



ISSN: 2278 – 0211 (Online)

## Investigating The Contribution Of Civil Society Organisations To Local Governance (A Case Of United Civil Society Organisations Of Nzema East District-UCSOND)

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### **Abstract:**

*In Ghana, civil societies have played important role in national development in an uncoordinated manner. The aim of this study was to examine the contribution of the United Civil Society Organisation of Nzema East District (UCSOND) to local governance in Nzemaland. The research assessed the activities of UCSOND at the grassroots, for example how its capacity enables it to play its role. The challenges facing the union were also examined. Case study approach was used to assess UCSOND's contribution to local governance. The principal method used in the analyses of the data was interpretive inquiry. Tables and pictures were used to summarise UCSOND's activities at the grassroots, its capacity and ability to play its role. Most importantly, the challenges confronting the union were identified and ranked using the Kendall's co-efficient of concordance. The findings were that UCSOND has been instrumental in stimulating popular participation in local governance through civic events. Secondly, it has aggregated citizens' voice and influenced policies and programmes. The study also reveals that UCSOND has a low organisational resource base.*

**Key words:** Civil Society Organization, Capacity building, Participation, Local Governance, UCSOND, Development

### **1.Introduction**

One of the major issues confronting the world today is how to achieve development. Development as known today is a post-World War II phenomenon that has passed through various forms and fashions (Morse, 2004). Development is being seen comprehensively with the human being well placed in the centre of all efforts. If development is all about people, their progress in life, then it must envision poverty reduction, better nutrition and health services, access to facilities, improvement in infrastructure, reduction in unemployment and literate population. The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP, 2010) Human Development Report (HDR) has observed that dimensions of poverty go far beyond inadequate income to include social exclusion, poor health and lack of participation. A United Nations HDR commented, for example, that, in the face of current challenges for development, people's participation is becoming the central issue of our time (Craig & Mayo, 1995). Capacity building, by far, remains a key ingredient for achieving both popular participation and empowerment, hence it is not possible to treat them as discrete. All UN summits call for capacity-building programmes for Non- Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and other social organisations (Eade, 1997).

Local governance has become a preoccupation for achieving good governance and development. The World Development Report of 2000/2001 succinctly made it clear that the only way to secure the crucial local information as a necessary input for effective policy formulation is through popular participation in local governance (World Bank, 2001). The role of civil society in achieving the much needed development have been recognized by social scientists, political analysts, policy makers and practitioners alike across Africa and is reflected by the place it occupies in the global setting. Some think tanks have christened it the third sector; others the first sector in opposition to those who see it as nothing but the political side of society (Gyimah-Boadi, Oquaye & Drah, 2000).

In Ghana, Civil Society Organizations (CSO's) have been extremely proactive in playing complex and varied roles in democratic governance. They have spurred the onset of Ghanaian democratisation, articulated concerns and influenced national and civic affairs. Gyimah-Boadi et al. (2000, p. 9) States that "the latest addition to the Civil Society landscape of the 1990s are independent policy research and advocacy institutions and independent radio and television stations as well as newspapers". Realizing the vital contribution of CSOs in democratic governance, the International Federation of Electoral Systems (IFES) selected and trained some

CSOs in the country. Among them was the United Civil Society Organization of Nzema East District (UCSOND) to begin the grassroots involvement in decentralization. UCSOND is a non-governmental organization formed in 1999 by the civil society groups in the then Nzema East District. It was formed by indigenous groups and run by indigenous people. The rationale behind this umbrella organization is to develop and nurture a culture of local participation in democratic governance through an active and dynamic partnership between local civil unions and the District Assembly (DA). The significance of civil society organizations in local governance and the host of challenges confronting UCSOND gave rise to the following pertinent questions:

- What have been the activities of UCSOND at the grassroots level?
- How does UCSOND's capacity enable it to play its role?
- What challenges confront UCSOND in its operations?

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Study Organisation

UCSOND, formed in 1998, has its headquarters at Axim. It was formed from community based organisations, farmer based organisations and trade/ artisan associations in the then Nzema East District. The group members are part of the communities and are invariably the beneficiaries. The idea of UCSOND was conceived in 1998, when the International Federation of Electoral Systems (IFES) selected and trained fourteen civil society groups through the project dubbed "Enhancing civil society effectiveness at the local level (ECSELL)" (UCSOND, 2005). This programme was fully implemented in 2001. IFES gave way to the Co-operative League of the United States of America (CLUSA) in the programme Government Accountability Improves Trust (GAIT) with funds from United States Agency for International Development (USAID). UCSOND's vision is "To reach sustainable citizen satisfaction through citizens' participation" "while its mission statement read "we exist to unite Civil Society Organisations in the Districts to improve upon the practice of good governance for the benefit of members and communities". In terms of objectives and constituencies, UCSOND is a civic, development and issue-oriented organization (Diamond, 1994).

### 2.2. Study Design

A case study research was applied. The selection of this approach was informed by the theoretical underpinning of the study objectives, the nature of the research problem, how data was analyzed, interpreted and presented as well as the scope of the study. Neuman (2003) posits that a case study approach examines in depth many features of a few cases over duration of time. It is a detailed examination of specific individuals, groups, organisations, moments, events or geographic units. The selection of case study approach was informed by the following considerations: First, the researcher wants to come into close contact with UCSOND. Secondly, case study gives rich insight that cannot be obtained from mere statistics. Thirdly, it can help to explain the link between CSOs, local governance and development. Finally, UCSOND is one of the few Civic Unions currently engaged in local governance. Having been in local governance for over ten years, UCSOND has relevant achievements and documentation essential for the study. For instance, Yin (1994) concludes that case studies enable the researcher to deal with a full variety of evidence- documentations, artifacts, interviews and observations.

### 2.3. Data Collection Techniques

The research employed interview guide to generate primary data. This was augmented with focus group discussion and field observation of UCSOND activities. This enabled the researcher to document hard to-quantify objectives. The use of primary data sources in the research helped to determine the frequency of UCSOND activities at the grassroots level, its capacity and ability to play the required role as well as its challenges. Secondary data was obtained from sources such as photographs of UCSOND activities, minute books and financial records of UCSOND, journals, books, magazines, newspapers, internet, articles and research papers on CSOs both within and outside Ghana.

## 3. Results And Discussion

The study sought answers for the following questions: What have been the activities of UCSOND at the grassroots level? How does UCSOND's capacity enable it to play its role? and what challenges confront UCSOND in its operations?

### 3.1. What Have Been The Activities Of UCSOND At The Grassroots Level?

The study examined programmes that UCSOND undertakes as well as its role in local governance. UCSOND's role in governance is in three folds. The first part deals with UCSOND's role as advocate of quality development and services. The second part examines local economic development and poverty reduction role of UCSOND, while the third part discusses UCSOND's promotion of good governance (Ghaus- Pasha, 2004). The study revealed that UCSOND is involved in a host of activities. This is consistent with Anheier and Salamon's (1998) view that CSOs perform diverse activities. A summary of their activities is presented in table 1. Table 1 clearly shows the activities used by UCSOND to promote citizens' participation in local governance within its catchment area. UCSOND often uses civic events like town meetings, questions and answers fora, information sharing and advocacy campaign to convey messages to citizens. Besides these activities, it was learnt that UCSOND also disseminates information on domestic violence bill, national health insurance scheme, local government policies among others. Ghaus- Pasha (2004) concedes that the role of CSOs in governance centers on advocates of policy change. UCSOND derived its advocacy agenda based on districts and community needs.

Activity	Issues/ topics	Targets
Parliamentary candidate debate	Governance, development, welfare	Politicians, community
Question & Answer fora	Service delivery	Service provider, citizens
Advocacy Campaign education, sanitation	Current & emerging issues- HIV/AIDS, health, jobs,	Community, NGO's, Local government, Market actors
Town meetings	Specific community needs- Electricity, roads, accidents	Local government, community
Training & Capacity building Workshops	Training/ skills development, institutional capacity building, research	UCSOND executives/ members
Participatory review clinics health insurance bill	Domestic violence bill, right to information bill, national	Local government, CSOs, community
Stakeholders Strategic forum	Community development, local government policies, Strategic planning, citizens Participation in governance	CSOs, traditional rulers, local government, private sector

*Table 1: Summary Of UCSOND Activities*

*Source: Fieldwork, 2011*

The then Nzema East District, like most districts in Ghana, had been stifled by a host of socio-economic problems. Among these were communication difficulty and high cost of transport fares, especially that of taxi. This situation arose because of deteriorating and inaccessible road networks, dense vegetation cover and heavy rainfall. This situation compelled drivers to charge high fares. Following this background, UCSOND initiated an advocacy campaign for a reduction in fares. Additionally, excessive speeding on Ghana - Cote d'Ivoire trans-highway and overloading has been reduced. One remarkable outcome from UCSOND's advocacy is a Town Meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2005. The event was held to find solutions to frequent accidents on Kikam–Ankobra stretch of the Ghana - Cote d'Ivoire trans-highway after the 36<sup>th</sup> person had died on the road. The interviewee noted that exactly a month after the event, the Ghana Highway Authority erected speed limit, sign posts as indicated in Figure 3. Since then, there has been a high success in preventing road accidents. The success was attributed to collaboration with the District Assembly (DA), the community and local transport unions.



*Figure 1: Ankobra- Kikam Stretch Of Road With Sign Post*

*Photo Credit: Author, 2011*



UCSOND instrumentality in forming partnership with stakeholders like District Education Office (DEO), Parent-Teachers' Associations and communities has recorded success in girl child education enrolment, awards of scholarships to the needy but brilliant pupils, truancy and school dropout. Figure 2 shows a group of some Muslim women being apprised of the relevance of sending their female children to school.



*Figure 2: Meeting With Muslim Women On Girl Child Education At Kamgbunli  
Photo Credit: UCSOND, 2007*

From the study, it came to light that the then Nzema East District had only 12 public toilets as of 1996. This compelled coastal dwellers to use the beaches as their place of convenience. The severity of the situation in Axim for instance, gave birth to Sanitation Improvement Platform for Axim (SIPA), in 2002 with UCSOND as an active stakeholder. Through SIPA's initiative, sanitation menace in Axim has been brought to the barest minimum, thus bringing joy to the lives of people.

UCSOND was also instrumental in creating a platform for women to participate in local governance, advocate on issues affecting their welfare and the development of their communities through the formation of Women's Wing in June, 2005. The Women's Wing of UCSOND has achieved success in respect of advocating against rape and defilement, teenage pregnancy, unfair terms of trade, malnutrition, social injustice, lack of job opportunities and micro-finance for women. For instance, in 2005 the Women's wing vehemently protested against illegal fees demanded from sellers by Environmental Health Department of the then Nzema East District Assembly (NEDA), Aiyinasi office. Figure 3 shows the inauguration of the Women's Wing.



*Figure 3: Inauguration Of UCSOND Women's Wing  
Photo Credit: UCSOND, 2005*

#### **4. UCSOND Capacity And Ability To Play Its Role**

The resource capacity base of UCSOND and an evaluation of UCSOND's performance and competency over the years were analyzed. The study solicited views on UCSOND's approach to effectively participate in local governance. UCSOND's major approach to participating in local governance is directed towards building partnership and networking through signing of Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with development organizations, local government institutions and other CSOs. The idea here is networking technical capabilities as a basis of building trust and relationships needed to improve democratic governance and human resource development. Clearly, this approach affirms the assertion by Eade (1997) that capacity building is an approach to development.

Interviews with leaders revealed that UCSOND uses education, persuasion, collaboration and confrontation in their attempt to influence policies and programmes (Covey, 1994). It was found out that UCSOND often resorted to the use of education and collaboration to influence local businesses, community, District Assembly and its allied departments in terms of policy formulation,

participation and services delivery. Ghaus-Pasha (2004) has noted that strategies and tactics influence the kind of success a coalition can achieve. Ghaus-Pasha argues that effective grassroots education and organizing efforts help to sustain and strengthen the institutional base essential for holding governments accountable.

A very important factor that can influence the ability of any organization to play its role in modern governance is the educational attainment and literacy level of its membership. Formal education equips people with knowledge, skills and techniques to improve competencies aimed at increasing the productive capacity of the population. Majority of UCSOND's members are illiterates. This situation of high illiterate membership has contributed to low self-esteem and increasing mental dependence. The big issue is that members depend to a great extent on the few leaders. In discussing leadership, Diamond (1999) contends that CSOs can deal effectively with political challenges through mentoring of future leaders. However, UCSOND seems to be doing very little in this regard.

The study gathered information on the source of funds available to UCSOND. It came to light that UCSOND derives its funds from partner NGO's sponsorship and membership dues. The discussants agreed that in terms of financial resources UCSOND is not better off. This predicament began in 2007 when international Non Governmental Organizations (INGO's) pulled out of the then Nzema East District principally because they had completed the phase of their programmes. Furthermore, payment of quarterly dues by members has significantly reduced. Most of UCSOND's members are in the informal sectors and do not earn stable and regular income. Thus, when it comes to contributing money they are not able to and some rather prefer withdrawing their membership. The importance of finance has been summarized by James and Malunga (2006) to the effect that the availability of funding sources and sizes evidently influence how CSOs behave. Thus UCSOND's inability to perform some activities can be attributed to paucity of funds.

For UCSOND to effectively deliver and maintain services, issues of logistics ought to be tailored to its objectives. The study found that UCSOND does not have a printer, photocopier and a fax machine for secretarial duties and no vehicle for errands, public address system, projectors and video camera for advocacy campaign and therefore rely heavily on the facilities and resources of some of the member groups and the leadership. However, it has been able to acquire an office at the Axim Kundum Park through the assistance of the DA, one Pentium IV computer, and a motor bicycle donated by the CLUSA GAIT programme. UCSOND's secretariat is also poorly furnished and does not have permanent workers. This situation has resulted in intermittent closure of the office.

### 5.Challenges Facing UCSOND In Its Operations

Although, UCSOND has made substantial inroads into good governance issues in the area they operate, such successes have been constrained. The union is plagued with varying degrees of challenges. In an in-depth personal interview and focus group discussion (FGD) with pioneer UCSOND's members, they alluded to a host of challenges and ranked them based on the severity of the problems with the most serious problem taking the top of the table.

Challenges	N	Total Scores	Mean Rank	Standard Deviation	Ranking
Human resource constraints	3	5	1.67	0.577	1
Inadequate sponsorship	3	8	2.67	0.577	2
Inadequate logistics	3	11	3.67	4.619	3
Poverty	3	13	4.33	0.577	4
Apathy	3	16	5.33	1.155	5
Leadership challenge	3	18	6	1.732	6
Lack of strategy & tactics	3	21	7	0	7
Improper documentation	3	22	7.33	1.155	8
Lack of awareness on governance issues	3	23	7.67	4.041	9
Limited conflict prevention Skills	3	28	9.33	0.577	10

Table 2: Challenges facing UCSOND in its operations  
Source: Fieldwork, 2011

$$W_c = \text{Kendall's coefficient of concordance} = 0.639$$

$$\text{Chi-square} = 17.255$$

$$x^2_{cal} > x^2_{table}$$

The Kendall's coefficient of concordance (Greene, 1997) was employed to ascertain if there was agreement among the challenges ranked. The chi-square ( $x^2$ ) calculated is greater than the tabulated ( $x^2$ ) value indicating that there is an agreement among the constraints.

From Table 2, Kendall's coefficient of concordance ( $W_c$ ) was found to be 0.639 (63.9 %) indicating a moderately high agreement between the rankings made by the rankers concerning the relative importance of the stated problems. This implies 63.9 percent of the challenges were correctly ranked in the same order by the rankers. A mean rank of 1.67 for human resource constraints indicates that of the ten challenges, it is the most critical/ important while a mean rank of 9.33 meant limited conflict prevention skills is the least critical/ important. A standard deviation of 0.000 (Max of 7, Min of 7 and Mean of 7) for lack of strategy and tactics in particular shows that it was ranked 7<sup>th</sup> out of 10 challenges by all the three independent rankers. Across all the three rankers' poverty, inadequate sponsorship, human resource constraints and limited conflict prevention skills were the problems that were ranked with same uncertainty by the rankers. This is seen from their equal standard deviation (0.577). The analysis again revealed that inadequate logistics had the highest standard deviation of 4.619 meaning it had the highest discordant across the rankers. In sum, it is worth mentioning that a mean rank of 1.67 for human resource constraints shows that it is the most important of all the ten challenges. Hence, if that is tackled there is a chance that it will have a positive effect on the other challenges.

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