymakers, DSR bridges the gap between the Assembly and the public, fostering a sense of active citizenship. In analysing the data, three broadcast programmes; Ti-Jintora Saha, Ye Govononti Kukoli Saha, and Biepu-Biepu Yeto□sa Saha have emerged as key broadcasts that contributes to building the civic consciousness of the local community and fostering local participation in DLG in the Kumbungu District. These programmes have distinct contents, formats and styles that engage and empower grassroots communities in various ways. The debates that these programmes generate enhance the quality of the understanding of issues that are germane to local community development. I will analyse each of these broadcasts and how they contribute to local accountability and institutional responsiveness.

7.2.1 Ti-Jintora Saha (Time with Your MP)

The programme, Ti-Jintora Saha[31], is an example of how Simli Radio supports the development of the civic consciousness of the local people of the Kumbungu District. My research shows that constituents of the Kumbungu District, and other participating Districts, often use such broadcasts as a platform upon which to make their views and opinions clear on matters that are pending before Parliament. I would argue that the programme offers an opportunity for constituents to gain insight into issues before Parliament and about how Parliament intends to approach it.

The view of the Programmes Coordinator of DSR on this broadcast indicates that it is one of the most highly listened broadcasts from the station. In an in-depth interview, he disclosed that the broadcast has had a tremendous impact on the civic consciousness of the local people on a wide range of parliamentary business since its inception in January 2000. He noted:

> *The programme is really empowering to the local people. They get firsthand information about what is going on in Parliament once every week from their MP. They convey to their MPs their views on matters that are pending legislation* ***(Interview: PC, Dalun, 25/01/2021).***

To further illustrate the significance of this broadcast to political awareness and civic consciousness of grassroots communities, a 72-year-old farmer and father of 23 children in Nawuni, an overseas farming community in the Kumbungu District, in an interaction with me during my field visit where I observed the radio listening culture/ practices of households, noted:

> *This is the voice of our MP. He is telling us about a new law that they want to pass. He has said that it will help stop this new relationship between woman-woman and man-man. I support the law! We do not need that behaviour here, in this town* ***(Personal Interaction: Mba Sulley, Nawuni, 04/09/2021).***

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31 Ti-Jintora Saha is translated as 'Time with your MP'. It is one of the flagship broadcasts on local governance which, provides a platform for the constituents of the local community to directly engage with their Members of Parliament (MPs). The one hour-long weekly programme, scheduled on Saturdays at 19:00GMT, is mainly broadcast in the indigenous language of the constituent communities. The programme intersperses talks *(mostly in-studio, and in very exceptional circumstances, via phone)* with phone calls from listeners who pose further questions asking for clarity, to their MP.

Apparently, on that day, in September 2021, my host was referring to a Bill presented before Ghana's parliament that had sparked some controversy 3 months earlier, which was known as the 'promotion *of proper human sexual rights and Ghanaian family values'.* The Bill, which sought to criminalise homosexuality in all its forms, generated heated debates in Ghana's media space. It was this Bill that the MP was discussing with his constituents when he took his turn on the broadcast. My host was hearing about it for the first time from his Member of Parliament. I discovered that my host had previously heard about other Bills for the first time on this broadcast, including the Bill on 'Vigilantism and Related Offences' (2019), which criminalised and disbanded gun-wielding political party private security operatives; Right-to-Information Bill (2018), which grants public access to classified government documents as an anti-corruption measure; A Bill on public holidays, which modified and introduced new public holidays in the country; and Intestate Succession Bill (2018), which promotes the spousal inheritance of properties and assets.

This demonstrates how radio shapes ordinary citizens' political awareness and empowers them to contribute to daily political debates within their local communities. What strikes me most is the dexterity and accuracy with which my host explained each of these Bills (some of which have now passed into law), and the arguments and counterarguments that he heard on the programme with the MP that shaped his political thought about the Bill.

By these broadcasts, DSR contributes to fostering an inclusive democratic process. The broadcast helps bridge the gap between elected representatives and the people they serve by creating a platform for dialogue and exchange of ideas. This open communication channel can lead to increased transparency and accountability in governance. The focus of the broadcast on issues pending before Parliament enables constituents to stay informed about the legislative agenda and the decision-making process. This knowledge, I argue, empowers grassroots communities to participate more effectively in the democratic process by influencing policy outcomes through their feedback, suggestions, and support.

7.2.2 Ye Govononti Kukoli (Your Government Voice)

Ye Govononti Kukoli[32] is another example of how Simli Radio supports the development of local community civic consciousness but, in contrast to Ti-Jintora Saha, this programme focuses on both local and central governments' routine activities in the area of national development including local infrastructure and social services that directly impacts upon the local community. I observed that this broadcast is very participatory and engaging, as many local people, who describe themselves as apolitical, call into the programme to have their say on the topics raised. While some call into the programme to describe their expectations of such government actions, others simply ask for direction on how to benefit from government social service.

I monitored this programme throughout the period of my fieldwork. On one of such occasions, in July, for instance, the governments' programme of enforcing the registration of a Tax Identification Number (TIN) by all citizens before they can access any government social protection services, including National Health Insurance (NHI), credit for farmers under the Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ), and Free Senior High School (FSHS), among other services, was the agenda for discussion on DSR's Ye Govononti Kukoli Saha. I observed first-hand how ordinary people dispassionately approached government actions that impact on their livelihoods.

A caller to this programme, who identified himself as Afa Baako, a 47 year old farmer and resident of Jegbo, a farming community in the Kumbungu District, while appealing to his colleague farmers to pay their taxes regularly so as to sustain government programmes, called to question the government's decision to make access to social protection services for vulnerable persons including farmers, dependent on a TIN.

> *Why will the government say my child, who qualifies for secondary education, cannot go to school, because I, the father, have no TIN? Is it not against the right of the child to an education? The government should*

[32] Ye Govononti Kukoli, which literally means 'Your Government's Voice', is a local government broadcast designed to engage the local community on a series of government programmes and projects which impact on the local people. The programme chronicles government actions that have occurred during the week, and it is broadcast in the local languages of the listening communities, with a wider audience coverage. My research shows that the one hour Sunday primetime broadcast (20:00-21:00GMT).

rethink this directive ***(Broadcast Monitoring: Afa Baako, Ye Govononti Kukoli, DSR, 11/07/2021).***

At an FGD, an Assembly Member indicated that he never misses Govononti Kukoli on DSR, because community views and arguments on this broadcast shape the quality of the discussion and input, he offers at the Assembly's general meetings. He argued that, as Chairman of a subcommittee of the Assembly, most of the sentiments of the local people expressed on Ye Govononti Kukoli Saha inform his decisions at the subcommittee level, and even his contributions at the Executive Committee level **(FGDs-6: Kumbungu, 30/03/2021)**. This assertion makes it evident that CR is addressing an essential needs gap by expanding the platforms for local peoples' participation in local governance at the local level of governance.

I would argue that, beyond the informative role of the broadcast, Ti Govononti Kukoli conveys a great sense of satisfaction to the producers and patrons of the broadcast, as it provides a platform for the free expression of dissent. This level of engagement demonstrates the broadcast's effectiveness in providing a platform for the community to have their say and contribute to the discourse surrounding government actions and social services. The diversity of calls received by the broadcast further showcases its relevance and appeal. It is plausible to suggests, based on the quality of debates emanating from grassroots communities, that Ye Govononti Kukoli not only informs and engages the community, but also, serves as a source of practical information and assistance which reflects local people's concerns about the impact of government actions on their lives and livelihoods.

7.2.3 Biepu-Biepu Yeto□sa (Elections Matters)

Beyond Ye Govononti Kukoli, another empirical example that emerged from the analysis of how DSR's broadcasts contribute to enhancing the civic consciousness of the local community is Biepu-Biepu Yeto□sa[33]. In contrast to the two previously discussed examples, however, this seasonal broadcast promotes community

[33] ***Biepu-Biepu*** **Yeto□sa** means **Elections Matters.** It is a periodic broadcast produced in collaboration with the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) with funding support from non-profit organisations in good governance. In the immediate past district-level elections in December 2019 and September 2015, the Star Ghana Foundation and Abantu for Development, both leading civil societies in governance, provided generous funding to support this programme, respectively. The broadcast is for 2 hours each weekday (Monday to Friday) and often starts three months before the district-level elections and has dedicated free slots in the last month before the elections for contesting candidates to engage with their electorates.

participation in local level elections as a way of supporting local community members to exercise their civic rights to vote, to contest in elections, and to deepen good local governance processes in the District.

I would argue that the broadcast has contributed to expanding the frontiers of local democracy in the District and the entrenched inclusive participation in local politics. My research findings shows that this broadcast by DSR intensifies civic education and is aimed at encouraging the right calibre of people, including the marginalised and socially excluded, to stand for political office in local elections. The broadcast is also used to educate and to discourage partisanship and monetary inducement in District-level elections, as established by law.

The Simli Radio Programmes' Coordinator noted that:

> *For many of our constituent households, they understand the importance of District-level elections through this programme. We emphasise to them the need to either stand for elections, if you have the capacity to do so, or to go out and vote for the candidate who can best represent your interests.* ***(Interview: PC, Dalun, 25/01/2021).***

In an interview with the Board Chairman of DSR, he disclosed that this broadcast in 2015, resulted in the election of two people with disabilities as Assembly Members. He argued that in the 2019 local-level elections, the broadcast led to more women (7) contesting at the District level elections than in any previous election **(Interview: DSR Board Chairman, 25/01/2021)**. Although none of the women who contested were elected, the DCD, disclosed that 2 of the 7 women who contested the elections were appointed into the Assembly as government appointees, a decision made because these women were vocal on radio during this broadcast **(Interview: DCD, Kumbungu, 12/04/2021)**.

The research findings show that, this broadcast provides the platform for local politicians (Assembly aspirants) to hone their leadership skills in the local political space. For instance, it was revealed that the current District Chief Executive (DCE) was discovered and mentored following a Biepu-Biepu Yeto□sa Saha broadcast when he first contested as an Assembly Member for Gamprisiya Electoral Area in the 2010 District-level elections **(Interview: DSR Board Chairman, 25/01/2021)**. This research further shows that the funding for Biepu-Biepu Yeto□sa Saha is not limited only to on-

air broadcasts, but also includes empowerment training workshops and logistical support for persons with disabilities, women, and young people to contest local-level elections **(Interview: GDCA, Tamale, 09/03/2021)**.

Notwithstanding these significant contributions that DSR Biepu-Biepu Yeto□sa Saha is making to creating and deepening civic engagement among rural people in the Kumbungu District, some shortcomings were observed. Firstly, my research showed that the civic education given on radio does not properly address the real-time and tested functions of an Assembly Member in the local government structure. For instance, the Assembly Member is erroneously presented, on Biepu-Biepu Yeto□sa Saha, as the key development agent of the local people at the Assembly **(Interview: PM, 30/04/2021)**. Secondly, there is unbalanced education on the rights and responsibilities of citizens in relation to the local governance. The broadcast fails to adequately address the rights and responsibilities of local communities. Instead, much of the civic education is, focused on rural peoples' rights, whilst little attention is paid to their corresponding duties to the local government structures as citizens, such as the payment of taxes **(Interview: DCD, Kumbungu, 12/04/2021)**.

I will argue, that whilst the civic education on the radio broadcast may lead to enhanced civic activism on rural peoples' entitlements to community and personal development, there is generally a lack of focus in countering the growing civic apathy in the local government system among rural people (Ayee, 2004), leaving a gap in the Biepu-Biepu Yeto□sa Saha broadcast on DSR. For instance, in one of my field visits where I was monitoring household radio listening practices in Jakpahi, a farming community in the Kumbungu District, I observed that most rural people were very concerned about the continuing partisanship at the local government level. Grassroots communities recognise that the local governance system, which was originally designed to allow nonpartisan discussions of rural development issues, has now seen significant political interference for some time now. Scores of rural people decry the level of politicisation in the allocation and distribution of social services from the Assembly. It is even claimed by a section of participants at my FGDs, that if one does

not belong to the ruling party, you could not benefit from any facility including 'Ayaaluna'[34].

During a radio listening session one evening, a middle aged woman who formerly extracts shear butter for sale in Jakpahi, Mma Kubura, soberly reflects on her ordeal in August 2020 when the government Covid-19 stimulus package were distributed in her community. She decried:

> *"The other day when the DCE people brought Ayaaluna to this village, I was not given any money. Only those women who always attend meetings at the chairman's house were given money. It was after the voting that I heard that the money was from the government to support those who lost their businesses due to the corona. I lost my shear butter business, yet I did not get any compensation"* ***(Personal Interaction: Jakpahi, Mma Kubura, 05/07/2021).***

The sentiments expressed above were supported by the arguments of a cross section of Assembly Members. The overriding argument from participants at Assembly Member FGDs is that, if one was perceived to be opposition to the ruling party, such an assembly member was not involved in any decisions concerning his/her own electoral area. Even where a development project has been undertaken in an electoral area of a perceived opposition assembly member, such projects have been monitored by the ruling party executives in those communities **(FGDs-5: Nyankpala, 25/03/2021)**. These sentiments are not entirely surprising on the face of it. It has become routine in Ghanaian local government establishment that only people who can be politically identified to a ruling party benefit from such support packages or recognised in the allocation of development projects especially in an election year (Anaafo, 2019; Agomor et'al., 2019). This practice, however, calls to question the open display of bias or partisanship in the distribution of the outcomes of democracy in a local government administration and what the focus of civic education campaigns should be on CR programmes focused on promoting local participation in governance.

34 A Dagbanli term coined to politically describe Ghana's government relief intervention to small scale enterprises in rural communities as part of social support for the hardships Covid-19 had imposed on people and businesses.

7.3 Promotion of institutional accountability and responsiveness to local needs

In this section, I analyse CR broadcasts that significantly contribute to the promotion of social accountability, institutional responsiveness to local needs, and the localisation of community development through the active participation of the local community in decision-making processes, pursuant to the objectives of Ghana's DLG policy framework. Empirical evidence presented in this section demonstrates the impact of DSR's broadcast programmes on the Assembly's responsiveness to the needs of the local people of the District. Following the analysis of field data, Yelvuhi Courtu, Assembly Kpamba Saha and Bipola Kukoya, emerged as key broadcasts that exemplifies effective platforms which addresses some of the core community concerns on social accountability and responsiveness to local needs.

7.3.1 Yelvuhi Courtu (Court of Public Opinion)

Yelvuhi Courtu[35] broadcast is an example of how local people use a grapevine approach to expose or deter corruption. For instance, serious allegations of financial impropriety, abuse of office, and conflict of interest issues, have been raised during this broadcast against some local government officials, including the DCE. I will illustrate this point with two examples from the data that I found to be very significant.

First, during a Thursday show in August, 2021, a Nawuni resident called into the programme and accused the Assembly man of the area of conspiring with some officials of the District's National Disaster Management Organization (NADMO) to appropriate relief items that were meant for the relocation of some of the residents of Nawuni and Afayili to higher ground ahead of the Bagre Dam spillage, which causes yearly flooding in the two communities. He claimed to have been reliably informed that bundles of corrugated roofing sheets, bags of cement, and some other undisclosed items that were meant for the community relocation exercise for registered households, were redirected from the NADMO central stores in the area to the private residence of a senior official of the District NADMO in the regional capital, Tamale **(Broadcasts Monitoring: Unknown Caller from Nawuni, Yelvuhi Courtu,**

[35] **Yelvuhi Courtu,** a Dagbanli expression which means, Court of Public Opinion, is a bi-weekly programme broadcast on Mondays and Thursdays between 19:00-20:00GMT is an all phone-in programme that provides local community members with the opportunity to express their misgivings about virtually any matter of community or personal interest.

19/07/2021). This allegation triggered an immediate reaction from both the Assembly man and the NADMO Coordinator.

The second instance occurred around a month before the announcement of DCE nominees by the President of the Republic of Ghana. Key allegations of financial impropriety, abuse of office and conflicts of interest against the DCE, who was rumoured to have been renominated for a second term in office, were brought to light on this programme. For instance, an anonymous caller alleged that, in 2018, the DCE was reported for engaging in financial malfeasance, but no action was taken against him, only for him to find favour with the President for consideration for another term. In a similar barrage of accusations, another anonymous caller accused the DCE of abuse of office for personal gain, claiming that the DCE diverted Assembly resources (stating utility poles and L.E.D. bulbs, which were meant to improve street lighting, sewing machines and other equipment that was meant to support people with disabilities in the District), for private use during the campaign period, in which he was a parliamentary candidate for the ruling party. Again, a third anonymous caller accused the DCE of a conflict of interest, arguing that the DCE had awarded contracts to some of his well-known friends and family members and appointed his close associates to occupy key offices at the local Assembly. While only the first allegation of double salary was rebutted by a senior officer at the Ghana Education Service (GES) in the District, who called into the programme, the other two allegations remained unrefuted and topical until the end of my fieldwork in the District.

To conclude, the dialogic nature of Simli Yelvuhi Courtu builds a sense of citizenship among the local community which, according to Chantal Mouffe, cited in Rodriguez and Miralles (2014) is about the participation of people in routine political practices, rather than something that is guaranteed because you are part of the system. These empirical findings presented above, exemplifies how CR contribute to the fight against corruption. It is plausible to, further suggest, that the findings demonstrate how CR provides platforms for ordinary citizens to call to question key government decisions, and to bring to the fore, the adverse impact of such government decisions on the socio-cultural and economic wellbeing of grassroots communities. In particular, the use of the grapevine approach helps to unearth hidden agendas and corrupt practices in public services. CR can bring to the fore those critical issues that state agencies miss

in their investigations, thereby prompting action from such investigative bodies. This is a situation that can enhance the responsiveness of local authorities to local needs, if well addressed. I would argue that CR plays pivotal roles in enhancing social accountability and stimulating local government responsiveness to service delivery.

7.3.2 Assembly Kpamba Saha (Time with Your Assembly Member)

Assembly Kpamba Saha[36] is another example of a Simli Radio broadcast that promotes accountability and responsiveness but, in contrast to Yelvuhi Courtu, this broadcast is an accountability forum for Assembly Members and the Heads of Units of the Assembly, including decentralised agencies, accounting to community members on specific issues. The broadcast facilitates the attainment of the constitutionally mandated requirement for the routine engagement of Assembly Members with their electorates. In an interview with the Director of Policy Planning at the MLGDRD, it was revealed that the job of an Assembly Member is not full-time, and most Assembly Members are engaged in full-time employment elsewhere, sometimes outside the District. It was also revealed that Assembly Members do not receive a budgetary allocation for community mobilisation and outreach purposes **(Interview: MLGDRD, MS Teams, 17/02/2021)**. All these factors make it difficult for the Assembly Member to regularly visit the community and, when they do visit, they are not able to cover all the communities in their electoral areas, often due to a lack of funds, poor road networks and other personal commitments **(Interview: PM, 30/04/2021)**. The radio therefore became a practical alternative for reaching their constituents in order to update them on current developments and to address their teething problems **(FGDs-5: Nyankpala, 25/03/2021)**.

As Assembly Members take turns on the *Assembly Kpamba Saha*, they are asked questions on wide-ranging issues about Assembly policies and programmes for their specific communities. Other guests with general mandates were often asked questions about their institutions' plans to help address the problems in their

[36] **Assembly Kpamba Saha** is literally translated as "Time with your Assembly Member". It is a broadcast which provide Assembly Members and staff of the decentralized assembly, the opportunity to stay connected with their electorates and the grassroots. Although the programme was originally designed to be broadcast in the local language, where a guest on the show does not speak the indigenous Dagbanli language, an expert interpreter often assists. Where any Assembly Member found it difficult to come to the studios, he was pre-recorded and later connected via the telephone so that s/he could respond to emerging questions from the public.

communities **(Interview: SM, 25/01/2021)**. The respective communities are informed of the schedule, which Assembly Member would be taking her/his turn the following Friday, they were encouraged to seek information and to call in during the programme to confront their representative about the issues that they come across, or on their claims. In an FGD, participants noted that some constituents take out their frustration and anger, in relation to the general underdevelopment situation of their communities, on Assembly Members whenever they appear on the programme **(FGDs-5: Nyankpala, 25/03/2021)**. The Presiding Member of the Assembly observed that very controversial and incriminating information coming from Yelvuhi Courtu is carried onto Assembly Kpamba Saha for confirmation by the Member appearing on the programme **(Interview: PM, 30/04/2021)**. The broadcast serves as a platform for accounting to the local people.

Here is an AM speaking at an FGD:

> *This programme is like a double edged sword. It allows you to get the fame of talking on radio as a representative of the people, and, at the same time, put you face to face with your angry constituents, because their problems are staring at you in the face.* ***(FGD-5: AM Participant, Nyankpala, 25/03/2021)****.*

Similarly, the PM, in an interview, also noted:

> *Our constituents keep measuring our campaign pledges against our deliverables, especially in the provision of basic social amenities, and some are specific on how certain development projects were allocated* ***(Interview: PM, Gumo, 30/04/2021).***

What this means is that the broadcast allows for community interaction and also opens the Assembly Members up for interrogation by their constituents. This puts Assembly Members on their toes in being ready to account when called upon to do so.

The finding indicates further that Assembly Kpamba Saha has exposed the inefficiencies of most Assembly Members, especially in situations where some appear to give vivid accounts of their stewardship with some stellar performance, or efforts to get the Assembly to address some of their most pressing concerns. I would argue that the programme has provided the least voiced in the community with an opportunity to directly question their AM and other decentralised institutional heads about their

stewardship. For instance, in an FGD, a participant argued that the programme had yielded positive impacts, as some callers' demand timelines, which they use to track government pledges to them.

> *The questions that community members ask on this programme are very revealing. If you come on the programme and want to engage in lies, the people will expose you* ***(FGD-2: Tunteiya, Zangbalung, 20/02/2021).***

Findings from my study reveal that a unit head at the Assembly was transferred out of the District, because he was provoked by questions from the rural people and resorted to insults, rather than addressing the questions from the community members **(Interview: DCD, Kumbungu, 12/04/2021)**. In another instance, I observed how some callers demanded the resignation of an AM for failing to honour his timelines in getting a contractor back on site to complete his community road project, leaving the community cut off from the rest of the District during the rainy season **(Broadcast Monitoring: Assembly Kpamba Saha, 16/07/2021)**.

The PM concludes that he had observed how Assembly Members often lobby him to get approval for some development interventions for their constituents, because they will have to appear on Assembly Kpamba Saha to account to their people. He remarked:

> *The programme has, without a doubt, doubled the efficiency of our Members in the Assembly. If an intervention is not approved, it is because we lack the funds to undertake it, rather than an Assembly Member failing to draw out attention to it.* ***(Interview: PM, Gumo, 30/04/2021)****.*

I would argue, on the basis of the aforementioned evidence, that the broadcast has injected key consciousness with regard to accountability and responsiveness, into Assembly Members, unit heads of the Assembly, and Heads of other decentralised institutions in the District. The broadcast creates a forum that promotes dialogue, with greater emphasis on the interests of grassroots communities, where rural people not only listen to their elected officials but are able to question them and to get them to respond to local community needs.

7.3.3 Bipola Kukoya (Youth Speak Up/Community Journalists)

Bipola Kukoya Saha is an example of how young people use radio broadcasts to demand accountability and to influence local authorities' responsiveness to young people's needs in policymaking and implementation. Youth Speak-Up recognises the exuberance, the energies, the vision, the courage, and the resilience of young people in producing positive change in their communities and in the world in which they live, and they therefore seek to harness these potentials to champion young people's voices in local level governance. To this end, it established Community Listener Clubs (CLCs) from the existing youth organisations in the local communities, as activists from whom Community Journalists could get the support to conduct their activities **(Interview: SM, 25/01/2021)**.

I would argue that the programme exposes young people to a series of capacity building activities, and this enhances and develops their leadership and advocacy skills and refines their ability to speak up on issues that affect them and their communities. My research observed that members of the CLCs listen and contribute to radio discussions through call-ins, text messages, and even WhatsApp messages[37]. These CLCs receive training on conducting dialogue sessions in order to identify community challenges and action plans that address the local community's challenges. Significantly, the CLCs support the CJs to bring attention to additional areas that need coverage and amplification.

One of the unique approaches of the Youth Speak-Up broadcasts is the use of CJs, who often transmit directly from the field, with the CLCs having access to the microphones and influencing decisions at base. I would argue that this approach is more like evidence-based journalism and reporting. My research reveals that key local government officers in the District do not dare to bear false witness on the programme, due to the seriousness of the approach, which uses hard-core evidence to question authority. Simli Radio's Manager argued:

> *The debates from Youth Speak-Up are insightful! The CLCs engaged in issue-based discussions and did not allow for trivialities. Their arguments*

[37] Appendix 1a, No.24: Direct participant observation, radio broadcast monitoring of Bipola Kukoya, Simli Radio, 15/07/2021

are often supported with solid evidence from the field. If you joke on their programme, they will humiliate you. ***(Interview: SM, Dalun, 25/01/2021).***

For example, during a broadcast monitoring, I observed how the CJ and the CLC challenged the Assembly's claim to have completed two projects: a 10-seater water closet toilet facility in Vo□gu Kushibo, and a CHPS compound in Jakpahi, all in the Kumbungu District. This claim was captured on a newly launched website (delivery tracker) of the Ghanaian government, which catalogued all ongoing and completed infrastructure projects in every sector of the country. The programme, which is also streamed live on facebook feed, televised the projects in their uncompleted state and demonstrated how work had stalled at both sites. The DCE immediately called into the programme and apologised to the residents of both communities for the incorrect data submitted and promised that the impression created would be corrected **(Broadcast Monitoring: Bipola Kukoya, 15/07/2021)**. After about a week, I visited the website and noticed that those projects' status had been delisted from "Completed" and moved to "Ongoing Projects". This exemplifies how young people can promote accountability using the radio.

I would argue that Youth Speak-Up, on DSR, has increased the recognition of young people, CJs, and CLCs members in community level decision-making. The evidence from my research shows that CJs and CLCs now receive more invitations to district-level forums on youth matters than they used to. The District now has greater incentives to work with young people for the overall development of the District. Furthermore, I observed that there were two other significant impacts from the Youth Speak Up broadcast on DSR in the District that foster accountability and responsiveness. Persons with disabilities' (PwDs) access to funding from the Assembly, and the direct intervention of the Minister of Roads for the construction of the Kumbungu-Gbullung road are key impacts of Bipola Kukoya Saha.

By law, a 2% allocation of the District Assembly Common Fund (DACF) is to be given to persons with disabilities to support them in any venture (DACF Act, 1993). In the Kumbungu District, this allocation is often channelled into something else. A CJ, after weeks of thorough investigations into the plight of a number of persons with disabilities in the District, brought the situation to the attention of dutybearers on Youth Speak-Up and advocated for access to the funds. The response from the dutybearers was swift,

as the DCE for Kumbungu called into the programme and assured PwDs of his willingness to support them in accessing the funds **(Broadcast Monitoring: Bipola Kukoya, 15/07/2021)**. Subsequently, the funds were released to registered PwDs to support themselves **(Interview: DCD, Kumbungu, 12/04/2021)**.

The other remarkable impact of the broadcast, my research found, was when some CJs and CLCs in the district used Youth Speak-Up to mobilise over one thousand people from various communities in the District to protest about the bad state of roads, especially the roads from Kumbungu Township to Gbullung.

In collaboration with the Gbullung Area Youth Association, the CJ and CLC used the radio to amplify the need for surrounding communities to show solidarity for the public protest. The protest is said to have gained greater media coverage and ended peacefully, without any violent incidents. It gained the attention of the relevant dutybearers. It was reported that the Minister for Roads, who was, coincidentally, in the region, listened to the protest on one of Simli's sister radios, which relayed the broadcast, and announced later that night that a contractor had been assigned to construct the stretch of the road between Kumbungu and Gbullung **(Interview: SM, 25/01/2021; PM, 30/04/2021)**. I visited this stretch of road during my field work and saw it in good shape. I will conclude by arguing that the broadcast demonstrates the power inherent to radio in contributing to stimulating responsiveness to community needs and promoting accountability in the Kumbungu District as part of improving community participation in local governance.

7.4 Platform for fostering local collaboration for community development

In the previous section, I argued that CR is utilised as a powerful medium for the promotion of accountability and responsiveness to local community needs. I used empirical examples of broadcast programmes that are designed to promote local accountability so as to demonstrate the impact CR is having in the development of Ghana's rural areas. In this section, I present the empirical findings on DSR's broadcasts, which promote community development. I argue that community development is the focal point of Ghana's DLG system, and that DSR is accelerating the attainment of this objective through its broadcasts. The findings in this section are anchored on the concepts of community development and citizenship. I would argue

that people generally have a right to participate in, and to influence, everyday decision-making processes that impact upon their lives and livelihoods. People also need to have their lived experiences and perspectives on decisions heard and acted upon. Community development is a way for people to reach this goal and to achieve their right to be part of such decisions that affect their lives. The analysis of data from my fieldwork shows that three broadcasts on DSR directly address issues of community development through the development of local collaboration.

7.4.1 Asan Zal-Nim Saha (Time with Opinion Leaders)

Asan Zal-Nim Saha[38] is an example of an empirical broadcast that emerged from the analysis of my research on how Simli Radio contribute to building local collaborations in order to drive community development. The broadcast not only provides access for local community members' participation in local governance but, more widely, serve as a platform that fosters local collaboration among the different stakeholders in the District to dialogue and chart a sustainable path to development.

I would argue that the broadcast is often a forum for repairing and enhancing government-community relations. In this broadcast, stakeholders from the local Assembly and other parastatal agencies in the district or region are invited to the studios, where they engage local community-based opinion leaders after listening to the community voices, pre-recorded from the local community, being broadcast **(Interview: PC, 25/04/2021)**. One notable achievement of the broadcast, as my research revealed, is how the broadcast has encouraged good working relations between the Assembly staff and the local community. The PM of the Assembly, noted:

> *The Assembly staff often suffered attacks in the communities when it came to enforcing sanitation byelaws. Now, we are seeing increased cooperation in enforcing Assembly byelaws because of the Asan Zal-Nim Saha programme on Simli Radio.* ***(Interview: PM, Gumo, 30/04/2021)****.*

The DCD of the Assembly corroborates the PM on the significance of this broadcast to government-community relations. He argued:

[38] **Asan Zal-nim Saha** means Time with Opinion Leaders. It is a two-hour indigenous language programme which utilises a community-led approach to amplifying rural voices in local governance through the recording of critical voices from select local communities, based on the outcome of needs assessments conducted by Simli Radio.

> *If there is any single radio broadcast that has supported [us] in strengthening cooperation in law enforcement at the community level in the District, then it is none other than Asan Zal-Nim Saha.* ***(Interview: DCD, Kumbungu, 12/04/2021)****.*

These assertions are evidence that CR is a powerful dialogic medium of communication which promotes participatory governance through collaborative community building.

7.4.2 Tinkpansi Lebgimsim Saha (Community Development Hour)

Simli Radio's 'Tinkpansi Lebgimsim Saha', which literally translates to mean "Community Development Hour", is another example of how CR fosters development through collaborative programming. However, in contrast to Asan Zal-Nim Saha, this broadcast uses a blend of local indigenous music, folk tales and phone-in segments with in-studio panel discussions, in order to invoke the community sense of purpose and identity in fostering collaboration for local development (Document Analysis: DSR Broadcasts Schedule, 2021). The local music played during the broadcast is carefully selected, and it includes music that invokes patriotism, instils a sense of belonging and the need to be involved in the community development processes. Folk stories often narrate the lived experiences of community people in times of challenge, and how such challenges have been confronted **(Interview: PC, 25/04/2021)**. This provides some motivation for community members to continue to make a significant contribution to the development of their communities.

The Station Manager, in an interview, disclosed that this broadcast is one of the most listened to daytime radio programme. According to him, it reflects on real time challenges in local communities. He argued that the broadcast provides people the opportunity to discuss challenges they face in their respective communities. He noted:

> *It is a broadcast that recognises the need for rural people to have a platform to talk about things that impact their lives and to discuss ways to transform their communities and themselves. The calls from radio listeners and the content of discussions suggest that the broadcast has had great impacts on the lives of many people* ***(Interview: SM, Dalun, 25/01/2021)****.*

During FGD with Assembly Members, participants observed that this broadcast has engaged in shaping the lives of rural youth, striving to make the youth find their

purpose in life through the sharing of the lived experiences of people who come on the broadcast. In particular, a participant explained how the programme was used as a tool against rising social vice in the district. He inferred that the broadcast has provided information on various alternative livelihood empowerment and skills development opportunities to the youth of his electoral area, making young men and women more productive in the transformation of the local economy.

> *On the social front, this broadcast has led the campaign against drug abuse and substance addiction among youth in these areas of the District. The youth now channel their energies into learning productive trades in the regional capital, and come back to set up their businesses here, in the District* ***(FGD-5: AM Participant, Nyankpala, 25/03/2021)****.*

During an FGD with members of a community group in Vo□gu, participants demonstrated their love for the programme. The participants took turns to indicate how valuable the programme was to their lives. For example, a participant noted that the combination of indigenous music and folklore radiates a sense of belonging and identity with the issues being discussed. Another participant claims that the programme draws them closer to the realities of life surrounding them. She argues that the broadcast teaches them patience in the face of apparent challenges and introduces them to ways of managing their own affairs, and those of the community life **(FGDs-2: Vo□gu, 16/01/2021)**.

In another FGD, a participant equates the information from this broadcast to an Islamic sermon from a Friday pulpit at the mosque. She noted that the issues that have been discussed, which related to home management, child education and participation in small-scale trading, provide some stimulus to housewives to navigate the rough terrains of marriage and the family in the communities. She averred that the broadcast has taught the women of her community the need to look after their children and to contribute to the governance process of their district by participating in decision-making processes as the need arises. Her argument centred on the adjustments to some cultural practices that now allow women's voices to be heard during community discussions on development and social issues. She argued:

> *There is now growing acceptance of women's views on issues that affect not just the family, but the predominantly patriarchal community. Our voices are now being heard on very contemporary issues on community*

development. Our husbands accommodate our views and allow us to fully participate in community decision-making processes ***(FGD-3: Tunteiya, Zangbalung, 20/02/2021).***

It emerged in an FGD in Gbullung that this broadcast has helped to curb the growing rural-urban migration of young men and women to the national capital in search of non-existent jobs. A participant noted that she was brought home from Accra, the national capital, where for 3 years she worked as a Kayayie *(Head Porter**),*** because her father had listened to the harrowing lived experiences, including the sexual and human rights abuse of girls who went into this trade. According to the participant, her father could not forgive himself for allowing her to embark on such a dangerous journey, and therefore called her to return home. Upon her return, her father sold a few cattle to register her to learn dressmaking in the District capital in Kumbungu and, today, proudly, she is the only dressmaker serving her community and other localities. She concluded, with rousing applause from her colleagues, that Tinkpansi Lebgimsim Saha has saved the lives of many young girls from poor homes in rural communities in the District, and that it is not for nothing that many people in the villages tune in to listen and contribute to the broadcast daily **(FGDs-4: Gbullung, 23/02/2021)**.

The Technical Adviser of GDCA in an interview, argued, that this broadcast allows community members unfettered opportunities to directly discuss challenges that confront their communities and to provide local solutions to address such development challenges **(Interview: GDCA, Tamale, 09/03/2021)**. I would argue that key concerns that are raised by rural people on this broadcast have become the basis of rural development programming for the Assembly and some NGOs. For instance, GDCA introduced alternative livelihoods' support opportunities to curb the mass migration of young people from rural communities to the capital, so as to engage in unhealthy menial jobs, helping to end the mob (in)justice of alleged witches and thieves, curbing the growing drug abuse among young people, providing support systems for people living with disabilities in response to calls by the local community on this broadcast **(DA: GDCA, 2019)**.

7.4.3 Zingama Tumaduu Saha (Time with NGOs)

I have argued elsewhere in this study that CR is well known for its community outlook. It is a medium prominently championing community development agenda and

providing opportunities for local community members to rediscover and build their identities and senses of belonging, to promote a sense of community, to enhance their lives and livelihoods through the process of social communication. In this section, I build on the previous arguments, that CR provides local community members with the opportunity to access critical services from both governmental and non-governmental development-oriented agencies. In the case of DSR, I would argue that Zingama Tumaduu Saha, is one reason that local community members prioritise listening to CR, rather than its counterparts in the regional capital.

My findings shows that this broadcast supports the community development agenda by fostering mutual partnerships with the diverse community-based development-oriented agencies and stakeholders that empower the listening community out of marginalisation, deprivation and the vicious cycle of poverty. My research indicates that through partnership arrangements, DSR utilises this broadcast to introduce key poverty alleviation strategies and services, including agriculture financing and marketing, village savings and loans schemes for women's groups, small scale business opportunities and skills development, to the diverse membership of its listening community **(FGDs-2: Vo□gu, 16/01/2021; FGDs-5: Nyankpala, 25/03/2021)**. During my field interaction session with Mma Saanpaga, a regular listener to DSR and popular described as "Magazia"[39] from Zugu, her remarks broadly demonstrate the general feeling of the local community about the impact of DSR's mutual partnerships with its development agencies. She noted:

> *It was on Simli Radio that we heard of NORSAAC's programme on 'Promoting Economic Independence for Women and Youth' (PEI-WAY) in the region. Myself, and my group, subscribed to one of their Village Saving and Loans Association (VSLA) and we benefited from their financial literacy training and entrepreneurial skills development packages. Today, I have added agro-input dealership to my farming activities from loans I accessed from the VSLA contributions. Simli Radio not only introduced me to a great income generating source but helped me gain recognition and social status in my community* ***(Personal Interaction: Mma Saanpaga, Zugu, 02/09/2021)****.*

[39] "Magazia" is a Dagbanli colloquial term used to describe a very famous women leader in the local community. They are considered very influential opinion leaders for women in traditional societies.

Further to this, the station has rolled out opportunities that strengthen the activities of rights based activist groups, other community-based organisations in governance such as the Youth Speak-up and the Young Female Platforms programmes of the Youth Empowerment for Life (YEfL) and NORSAAC, respectively, which facilitate its community mobilisation and activism drive **(DA: DSR Broadcasts Schedule, 2021)**. These two programmes, in particular, addresses issues of low participation and representation of women, girls and young people in leadership and community decision-making processes **(Interview: SM, 25/01/2021)**. I would argue that CR becomes the learning platform for young people to deliberate and to speak up on governmental issues that impact upon their lives. The initiative empowers young people to challenge the status quo and to assert their rights to representation at all levels of the community decision-making processes. A young female activist in Dalun, and a regular panellist on DSR's Youth Speak-up, 18 year old Chentiwuni, articulates how this initiative has encouraged DSR listenership culture among the young people in her community. She argued:

> *Young people now have programmes on radio that specifically address their concerns and needs. The broadcast formats of these programmes make it interactive for young people to engage in topical issues that impact on their lives. I find young people discussing the broadcast topics at their various social spots in the communities. Each week's broadcast always leaves young people with something significant to deliberate on, until the next broadcast. Since the start of these broadcasts, we have observed an increased radio listenership of young people. More fulfilling is that young people volunteering to lead initiatives and to take up leadership roles, like contesting in Assembly elections* ***(Personal Interaction: Chentiwuni, Dalun, 03/09/2021)****.*

The implication of these two statements is that CR is increasingly becoming attractive because it promotes services that directly impact on its listening community. Strong mutual partnerships, such as those narrated above, leverage the strengths, understanding and collective focus of the diverse community, in order to stimulate solutions to community problems and to advance the community's course of action. This sense of identity and recognition encourages collective ownership among the local community, and the need for them to make the radio work for, and in, their

interest. It also underlines the special relationship between CR and pavement radio[40], as some critical social issues from the former are digested into the latter, and *vice versa*. Young people will continue to discuss topics of interest that they have listened to on radio at their various social spots and this, in turn, encourages free expression and a broader involvement in radio listenership.

7.5 Conclusion to chapter

To conclude, it is pertinent to call attention to the critical role of CR in addressing low community participation in the local governance space in Ghana. In this chapter, using empirical evidence from my field research, I demonstrated how CR is not only promoting accountability and responsiveness to local community needs, but also developing the local community's civic consciousness and increasing their political awareness. I argue, in this chapter, that when the local community is provided with the platform, such as radio, on which to engage with matters of interest to the community, it builds their capacities and they become conscious of their environment and the things that lead to progress. As empowered citizens, they are able to demand accountability from their local leaders and they are able to make decisions that inure them to the benefits of the local community. The chapter has therefore argued that DSR broadcasts trigger local level accountability and stimulate local level responsiveness to community needs.

This chapter has further demonstrated that CR has served as an appropriate platform that enables local communities to actively engage in debates which contribute to a better understanding of the mandate and the programmes of activities of the decentralised Assemblies. The chapter has provided evidence to demonstrate the critical role that CR continues to perform in an attempt to address the low levels of community participation in DLG. In this chapter, I have focused on specific broadcasts of DSR that are designed to amplify local voices in local-level decision-making processes, broadcasts that galvanise support for young people, women and the differently abled's inclusion in local level politics, and those that drive holistic local community development.

[40] **"Pavement radio** is an expression first popularised by historian Stephen Ellis in referring to the grassroots, informal communication networks that relay information, primarily in urban African settings" (Ellis, 1989).

CHAPTER EIGHT

ANALYSIS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Introduction to the chapter

The objective of this study was to investigate how community radio (CR) contributes to local community participation in DLG in the northern region of Ghana. Specifically, the research sought: firstly, to determine the nature of local community participation in DLG in the Kumbungu District of Ghana, and, secondly, to ascertain why CR was deemed to be a significant social communication tool to provoke local community participation in local governance business and, thirdly, to examine how DSR was addressing the concerns of poor community participation in decentralised local governance in the district.

This chapter therefore provides an analysis of the key findings of my research. I began with an analysis of community participation in decentralised local governance (DLG) in Ghana, before focusing on the core issues that affect local community participation in DLG in the area studied. Key findings on CR ownership, and how it impacts local community identity formation and participation on CR in the Kumbungu District are analysed. CR access, as an enabler of voice and representation, is examined in the context of Ghanaian democratic space. The impact of CR's exclusive use of local language on broadcasts dealing with local community participation, is also analysed. My analysis of DSR enables me to contribute to scholarly arguments about the nature of CRB, on how CR responds to community needs and the implication of collaborative programming on local radio to local community participation, in the Ghanaian context.

Together, this chapter summarises the research's core findings, presents the conclusions drawn from the discussions of the findings, and draws out the implications for the theory and practice relating to good local governance and CR integration for effective local community participation. The chapter also looks at how this research contributes to knowledge, before it proceeds to make policy recommendations, to provide directions for future research on participation, local governance, and CR.

8.2 Community participation in decentralised local governance

Community participation is noted as being the pivot of decentralised local development planning and decision-making. DLG in Ghana was introduced to provide the opportunity for various interest groups at the community level to actively participate in governance processes and enhance the efficiency of district level authority's responsiveness to community needs. However, one of the fundamental concerns that emerged from my research on local community participation in DLG, is the high level of civic apathy in relation to local governance issues. This research found that there was general disinterest in local community participation in local governance issues. Based on my research's evidence, I argue that the lack of interest in local politics among rural people is the result of the systemic failure of local policies in responding to local needs, the over-politicisation of development programmes and the lack of space for marginalised voices in local government decision-making processes.

Governance scholars have extensively discussed the impact of apathy on political participation and national development. Ayee (2004), for example, observed that civic apathy was a critical factor that undermines rural people's participation in Ghana's DLG administration. Ayee (2004), argues that civic apathy in Ghana manifests itself as low voter turnout in district-level elections, the unwillingness of rural people to pay taxes and, when needed, the lack of zeal to participate in community communal labour in the area of sanitation. Other researchers, e.g., Arkorful et al., (2021); Naaikuur and Diedong, (2021); Anaafo (2019); Sanyare, (2013); Michels, (2012) and Lowndes, Pratchett, and Stoker (2001), have also reported growing disinterest in local community participation in development planning processes across many parts of Ghana. What my research evidence contributes to the discussion on apathy is to answer the question: why is the phenomenon so pronounced in Ghana's decentralised local governance administration? My research shows that there is the growing suspicion that local community's participation at the district level has very little impact on the performance of the system, owing to an entrenched partisan political regime.

Despite overwhelming evidence of civic apathy towards political engagement at the local level, my research shows that civic education campaigns on CR fail to address the key factors that undermine local community participation in decentralised local governance. For instance, at the heart of Ghana's DLG policy framework are two key players: a Chief Executive, who is appointed by an Executive President to serve as

the political head of the Assembly; and a number of Assembly Members, 70% of whom are popularly elected at the polls, by universal adult suffrage, to serve as the legislative body of an assembly, each representing an electoral area in the District. My research findings show that the appointment of a DCE and 30% of the AM only seek to satisfy central government political objectives at the local level, as these appointees merely follow the directives of their appointing authority in aligning community needs to the government's political agenda. This state of affairs is undesirable to many local community members, who do not see why they should participate in an election that does not guarantee the proper devolution of power to them but, rather, are consigned to an appointed leadership that pays allegiance to the appointer.

The current arrangement is merely an extension of the central government's grip on local governance, as decision-making powers at the local level are concentrated on central government appointees, rather than on the elected representatives of the local people. This view entrenches local elite capture and impacts on local decision-making processes. Crawford (2014, p18) argues that central government appointments to local government structures were inconsistent with democratic principles and good governance practices, since this encourages "upward accountability to central government", as opposed to "downward accountability to the local electorates". My research shows that CR campaigns have failed to address this growing trend to local elite capture and the rent-seeking attitude of partisan political actors in the DLG space. Indeed, the evidence from my research suggests that the present arrangement does not allow for the much-touted bottom-up development programming at the local level, neither does it support political accountability to the local community, in whose interest the local political actors work (Crawford, 2004 and Ferrazzi, 2006).

Additionally, heavy political influence at the local Assembly limits effective discussions on critical matters relating to local development. My research indicates that Assembly Members from the Kumbungu District are politically aligned to either a ruling or an opposition party. I would argue that this finding contravenes two critical provisions on local governance that are enshrined in Ghana's Constitution. For instance, Article 248:1 directs that:

> "…a candidate seeking election to a District Assembly, or any lower local government unit, shall present himself to the electorate as an individual, and shall not use any symbol associated with any political party".

while Article 248:2 cautions that:

> "…a political party shall not endorse, offer a platform to or in any way campaign for or against a candidate seeking election to a District Assembly, or any lower local government unit".

Nonetheless, my research findings are consistent with Adamtey's study (2014, p79), which reported that in all the 5 District Assemblies that he studied, he found substantial political influence in their structures and decision-making processes. I would argue that the local media have failed to amplify calls for a more neutral local governance.

My conclusion from the arguments above is that local government authorities are only keen on the rhetoric of participation as a matter of procedure, and, where possible, as an attempt to satisfy the requirements of the local component of the National Development Planning Act, 480 (1994) and other relevant Acts. They do not employ the process, because they truly trust that it is the best practice and that it would guarantee the interests of local community members. Further, this kind of community participation can best be described as "non-participatory", at the very least (Arnstein, 1969). While there is so much talk from local government authorities about the importance of participation in community development, and often references to efforts by the Assembly to enhance community participation in the planning and implementation of development interventions, Arnstein (1969, p217), points out that the "real objective is not to enable people to participate in planning or conducting programmes, but to enable powerholders to educate or cure the participants".

Another conclusion arising from my research findings is that community participation in development decision-making processes at the district level, through the structure laid down, is only met as a requirement, whereas the actual decision-making is reserved for key political actors. In the view of Michels (2012), when it comes to the reality of community participation in development decision-making processes, the community can only "hear, but not be heard". There remain heavy political influences at the district level regarding community participation in development decision-making processes too. Besides these, there are relevant provisions of law and adequate knowledge of these laws, that aim to engage the local communities in development

decision-making at the district level, but limited capacity, inadequate financial resources, and political expediency make it impossible to achieve this.

Nonetheless, the evidence from these findings and from the current research that has been cited elsewhere, suggests that the present approach has failed to engender the effective participation of the local community in development decision-making processes, since the findings demonstrate that such decision-making powers are limited, rather, to a privileged few in the Assembly. The sub-structures are rendered incapable and totally ineffective in supporting any community mobilisation and participatory efforts in the district development planning processes (Fox et al., 2011, p24).The evidence has provided a contrast to the theoretical arguments of Ayee (2011), Inkoom (2011), Awortwi (2011; 2010), Ahwoi (2010), Conyers (2007), and Crawford (2004), that local governments can better deal with local community development needs because they are closer to the people, and therefore have access to local knowledge and information which the central government lacks. What is evidenced from my research is that local governments instead impose development interventions on local communities. Decentralised authorities do not engage in a participatory way with the local communities so as to explore local knowledge in relation to putting forward sustainable interventions in local needs.

8.3 Issues affecting community participation in local governance

In Chapter 5, I presented elaborated findings from my field research, detailing some critical issues affecting local community participation in DLG in the area studied. In my arguments, I identified the political partisan capture[41] of local decision-making structure and socio-cultural factors that altogether debase the relevance of women's participation in the local political spaces of highly patriarchal societies, and the lack of access to local government information by local citizens, as some of the issues that militate against local people participating in local governance.

I argued that Ghana's model of local governance was designed to cater for local people's participation in the political space of the country by the direct transfer of

[41] I define **political partisan capture** as the situation in which local political actors, or agents, take over the decision -making processes of local level structures, further marginalising the voices of the ordinary local community's people, because their political party is in government, and they want wild, unbridled political power.

decision-making powers from the central government to the local people at the district level and, to a large extent, to encourage bottom-up decision making for holistic and inclusive community development in Ghana's rural areas. The idea of encouraging decision-making from below was to inspire local initiatives, to improve direct accountability to local people, to ensure responsiveness to local needs, and to promote the indigenisation of development outcomes. While these objectives are yet to be attained, there continues to be general disinterest from the local people in local governance, as evidenced in Chapter 5. Local participation in civic duties, including participating in local elections, paying taxes, and even attendance at local meetings, continues to see a decline in most Ghanaian local communities.

As presented in Chapter 5 of this thesis, the phenomenon of the excessive political capture of local decision-making structures remains one of the most cited reasons for the poor participation of the local community in local decision-making in Ghana. As argued in previous chapters, Ghana's DLG policy framework was widely perceived to be the model that would promote local accountability, drive responsiveness to local needs and entrench local democracy (Ayee, 1994; Rodríguez-Pose and Ezcurra, 2010). At the onset of DLG, many scholars and supporters of decentralisation were optimistic of the opportunities it offers to local community members to engage in community politics and to make significant contributions to change at the community level (Saito, 2003; Smith, 2007).

Data from this research, and data presented from other studies, suggest that local level decision-making structures are usurped by heavily central partisan political influence rendering the structures both dysfunctional and inept. For instance, the appointment of Chief Executives and the retention of 30% of the membership of local assemblies emerged from the findings as one way in which the central government extends its control over local assemblies' decision-making processes. Aside from this finding being consistent with the findings of previous studies, I am taking the arguments of Agomor, Adams and Taabazuing (2019) and further developing my argument that the present practice is not only inconsistent with democratic practices, but also supresses local initiatives and muffles local participation, as citizens do not see their contributions reflected in the local decisions that are often implemented.

I argue that local assemblies in Ghana are being micro-managed by central government in a manner that is completely opposed to the principles of political devolution. For example, a central figure in the Ghanaian local government structure is the AM, who is elected with the local legislative authority to serve as the connection between the local community and the local Assembly. Despite their critical role in the DLG structure, these research findings show that they have largely been relegated in decision-making, especially if they have no ties to a sitting government. Their lack of the logistics and resources to effectively connect their local communities to the Assembly is glaring. The sentiments expressed by AM at FGDs during my research further justify the findings of Adamtey, Amoako and Doe (2021), Adamtey (2014), Adusei-Asante (2012), and Ahwoi (2010), that AMs operate under very stressful economic circumstances. For instance, Adusei-Asante (2012) argues that the lack of dedicated resources for AMs has, in some cases, led to the misapplication of funds that were originally earmarked for local development, in some districts in Ghana.

Additionally, I have established that, besides starving AMs of the necessary resources to carry out their functions, there is a growing illegality and a deliberate usurpation of their functions by the local leadership of political parties, as evidenced in Chapter 5, and these contribute to the ineffectiveness of AMs in local decision-making processes. Adamtey (2014) again reports the frustration of most AMs, since their views and the opinions of their communities are often not reflected in the Assembly programmes. Based on the analysis of my research findings, such a situation arises because of the manipulation of Assembly business by a cabal of local political elites who are armed with central government powers that are occasioned by the apparent weaknesses of existing legislatures, depriving the local legislators of the possibility of influencing local decisions through constructive debates.

Another critical issue is the cultural misconception of local women's significance in decision-making in patriarchal societies. The findings presented in Chapter 5 of this research demonstrate that traditional societies, which are structured along patriarchal system, create a particularly male dominance over all things. Women, essentially play second fiddle to the men in these societies. There emerged a particularly dominant view among local community members that the place of a rural woman, in their communities, is in the kitchen and in 'the other room'- referring to women meeting the

sexual needs of their husbands. This view affirms Dolphyne's (1991) description that there is a "deep-seated cultural perception of women as inferior beings compared to men", in traditional societies. While this finding corroborates the studies of Gyimah and Thompson (2008), Mahamadu (2010), Odame (2010), Baveng, (2011) and Sossou (2011), based on data from my research, I argue that sexism is a common practice in traditional societies, and when it is aided by the conspiracy of silence over women's issues in conservative societies, such as those evidenced in Chapter 6 of this thesis, it undermines and underrates their potential. It tends to deny women and girls the opportunities for education, entrepreneurship and improved living conditions. The years of male domination of the political bureaucracy, institutional sexism and the patriarchal system have relegated more rural women to political obscurity in Ghana.

This account is not only consistent with the arguments of Tamale (2000, p12), that "when women step over from the 'private' sphere to claim their rightful space in the 'public' arena, traditional values provide a ready tool for men to use to remind them of their 'proper' place", but also it reveals the inadequacies of legal frameworks governing the conduct of local government business in Ghana. This view gives credence to Opare's (2005) analysis, which argued that one's ability to read, write and speak English is seen as being essential in enabling one rise to key leadership positions in rural communities in Ghana. In addition to the above, respondents indicated that local politics was too demanding of time and money, while offering very little reward.

Another significant issue affecting participation in DLG, presented in Chapter 5, is that information from local government officials at the District level to the community, is inadequate. Where there is an inadequate free flow of local government information from the Assembly to local communities, local people soon become dissuaded from participating in the activities of the Assembly, since they lack information. A key consideration that is customary in the institutional objectives of local governments worldwide, where they are practised, is the effective and deliberate engagement of ordinary citizens in development decision-making processes. These people constitute a core political and economic group in society whose voice is central to policy initiatives. I argued that the marginalisation and deliberate silencing of ordinary people's voices in development decision-making processes should not only be deemed an affront to good democratic tenets, but also a way of evading downward

accountability. Local government authorities are required to report to their citizens on how the public funds entrusted to their care are utilised. One way of meeting this requirement is for assemblies to provide regular information to the public through appropriate channels, such as radio, on local government projects and programmes.

As local governments are constituted into the basic political unit that is closer to the local folks, and with a mandate to serve the needs of ordinary people from the communities, local government authorities need to be in touch with the community, including the marginalised and socially excluded. Stimulating ordinary peoples' involvement in local government activities will require trust and transparency in the flow of local government information and, hence, effective communication with citizens. As I have already established in previous chapters of this thesis, one of the effective ways of empowering citizens to demand local governance accountability is to ensure that local communities have access to information.

My research has shown that the concerns in relation to low community participation in local governance activities in Ghana are linked to the lack of access to local government information. The essence of local governance is to devolve decision-making powers to ordinary citizens, so that they can decide on their own development trajectory. Information and effective communication that are based on trust and transparency, play a vitally important role in achieving this task. For citizens to be actively involved in the governance process, it is essential that they receive the necessary information from trustworthy sources, and such information should be reliable. The regular dissemination of local government information from the Assembly to its citizens through channels that not only provoke constructive debate and feedback, but also that are the most trusted and preferred by its citizens, have the potential to enhance civic participation.

Effective communication is critical to stimulating civic participation, and so it is with the credibility and transparency of the message communicated. It is pertinent to call attention to the argument emerging from this research, that local communities will demonstrate good faith in local government business and make efforts to participate if the local assembly demonstrate openness, transparency and trust in relaying relevant information to them. Nonetheless, I have identified an essential function of CR as that they must inform the local community about community problems. It is

therefore reasonable to emphasise that CR provides the much needed access to local community information.

8.4 Community ownership and control agents for identity formation and as a participatory mechanism

A key finding that is presented in Chapter 6 is that DSR is generally perceived by its listening community to be a communal property, irrespective of the station's legal and formal ownership status. The concept of community ownership is particularly germane to participatory development discourse because of its superseding impact on how the local community, or beneficiaries, engage in development actions (Gumucio-Dagron, 2001, and Tufte and Mefalopulos, 2009). In this section, I argue on the concept of ownership in relation to how it reflects group identity formation among the station's listening community.

One of the plausible and fascinating arguments from this notion of the communal ownership and control of CR, is the communal identity that it confers on its listening community. Communal ownership strengthens community identity and drives community participation in a station's broadcasts. CR scholars, including Bosch (2014), Fairbairn (2009), and Fraser and Restrepo (2001), hold the view that a community sense of ownership and belonging to a CR project commences with the unalloyed participation of the community, from the inception of the project through to the mobilisation of both local and external resources for the establishment of the CRS. The argument I make here is that when a CR comes into existence through this process of early engagement and consolidated solidarity with community needs, it yields a genuine sense of community ownership. In some instances, this will, in turn, influence essential aspects of the station's broadcasts.

Historically, studies conducted on CR in Ghana tend to focus on the contested nature of community ownership and participation in the management of CRB (Naaikuur and Diedong, 2020; Asuman and Diedong, 2019; Amadu and Alhassan, 2018; Diedong and Naaikuur, 2012; Naaikuur and Diedong, 2014; Ufuoma, 2012, and Alumuku, 2007) rather than adducing evidence on demand-driven CR projects in Ghanaian communities. At present, there is little evidence to suggest any wide-spread community-driven demand for the establishment of CR in Ghana. I argue that the

emergence of a CR movement in Ghana can be described as a natural evolution in a pluralistic media space. What may come close to a demand-driven CR establishment is the recognition of the potency of radio by church associations in relation to the spread of the Gospel, and by NGOs for development work. The earlier established CRS were not in response to any known community need that came from the communities themselves but, rather, the proponents of this type of media were simply filling a gap that was created due to the liberalisation of the country's broadcast media environment. In the case of DSR, the evidence suggests that, although it was initially established through funding support from the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), through the Ghanaian Danish Community Partnership (GDCP) programme in 2005, and is presently micro-managed by the GDCA, the station has been able to consolidate its gains in community participation.

Focusing the arguments on the community ownership and control of CR within legal and regulatory frameworks, is essential in addressing the apparent gap between the present models of CR establishments in Ghana, and best practices around the world. Studies (Buckley, 2011; Buckley, Duer and Siochru, 2007, and Price-Davies and Tacchi, 2001), that seek to highlight the relative importance of legal and regulatory frameworks in relation to broadcasting developments, have argued on two grounds: the provision of mechanisms for monitoring the compliance of broadcast media activities relative to their mandate of service in the public interest, and the creation of an enabling environment for the growth of community broadcasting in a country. In countries where there is legislation on CR, strict requirements for the adherence, on CR principles, to community ownership and control, are explicitly provided for. Where these laws do not yet exist, as in the case of Ghana, there are no regulations that require adherence to the core principles of CR, such as requirements to confer ownership and control rights, to the local community, and also, on accountability to the local communities, as means of generating the trust that is necessary for participation and sustainability.

The delay in the passage of a broadcasting Bill in Ghana has been of concern to many media analysts, who have blamed the legal void for the current challenges bedevilling the country's broadcasting sector (Ayeboafo, 2019; Blay-Amihere, 2016, and Buckley et al., 2005). Predictably, many analysts argue that governments have been

unresponsive to the law for political reasons. They contend that the law is expected to restrict the interests of political elites in media ownership, and in political influence on broadcasting authorisation (Broadcasting Bill, 2014). Although the Bill recognises CR broadcasting in Clauses 25 to 31, there is little evidence in it to suggest that, when passed into law, it will address the issues of CR ownership and control in the broadcasting space. The language chosen to define community broadcasting, in Clause 25 of the Bill, attests to this assertion (Broadcasting Bill, 2014, p24). Again, the Bill fails to address the context and parameters of the concept of authentic CR, which I argue, results from the ownership and control arrangements of a radio facility.

In the context of this research, identity formation reflects the ways in which individuals and the collective members of the community represent themselves in relation to others. It emphasises how relationships are developed among the individuals and groups in a community, and how a community's association with its radio broadcasting leads to a new identity construct. Consistent with the arguments of Backhaus (2021), and Fornas and Xinaris (2013), CR impacts on community identity formation and group expression, as it provides the space for the participation of the local community, particularly in relation to content generation, broadcast management and, to some degree, the financing of the broadcast facility. That notwithstanding, I argue that a community sense of ownership and control contributes to listeners' willingness and desire to participate and engage in media broadcasts. I posit that if the debate about CR's authenticity is to be addressed, the ownership and control rights of the station should be transferred to the local community.

In the context of this study, despite DSR's legal and formal ownership status, it is generally well perceived by its listening community and can be framed as a communal property. The positive local community perception and framing of DSR as communal property stem from the firmly established notion that the station is rooted in the local community providing inclusive broadcasts that prioritises and reflects the diverse interest, concerns and cultural heritage of the community. DSR also is endorsed for providing a localised platform that enables self-reflection, self-expression, minority representation and the sharing of local knowledge and experiences through content generation (programming) and engagement which is overlooked by mainstream media. The concept of ownership and control, according to Backhaus (2021),

represents a multifaceted approach to empowerment and meaning creation which drives and stimulates listener participation. However, beyond community participation and engagement, I argue that the ownership and control rights of CR by the local community contributes to individual and collective identity formation.

8.5 Community access, voice and representation on community radio

Concerns about access, voice and representation on CR by the local community were found to be a key dimension of local community participation on CR. I will argue that the foundation of CR is the relationship that exists between the station and its listening communities. My research confirms what is already a common assumption: that CR, when set up effectively, provides facilities that give the local community access to production opportunities. Access allows CR to focus on local issues, giving voice to groups and individuals who otherwise would not have had the opportunity to express their views, to hold local authority leaders accountable, and to act in the best interest of the local community (Backhaus, 2021). CR provides the platform on which rural communities communicate about issues that affect their daily political and socio-economic lives.

This research finding shows that CR provides listeners with the opportunity to participate in their local government activities through robust programme production. I have argued that Ghanaian civil societies working in local communities have used CR to empower the local communities, who have otherwise had no opportunity to express themselves. Simli Radio is used to build the capacity of local people so that they can fully participate in decision-making processes, and to amplify marginalised voices and interests. I have examined how CR promotes the local community's right to communicate and assists in the free flow of information and opinions, and I concluded, based on my research results, that CR encourages creative expression and contributes to democratic processes at the local level. My research findings show that CR access through DSR is prominent in terms of programme production, as community members constituted the guests for talk shows; call-in participants via mobile phones; interviewees for programmes; local reporters/citizen reporters; as hosts for special programmes, and as recorders for vox pops, in relation to issues that mostly relate to local governance and community development.

In this research, the broadcasts of DSR provided the local community members with access to information, the facility to express themselves, and a platform from which to register any community concern that required redress. This improves rural people's participation in the social accountability framework process of the local governance system. This research's findings demonstrate how the receivers of radio broadcasts engage with the medium to demand accountability from dutybearers, and to improve government responses to their needs. The findings acknowledge the significant role of local community access to radio facilities in relation to local community participation, as access shapes the ways in which CR listeners engage in the station's broadcasts and in related CR activities. What is most apparent from my research findings on CR access, voice and representation, is that DSR provides the medium for the co-creation of broadcasts that focus on amplifying local community concerns and rallying local solutions to those challenges. Local community members are therefore regarded as the co-creators of news and entertainment, rather than as passive consumers of such media products.

To demonstrate what CR access means to local participation, Backhaus (2021) describes CR access as representing an appealing solution, and Scott (2014) argues that "a free press is not free if the public cannot access it, understand it and contribute to the creation of it". In similar sentiments, Waisbord expresses that one of the most visible challenges to participation in developing countries is the lack of access to communication and information. The empirical findings on CR access provide a new perspective on the importance of voice and listening in CR for local governance and development purposes. I argue that the questions of voice and listening are central to building robust, engaging, and autonomous communities. By enabling decision-makers to understand the needs and concerns of the local communities they serve, CR provides the voice and listening that foster a sense of civic engagement and community involvement and leads to the development of shared goals and priorities. My arguments is backed by Backhaus (2021) conclusion that where CR provides the platform for diverse voices to be heard and local authorities actively listens to the needs and concerns of the local community, a more inclusive, participatory, and responsive society is established.

Indeed, a lack of clarity in relation to CR ownership structure impacts on community access and participation, its democratic management principles and, to a great extent, on the non-partisanship ethos of the station. Of particular interest is the lack of broader participation in CR management through elected representative executive committees. There was very little evidence from the data to suggest that the listening communities are adequately represented on the stations' Board. The data also did not find any meaningful regulatory requirements or structures that emphasise the local accountability of the station's Board to the listening community. Rather, what is observed is the retention of greater control of the selection and appointment of the station's Board by the GDCA, against the conventional practice of representative community election.

8.6 Language (local dialects) as a vehicle of community participation

In exploring the potentials of DSR as a vehicle for enhancing community engagement in local government affairs in the Kumbungu District, the crucial role of local language broadcasting as a key identity construct for local people's participation in media and governance became apparent. The use of local language in broadcasting was observed to be a major pillar that builds local identity, empowers local communities, and consolidates local people's sense of belonging. Taken together, the prevalence of local language use in local broadcasting contributes to efforts to decolonise the broadcast media space and to enhance the democratisation of communication. In addition to its emphasis on diversity and inclusion, local language broadcasting promotes marginalised voices and community identity, as observed in the findings that are presented in Chapter 6.

It is also significant to argue that, while the origin of CR remains debatable among scholars and researchers, its evolution as a medium for mass communication serving rural, peripheral, and marginalised communities is, however, the result of a historical struggle for voice, identity, and recognition. To best understand why CR, today, has evolved to become one of the leading instruments for rural community engagement, my research also focused on the local language broadcast policy of Simli CR. I argued that the local language broadcast ethos of DSR satisfies the deep aspirations of minority and marginalised sections of the rural communities who do not have a voice in community decision-making processes. Local language use in programme

production and broadcasting is a crucial element that represents the culture of a society. However, beyond the consolidation of a society's culture, local language broadcasting facilitates a community's access to creative expression, constructing significant social connections among the community's members, and supporting broader social cohesion in the community.

In his *"imagined communities"*, Anderson (2006) reasoned that indigenous language is a significant element in the development of a society where there are multicultural systems. Schudson (2011) argued that indigenous language was a key component of communication, and he called on the broadcast media to align its programmes with the language of the people who receive their broadcasts. I developed the arguments of Akpojivi and Fosu (2016), who noted that the failure to use indigenous language in media broadcasts leads to the concentration of critical information with a few people in society and may impede broader participation. I would argue that DSR, through its local language broadcasting. is bridging the information gap that exists between the lettered and the unlettered in the local communities and is expanding the frontiers of good governance in the district.

Overall, I suggest that local language broadcasting enables more rural people in developing countries to actively participate in their socio-economic, cultural, and political development, which constitute the key indicators of decentralised local governance today. The use of local language in CRB is a prime reason why there is meaningful participation and engagement by local communities in media discourse.

8.7 Community radio for policy discussions and civic engagement

I argued, in Chapter 7, that the broadcasts of DSR enhance local government policy discussions and civic engagement in the local community. CR enables local community members access to information on government programmes, projects and policies, and provides a platform for informed debates thereon. I argued that when citizens have access to information about government actions, it improves the local community's civic engagement. I noted that one of the most effective ways that local peoples' views and opinions can be reflected in local level government policies is when draft policies and programmes are subjected to wider debates and public discussions on channels that are friendly to the environments of rural people.

What this means is that CR is best positioned as an appropriate channel, or forum, for debates and discussions that are related, but not limited to, the formulation of district development plans. Simli Radio has an objective to amplify marginalised people's and the local community's voices on things that impact upon their lives. From the findings presented, the station is achieving this objective in several ways. In this sense, CR is well accustomed to the cultures of rural people and serves their best interests rather than any external interest. More importantly, this research has established that MMDAs are mandated by law to effectively engage the media in order to enhance participation in local governance. What is required of CR is that it addresses the participatory gaps in the preparations for district development plans. By this, CR needs to stimulate local community interest in the preparations of the district development plans and the ways in which local assemblies debate these plans during their plenary.

Often, it is expected that the local government should be taking more interest of incorporating CR into its structures to promote local government policy dissemination. This argument, however, raises a fundamental question about CR legitimacy (independence). This paradoxicality seems the contradiction of democracy. Nonetheless, the data reported in chapter 7 appear to support the assumption that CR's strength lies in its close connection to the local community it serves. They are often seen as platforms for alternative voices, grassroots perspectives, and marginalised communities. Incorporation into government structures can risk distancing CR from its audience, as decision-making processes become more centralised. This can reduce community participation, limit local ownership, and undermine the station's relevance and effectiveness. The study findings also suggest that CR regulatory environment plays a significant role in determining its independence and legitimacy. Incorporation into government structures may subject CR to regulations that favour government interests, restrict broadcast content, or impose bureaucratic hurdles in its operations.

To address this paradox, I argue that it is crucial to explore alternative models that maintain CR's independence while still accessing government support. Exploring the growing digital space, collaborative partnerships, transparent funding mechanisms, and legal safeguards can help strike a balance between autonomy and resource sustainability. Additionally, advocating for strong legal frameworks that protect the

independence of CR and engaging in dialogue with government stakeholders can help mitigate the risks associated with local government incorporation.

One pertinent finding that emerged from this study is how the growth of technology, and the unprecedented expansion of mobile telephony in local communities, has made the confluence of listener phone-in and in-studio radio panel discussion an exciting phenomenon in CR broadcasting, since the ordinary person can contribute directly to live discussions by using a mobile phone. The interactive character of radio, and its growing participatory potential, are most remarkable in widening the access of formerly marginalised voices to democratic processes at the local level, especially in emerging democracies. My research underlines the importance of CR in offering opportunities to rural people to participate in public debates on the radio through phone-in segments, and this has expanded the platforms for civic engagement in both local and national issues.

For Gadzekpo (2008), the free media space and the opportunities for citizens to freely express their views on national matters, continue to enhance the culture of public debates and dialogue in the Ghanaian public sphere, further entrenching the fora for the constructive criticism of policies, which will eventually lead to reforms of the intended government policy actions. The study findings are further supported by Jallov (2012), Gorden (2012), Alhassan, Odartey- Wellington and Amadu (2018), Gadzekpo (2008) and Fleming (2002), who have observed that local people can contribute to wider debates on pertinent issues from the comfort of their communities via the telephone, as part of ongoing efforts to democratise the communication process. CR continues to expand the frontiers of local government participation by amplifying rural voices so they can be heard in relation to government actions through radio phone-in segments on some of the most controversial programmes on local government. It is suggested that more phone-in segments should be introduced into programmes that relate to DLG in order to allow ordinary people to contribute to shaping local level policies in their communities.

8.8 The responsiveness of community radio programming to local needs

The study observed, in Chapters 6 and 7, that CR broadcasts are designed to be responsive and to address local community needs. Simli Radio broadcasts portray the

engaging approach to stimulate dutybearers' responsiveness to community needs and to promote social accountability within the decentralised Assembly. The radio station provides the necessary platform from which rural people can hold their authorities to account. It is pertinent to note how the station is recasting the concept of journalism in providing a voice for marginalised communities in the local governance space of their Assemblies. It is, perhaps, most noticeable how that approach enables local communities to bring to the attention of dutybearers, those things that affect them, and to call into question certain local government decisions that impact on their livelihoods and socio-cultural developments.

The dialogic nature of the CR broadcasts builds a sense of citizenship which, according to Chantal Mouffe, as cited in Rodriguez and Miralles (2014, p399), is about the participation of people in routine political practices, rather than something that is guaranteed because you are part of the system. It also reflects on the concept of participatory development communication, which I analysed in Chapter 3. Further, an analysis of the approach adopted by the CR to foster accountability and stimulate the responsiveness to community needs, reflects what Park et al. (2005, p3) described as communication for social change (CfSC). These authors have defined social change, here, as 'a positive change in people's lives- as they themselves define such a change'. To put it more broadly, CfSC is defined by the CfSC Consortium as:

> A process of public and private dialogue through which people define who they are, what they want, what they need, and how they can act collectively to meet those needs and improve their lives. It supports community-based decision making and collective action processes to make communities more effective and build more empowering communication environments. **(CfSC Consortium, 2004, p1)**.

This approach recognises that the media, especially CR, are a very powerful tool, which must be taken into account when addressing the political, economic or cultural sphere of a community. My research shows that community media represent social and cultural resources that can empower people, both in their personal development and in their development as members of the larger society. An important prerequisite for the empowerment of citizens is a concerted effort to improve media and information literacy skills that strengthen citizen advocacy and communication skills. The approach adopted does not rely simply on using media technologies but, largely, it

emphasises community participation and the local ownership of the process of development. CR, as discussed in Chapter 2, typically empowers the marginalised and grassroots communities. Grindles (2010), for instance, concludes that the demand for accountability serves as a check to government actions, and I argue that where accurate information is made available to citizens in a timely manner, it empowers them to constrain the excesses and abuses of politicians, public officials and public organisations.

As the empirical evidence has shown, the accountability broadcasts of DSR address a communication gap that exists between the community, on the one hand, and community leaders on the other. Such broadcasts create the fora for frequent contacts between AMs, in particular, Members who are mandated by Act 462 and Act 936 revised, of Ghana's local government system, to routinely engage and interact with their constituents. I argued that the activities of DSR have given further meaning to DLG. The findings affirm that CR provides an appropriate medium that serves as an interface between duty bearers and rightsholders. The interactive and dialogic programming concepts of CR provide an effective avenue along which local authority and rural people can engage with government policies and programmes, thus further enhancing social accountability, transparency, and responsiveness to community needs. I emphasise that the participation of local people in CR broadcasts is essential for effective local governance, as participation is a key pillar of good governance.

A key finding of my research is that the local community serve as producers of media content relating to accountability in CR broadcasts. This is consistent with Ndirangu's (2014) argument that CR promotes positive voluntary participation in media production, rather than passive consumption of media content. It is pertinent to submit that the direct participation of members of the community as producers of media content that demands accountability from dutybearers and seeks to get the local assembly to be responsive to community needs, suggests that the community owns the process of governance and determines the direction of decisions regarding development issues in the community. This argument is sustained by the earlier empirical research of Ndirangu (2014) and Naaikuur (2020), who both found the CR listener acting as the co-producers of media content on CR in both Kenya and Ghana, respectively. An added perspective from my research is that, beyond being co-

producers, the local community, in CR broadcasting, sets the agenda for public discussions on air. Through listener clubs, studio discussions, phone-ins, and other novel avenues, like the SCC concept discussed in Chapter 7, local CR listeners dictate which issues are important to the community, and they direct the way that discussions proceed on radio. They contribute ideas that enrich the discourse on public corruption, as demonstrated in the previous chapter.

It is pertinent to note that, while these approaches are relevant steps towards enhancing the social accountability and responsiveness of local government authorities to community needs, there are some shortfalls in some of DSR's accountability programmes. My study shows that the key shortfalls of DSR broadcasts are the lack of the capacity and focus that are needed in order to monitor and report on district development plans and budgets; the inability to transmit the live proceedings of decentralised Assembly meetings; and the failure to track and report on the financial income and expenditure of the Assembly. For instance, Section 88 of the LGA, 2016 (Act 936), requires District Assemblies in Ghana to conduct public hearings on proposed district and subdistrict development plans annually. Section 42 of the same Act sets out the modalities and platforms for participation, which include budget preparations and validation fora. In section 46 of the Act, CR is recognised as one of the key apparatuses for community engagement and information dissemination at the district-level. These are critical provisions that not only require the watchdog role of CR, but the amplification of the voices of the voiceless and marginalised members of the local community to ensure that the right decisions occur and that they are in the best interests of the community.

Notwithstanding these clear legal provisions, which are enshrined in law, this research did not find any evidence, either at the station, or even at the community level, to suggest that CR had prioritised the monitoring, coverage, and reporting on the design and implementation of the district development plans of the local Assembly. Some of the provisions of Act 936 require that district-level authorities account to their constituents in relation to the implementation of the district development plans and budgets, to enable citizens to monitor such projects and activities. I will argue that CR could play this role of guaranteeing accountability by tracking the implementation of

these policies, a role which is crucial in updating the public, the rate of success and any challenges that occurred.

Again, DSR has not demonstrated interest in ensuring that the meetings of the Assembly are transmitted live to allow members of the local communities to understand the processes and issues that are being discussed by their representatives. There is also very little evidence to suggest that CR has the capacity to track and report on the financial expenditure of District Assemblies. In addition to these provisions, the Right to Information (RTI) Act 2019 (Act 989) guarantees access to information held by any public institution, including the District Assembly, by any Ghanaian citizen. The preamble of the RTI Act 2019 (Act 989) reads, in part: "... foster a culture of transparency and accountability in public affairs....". Fortified by these legal guarantees, CR should use its accountability platforms to obtain documents and information that can place them in an incontestable position to fight corruption in public office at the local level. Unverified information in the media is a danger to democracy (Watts, Rothschild and Mobius, 2021; Lee, 2019). According to Gurevitch and Blumler (1990), and Curran (1996), cited in Graber (2003), one of the four critical pillars on which the media can support democracy to guarantee citizens' rights is that they are able to "act as public watchdogs that bark loudly when it [sic] encounters misbehaviour, corruption, and abuse of power" (2003, p143) in government corridors. The non-partisanship codes of the GCRN encourage CR to hold other public trustees, such as the Assembly, accountable while collaborating as partners for development.

Contrary to expectations that CR will lead to local accountability, I have observed an interesting tension between the many examples demonstrated in chapters 6 and 7 whereby DSR initiates creative forms of community expressions, provides open access to local communication facilities, and engage in democratic debate at the local level through participatory broadcasts, yet the impact of these opportunities do not materialise in successful ways to hold local authority and elite leaders accountable. It seems plausible that these results are due to power dynamics and political interest inherent in local communities' governance and decision making processes impeding efforts of CR in challenging local authority and establishing accountability. The success of CR in holding local authorities accountable depends also on broader social and political contexts. For example, Ghana's local governance structures lack the

necessary transparency and accountability mechanisms, creating barriers for CR initiatives to influence decision-making processes. The inconsistency could also be attributed in part, to inadequate institutional mechanisms to incorporate CR into local governance structures. That is to say that local authorities fail to appreciate the inherent potentials of CR as a platform for local accountability.

8.9 Collaborative community radio programming

One notable finding from the research is the deep collaboration between CR and other community development agencies, in the district, in particular, and in the region at large. This research observed that the collaboration between DSR and NGOs and CBOs in the district is producing positive results in relation to the overall community development agenda of the district, particularly in the areas of young people's participation in local governance, women's participation in communal decision-making, the demand for social accountability from government representatives, local authorities' responsiveness to community needs, and the efficient delivery of social services by state/public agencies.

My research demonstrates that development partners' collaboration with CRS in disseminating development information, mobilising community members for development action and empowering community members to actively participate in local governance, are practical steps that may propel development in local communities. Radio, for example, is severally described as a mobilising tool for reaching audiences for the purposes of empowering them (Forde, Foxwell and Meadows, 2003; and Meadows et al., 2007). On why NGOs find CR to be reliable partners in the delivery of development outcomes, Heywood (2018) argued that NGOs cannot effectively reach their targets if they fail to enlist radio in their programmes. Heywood (Ibid., p3) further noted that "far from being of secondary importance, radio lends itself to use by NGOs in promoting awareness of and participation in election campaigns". Similarly, Cottle and Nolan (2007) emphasise that NGOs depend on radio as amplifiers of their advocacy and as platforms for awareness creation.

Consistent with the arguments advanced here, the data indicate that YEfL-Ghana, for instance, continues to use DSR, as well as other CRSs across their operational areas, to provide the platforms needed for youth political engagement, youth empowerment

purposes, and for reaching out to more young people in their constituent communities. The data also demonstrate that DSR plays leading roles in mobilising young people, through the series of YEfL-Ghana focal programmes, in order to actively participate in local governance issues. Through DSR, YEfL-Ghana YP, for instance, has reached many young people and mobilised them for effective local government engagement especially during District level elections, when the young people invite contestants to a debate so such contestants are able to elaborate on their policies and explain how they can contribute to community development. The YP is also said to have, on many occasions, set the agenda for public debate on issues of community sanitation, drug abuse among young people, corruption in public offices, deteriorating educational and health infrastructure and bad roads, which has led to better interventions from the appropriate agencies.

The research findings also demonstrate that CR is used to encourage female voices in community development issues in a highly patriarchal society like that which exists among the Dagbamba of Northern Ghana, the restraining of the rural-urban drift of young girls in the District, and the provision of information on alternative livelihood support opportunities to rural people from deprived communities. These findings can well be located in O'Brien's framework of the gendered participation of women in CR, in which she argued that one of the many ways that CR has reflected its principle of democratising communication is through its role in representing and contributing to local cultures (Meadows et al., 2005), and by working with marginalised groups, including women, to attain equality (Baker, 2007; Sussman and Estes, 2005, and Barlow, 1988). The findings also reflect the views of Malik and Pavarala (2021,) who argued that CR can be used as a tool to address women's marginalisation by creating spaces for the expression of women's issues and addressing women's representation in development. The researchers narrate how India's Radio Mewat used the folk story approach, in its *'Hinsa ko no'* gender programme, to address issues of women's empowerment, women's abuse, and women's silenced voices in a patriarchal household (Malik and Pavarala, 2021, p76).

The key findings from DSR's participatory broadcast programmes, which are presented in Chapter 7 demonstrate how CR provides a platform for marginalised groups of society to either contribute to community development processes, or to

benefit from development outcomes through the folk stories approach, often reflecting peoples' lived experiences on development issues. Community concerns generated by this programme have often become central to local level government policy formulation. The findings also point to significant attitudinal changes among a cross section of community members, either culturally or socially, with respect to the collective development of the individual and community. This resonates with the arguments of Scott (1992) and McIntosh and Wright (2018), that exploring lived experiences, especially for women and marginalised groups, in broadcasting, can be a way of providing voice and visibility as a response to "subordination, oppression, and discrimination", in a society where only the privileged are visible. To quote Scott (1992, p24); "What could be truer, after all, than a subject's own account of what he or she has lived through?" It is pertinent to emphasise that exploring the personal experiences of people in a community is germane to understanding both the community, and the perspectives of the members of that community, and it also informs local level development policies.

8.10 Implications and recommendations resulting from the study

Based on insights from the analysis of this research's findings and discussions, I have identified a number of policy implications and recommendations for consideration. I will examine the implications in general terms, while discussing the recommendations under two broad subheadings: the DLG framework; and the CR policy framework.

8.10.1 Contribution to knowledge and implications of the study

To begin, my thesis makes a significant contribution to methodological pathways in CR research. I have observed that only a few of the key scholarly research works that I relied upon in conducting this study examine CR's impact on local participation and community development from an insider perspective. I would argue that, to fully appreciate the contribution of CR to local level participation and development outcomes in local communities, research must be centred on exploring the lived experiences of the local people, for whom radio listening is a daily ritual. The use of direct participant observation in researching CR will give practical meaning to the presence of radio broadcasting in local communities and will bring to the fore the most significant impacts of local media broadcasting, not only in community culture but, more specifically, to individual members of the local community.

Theoretically, this research demonstrates that earlier development models, such as modernisation and dependency, have not been effective models for harnessing rural potential. The evidence suggests that these models view rural lifestyles as unproductive. It assumes that development is linear, with laid down steps that must be followed in order to achieve it. By exploring participatory theoretical approaches in understanding a local community culture of engagement, relative to radio and local politics, this thesis has shown that local community members are not only capable of defining their own 'development' priorities but are collectively engaged in activities that are geared towards attaining their kind of local community progress. My argument is that CR is not perceived as an alternative media space, by local communities, but, rather, as a participatory medium of communication that meets their needs. They identify with CR because it speaks their language, amplifies their voices, and provides the space for their belongingness and the creative expressions of community goals. That is to say that, to attain a desirable level of local development, local participation in planning decisions at the local level is integral to their success.

Finally, in practice, this thesis builds our understanding of the interrelationship between CR, local participation and community development. The thesis demonstrates that, whereas participation is an indispensable part of the local development processes, CR is the appropriate medium to facilitate local participation in community decision-making processes. My research provides evidence that suggest that CR is a catalyst to local development, by encouraging local identity formation, by amplifying the silent voices of minority and marginalised groups, and by the development of a representative community culture. The current study provides practical and concrete participatory strategies to address the limited involvement of grassroots communities in Ghana's DLG programme. Ghana's LGA 936 (2016) emphasises and prioritises community participation in local development initiatives. However, efforts to engage local people in the decentralised governance system, the foundation of the country's community-based bottom-up development initiatives, have proven elusive. Despite more than three decades of implementing DLG to stimulate grassroots community participation, the evidence from this research and other studies shows that there is still a lack of tangible, pragmatic, and resourceful social communication strategies or plans that can serve as manuals or blueprints for local government authorities. By using a combination of research tools, my study analysed

data from my fieldwork and identified practical methods to encourage local community participation in DLG affairs.

This study also makes a policy contribution to the ongoing policy debate on constitutional amendments and local government reforms in Ghana. This study coincided with the Government of Ghana's efforts to review and amend entrenched provisions in the Ghanaian Constitution to deepen democracy, enhance participation, empower grassroots communities, improve accountability, and address the shortcomings in the local government system. By advancing arguments that address the gaps in previous research, this study findings support Ghana's objectives of achieving successful decentralised reforms, increasing local community participation in local governance, and promoting sustainable local development.

8.10.2 General recommendation

My research has established that local community participation is an essential component of local community development. There is a need to strengthen local level structures to better engage with all spheres of the local community. Strengthening local level structures may drive the necessary local participation for local community development. The participatory programming of DSR broadcasts offers an opportunity for better collaboration with the appropriate stakeholders to encourage local community participation in regard to local level development planning decision-making processes. Since trust is essential in building a fairer, just, and equitable society, the District Assembly needs to establish strong mutual collaboration with the CRS and other interest groups, including NGOs and CBOs, in order to give meaning to participatory decentralised local governance. My research demonstrates that DSR broadcasts engender the trust of the local community because of "the community-ness" it has created, and the sense of ownership and control the community retains in the medium. On the other hand, evidence suggests that the local community perceive the Assembly to be an external entity that has been imposed upon them. This limits the level of trust the community has in the Assembly. The element of co-creation of development priorities and outcomes is missing. Establishing strategic mutual collaboration with the CR can aid local structures to rebuild trust with the local community. This process might yield desirable levels of local participation in the local development planning processes of the Assembly.

8.10.3 Recommendations for MMDAs/ local government authorities

First, there is the need for local government administrations to be more responsive to the needs of local communities. Closely related to this, is the need for local leaders to be accountable to their communities. To achieve this, it is recommended that the country revisit the legal provisions that give legitimacy to the current local government arrangement, in which the President appoints the DCE and 30% of the AMs to the Assembly. While it is good practice that the central government has representation at the Assembly level, I find it problematic that the central government literally imposes on the local community persons who owe allegiance to the centre and the President, rather than to the local people and the communities. It is significant that an appropriate balance is reached to ensure that the local communities own the processes of decision-making about their development at the local level. What might enhance this process is to build into the local community a sense of ownership and belonging, which starts with establishing trust between local authorities and the local communities. When the DCE knows that he is, in all spheres of work, responsible to the local community, he will prioritise their needs over the political gimmicks of the central government.

Secondly, my research has established that there is low community participation in DLG decision-making processes across the communities in local Assemblies. One of the reasons for the apathy in local community participation is the lack of appropriate social communication facilities, or the failure to harness the participatory potentials of CR for local public engagement. While there are provisions in the LGA stipulating the use of local media, the evidence, in this study suggests, that these provisions are flouted without any sanctions. I therefore recommend the strengthening of these provisions by making them entrenched and spelling out the penalties or sanctions for violating them.

Third, establishing effective and meaningful collaboration with key stakeholders in the District is critical to increasing local community participation in the activities of the Assembly. Such collaborations should be geared towards strengthening civic education campaigns and local community outreach programmes, using local community opinion leaders and CR. Civic education and outreach programmes should focus on creating local community awareness of the functions of decentralised

departments of the Assembly. It should offer the space for dialogue on the need to participate in the activities of the local Assembly. Community voices and needs should be carefully examined and upheld at all times.

Finally, the role of the AM cannot be overemphasised. The DACF should be retooled (restructured), and provisions should be made for Assembly Members to receive periodic accountable imprest to encourage them to routinely engage with their communities. It is recommended that policy review should empower the local Assembly so as to control local resources to ensure that it becomes more responsive to local needs and priorities. One of the oft-cited reasons for the unresponsive nature of Assemblies to local needs is precarious financial constraint and the unilateral direction of the ways in which financial resources that are disbursed by the central government, should be expended. Local level development planning which captures the aspirations and felt needs of the local community should take centre stage in resource budgeting and planning at all times, not satisfying the political goals of the ruling party and the government.

8.10.4 Recommendations for community radio managers and stakeholders

On the CR front, my research has demonstrated the impacts of creating a community's sense of ownership and control. I have established, through my research, that communal identity and belonging are associated with a community's sense of ownership, and the control not only of development decision-making processes, but also of communication facilities. I would recommend that CR broadcasts are well researched in order to ensure that local community needs, and priorities, are appropriately aligned to reflect local community ownership of the broadcasts. The local community should make up a central part of radio production and broadcasts that should mainly focus on prioritised local needs. This will enhance local participation in CRB and strengthen the quality of the discussions on the community level development agenda.

A central part of my research reveals the value of local language broadcasting on DSR. As part of recommendations of this study, it is important that CR adhere to the strict local language broadcasts policy. There is always the tendency to abandon creative aspects of the local culture for some sort of 'modernisation'. It is therefore recommended that the on-going national media broadcasting policy review take into

account the significance of local language broadcasting to local participation in local development. Appropriate legislation should be enacted to ensure that CRS adhere to local language broadcasting. This could become a major requirement for CR licensing and operation in the country.

Another recommendation is that CR expand local participation through the radio listener club model. Evidence from this research suggests that the RLC model empowers local citizens to be assertive and civically conscious. The RLC model also breaks cultural impediments against women, young people, and persons with disabilities participating in local politics. Since RLCs are organised based on a target audience, it facilitates association and identity creation among local community members while, at the same time, providing access and voices to marginalised members of local society. The model is crucial in widening the frontiers of local participation and enhancing the capacities of local communities to be critical about their development needs.

In addition to the RLC model, my study recommends the adoption and implementation of the Simli Connect model of participatory broadcasts. The findings suggest that these pioneering model centres are increasing local participation in CR programming across marginalised and disadvantaged local communities within the broadcast community, in hard to reach rural communities where internet and mobile phone access are limited, and this model of participatory radio listening and discussion could prove to be very useful. My research has discovered that, beyond providing access to the most vulnerable and marginalised in the community, the Simli Connect model makes radio listening equitable for all. It removes the limitations that financial resources, or the lack of it places for local community participation and access to communication tools that support the attainment of their goals.

The concept of community journalism, which DSR draws on significantly to make its news production more community centred, is yet another significant model of participatory broadcasting that should be encouraged and adopted by CRS. CR can foster an environment of good local governance that is responsive to community needs, and accountable to the local people, if they develop the skills of their community journalists. Community journalists who are so empowered can promote the canons of good local governance, if they operate in line with the core values of

unearthing the truth and showing evidence for wrongdoing amongst public office holders at the community level.

8.10.5 Recommendations for further studies

My research has identified a number of areas that will need further studies to bridge the knowledge gap in the participatory and communication literature. To begin, there is a knowledge gap on the emergence of CR in Ghana. What prompted the introduction and establishments of CR in Ghana, is a topic that is largely under-researched. What is common knowledge about CR in Ghana, is that the first stations came about as a result of the liberation of the airwaves occasioned by mass movements and protests for the free, independent, and private participation in the Ghanaian media space. All accounts indicate that this movement was particularly in favour of commercial broadcasting licenses, for instance, for commercial radio, television, and the lifting of the censorship of newspapers. How CR emerged in Ghana is still unclear. There is a need for future studies to pay attention to how CR emerged, and what the motivations were for its introduction in the country.

Secondly, the rapid growth of social media, in most Ghanaian rural communities, provides unbridled opportunities for CR to expand its participatory frontiers. How can CR in Ghana leverage the vast potentials of social media to increase local community participation in local broadcasting? It will be interesting to explore the confluence of social media and local CRB in order to enrich our understanding of how the two media types, though different in disposition, can be coalesced so as to enhance local community engagement and participation. While some argue that radio is generally losing its space in the current social media-dominated environment, mostly in urban areas and the developed world, this research shows that this does not hold true for rural and underdeveloped environments. Noting the potential of social media, however, how CRS might fuse the new media trend into its daily broadcasting is a subject for academic enquiry.

Another research gap that is identified from this research is how journalism is practiced in CR in Ghana. What form does journalism practice take in CR in Ghana? What principles and ethics guide the conduct of Ghanaian CR news reporters? These are areas that are largely under-represented in CR literature. Exploring the canons of journalism practice in CR would be an interesting field for future studies. A study in

this area will contribute significantly to a new body of knowledge on the value of professionalism, against the CR principle that the sector uses volunteers as producers, presenters and news gatherers.

Finally, this research has brought to the fore the significant roles of CR in local community development especially in increasing the frontiers of local community participation. However, there are regulatory and legislative limitations to how far the media can reach. It is important that future studies focus on a policy review of the extent CR reach and coverage. To do this, future research should focus on examining the impact of the limited coverage and reach of CR on the nature of CR programming, and on the local community in general.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: List of My Primary Research

a. Primary interviews conducted

S/N	Interview Type	Date	Duration	Location	Participant
Focus Group Discussions					
1.	FGDs-1: Dahinsheli, Dalun	14-01-2021	2hrs	Dahinsheli RLC meeting ground in Dalun	Female= 7 Male= 4
2.	FGDs-2: Sonŋsim B□bu, Vo□gu	16-01-2021	2hrs	Under a hut in Vo□gu	Female= 6 Male= 5
3.	FGDs-3: Tunteiya, Zangbalung	20-02-2021	2hrs	RLC meeting ground in Zangbalung	Female= 6 Male= 3
4.	FGDs-4: Mabilgu, Gbullung	23-02-2021	2hrs	Under a tree in Gbullung	Female= 5 Male= 6
5.	FGDs-5, Assembly Members, Nyankpala	25-03-2021	3hrs	DAAD Conference Hall at the UDS, Nyankpala	Female= 2 Male=7
6.	FGDs-6, Assembly Member Chairpersons, Kumbungu	30-03-2021	2hrs:30mins	DCE Conference Hall in Kumbungu	Female=0 Male= 7
Indepth Interviews					
7.	Interview: DSR Station Manager	25-01-2021	3hrs	Station Manager Office in Dalun	Male=1
8.	Interview: DSR Programmes Coordinator	25-01-2021	2hrs:30mins	Simli Radio PC Office in Dalun	Male=1
9.	Interview: DSR Board Chairman	25-01-2021	1hr	News Editor's Office in Dalun	Male=1
10.	Interview: Head of Programmes, MFWA	16-02-2021	1hr:30mins	MS Teams	Female=1
11.	Interview: DPP, MLGDRD	17-02-2021	1hr:30mins	MS Teams	Male=1
12.	Interview: TA, GDCA	09-03-2021	2hrs	Technical Adviser's Office in Tamale	Male=1
13.	Interview: NMC Chairman	07-04-2021	1hr	NMC Chairman's residence in Kumasi	Male=1
14.	Interview: DCD, KDA	12-04-2021	2hrs	DCD Office in KDA	Male=1
15.	Interview: DPO, KDA	13-04-2021	1hr	DPO Office in KDA	Male=1
16.	Interview: GCRN	24-04-2021	1hr:45mins	MS Teams	Male=1

17.	Interview: PM, KDA	30-04-2021	2hrs	PM residence in Gumo	Male=1
18.	Interview: EC, KDA	30-04-2021	1hr	EC Office, Kumbungu	Female=1
Observation Visits and Radio Broadcast Monitoring					
19.	Personal Interaction: Mma Kubura, Jakpahi	05-07-2021	20mins	Respondent resident in Jakpahi	Female=1
20.	Broadcast Monitoring: Ye Govononti Kukoli	11-07-2021	1hr	Radio Broadcast Monitoring of Ye Govononti Kukoli	Female=4 Male=12
21.	Broadcast Monitoring: Tinkpansi Lebgimsim	12-07-2021	1hr	Radio Broadcast Monitoring of Tinkpansi Lebgimsim	Female=7 Male=14
22.	Broadcast Monitoring: Zingama Tumaduu	13-07-2021	2hrs	Radio Broadcast Monitoring of Zingama Tumaduu	Female=4 Male=11
23.	Broadcast Monitoring: Asan Zal-Nim Saha	14-07-2021	1hr	Radio Broadcast Monitoring of Asan Zal-Nim Saha	Female=3 Male=8
24.	Broadcast Monitoring: Bipola Kukoya Saha	15-07-2021	1hr	Radio Broadcast Monitoring of Bipola Kukoya	Female=5 Male=9
25.	Broadcast Monitoring: Assembly Kpamba Saha	16-07-2021	2hrs	Radio Broadcast Monitoring of Assembly Kpamba	Female=4 Male=8
26.	Broadcast Monitoring: Ti-Jintora Saha	18-07-2021	2hr	Radio Broadcast Monitoring of Ti-Jintora Saha	Female=7 Male=11
27.	Broadcasting Monitoring: Yelvuhi Courtu	19-07-2021	2hrs	Radio Broadcast Monitoring of Yelvuhi Courtu	Female=5 Male=12
28.	Personal Interaction: Azindow, Logshegu	30-07-2021	30mins	Simli Connect Centre, Logshegu	Male=1
29.	Personal Interaction: Mma Saanpaga, Zugu	02-09-2021	20mins	Respondent home, Zugu	Female=1
30.	Personal Interaction: Chentiwuni, Dalun	03-09-2021	30mins	YEFL social centre, Dalun	Female=1
31.	Personal Interaction: Mba Sulley, Nawuni	04-09-2021	30mins	Respondent resident in Nawuni	Male=1

b. Primary documents consulted

1. AMARC. (2003). AMARC Statutes.
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6. Ghana Statistical Service. (2013). *Ghana living standard survey*. Accra, Ghana:
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   - **2014.** Media and local governance in Ghana. A Policy Brief.
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9. Ministry of Communication. (2004). *Ghana National Media Policy*. http://www.ict.gov.gh/html/comments.htm.
10. NCA. (2019). Accra-Ghana. https://www.nca.org.gh/industry-data-2/authorisations-2/tv-authorisation-2/
11. Document Analysis

    Republic of Ghana:
    - **1979.** Constitution of the Republic of Ghana
    - **1988.** Local government law (PNDC) Law 207
    - **1992.** The Constitution of the Republic of Ghana
    - **1993.** District assembly common fund (DACF Act)
    - **1993.** Local government law (Act 462)
    - **1994.** District assemblies' elections Act (473)
    - **1994.** National development planning system (Act 480)
    - **2003.** Local government service Act
    - **2016.** Local government (Act 936)
    - **2019.** Right to information Act

12. Simli Radio Broadcast Schedule, 2021.

Appendix 2: Ethics Approval

UNIVERSITY OF
FORWARD
THINKING
WESTMINSTER

Project title: Community Broadcasting and Decentralised Governance in Ghana: A case study of community radio in local government in Northern Ghana

Application ID: ETH2021-0226

Date: 02 Dec 2020

Dear Mohammed Faisal

I am writing to inform you that your application was considered by the DCDI Research Ethics Committee at its meeting of 02 Dec 2020.

The proposal was approved.

The expiry date for this proposal is 22 Feb 2021.

Yours,

Anthony Mcnicholas

DCDI Research Ethics Committee

I am advised by the Committee to remind you of the following points:

Your responsibility to notify the Research Ethics Committee immediately of any information received by you, or of which you become aware, which would cast doubt upon, or alter, any information contained in the original application, or a later amendment, submitted to the Research Ethics Committee and/or which would raise questions about the safety and/or continued conduct of the research.

The need to comply with the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018.

The need to comply, throughout the conduct of the study, with good research practice standards.

The need to refer proposed amendments to the protocol to the Research Ethics Committee for further review and to obtain Research Ethics Committee approval thereto prior to implementation (except only in cases of emergency when the welfare of the subject is paramount).

The desirability of including full details of the consent form in an appendix to your research, and of addressing specifically ethical issues in your methodological discussion.

The requirement to furnish the Research Ethics Committee with details of the conclusion and outcome of the project, and to inform the Research Ethics Committee should the research be discontinued. The Committee would prefer a concise summary of the conclusion and outcome of the project, which would fit no more than one side of A4 paper, please.

GLOSSARY

AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
AM	Assembly Member
AMARC	World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters
BC	Board Chairman
CDD	Centre for Democratic Development
CJs	Community Journalists
CLCs	Community Listener Clubs
CR	Community Radio
CRB	Community Radio Broadcasting
CRS	Community Radio Stations
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DA	Document Analysis
DACF	District Assembly Common Fund
DCD	District Coordinating Director
DCE	District Chief Executive
DLG	Decentralised local government
DSR	Dalun Simli Radio
ERP	Economic Recovery Programmes
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
GCRN	Ghana Community Radio Network
GDCA	Ghana Developing Communities Association
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KDA	Kumbungu District Assembly
LGA	Local Government Act
MFWA	Media Foundation for West Africa
MLGDRD	Ministry of Local Government, Decentralisation and Rural Development
MMDAs	Metropolitan/Municipal/District Assemblies
MP	Member of Parliament
NADMO	National Disaster Management Organization
NCA	National Communications Authority
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation

NLC	National Liberation Council
NMC	National Media Commission
NRC	National Redemption Council
PARDIC	Public Administration Restructuring and Decentralisation Implementation Committee
PC	Programmes Coordinator
PDC	Participatory Development Communication
PM	Presiding Member
PNDC	Provisional National Defence Council
PNP	Peoples' National Party
PP	Progress Party
PwD	Persons with Disabilities
RCC	Regional Coordinating Council
RLC	Radio Listener Club
SM	Station Manager
SMC	Supreme Military Council
TA	Technical Advisor
UGCC	United Gold Coast Convention
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WB	World Bank

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