

An Impact Evaluation of the District Assembly Common Fund in the Suaman Dadieso District in the Western Region of Ghana

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Abstract

This study aimed at evaluating the impacts of the districts assembly common fund in the Suaman Dadieso District in the Western Region of Ghana. A mixed method approach employing the simple random sampling procedure was used to select eighty (80) participants for the study. The participants were recruited from two communities within the District- thus Dadieso and Karlo. The leaders of the Youth for Suaman Development were also interviewed. The data was collected between the months of May 2016 and June 2016. The outcome of the evaluation indicates that community members are not contacted when the Assembly seeks to embark on developmental projects with District Assembly Common Fund since decisions are taking from the top-down approach instead of the bottom-up model that encourages community member participation. The outcome of the study also showed that most community members have not benefited much from the District Assembly Common Fund regarding poverty alleviation, health and education as poverty continues to persist in the district. The results of the study show that the district has not lived up to expectations of the community members since its creation in 2012. It is therefore imperative for the District take important steps in developing areas where it failed and work towards achieving the set goals in subsequent years.

Keywords: District Assembly, Common Fund, Local Government

1. Introduction

Many local level developments have failed because of lack of appropriate policy and Legislative changes to accompany the transfer of resources from the central government to the metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies to ensure that they execute the functions legally devolved to them (Fyn 2012, Ahwoi 2010). In Ghana, a great difficulty in local level development has been existing due to the lack of sufficient fund to carry out development tasks at the district level (Ayee, 2000, Arthur 2004). Adequate financial resources are essential for effective execution of development projects. Irrespective of how perfect district development plans may be, very little progress can be achieved if there is an inadequate financial provision. Several measures have been put in place to see to the transfer of financial resources to the district levels however, the measures put in place to affect this transfer do not grant the local government units' sufficient control over the financial resources that they need to perform functions efficiently (Owusu, 2004). It has been revealed by Yeboah, and Obeng-Odoom, (2010) that often revenues from the internal sources of the Assemblies are woefully inadequate to address the developmental problem in many districts in Ghana. Before the introduction of District Assembly Common Fund (DACF), District Assemblies in Ghana were relying heavily on such internally generated revenue as basic rate, property rate, special rate, fees, licenses and others. Other sources of the revenue of the Assembly were grant in aid and ceded revenue. The grants have however been inconsistent and the system has always been criticized as having no rational sharing formula (Darison, 2011; Banful, 2009). The bad financial position of many district Assembly's in Ghana has prevented them from providing social and economic needs of the people effectively (Antwi-Boasiako, 2010). The introduction of the District Assembly Common Fund (D.A.C.F.) in 1994 was therefore seen as a strategy to enhance financial autonomy and effective local government administration in Ghana. For instance, between 1994 and 2005, the government had released a total of 3.32 trillion old Ghana cedi under the DACF to District Assemblies for their programmes, Inanga and Osei-wusu (2004) and cumulative releases into the Common Fund since its inception from 1994 to date stands at GHC 1, 365,157,839.20 (District Assembly Annual Report, 2010).

Although, many district Assemblies have been able to use the fund to provide several development projects, its utilization and management reveal high level mismanagement of the fund (Fyn 2012, Ahwoi 2010). This situation undermines the effort of the Assembly to provide efficient service delivery to the people in the local areas. Moreover, it could be said that allocations of the fund to the Assembly have undermined the effective collection of Assembly's internally generated fund instead of serving as a motivating factor. Because of limited tax revenue due to poverty and general distrust by the local people, the Assembly now relies on the common fund rather than their own resources. This has put a lot of pressure on the Common Fund to meet the ever-increasing needs of the majority of residents, especially the rural poor in many districts in Ghana. An effective mobilization of the local revenue is crucial as it can complement the common fund to bring more development to the rural areas thereby accelerating the poverty reduction efforts of the Assembly (Fyn

2012, Ahwoi 2010). Suaman Dadieso District in the Western Region of Ghana is not different from the other districts in Ghana described above. Legislative Instrument (LI) 2016 established the Suaman Dadieso District in 2012. Until now, the district has been allocated with more expenditure functions than can be financed by the income sources it can generate internally. This mismatch of functions and finances, which is also known as vertical imbalance means a continuous dependence of District Assembly on transfers from the central government (Debrah, 2009).

There has been rigorous procedures within the Suaman District Assembly to generate fund internally, however, irrespective of the rigorous procedures to generate adequate funds, the Suaman District still faces numerous challenges in its efforts to generate funds internally and these includes but not limited to; Insufficient revenue staff; Reluctance of tax payers to pay taxes; market infrastructures which are in poor condition; Illiteracy among tax payers and Low incentive for tax Collectors (Suaman Dadieso Annual Progress Report 2014).

Furthermore, most of the development projects executed under the District Assemblies Common Fund within many districts in Ghana have been poorly done and this undermines the sustainability of these projects to reduce poverty in the District. There have been several reported cases of contractors using low quality materials for common fund projects. Apart from the short span of such projects, they put pressure on the Assembly's meager resources because it must undertake regular maintenance of these completed projects. Besides, the rural poor have not been involved in the design and implementation of these projects that affect their very lives (Richard, and Eyoh 2007). Because of this, community members have little knowledge about the procedures and payments of the fund and utilization which hampers them from demanding accountability from the leaders in charge of the payment of the Common Fund in the district. Finally, in a bid to expand economies and create jobs in the rural areas the Assembly has been directed to spend 20 percent of its common fund allocations to be distributed among the individuals for income generation activities to improve the incomes of the local population (Fyn, 2012). But this has been poorly implemented because the criteria for selecting beneficiaries may be influenced by political considerations and needs to be examined. This has therefore prompted the researchers to evaluate the common fund that has been disbursed from the central government to the Suaman Dadieso district since it created five years ago. This paper therefore aimed at evaluating and assessing the impacts and performance of the district assembly common fund in Suaman Dadieso District from the period of 2012 to 2016.

2. An Overview of the District Assemblies Common Fund

The district assembly common fund was established in under the Article 252 of the 1992 constitution of the republic of Ghana. The main motive behind the establishment was to make financial resources available to the District Assembly's for local development. The Article 252 states that the parliament of Ghana shall make available not less than 7.5% of the total annual national revenue to be distributed among district assemblies based on approved formula by parliament. The total annual revenue in this act is defined as the "all revenue collected by or accruing to the central government other than foreign loans, grants, non-tax revenue and revenue already collected by or for District Assembly's under any enactment in Force" (The Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, Article 252). The District Assembly's Common Fund was specifically established to boost local governance and deepen Government's commitment to decentralization in general, and fiscal decentralization in particular and encourage sustainable self-help development, to Balance the internally generated funds (IGF) of the District Assemblies to undertake development projects, to ensure equitable distribution of development resources in every part of Ghana, to make up for development deficiencies in disadvantaged communities, and finally to support creation and improvement of socio-economic infrastructure in Ghana.

The DACF has since 2006 been the leading revenue contributor to the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assembly's (MMDA's) and has continued to increase on an annual basis (NDPC 2009). In 2008, the DACF constituted 43 percent of the overall resources to the MMDAs. Since the inception of decentralization, the government, through the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF), has disbursed a total of GH¢ 1, 024,755,220.00 to the various Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (District Assemblies) at the end of 2009 (District Assembly Common Fund Secretariat).

Through the DACF, MMDAs have, among other things created jobs through cottage industries, built and improved health facilities, constructed schools, built houses, and supported community initiated projects.

The DACF continues to be the main revenue generation pool for the Suaman Dadieso District Assembly. It accounts for more than half of revenues received by the Assembly (**Table 1**). For 2014, the DACF accounted for 60 percent of the total revenue as against 54% recorded in 2013. The significant size of the DACF received for 2014 might be the result of the release of outstanding quarterly payments in respect of 2013

Table 1: Trends of Revenue by Sources in Suaman Dadieso District from 2013-2014

S/N ^o	SOURCES OF REVENUE	2013 (GHC)	2014 (GHC)
1	DACF	588,786.29	507313.66
2	IGF	121,681.35	137023.06
3	DDFF	232,430.40	758,213.81
4	OTHER TRANSFERS	-	1511.63
	TOTAL REVENUE	942,898.01	1,404,062.16

Source: Suaman District Assembly (2014)

Table 1b: DACF Received from January – December 2014

DATE	ACTUAL AMOUNT (GHC)	PERIOD
31/3/2014	148952.96	3 rd Quarter 2013
27/7/2014	172047.55	4 th Quarter 2013
17/1/2014	186313.15	1 st Quarter 2014
TOTAL	507,313.66	

Source: Suaman District Assembly (2014)

Irrespective of the potential impact of the District Assembly Common Fund, it has been saddled with numerous challenges such as undue delays regarding the release of the funds from the central government to the District Assemblies. Even though the Districts Assemblies common fund was created for the purpose that has been outlined above, it can be seen clearly that it has not yielded any significant impact in the lives of the residents of Suaman Dadieso District in the aspect of poverty alleviation, good roads, good drinking water, education, infrastructural development, water and sanitation and health.

2.1 Brief Profile of the District

The Suaman District was created in the year 2012 under LI 2016. It was carved out from the then Aowin - Suaman District with Dadieso as its Capital. It is located at the mid-western part of the Western Region. The district is bounded to the south and east by Aowin District, to the west by the Republic of La Cote D' I Voir and to the north by Sefwi- Akontombra and Bodi Districts. The district has a total population of about 69,207 people according to the 2010 population census.

The district has two Area Councils i.e Dadieso Area Council and Karlo Area Council. Due to time and resource constraints and for the purpose of this study two different communities were purposely sampled in Suaman Dadieso District. These includes Dadieso and Karlo. The areas were given orientation on the purpose of the study and its contribution towards the understanding of district assembly's common fund and how it has impacted on their lives.

2.2 Data Collection

Quantitative and qualitative study employing the simple random sampling approach was used in collecting data from the community members. Simple random sampling means that every member of the sample is selected from the group of populations in such a manner that the probability of being selected for all members in the study group of populations is the same.

The questionnaire designed for the people of Suaman Dadieso District was in two parts; the first part dealt with questions pertaining to social demographics (age, sex, educational level, occupation, amongst others) and the second part of the questionnaire dealt with questions relating to information on the impact of the district assembly's common fund in the livelihood of the in the aspect of education, infrastructural development, health, water and sanitation, poverty alleviation. The questionnaires included both open and close ended questions. The questionnaire was designed to simply explore how the community members participate in DACF projects, access to information on the DACF and the utilization of the DACF. In all, eighty (80) questionnaires were administered by the research team from May 2016 to June 2016 within Dadieso, the District capital and Karlo, the next biggest town within the district with the second largest in population in the district. In Dadieso, the researchers distributed fifty closed and open ended questionnaires while thirty were distributed in Karlo, the next biggest town in the district. Even though there are many rural communities within the District, however due the availability of resources, the researchers could only travel to Dadieso and Karlo. Administered questionnaires were examined to check completeness, accuracy and consistency of responses to detect and eliminate errors. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to process the quantitative data. The data were

processed into statistical tables and charts for interpretation and discussion.

After the quantitative questions were distributed and collected, the convener and the secretary of Youth for Suaman Development were interviewed to obtain more information to support the quantitative data. The interviewees were Mr. Emmanuel (Convener) and Mr Augustine (General secretary). The interview data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

In all, eighty (80) participants were recruited for the study. After the results were obtained, 17 (21.3%) of the respondents were between the ages of 16-26years, 23 (28.8%) were between the ages of 26-35years, 33 (41.3%) between the ages of 36-55years and 7 (10%) above 55 years. This shows that most of the respondents are between the ages of 36-55 years. It is also seen that most of the respondents (67.5%) are males with a moderate of them (32.5%) being females. The results again show that most of the respondents (58.8%) had education to J.H.S level with some of them (26.3%) having Secondary education and a few of them (15%) having Tertiary education. On their occupation, most of them (41.3%) are into Farming, 13 (16.3%) are working in the Formal sector with 24 (30%) working in the Informal sector and 10 (12.5%) being unemployed. On religion, 64 of them representing 80% are Christians whilst 16 of them representing 20% are Muslims. Finally, on their marital status, 41 of them representing 51.3% are Married, 25 of them representing 31.3% being Single, 6 of them representing 7.5% are Widowed and 8 of them representing 10% are Divorced.

3.2 Knowledge on the District Assembly's Common Fund in the District.

To assess the level of knowledge of the community members regarding the District Assembly Common Fund, some relevant questions were asked in that regard. The first item on the questionnaire asked if they know what the common fund is about and any forum organized to discuss the District Assembly Common Fund. With this 33.8% of the respondents responded in the positive with 20% of them responding in the negative and 46.3% of the respondents saying they do not Know (Fig 1). The large number of respondents (46.3%) who said they do not Know means that most of the people in the community are not aware of the District Assembly Common Fund. This shows that there is a very low level of awareness pertaining to community members' idea about the District Assembly Common Fund in the community.

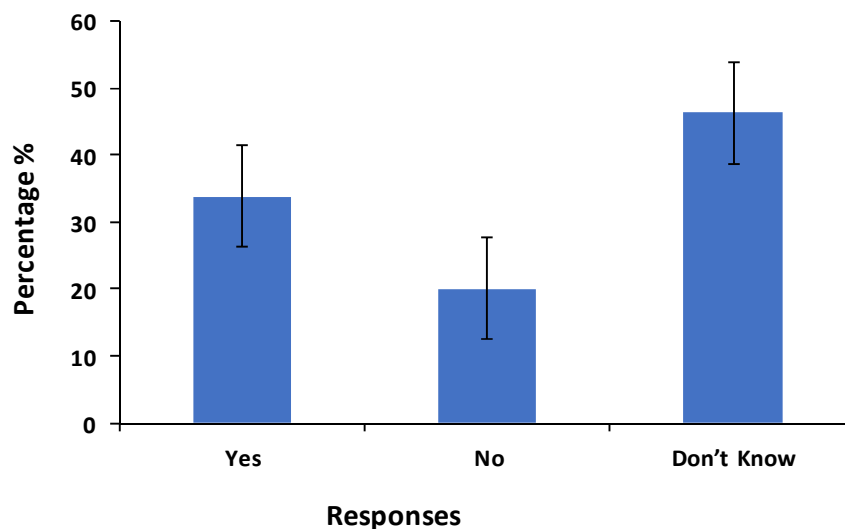


Figure 1: Respondents Knowledge on Common Fund, Source: Field Survey, 2016

Secondly, the respondents were asked if have attended any forum organized by the assembly that discusses the utilization of DACF, 12.5% of them answered in the positive with 77.5% of them responding in the negative while 10% of the respondents also indicated they do not know. The high number of respondents (77.5%) who responded in the negative show that the Assembly hardly organizes forum to solicit views and opinions from the community members on the utilization of the DACF. This therefore means that most of the people in the community do not take part in any discussion pertaining to the utilization of the DACF (Fig 2)

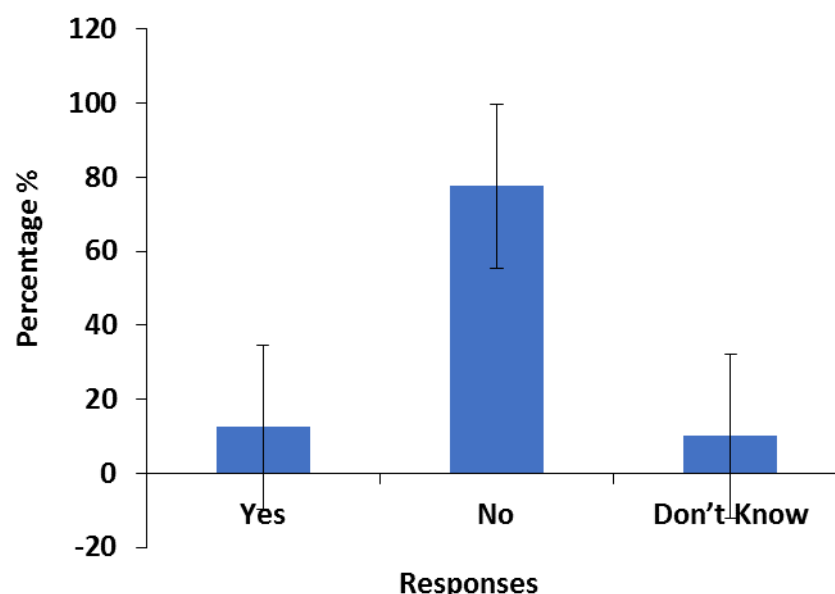


Figure 2: Community participation in organized forum by the Assembly
 Source: Field Survey, 2016

The respondents were further asked if they have benefitted from any health project or programme initiated with DACF. On that, 78.8% of the respondents responded in the negative whilst 8.8% also responded in the positive with 12.5% saying they Don't Know if they have benefitted from any health project initiated with DACF. A brief interview with convener, Emmanuel and the general secretary in the person of Augustine of the Suaman youth for development revealed that Dadieso polyclinic for the past three years after its construction has been abandoned.

In the interview, Emmanuel said... *“Suaman-Dadieso is a densely-populated community but again it is very sad to note that we do not have a modern state of the art health facility where commuters will access quality health care delivery. The health center in Suaman-Dadieso cannot boast of 10 beds and this has necessitated huge number of referral cases to distance communities like Enchi and Juaboso of which pregnant women and children are found vulnerable. These referred patients in countless occasions die during their journey to receive health delivery because of poor road network. However, we will place on record that government through its communication outfit in a press conference made it known to the general public that the government has completed a polyclinic in Suaman-Dadieso. As residents in the community, we find that story to be untrue and we are surprised as to why the DCE is not re-locating the poor health center to the new completed polyclinic as captured on government records”.*

Also, when asked if they have benefitted from any poverty alleviation programme initiated by the DACF, only 22.5% answered in the positive whilst 77.5% also answered in the negative. This shows that most of the respondents have not benefitted from any poverty alleviation programme with DACF. It can be observed from the [table 2](#) that only 88 people within the Dadieso and Karlo had benefited from Ghana's Livelihood empowerment against poverty (LEAP). Within the whole district, only 215 persons including the elderly - 65+ with no support, orphans and vulnerable children and persons with disability without productive capabilities had benefitted directly from the poverty alleviation programs of the district. This implies that there is no other poverty alleviation programme in the district to cushion the poor. This trend is evident in our study as well as the district's 2015 annual progress report.

Table 2. Number of Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) Beneficiary Households by Community

COMMUNITY	MALE	MALE DECEASED	FEMALE	FEMALE DECEASED	TOTAL
1. Dadieso	25	-	28	-	53
2. Karlo	13	-	22	-	35
GRANDTOTAL					88

Source: District annual progress report, 2015

It is evident from the 2014 district annual progress report that as at 31st December 2014 the monthly support fee ranging from GHc8 – GHc24 (2 USD-6 USD) per household member within the above-mentioned categories had not been paid for 10 months. The Desk Officer could not explain the reasons since he had not obtained official correspondence on the matter. It is important for the Assembly to find out the reasons since the project contributes significantly in addressing poverty situations in the households of beneficiary members.

Moreover, when they were asked if they have benefitted from any education programme initiated with the assistance of DACF, 65% of the respondents responded in the negative whilst 35% of the responded in the positive. This shows more than 50% of the respondents have not benefitted in one way or the other from education projects carried out with the assistance of the DACF. The findings of the current study on education are not different from the 2014, 2015, and 2016 annual progress report of the district that revealed that at least 95% of pre-schools within the district lacks a suitable structure for effective teaching and learning. Regarding primary and junior high schools in the district, similar findings were revealed as at least 90% of the primary schools in the district are being organized in mud structures. The situation for junior high schools in the district were quite encouraging however more needs to be done. It was captured in the district progress report that at least 40.1% of junior high schools within the Suaman Dadieso District are being organized in mud, wattle and daub structures or under trees. The situation described above concerning education does not support an effective teaching and the development of human resources needed for the growth of the district.

An interview with Mr. Emmanuel and Augustine also confirmed that over the past years several educational projects has been abandoned. For instance, they mentioned the abandoned construction of Jubilee school for the past eight years.

Mr. Emmanuel mentioned that ... "we the Youth for Suaman Development are left in dismay as to why the jubilee school constructed some years back has been abandoned for years and leadership is sitting aloof, unconcerned failing to complete such block since we already have classrooms deficit in the community". They further showed their dissatisfaction regarding the state of the only senior high school in the district.

Mr. Augustine, the secretary also said this about the senior high school in the district... "It is disgusting to talk about the state of the only senior high school in Suaman community (Dadieso Senior High School). The School is known for its limited infrastructure and poor academic environment facilitating poor examination performances of about 80% WASSCE candidates since its establishment".

3.3 Community Participation in DACF Projects

When the community members were asked if they are contacted when the District Assembly wants to embark on a development project with DACF, 16.3 % of them answered in the positive whilst 83.8 % answered in the negative. This shows that most of the respondents are not contacted when the Assembly wants to embark on developmental projects with DACF. On whether they have been involved in the implementation of any District Assembly project funded with DACF, 65% of them answered in the negative whilst 35% also answered in the positive. This implies that the Assembly do not engage the community members in the implementation of DACF projects. When asked if you have ever been involved in evaluation of the DACF projects in the District, 68.8% of them answered in the negative and 31.3% in the positive. This shows that the Assembly do not take into consideration the views and the perspectives of community members in the evaluation of the DACF projects in the District.

3.4 Utilization of the District Assembly Common Fund

On the utilization of the District Assembly Common Fund, when they were asked whether they are satisfied with the time the central government releases the DACF to the District, 16.3% of the respondents answered in the positive whilst 83.8% answered in the negative. The large number of respondents (83.8%) who said they are not satisfied with the time of release of the DACF shows that the delay in the release of the funds do not auger well for the Assembly. Within the districts progress reports, it was mentioned that the undue delayed in releasing the Common Fund affected payment schedules of projects within the district.

Finally, they were asked to rate the performance of the District since it was created in 2012 towards development. It is important to acknowledge that 78.8% of the respondents rated it as poor, 18.8% rated it as Very Good and 2.5% rated it as Good. The high number of respondents (78.8%) who rated it as poor shows that most of the respondents are not satisfied with the performance of the District since its inception in the District. An interview with the leaders of the Suaman youth for development indicates that the district has not lived up to expectation and this can be seen from abandoned projects such as the abandoned community center/ICT center as well as abandoned town roads.

Mr. Emmanuel said this in an interview with him ... "You can see the deplorable state of road network from Juaboso-Dadieso, Akontombra-Dadieso and Dadieso-Enchi. All indications in Suaman-Dadieso point

to the fact that we do not have leadership in the community. The is unwillingness on the part of the leadership we have to serve the interest of Suaman community and we can boldly say without any reservation that leaders in Suaman are only serving their self -interest and not the interest of entire Suamnan Dadieso District”.

4. Conclusion

At the end of the study, it was revealed that the Dadieso District Assembly uses the top-down approach in undertaken most of their projects which is seen in most community members not consulted. In view of this, this current study proposes the bottom-up or backward model in all decision making regarding development projects in the District.

According to Elmore (1985), the bottom-up or backward mapping model posits that, in order to identify factors involved in service delivery, there are certain targets areas that are worth considering and those are; their respective desire, goals, local structure and the culture of that community in question. All these factors have a very significant on the success or otherwise of those service delivery and projects. The crux of this model shows that the utility of any policy implementation is maximized when it reflects the wishes, desires and at least the behavioral patterns of those in the lower echelon of society or organization. It is argued that occupants of this lower strum of what some call the “haves-not” of society have greater information about the positive and negative repercussion of any policy purported to be implemented on them (Baumann, 2000). This therefore means that for any government project to be successful the people who will be directly affected by those projects need to be consulted and their views considered. Without proper consultation and consideration of the views of the beneficiary, most of these projects will end up becoming “white elephants” in the community. Therefore, the involvement and participation of the community members in DACF projects is highly encouraged in all districts in Ghana. This is because the study showed that community members are not contacted when the Assembly wants to embark on developmental projects with DACF. At the end of the evaluation, it was evident that most community members have not benefited from the DACF regarding poverty alleviation, health and education as poverty continues to persist in the district. The findings of the current study show the district has not yet lived up to expectation of community members since its creation in 2012. It is therefore imperative for the District take important steps in developing areas where it failed and work towards achieving the set goals in subsequent years.

5. Recommendations

The District must embark on regular education and sensitization programme concerning the DACF so that the level of knowledge of the people can be enhanced. on the basis of local government act, (ACT462, ACT1993) which talks about involvement of the local people in local governance and being accountable to them, we therefore recommend that the assembly should involve members in designing projects which is in their best interest which will be beneficial to the entire district as well as their involvement in monitoring and evaluation process of the common fund projects in the district. We also recommend that there must be proper monitoring and evaluation of District Assembly Common Fund projects to ensure that projects are completed within schedule and with the agreed cost. Finally, we recommend that the central government must increase the DACF so that it can cover most of the projects that the Municipal and District Assemblies undertake.

Authors Contribution

Adisah-Atta Isaac (Conception or design of the work, data analysis and interpretation, drafting of the article and critical revision of the article)

Boahen Kwabena Philip (Assisted with data collection and transcription of interview, proofread final version to be published)

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