

Fostering Civic Engagement:  
Stakeholder Participation in Rural Projects in Ghana

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving wife Doreen and my two wonderful children, Kwaku and Ama. Thank you so much for putting up with all the challenges to make this intellectual journey a success. A special feeling of gratitude goes to my mother Lucy Kessie and father Akwasi Agyei, whose words of encouragement and push for tenacity still ring in my ears. I also dedicate this dissertation and give special thanks to my sister-in-law Yvonne for being there for me throughout the entire program but had to suddenly leave us. We miss you and Dada Ampah.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBO	Community Based Organization
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DA	District Assemblies
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
DFID	Department for International Development
GTZ	German Technical Zest
GPRS	Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Countries
IAP2	International Association of Public Participation
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
IFAD	International Fund for Agriculture and Development
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IISD	International Institute for Sustainable Development
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PPA	Participatory Poverty Assessments
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PSIA	Participatory Social Impact Assessment
RRA	Rapid Rural Appraisal
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SIDA	The Swedish Development Cooperation Agency
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
USAID	US Agency for International Development
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MVP	Millennium Village Project
UNMP	United Nations Millennium Project
WATSANS	Community Water And Sanitation Schemes

## ABSTRACT

### FOSTERING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION IN RURAL PROJECTS IN GHANA

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For more than two decades, development practitioners have expressed a growing concern over the lack of understanding of participation in rural community projects. While the concept of participation is clouded with practitioners' anecdotes suggesting that for effectiveness, participation needs to be socially constructed, research substantiating that assertion has been minimal and most often discussed without the voices of those whom development seeks to benefit. The intent of this study, therefore, is to take the discussion to the rural communities and present an argument that substantiates the position that stakeholder participation in rural project interventions is socially constructed, based on historical antecedents, and communities' contextual characteristics. These factors underlie the extent to which public participation in rural communities is more or less effective to promote development.

I focus the study on seven selected poverty hotspot villages located within the Bonsaaso Millennium Village Project cluster in Ghana. Using an in-depth qualitative inquiry, I interviewed 118 people who were chiefs, local community individuals, village committee leaders, and officials at the local district assembly and project staff. The study includes four main tasks. The first task was to gather the existing perceptions on communities' historical experiences in participatory development. The second task was to find out how participation was occurring in the selected villages, and thirdly, to ascertain how the selected communities perceived and interpreted participation. Lastly, I examined community perceptions on motivation for participation.

The main findings of this study are that the challenges and opportunities to local participation in community projects are connected to history, social development priorities and contextual characteristics of project beneficiaries. In conclusion, I recommend the rethinking of participatory approaches to rural development based on a holistic institution-based project model. In this approach, communities' intricate social environments have to be widely studied in-situ to inform project participatory processes before project commencement.

## **CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION**

For more than two decades, development practitioners have expressed a growing concern over the lack of understanding of participation in rural community projects. Yet, up to now, little has been known about the nature of participation in rural community projects and how it can be made to effectively reflect the aspirations of project beneficiaries. This concern is based on the fact that participatory tools adopted for engaging the rural populations in projects do not adapt to the specific social and cultural environments of the rural populations. Also, while the concept of participation is clouded with practitioners' anecdotes suggesting that for effectiveness, participation needs to be contextual and socially constructed, research substantiating that assertion has been minimal and most often discussed without the voices of those whom development seeks to benefit.

The problem, however, is that participatory tools most often lack the in-depth social baseline information and clear understanding of community experiences that may impact the active participation of rural populations. This leads to the supposition that participation as a development concept would be greatly enhanced if processes are made to be sensitive to the complexities of communities' history and intricate socio-cultural priorities. Jones (2001) suggests that,

“There is no doubt that socially constructed ideas and institutions channel human behavior.... Human culture is so powerful in directing human behavior that many evolutionary biologists and anthropologist think that cultural evolution has displaced evolution as the major mechanism of human adaption” (14).

This study addresses the concerns within the communities and presents an evidence-based argument substantiating the position that stakeholder participation in rural project interventions are contextual, socially constructed and complex. In this approach, a community’s intricate social environments have to be widely studied in-situ to inform project participatory processes before project commencement is recommended.

To facilitate understanding, I targeted and interviewed community leaders and individuals in seven villages participating in the Bonsaaso Millennium Village Project to help examine and illuminate the various issues and concepts associated with stakeholder participation in community projects. I applied an in-depth qualitative inquiry and now present an argument that substantiates the position that stakeholder participation in rural interventions is contextual, socially constructed and based on historical antecedents. To these ends, I completed four main tasks. First, I gathered the existing community perceptions regarding historical experiences in participatory development. I also assessed how participation was occurring in the selected villages. I ascertained how the selected communities perceived and interpret participation. Last, I examined perceptions on motivations toward participation.

The main findings of this study are that the challenges and opportunities to local participation in community projects are based on social development priorities and historical antecedents, while arguments for greater participation are contextual. The conclusions suggest that, stakeholder participation in rural projects be based on distinct understandings of its local context, historical and social development priorities of key stakeholders so that we may improve its application as society's development strategy.

I recommend the rethinking of participatory approaches to rural development based on a holistic institution-based project model. By this, participation for development will require an in-depth understanding of communities' contextual characteristics, its history regarding participatory development and perceptions of their social development priorities. These are identified as important inputs needed to foster unyielding support and participation from grassroots stakeholders. In this approach, communities' intricate social environments have to be widely studied in-situ to inform project participatory processes before project commencement.

### **Purpose and Significance of Study**

This research studies stakeholder participation in rural projects focusing on the Bonsaaso Millennium Village Projects and the way stakeholder participation, as a concept for community development, has been used to facilitate the project. The study includes with four main tasks:

- The first task I set for myself was to gather the existing perceptions on communities' historical experiences in participatory development. The assumption is that communities acquire unique historical experiences in development, which may or may not be participatory. Being able to understand their story within the context of their cultural and social setting may provide an understanding of how stakeholders perceive their community's past in order to imagine its future.
- For the second task, I studied how participation was occurring in the selected villages. I identified the various dimensions of participation in rural development projects that have been largely initiated and designed by an external agency seeking to provide some form of intervention. To this end, I gathered information on the stakeholders participating in the project, who is participating and how they are participating. Cohen and Uphoff (1977), for example, have suggested that understanding who is participating and how participating can potentially promote a broad understanding is an effective application.
- Thirdly, I worked towards normative interpretations of participation based on rural people's perceptions of participation. The assumption is that there are complexities of values within communities, and these perceptions and experiences can be harnessed to enhance both local and international development. Britha Mikkelsen (1995) states that in the current practice, the concept of participation is widely and loosely used, and like many other catchwords in the development



jargon, the meaning is blurred. Gathering perceptions to elucidate understanding was, therefore, significant.

- Lastly, I sought out the community's perceptions on their motivations to participate. Any collective action depends on the motivation of group members to accomplish desired outputs (Ostrom, 2001).

This study, therefore, is my contribution to literature and practice of participation and can help developmental practitioners, researchers and decision makers to see development as a human process. I contribute to the academic literature on public participation by adding understanding and some advancement to the nascent theoretical development in the field of stakeholder participation. Methodologically, the exploration of using grounded theory could benefit researchers using ground theory. For the Millennium Village Projects in Africa, and for practitioners in general, identifying solutions and innovations emerging out of local practice can guide and positively impact daily practice of participation for development.

## **Research Questions and Motivation**

I based the research on an overarching research question, which is: how can we understand community participation and its significant dimensions in rural project interventions?

This overarching question was expressed under five main questions, which are:

- i. What perceptions exist on communities' historical experiences in participatory development?
- ii. How is participation occurring in the selected villages?
- iii. How do the selected villages perceive and interpret participation?
- iv. What are the villages prioritized socio-economic needs?
- v. What are the villages' perceptions for their motivation?

Born into a typical rural setting and experiencing poverty first hand, I have learned how coming together as people to support community projects has led to community improvement in many ways. Almost every structure that was built was done under some kind of participation either by providing labor; resources, such as timber, sand, and fetching water; or sometimes in cash (although token). I have always wondered about the differences in development work in the rural areas and that of the cities. Why is it so complex for us in the rural areas to participate in interventions? Why are most of the rural projects predetermined by either the government or donors? Are the rural voices and

concerns important for the development processes? Some of these questions filtered into my career as I grew and have taken the fundamental place in my quest for knowledge. Recently, I undertook a field study for the World Bank looking at how stakeholders were involved in the Strategic Environmental Assessment of Ghana's Poverty Reduction Strategy. My experiences from the field indicated how very important development programs were for the rural poor, and they are most often completed with little or no participation from the rural beneficiaries themselves.

I realized that while some studies exist to support participation as a concept to ensure governmental support for local projects, very little seems to have been done to use the voices of the rural poor to support participation for development. My efforts to understand reasons why facilitated the preparation of the above stated questions, which eventually shaped this dissertation. The study of stakeholder participation in rural interventions, as reported in this dissertation, has its roots in my own personal experiences as a rural person, informed by my own quest for answers and driven by a personal desire to understand rural peoples' participation for development. I also note that these personal desires in some ways were an advantage, and in other ways a limitation--an advantage because I was able to draw on experience to help negotiate the local protocols needed to feel accepted by the community. On the other hand, they were a limitation because I entered the field with my biases as a rural person. In general, following strict research protocols was helpful in overcoming these limitations.

## **Chapter Overview and Structure of Dissertation**

In chapter one, I provide a basic overview of the study and also introduce readers to the subject matter. In this chapter, I introduce the study and the nature of the problem, the significance of the study, and research questions.

In chapter two, I review related and relevant literature on stakeholder participation in rural community interventions. I discuss the various definitions and typologies of participation, approaches and some challenges to participation.

In chapter three, I describe the setting for the research within the prevailing physical, political and socio-economic environment of the Bonsaaso Millennium Village Project and selected communities.

In chapter four, I explain the development and rationale behind the research design and back it with theoretical arguments where necessary. I discuss the methodological model and rationale for choosing a qualitative methodology. I also discuss the techniques for data analysis based on grounded theory principles.

In chapter five, I present the findings from the interviews, analyze them and discuss the perceptions of participants.

Finally, in chapter six, I draw conclusions for the research and present the implications of the study, as well as make recommendations for further studies.

## **CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this chapter, I review the literature on stakeholder participation, the justification for participation, how it has evolved over time, typologies supporting participation in practice, processes and approaches applied, the challenges emerging from practice, and finally the importance of considering ‘context’ in participation. The objective is to discuss the various dispositions for which the concept of participation has been used. I also ground the idea that emphasis on rural people’s perceptions and context within the general concept of participation is vital and can enhance rural people’s commitment to project ideals.

### **The ‘Stakeholder’ in Participation**

For more than 20 years, the participation of the poor and marginalized people in development initiatives intended to benefit them has been acknowledged as important in achieving sustainable development. The question is: why? The assumption is that the poor people themselves can better understand their economic and social milieu they face and probably have insights that can help shape initiatives intended to benefit them. Ideally, a good public participation program will enable those who are interested in, or affected by, a decision to have an opportunity to influence the outcome. However, while

stakeholder participation could have worthy ideals, there is little agreement about what it is and what its characteristics are.

A great deal of scholarly work has been conducted to theoretically justify and define the concept and practice of public participation in general. The IFC (2007) has recognized that the terms “public participation,” “citizen participation,” or “stakeholder participation” continue to be used interchangeably. They noted that while different organizations sometimes use different terminologies to explain the phenomena of engagement, be it “consultation,” “public consultation,” “public participation,” or “stakeholder involvement”, they most often express similar concepts and principles. As we begin to review “participation,” its characteristic terms, such as “stakeholder,” “involvement,” and “engagement,” are often used quite loosely and sometimes interchangeably. As a concept, stakeholder has referred to various things to different users, but always questioning who is being involved. The question of “who” relates to the interest or stakes a group or persons may have in a specific activity. While the Webster’s English Dictionary defines stakeholder as one “who is involved in or affected by a course of action,” the Black’s Law Dictionary (1983) describes the stakeholder as “serving the instrumental purpose of resolving control over a body of money: the 'stake' is property or money, and the 'holding' is done by a third person in a contest between two potential claimants.” As a term, “stakeholders” has spawned a wide range of interest in development policy, law and business” (Smillie et.al.1999; Shackley et.al. 2002). Habermas (1996) concluded that the term “stakeholder” is a legally constructed term

which began as a moral-normative prescription reflecting the general purposes of the state in securing cooperation for important state objectives. The construct shares certain meanings and purposes in law (Camilleri 1990), business (Wheeler et al. 2002; Dryzek 2002) and environmental decision-making (Jones 1997; Coppola 1997). Most likely, there could be more than one answer to the question of who should participate in specific projects.

For instance, the World Bank (1996) defines stakeholders as:

“Those intended to be directly affected by a proposed intervention, i.e. those who may be expected to benefit or lose from Bank-supported operations; or who warrant redress from any negative effects of such operations, particularly among the poor and marginalized. Those indirectly involved or affected can include persons or institutions (1) with technical expertise and public interest in Bank-supported policies and programs; and (2) with linkages to the poor and marginalized. Such stakeholders may include NGO’s various intermediary or representative organizations, private sector business and technical and professional bodies.”

While the World Bank definition of participation for development highlights the impacts of projects to its beneficiaries, that of the United States Agency for International



Development (USAID) focuses on the exercise of authority over projects. As described by LaVoy and Charles (1998), the USAID defines stakeholders to refer to:

“Those individuals and/or groups who exercise some type of authority over USAID resources such as Congress, Office of Management and Budget, Department of state, and those who influence the political process, e.g., interest groups and taxpayers..... Also USAID recognizes that ‘stakeholders’ in the field include a full range of actors including customers and partners and those who may be adversely affected by, or represent opposition to, development efforts” (24).

The Department of International Development (DFID), on the other hand, includes in their definition of stakeholders the issue of interest in project outcomes. In this case, stakeholders are not limited to “those that can be impacted,” or “may have influence,” but also “those with interests” in project outcomes. The DFID (2003) definition of stakeholder refers to:

“Any individual, community, group or organization with an interest in the outcome of a programme, either as a result of being affected by it positively or negatively, or by being able to influence the activity in a positive or negative way.”

DFID further suggests three main types of stakeholders that can be identified for rural projects, which are “key” stakeholders, “primary” stakeholders and “secondary” stakeholders. They define key stakeholders as those who can significantly influence or are important to the success of an activity. They define primary stakeholders as those individuals and groups who are ultimately affected by an activity, either as beneficiaries (positively impacted) or disbeneficiaries (adversely impacted). The secondary stakeholders, on the other hand, refer to all other individuals or institutions with a stake, interest or intermediary role in the activity. Peelle (1995), however, observes that these categories may overlap. Throughout this study, the phraseology on “stakeholder” and “public” would change, depending on their specific use by authors. However, they will connote the concept of stakeholders in general. The choice of stakeholder as an umbrella concept enables a closer look at persons or groups who are directly or indirectly affected by a project, as well as those who may have interests in a project and/or the ability to influence its outcome, either positively or negatively (IFC 2007). Stakeholders may include locally affected communities or individuals and their formal and informal representatives, national or local government authorities, politicians, religious leaders, civil society organizations and groups with special interests.

For purposes of clarity and in the context of this research, “stakeholder participation” is a preferred terminology to “public participation.” The study, however, adopts DFID’s (2003) definition of stakeholders as:

“any individual, community, group or organization with an interest in the outcome of a programme, either as a result of being affected by it positively or negatively, or by being able to influence the activity in a positive or negative way” (4).

### **Justification for Participation**

Before going on to discuss the evolution of participation, it is desirable to provide a justification for community participation in the development process. The discussion was made focusing on three schools of thought. These are the development agency, the political and the capabilities schools of thought on participation for development. Participation was justified as a prerequisite to, and catalyst for, sustainable socio-economic development and general societal well-being.

The development agency school of thought expresses that participation is all about building partnerships and ownership from the bottom up and primarily making policies more sensitive to the poor (World Bank 2000). The poor are generally the less educated and less organized than other more powerful stakeholders. Although they are more difficult to reach, their opposition can compound the problem of getting development projects accomplished. Supporting the development school of thought, Tandon and Cordeiro (1998) state that participation is exactly the process through which the most affected influence and share control of their development initiatives, decisions, and

resources. Also, involving the poor is crucial in ensuring stakeholder ownership, which is key to a project's success (NGO Working Group 1999). In addition, as Lisk (1985) has noted, this approach also enables a community to acquire non-material needs related to intangibles of well-being, such as social justice, basic human rights and related freedoms.

The political school of participation, in contrast, argues that participation is a way to facilitate political change in favor of the dispossessed (Blackburn and Holland 1998; Norton and Stephens 1995; Robb 1999). The political school of thought argues that participation holds promise outside the project framework (Thompson 1995) and for informing national policymakers for planning and implementing large-scale government programs. They stress the need for better partnerships between primary and secondary stakeholders as participation goes to scale. In this case, a direct community involvement in influencing the decision making process is anticipated about the socio-economic development and general well-being of the community that makes development programs better understood, accepted, supported, valued and sustained.

The capabilities school of thought categorizes participation as a process of strengthening the capabilities of people in order to control their own development. In this way, participation of beneficiaries provides a training ground for, and helps to build, a pool of enlightened participatory citizenry (Nelson and Wright 1995; World Bank 2002). This school of thought suggests further that strengthening stakeholders human, economic, social, and political capabilities is necessary in order to help them control their own

development should be the goal of participation. Social capabilities are defined to include social belonging, leadership, a sense of identity skills and relations of trust. Political capabilities referring to the capacity to represent one's self or others, access information form associations, and participate in the political life of the community or country. Economic capabilities enable people to acquire and use assets in different ways to increase their well-being. Human capabilities include good health, education, and the production of other life-enhancing skills (World Bank 2002).

The challenge, however, is how to understand these various schools of thoughts and find appropriate ways of utilizing their processes to enhance communities through their participation in projects. Although they propose and integrate some important elements in participation for development, not much has been discussed on how to take advantage of the historical and socio-cultural perceptions and experiences of the communities. Communities, in the physical world, are typically groups of people (a town, village, city for instance) held together by some common identity, interest or purpose. As Robert Chambers (1983) points out, that rural development projects have a high failure rate because the majority of program officers are external experts and outsiders, who are neither poor nor rural, and thus do not have a true understanding of the issues at stake. Social community realities must, therefore, be recognized to foster unyielding support for development.

## Evolution of Participation

“Participation,” as a term, is in the center of contemporary rural development discourse (Michener 1998; Chambers 1984). So, what is participation and where is it coming from?

Emerging from the ideas of Aristotle in *The Politics*<sup>1</sup>, participation was discussed as an essential concept for the development and fulfillment of the human personality. The work of the participation pioneers, such as Paulo Freire, a famous Brazilian educator in the early 1970s who wrote the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* argued that:

“Development can only be achieved when humans are ‘beings for themselves’, when they possess their own decision-making powers, free of oppressive and dehumanizing circumstances; it is the ‘struggle to be more fully human’” (29).

This was based on the conviction that every human being, no matter how ignorant or submerged in the culture of silence, is capable of looking critically at his world, and that provided with the proper tools, he or she can gradually perceive his personal and social reality and deal critically with it. According to Freire, education forms the cradle of innovation and initiative to transform the society that has denied them this opportunity of participation. Freire’s work, and that of others engaged in empowering the poor to change

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<sup>1</sup> The Politics of Aristotle: Translated Into English with Introduction, Marginal Analysis, Essays, Notes and Indices By Aristotle, Benjamin Jowett. Translated by Benjamin Jowett Published by Clarendon Press, 1885 Item notes: v.2:pt.1 Original from Harvard University. Digitized Jun 6, 2006

their impoverished conditions, contributed to the early body of knowledge on self-reliant development. Although it took awhile for this line of thinking to resound into the development discourse, participation finally became a mainstream concept when Chambers (1993, 1994, 1997) argued for its importance in development practice by emphasizing Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). According to Chambers, participation is where:

“The positivist, reductionist, mechanistic, standardized-package, top-down models and development blueprints are rejected, and in which multiple, local, and individual realities are recognized, accepted, enhanced and celebrated”  
(188).

Whereas Aristotle, Freire, and Chambers argued that participation is the end itself in supporting development projects, other scholars promoted the concept of participation as a means to an end. These are founded in a more institutional approach to participation, which appears with initiatives such as participatory budgeting and participatory poverty assessments (Hickey and Mohan 2004; Leal and Opp 2005).

Conforming to a more planner-centered approach, participation has been adopted as an efficient mechanism for delivering a development project and reducing cost, rather than a genuine understanding of a community's needs (Mosse 2001; Nelson and Wright 1995). Three big shifts seem to have characterized the debate on participation between the

1970s, 1980s and 1990s (Laderchi 2001). Landerchi emphasized that while the 1970s envisioned public participation as an important component of rural development and basic needs strategies, in the 1980s, it became associated with discourses of grassroots self-reliance and self-help. The 1990s, on the other hand, advocated for a much larger scale beyond the boundaries of project or grassroots interventions to other spheres of social, economic and political life as tools for empowerment and good governance. A process, Landerchi claims, is designed by the people, for the people or with the people to whom the development projects and programs are aimed.

Accordingly, a growing family of approaches and methods for participation has been developed for development agencies to embrace participation. Popular among them was the Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), which later developed into Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). Chambers comments that Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) emerged in the early 1990s based on practical innovations such as activist participatory research, but later developed into Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methodology. While PRA focused on the qualitative extent to which local people are involved in local research and their own plan of action, RRA challenged the way knowledge was generated via quantitative methods (McGee 1997; Cornwall 2000). In many ways, RRA has been described as fundamentally an extractive, externally driven process with an outside researcher agenda. The explanation given to differentiate between PRA and RRA is:

“If a community draws a map because you ask them to, it's RRA. If they realize



that the map belongs to them, and wants to keep it for their own use, then it's PRA.”<sup>2</sup>

IISDnet<sup>3</sup> argues that PRA, however, appears in more of a situational style than a method. They state that sometimes it is not even participatory and is frequently used as a trendy label for standard RRA techniques. They, however, caution that PRA stands the risk of being driven from external sources to create legitimacy for projects, agencies and NGOs involved in the global development agenda. Similar to PRA's is the Participatory Action Research (PAR), which IISDnet refers to as a more activist approach, working to empower the local community, or its representatives, to manipulate the higher level power structures. Although applied for a variety of interventions, IISDnet posits that PAR can empower a community, entrench local elite, right a wrong or totally mess things up when the researcher does not understand the local power structure within the environment in which it is being applied.

Robb (1998) discusses the further scaling up of PRA and PAR into Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPA). Participatory Poverty Assessment is a tool mostly used by the World Bank for its poverty assessments with the focus of providing information to policy makers, but is criticized to be information extractive with limited participation. Further developments have resulted in broader approaches such as the Poverty and Social Impact Analysis (PSIA), which, on the other hand, focuses on analysis of the positive and

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<sup>2</sup> See, A guide for field projects on adaptive strategies. IISDnet home. <http://www.iisd.org/casl/CASLGuide/RapidRuralAppraisal.htm>

<sup>3</sup> IISDnet: The International Institute for Sustainable Development (Winnipeg, Canada).

negative distributional and policy impact of policy changes (World Bank 2002). Poverty and Social Impact Analysis refers to the analysis of intended and unintended consequences of policy interventions on the well-being or welfare of different groups, with specific focus on the vulnerable and poor (World Bank 2002; Robb 2003). However, the International Food and Agricultural Development (IFAD 2005) argue that the experience with PSIA thus far clearly shows the difficulties of linking research results to development action. Proceedings from an international conference on PSIA concluded that although PSIA's are technically sound, demand-driven and participatory, they, however, have insufficient abilities to participatorily involve and address the poor during the information-gathering period, which is not sufficient to create pro-poor policies.

A recent approach adopted by the World Bank and other international organizations, such as OECD, is the Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) and the Institutional based SEA's. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is an analytical and participatory approach for mainstreaming and up-streaming environmental and social considerations in policies, plans and programs to influencing decision-making and implementation processes at the strategic level. The World Bank, however, has adopted and developed the SEA process, highlighting the importance of understanding the institutional challenges facing its application, particularly in the developing world context. SEA has been carried out in many ways to influence policy and development practice; however, effective participatory methods are needed in SEA to understand how environmental

degradation affects vulnerable groups whose identity varies depending on the country's context (Loayza 2008).

## **Defining Participation**

The many misconceptions and misunderstandings on the centrality of participation have supported the notion that participation is both a warmly persuasive word (Nelson and Wright 1994) and a cloud of rhetoric (Cernia 1985). Undeniably, throughout the development literature, it is difficult to find a clear definition of what “participation” actually is. While some completely dismiss its value altogether, others believe that it is the “panacea” that will ensure improvements, especially in the context of poverty alleviation. Lupton et al. (1998) suggest that the concept of public involvement is rather ambiguous, as it can be seen as both as a means to an end and an end in itself. Platt (1996) points out that the concept is often assumed and is often based on differing perceptions, which can give rise to problems. To this end, it is very evident that the language of development rhetoric lags behind the reality of development practice. Any reform will include both organizational reforms and innovations needed in recipient governments, donors, implementing agencies and project beneficiaries (Chambers 2000). In reviewing donors' efforts in promoting participation, it is important to recognize the various ways which development organizations have defined participation based on organizational focus and interest.

The World Bank (1992) defines participation as a:

“Process through which stakeholder’s influence and share control over their own development initiatives, decisions, and resources which affect them” (177).

It is evident from this definition that the World Bank has clubbed together all stakeholders, ignoring inequalities which affect the different stakeholders, particularly those who are poor and marginalized, to take part effectively in decision making (Tandon and Cordeiro 1998). The USAID (1995), on the other hand, defines participation as:

“An active engagement of partners and customers in sharing ideas, committing time and resources, making decisions, and taking action to bring about a desired development objective”

Adding gender dimensions to the development process, the Development Fund for International Development (DFID) defines participation as:

“A participatory approach that takes into account the views and needs of the poor, and tackles disparities between men and women throughout society”  
(Feeney 1998).

The German Technical Zest (GTZ) promoting self-determination considers participation as:

“A principle to promote initiative, self-determination and the taking over of responsibility by beneficiaries, thus representing a critical factor for meeting project’s objectives” (Forster 1998).

With this meaning, participation aims at an increase in self-determination and re-adjustment of control over development initiatives and resources. The Swedish Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), looking at other dimensions, views participation with reference to the democracy and equity goals, as an objective in itself. That is, participation is:

“A basic democratic right that should be promoted in all development projects considering the means of increasing efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability in development project” (Rudqvist 1992).

It is rather unfortunate that current arguments and research in favor of participation have excluded the “thick description” and intrinsic, but social, connectedness of public participation. Thick description, as a concept, was famously used by anthropologist Clifford Geertz in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) to describe his own method of doing ethnography and explains human behavior not only in terms of the behavior, but its context as well, such that the behavior becomes meaningful to an outsider (Geertz 1973). Habitually, participation has been understood by ascertaining quantitatively and numerically who participated or how many people were involved in the process with

minimal attention to the critical qualitative elements necessary for social learning and social invention<sup>4</sup>. One would have wished that participation proponents would have argued for more processes that allow contextual social learning and social innovation based on the historical experiences of grassroots people. Understanding the vital importance and prerequisites for defining local participation without sensitivity to the embedded socio-cultural and historical setting of project beneficiaries may adversely impact project support and sustainability. To this end, applying participation should ensure social learning and be able to wake the greater socio-cultural sensitivity for development.

Some scholars have argued that present public participation programs have undermined the traditional views for participation and, rather, focus on external expert knowledge, which is considered valuable and reliable (Simon-Vandenberg 2007; Tolson 2001; Innes & Booher 2004). In a community setting, participation and culture are intertwined and both informal and formal institutions co-determine the level and methods of public participation (Almond and Verba 1963; Sagie and Aycan 2003). However, relatively little systematic research has been done to examine the relation between culture and public participation (Enserink et. al. 2007). A much more dynamic, postmodern, interpretative, and ethnographically based approach, featuring spaces of intercultural communication, is suggested by Lie (2003).

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<sup>4</sup> Social Invention refers to new strategies, concepts, ideas and organizations that meet social needs of all kinds (Wikipedia). The World Bank (1996) comment that participants invent the new practices and institutional arrangements that they are willing to adopt. New social inventions are necessary for social change. See the innovation journal provoking discussion of the issue of social invention. <http://www.innovation.cc/discussion-papers/stuije.htm#need>

These attempts to define participation reveal the fact that participation, as a concept, is still explorative, counting on further contextual in-depth research for better understanding. Given the varied types and the different typologies of participation in developmental interventions, it is not surprising that participation continues to elude practitioners. Others have been inspired by this unsettled definition's problems to search for principles that can be adopted to ensure and characterize a good public participation process (Webler et. al 2001; Abelson et. al 2003). The challenges facing public managers today perhaps may lie in their own perception of participation and probably how to exercise it appropriately to achieve the desired goals of the larger population. This requires that respective conceptions on the subject of participation by the various stakeholder constituents are contextually studied and analyzed to improve our understanding of the process. This premise substantiates the essence of this research.

Deducing from the literature, it would be difficult at the moment to define participation universally and even specifically categorize its normative benefits. The range of discussion on participation continues to shift either as a means to an end or an end itself (Cooke and Kothari 2001). The discussion gives rise to the question related to the objective that stakeholder participation is meant to achieve. While one school of thought argues that participation is a means to an end, others support the notion that it is an end in itself. Moser (1983), on the other hand, explains the concept of participation as a “means” and as an “end” in development projects. Thus, where participation is interpreted as a “means,” it generally becomes a form of mobilization to get things done, and where it is

identified as an “end,” the objective is not a fixed quantifiable development goal, but rather a process whose outcome is an increasingly meaningful participation in the development process.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that stakeholder participation can be used to achieve a project’s material benefits or can facilitate the social development processes of the people toward empowerment and sustained engagement in project activities. It is important, however, that participation be used as a tool for achieving something more meaningful, but based on the desires of those engaged in the process. More appropriate will be the situation where participation develops as a means, building local people’s capacities and abilities, but with the intent of developing processes in participation as an end. In this case, we will be broadly viewing participation, weighing both benefits as a means and as an end.

### **Typologies of Participation**

Available literature shows a wide range of typologies supporting participation as a practice. Some have referred to the many types of participation and described its operation, while others discussed the approaches and mechanisms and how it has been applied in participatory development. In most cases, their limitations and strengths in implementation are discussed. This review summarizes these typologies, referring to what has already been done in this area and also relevant participatory literature.



A generally accepted typology for participation is Arnstein's (1969) participation ladder set out to distinguish different levels of participation in relation to levels of, or access to, power. Implicit in the ladder of participation is a position wherein citizens have control, a major goal for participation. The Arnstein typology addresses citizen participation as the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens to be deliberately included in future decision making. See Figure 1.

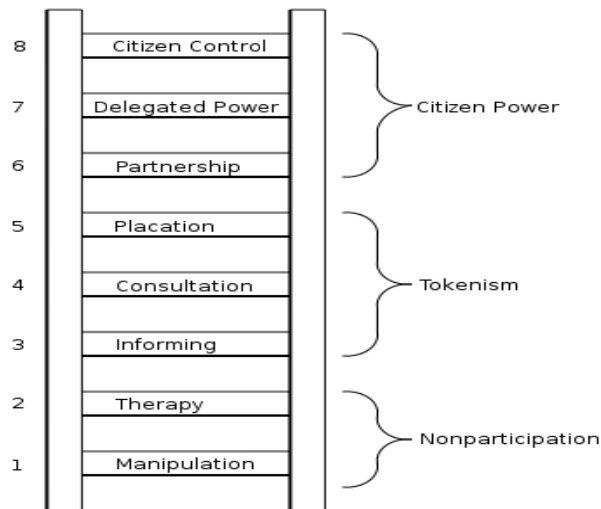


Figure 1: Arnstein's Participation Ladder

Source: Arnstein, 1969.

According to Arnstein, each group of steps corresponds to changes in degrees of citizen engagement, ranging from non-involvement through tokenism to citizen power. The ladder depicts participation as essentially a power struggle between citizens trying to move up the ladder, while controlling organizations and institutions, limiting their rise to the top by barring citizens' abilities to claim control or power for themselves. The metaphor of the ladder has become an enduring part of academic inquiry used to

demonstrate the struggle which citizens, mostly referred to as the poor and marginalized, struggle to acquire power through participation.

Several authors have criticized the ladder of participation, arguing that gaining control cannot be the sole reasons for participation. Choguill (1996), reviewing the Arnstein's ladder in a developmental context, suggests that where there are no governmental infrastructures or support, there individuals revert to self-management as the only strategy open to them when neglected by the state. Her framework of community participation for developing countries (Figure 2) is an attempt to address the dimensions of both community power in the political arena and performance in providing urban services, such as housing, through mutual help initiatives.

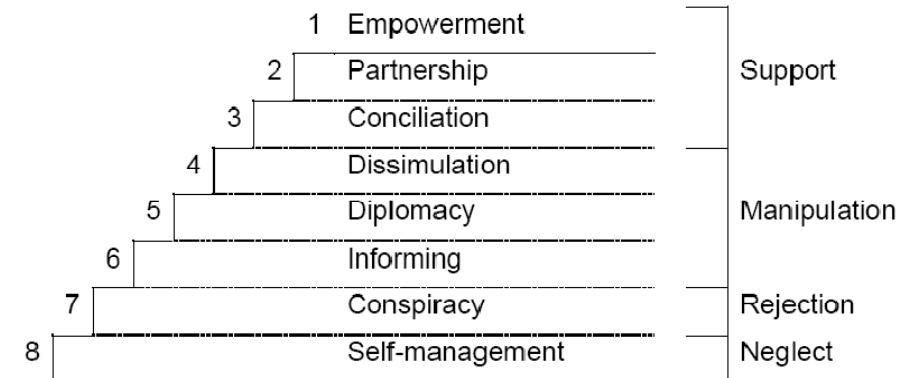


Figure 2: A Ladder of Community Participation for Underdeveloped Countries

Source: Adapted from Choguill, M.B. Guaraldo. 1996.

For Choguill, self management represents the bottom rung of the ladder, unlike Arnstein's, which is manipulation. The International Association of Participation (IAP2) has questioned whether the goal of participation should only be to gain control or that

meaningful participation can only happen in relation to external power. They, however, propose a framework considering a spectrum of five goals that should be the focus of any participatory typology. Their spectrum for participation demonstrates the possible types of engagement with stakeholders and communities and also shows the increasing level of public impact as one progress from “inform” through “empower.” As depicted in their framework in Table 1, the goals for participation are informing, consulting, engaging, collaborating and empowering citizens. Although the framework introduces some important issues on participation, it does not indicate how those goals can be achieved.

Table 1: IAP2 Participation Participatory Framework

	Inform	Consult	Engage	Collaborate	Empower
Goal	Provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions	Obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions	Work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	Partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	Place final decision-making authority in the hands of citizens

Source: Adapted from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

Other scholars have recognized that the linear conceptualization of participation does little to emphasize the importance of the process. Pretty et al., (1995) in order to address the challenges of understanding participation in a linear fashion, introduced participatory learning as a shift in the scope and focus of the participation discourse and practice.

Pretty et. al. (1995) observed that emphasis has shifted to the assessment of quality and impact of participation, rather than simply promoting the levels of participation. They do,

however, offer a participation typology that emphasizes on roles and responsibilities of the individuals, communities and authorities involved in participation. These they termed as “Passive participation,” “Participation in information giving,” “Participation by consultation,” “Participation for material incentives,” “Functional participation,” “Interactive participation,” and “Self-mobilization.” See Table 2. This typology is conceived as a way of working out how people make use of participation, particularly in identifying conflicting ideas about why or how participation is being used at any particular stage in a process.

Table 2: Pretty's Typology on Participation

Type of Participation	Meaning
Passive Participation	People participate by being told what is going to happen or has already happened. It is a unilateral announcement by an administration or project management without any listening to people's responses. The information being shared belongs only to external professionals.
Participation in Information giving	People participate by answering questions posed by extractive researchers using questionnaire surveys or similar approaches. People do not have the opportunity to influence proceedings, as the findings of the research are neither shared nor checked for accuracy.
Participation by consultation	People participate by being consulted, and external agents listen to views. These external agents define both problems and solutions and may modify these in the light of people's responses. Such a consultative process does not concede any share in decision-making, and professionals are under no obligation to take on board people's views.
Participation for material incentive	People participate by providing resources, e.g. labor, in return for food, cash or other material incentives. Much on-farm research falls in this category, as farmers provide the fields but are not involved in the experimentation or process of learning. It is very common to see this called participation, yet people have no stake in prolonging activities when the incentives end.
Functional Participation	People participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives related to the project, which can involve the development or promotion of externally initiated social organization. Such involvement does not tend to be at early stages or project cycles of planning, but rather after major decisions have been made. These institutions tend to be dependent on external initiators and facilitators, but may become self-dependent.
Interactive Participation	People participate in joint analysis, which leads to action plans and the formation of new local institutions or the strengthening of existing ones. It tends to involve interdisciplinary methodologies that seek multiple objectives and make use of systematic and structured learning processes. These groups take control over local decisions, and so people have a stake in maintaining structures or practices.
Self-Mobilization	People participate by taking initiatives independent of external institutions to change systems. Such self-initiated mobilization and collective action may or may not challenge existing inequitable distributions of wealth and power.

Source: Adapted from Pretty et al., 1995.

A crucial element of participation that may have evaded most of these scholars is the more complex set of relationships which exist in many ongoing participatory processes. Many of these typologies seem to suggest that roles and responsibilities change only in relation to changing levels of power, thus overlooking emerging roles not necessarily dependent on power, but based on the construction of their interest in a situation, such as a local project. It is also important to note that many of these typologies are devoid of context and provide few insights into how participation might be initiated as a collective process between all of the stakeholders in the intervention.

Then again, it has become a noted trend that while the aforementioned typologies differentiate kinds and levels of participation, very little is said about the different kinds of participants who take part in community development projects. It is imperative for future typologies to be able to identify those who are participating, those who are excluded and even those who are self-excluded.

### **Processes and Approaches for Stakeholder Participation**

Several processes have been identified as approaches to ensure that citizens' views are received and incorporated into enhanced project implementation. Mostly prominent among them is stakeholder consultation. There are a number of different definitions of consultation that exist, but perhaps the simplest and most straightforward is:

“A process of dialogue that leads to a decision”<sup>5</sup> (Audit Commission 7).

The Audit Commission (1999) report stressed that the notion of consultation being a dialogue implies an ongoing exchange of views and information, rather than a one-off event.

Dialogue, they say, is crucial in leading to decision making. However, they caution that in practice, however, it is sometimes difficult to make absolutely clear distinctions on consultation methods. They, however broadly, divide consultation into two kinds: i) direct consultation with a sample of people and ii) consultation with delegates, such as area forums, community groups and members who may represent the views of the local people. They stress that whereas direct consultation allows authorities to find out the views of local people first-hand, it most often can be difficult to make consultees feel involved in the decision-making process, or to provide feedback to them on how their views were taken into account.

Regarding consultation with delegates, on the other hand, they explain that consultees become more involved in the authority’s decision-making processes, but run the risk that delegates may not truly represent the wider community, or even the groups that have delegated them. Their illustration revealed several consultation methods that local authorities have been using over the years, which include citizens’ juries, citizens’ panels, referenda, complaints/suggestions schemes, service satisfaction surveys, consultation

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<sup>5</sup> Audit Commission Management Report.1999. The Audit Commission promotes the best use of public money by ensuring the proper stewardship of public finances and by helping those responsible for public services to achieve economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

documents, service-user forums, co-option/committee work, area/neighborhood forums, issue forums, question and answer session, focus groups, other opinion polls, community plan/needs analysis, shared-interest forums, visioning exercises, interactive website, and user management of services. They conclude that consultation can be a powerful tool, which brings significant benefits. However, this potential can be realized only if consultation exercises are carefully planned, imaginatively designed, competently carried out and then used to inform decision-making. Roberts (2003) suggests that consultation must include education, information sharing and negotiation, with the goal being better decision-making. A question that keeps coming up in the developmental discourse is why consultation alone has for many years been applied without furthering it towards an all-inclusive decision-making.

Another common practice mostly organized by public officials in their bid to build stakeholder acceptance in decision-making is public hearing or public meeting (Thomas 1995). Although these meetings remain the most formal procedure for involvement today, Herberlin (1976), submitting his critique, stated, “When there is a demand for public involvement, the knee-jerk reaction is to hold a public hearing.” The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) recognizes that formal meetings provide opportunity for the public to speak without rebuttal; however, the technique is disadvantaged, due to its inability to foster constructive dialogue and thus perpetuate an us versus them feeling. Although public hearings are instrumental in EIAs, it provides only another forum for established interest groups and those with large economic stakes



(Checkoway 1981). Very often it is the most visible, wealthy and articulated individuals and groups that are allowed to participate without attempts to identify less obvious partners. Gunder and Heberlin (1984) rebut some of these criticisms and suggest that when care is taken to scheduling and publicity, these meetings may prove representative of the relevant publics.

Another useful approach, mostly adopted to build acceptance and involve stakeholders, is through “focus groups,” where attendees are divided into smaller groups where each discusses the issue and then reports back to the meeting as a whole. This approach, sometimes called the “workshop approach,” is often used in conjunction with the public hearing meeting to facilitate defining opinions for each small group (Thomas 1995). Hendee et. al. (1976) commended the technique because it provides an excellent opportunity for those with opposing viewpoints to establish a dialogue, whether or not they reach agreement. They, however, recognize that workshops can be costly and time-consuming. Schwarz (1994) recommends the assistance of facilitators during such meetings. The facilitator’s role, according to Schwarz, is to stimulate, organize, and synthesize the thinking of the group so that it can reach consensus. Under the right circumstance, public hearings and workshops are simple to run.

The challenge, according to Gundry and Herberlin (1984), is knowing what those circumstances are. Public involvement may also be pursued through advisory committees (Thomas 1995). Although a pro-public manager’s tool, they are formed with the hope of

gaining a better understanding of public sentiments. Thomas recommends an optimal size of no more than fifteen members--large enough to represent the various interest groups and small enough to ensure control. The greatest risks, however, is how well committee members represent the public and how representatives are selected where the public is unorganized. A peculiar skill brought to bear on the process is mediation, where stakeholder participation has proven too intractable.

According to Schwarz (1994), mediation and facilitation are usually confused as the same; however, they are different. He clarifies that although both techniques involve intervention by a neutral third party with no decision-making authority, mediation usually occurs after conflicts have reached impasse, while facilitation often begins earlier. He further explains that where the goal of mediation is to resolve a particular conflict, facilitation is designed to improve the decision--making process. The essence of mediation and its growing popularity is because citizen groups have frequently led to an impasse between the parties (Cormick and Pattern 1977). For mediation to be desirable, they claim it requires that opposing sides move a step beyond impasse for compromise. The challenge, however, is the extent to which public managers may surrender significant decision-making authority to a third party and difficulties of engineering mediation where there are many organized groups.

Dealing with such complexities calls for the application of consensus-building processes (Gray 1989). She explains that this helps stakeholders establish a common

understanding and framework for developing a solution that works for everyone. According to Burgess and Spangler (2003), consensus building (also known as collaborative problem solving or collaboration) is a conflict-resolution process used mainly to settle complex, multiparty disputes. This allows stakeholders to make trade-offs between different issues and allows the development of solutions that meet more people's needs, as well as permitting stakeholders to deal with interrelated issues in a single forum. They, however, caution that it is critical that the definition of success is made clear from the beginning of any consensus-building process because most consensus-building efforts set out to achieve unanimity. Sandelin<sup>6</sup> also cautions that it is not an unanimous agreement. However, participants may consent to a decision they disagree with. He suggests that the consensus decision, which is critical in the policy decision-making process, typically goes through three stages: discussion, proposal, and modification. At the discussion stage, people freely share thoughts, opinions, feelings, ideas and react to each other's contributions, while at the proposal stage, thoughts and ideas are synthesized into one or more proposal statements. It is within the discussion stage that dialogue is critical.

Dialogue is a both a kind of conversation and a way of relating (Maiese 2003). It is where parties find new ways of relating to each other that help them to more fully understand the beliefs, meanings, values, and fears held by both their opponents and themselves (Chasin et. al 1996). The Dialogue Group, however, contrasts dialogue with

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<sup>6</sup> Rob Sandelin. Consensus Basics, Ingredients of successful consensus process (HTML). *Northwest Intentional Communities Association guide to consensus*. Northwest Intentional Communities Association. Retrieved on 1/20/2009.

discussion. They express that in dialogue, the interest is in creating a fuller picture of reality, rather than breaking it down into fragments or parts, as happens in discussion<sup>7</sup>. Dialogue, to them, does not try to convince others of other people's points of view. Rather, the emphasis is on learning, collaboration and the synthesis of points of view. They conclude that when practiced appropriately, it can move groups away from the dependency, competition and exclusion often found in hierarchical cultures to increased collaboration, partnership and inclusion. The modification stage, however, is where the summary proposal is tested and modified to meet the needs of the group. Although mediation, dialogue, discussion, and consensus techniques are necessary ingredients for successful participation, no phase poses more difficulties than getting started (Thomas 1995). Challenging aspects of the process may result where the process lacks adequate participation because consensus building depends on active participation. Secondly, some people might miss the initial stages and try to enforce their opinion during the proposal and modification stages, complicating the process.

### **Challenges to Participation**

The first task of the public manager in any stakeholder involvement process, according to Thomas (1995), is to decide the degree of involvement. He stresses that the desirability of public involvement depends primarily on the relative need for quality versus the need for acceptability in an eventual decision. Furthermore, while public managers were seen as

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<sup>7</sup> The Dialogue Group. The abridged text from the writings of Glenna Gerard and Linda Ellinor of The Dialogue Group  
<http://www.thedialoguegrouponline.com/whatsdialogue.html>

technicians who worked best when insulated from days past, the new view recognizes that contemporary public managers often make decisions in which public preferences are more important than technical criteria. According to Cooper (1984), working with citizens is an ethical obligation of public managers, and the first step in that direction is to recognize that their involvement is not easily achieved (Thomas 2003). Getting past the distrust between public managers and citizens continues to be a challenge. Suggested by Thomas (2003), both sides often undergo an unplanned, ad hoc learning process before the public involvement brings any benefits. The challenge is how much public participation, in what form, under what circumstances, who is involved and with what impact does that bear on public policies (Cupps 1997). The specifics of these challenges continue to cloud ideologies, bothering stakeholder participation in community projects.

Although stakeholder participation stands out as the most important success factor and plays a critical role in the quality control of projects, it continues to become one of the unresolved questions associated with community development projects (Rauschmayer & Risse 2005). Notwithstanding the varied meanings that are also ambiguous in nature, it means different things to many different people (Steelman & Ascher 1997). Curtin (2003) argues that stakeholder participation produces mixed signals with many government officials doubting its efficacy. Walters et al. (2000) also argue that the approach of involving stakeholders in decision-making, both at the local and policy level is potentially time consuming, expensive, complicated and emotionally draining. This has become necessary because although the government is often referred to as the major

stakeholder and player in the public policy process, individuals, both private and public interest groups, play crucial roles in the policy acceptance process. The reality is reform efforts are sometimes blocked by interest groups who benefit from the status quo. However, for policy reforms to be effective, they must respond to the needs of all existing stakeholders. Without conceptual clarity or practical direction in the continuum involving stakeholders in decision making, the process may continue to be complex, ambiguous and likely not to see any effective practice (Jones 2001).

A common perception is that stakeholder involvement adds to project costs and increases time lost to delays, which ultimately results in participation fatigue. However, this assumption is not always valid. True participation involves greater costs for the identification, design and planning phases, but saves more time and money during the implementation and evaluation phases because it ensures ownership of programs and plans (Bamberger 1986; Bhatnagar 1992). An impediment of stakeholder participation is not only the allegation that members of the public are not really interested in becoming involved, but that they also have no capacity to participate. Although it is important to assess the capacity of the stakeholder, both the leading agency and other participants (NOAA 2004), there must be strategies that would generate interest and build capacity. Kok and Gelderblom (1994) suggest that the apathetical nature of some stakeholders is a universal problem. They stress that that people are ignorant and need to be steered in the right direction, most importantly, in decision-making. Although contentious when it comes to ‘steering’ of affairs in stakeholder participation, the goal probably should not only be on consensus building, but also in decision insight. Lack of concern expressed by some stakeholders could be the

result of participation burn-out, fatigue, or the ineffective build-up of relationships. Svendsen (1998) commented that there is lack of knowledge and understanding about how to develop stakeholder relationships. On the other hand, not all participants need to favor the same alternative, and not all elements of an option need to have everyone's support. Instead, all stakeholders must see a clear response to their values and expressed tradeoffs in a proposed alternative. Stakeholders having insights into decisions, its processes and management guided by values and attitudes could be an effective way of improving the quality of decision-making, which many acknowledge lies in the political and institutional action arena (Partidario & Clark 2000; Dalal Clayton & Sadler 2005).

### **Sensitivity to the Historical, Social and Context for Participation**

Clearly, the various dispositions for which participation has evolved or has been defined indicate the lack of emphasis on getting participation right and getting the right participation (Chess 2000). Getting participation right will require that participants are active in the processes of development, and getting the right participation would require tools that are sensitive and respond to the historical, contextual and social development perceptions of the project beneficiaries.

The use of social information has proven advantageous in many fields. Beierle and Konisky (1999), assessing their programs in the Great lakes region, concluded that contextual public information is vital in defining environmental risks. Crate (2006),

through her detailed work of the Sakha people of post-Soviet Russia, has suggested the incorporation of in-depth knowledge of local systems and cultures to make development more democratic. Her ethnography of the Viliui Sakha, describing history, geography, ecology, culture and contemporary ways of being in the villages, reveals the very many characteristics of the people that can be harnessed to ensure ethnic solidarity for rural interventions. Marks (1984) use the case study of a Zambian community-based wildlife program to explain the role and significance of context in the prolific development of community-based wildlife programs in Africa. He shows how privileged insights might be gained from long-standing relations with natural resource users or from unexpected occurrences within the research subject, allowing the researcher to decipher the contextual factors that impinge upon projects. Ginkel (1987) uses a case study of fisheries management in the community of Yerseke to reveal the impact of remote forces on oyster fishing and farming to illustrate the interplay of numerous contextual factors and the multiplicity of motives that influence people's behavior in resource use. Edwards and Steins (1999), amplifying the work of Ostrom (1984), introduced contextual factors in common pool resource (CPR) as a special issue that needs to be considered in collective action projects. They advocate that an interdisciplinary, holistic approach to natural resource development should be based on the wider social, cultural, ecological and economic environment in which it is embedded. To them, contextual factors are constituted in the user groups' social, cultural, economic, political, technological and institutional environment and can have an important part to play in establishing the choice sets from which CPR users can select strategies. North (1990) and Ostrom (1986)



refer to these contextual and humanly devised rules that shape and govern human interactions as institutions. These institutions can be formal (written) or informal (informal), but they include any form of constraint that human beings devise to shape society's interactions. Understanding these institutions entails the acceptance of unpredictable elements that are central to the success or failure of respective community development programs (Mosse 1998) and may also result from fairly immediate and strong exposure to varied and most often changing external forces that may interact with the internal process in less than predictable ways (Dale 2004). According to North (1990), these institutions are the socially devised constraints that shape human interaction and policy decision-making.

It is worth noting that, although sensitivity to the social development priorities in participation has been highlighted in literature and theory, its applicability in practice is scarcely available. In this case, field research obtaining a good understanding of local people's perceptions, contextual situations and their historical antecedents on participation could be relevant dimensions that have not yet received much attention. The argument for participatory processes to be sensitive to local people's historical, contextual and social development priorities, in practice, is highlighted in the research framework below.

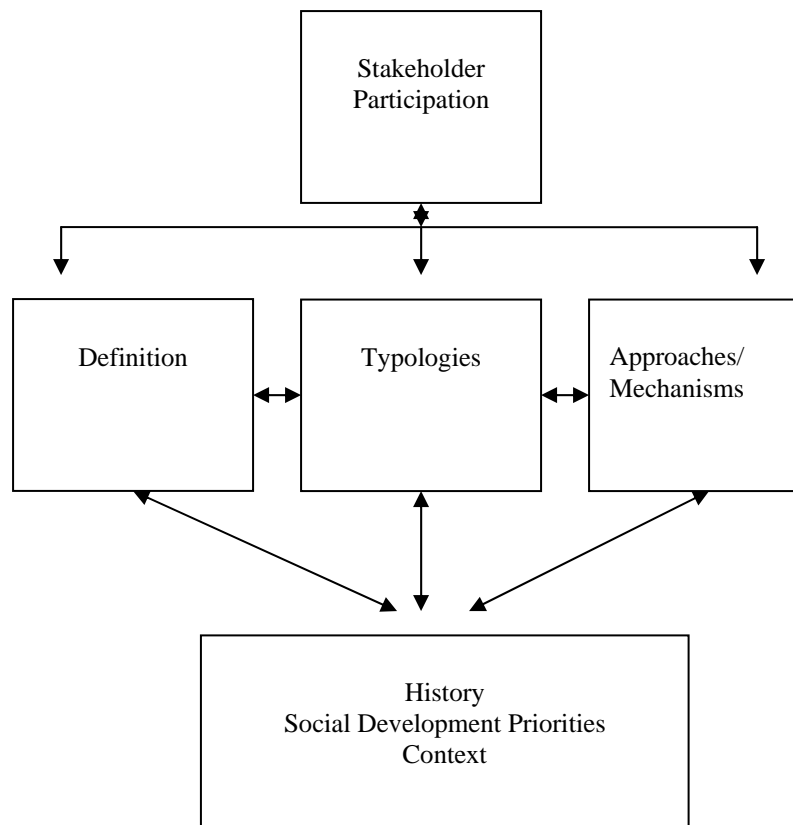


Figure 3: Research Framework

Source: Own Research

The framework depicts the understanding that stakeholder participation, in general, is wrought with many problems. These problems come out of the difficulty to practical understand the process, and where attempts are made, they are made without reference to the historical, social development priorities and contextual perceptions of local project beneficiaries.

I argue, based on this literature review that highlighting the historical, contextual and social development priorities of local project beneficiaries is essential for effective participation for development. Stipulated that each community has its own unique historical and varied social development priorities, then it is imperative that participatory strategies move away from the predominant blue print style of project implementation to more flexible and adaptable approaches that are socially sensitive and can allow participation to evolve and shape itself in the context of its key stakeholders.

### **CHAPTER 3 - THE MILLENNIUM VILLAGE PROJECT**

This chapter will provide the background information on the most salient features of the Bonsaaso Millennium Village Project and cluster of villages in Ghana. The first section will examine the setting of the selected villages and its geography. Secondly, the social, cultural and political structures and characteristics of the villages will be examined.

Thirdly, the planning processes of the MVP project, which includes information about the planning processes and practices and what participatory techniques are being used for the projects. Also, some information will be contrasted between the District Assembly <sup>8</sup>(DA) and the Millennium Village Project.

#### **The Setting:**

##### **Ghana and the Millennium Village Project**

Ghana is one of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC)<sup>9</sup> in a region marked by conflict and instability. Over the past few years, economic activity has broadened. While agriculture continues to be a key sector, manufacturing and construction are emerging as

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<sup>8</sup> A District Assembly is the highest political and administrative authority at the grassroots level in Ghana created as a result of Ghana's decentralization program in 1989. The DA has deliberative, legislative and executive powers of governance. The Amansie West District Assembly is one of the 138 District Assemblies in Ghana and the only District with villages participating in the Millennium Village Project which is collaboration between UNDP, the Earth institute, Millennium promise and the Amansie West District Assembly. The District Assemblies are physically closer to the people and their development problems than central government and, theoretically, identify their problems and attempt to solve them. It was initiated 'to promote popular grassroots participation in the administration of the various areas concerned from the stand points of planning, implementation, monitoring and delivery of those services which go to improve the living conditions of the people in a fair and balanced development (Ghana, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) are a group of 37 developing countries with high levels of poverty and debt overhang which are eligible for special assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. To receive debt relief under HIPC, a country must first meet HIPC's threshold requirements (Wikipedia).

important contributors to the overall growth of the country. The existence of a large natural resource base and a substantial and substantive agrarian base are potentials expected to be harnessed effectively to reduce poverty. Poverty in Ghana is not only rural, but it is also largely agricultural in phenomena. More than 60 percent of Ghanaians live in rural areas. Poor rural people have limited access to basic social services and amenities, safe water, all-year roads, and electricity. Poverty is deepest among food crop farmers, who are mainly traditional small-scale producers. About six out of ten small-scale farmers are poor, and many of them are women (IFAD 2008).

In spite of numerous poverty reduction policies in the past decade, results are not as impressive as the rhetoric and the array of policies and plans. In recent years, a practical plan has been recommended by Jeffrey Sachs, that investments be made into development by integrating local people and their governments into the development process in order to achieve sustained development under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Sachs 2005). The MDGs, as they are popularly called, are the world's targets for dramatically reducing extreme poverty in its many dimensions by 2015: income poverty, hunger, disease, exclusion, lack of infrastructure and shelter, while promoting gender equality, education, health, and environmental sustainability<sup>10</sup>. One of the programs set under the MDGs is the Bonsaaso Millennium Village Project situated in the Amansie West District of the Ashanti Region in Ghana. The Millennium Village project seeks to end extreme poverty by working with the poorest of the poor, village by

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<sup>10</sup>See Millennium Development Goals. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

village, throughout Africa, in partnership with governments and other committed stakeholders, providing affordable and science-based solutions to help people lift themselves out of extreme poverty<sup>11</sup>.

As a result, 12 Millennium Villages were created and located in the following countries: Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda. The areas were selected to represent each of the agro-ecological zones in Sub-Saharan Africa and also in a reasonably well-governed and stable country, in a hunger hotspot, and an area with the highest rates of rural poverty and hunger. See Figure 4 below.

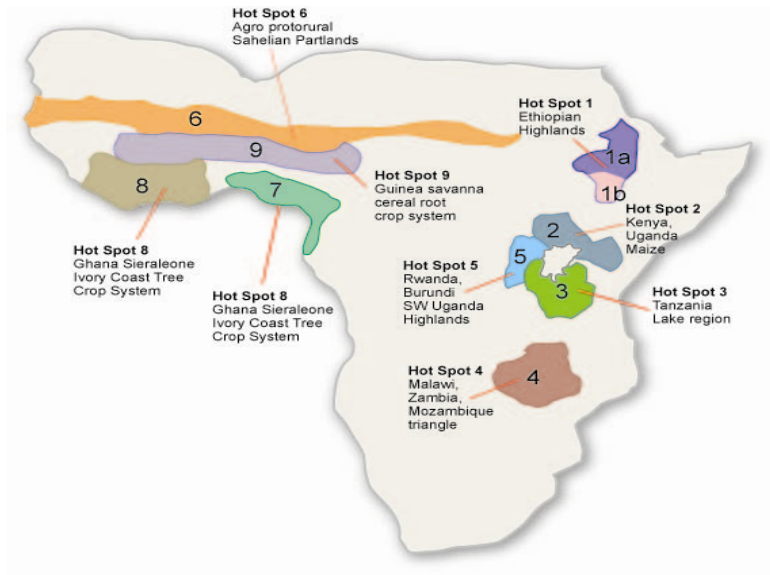


Figure 4: Location of the 12 Millennium Villages in Africa

Source: Millennium Project, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/mv/index.htm>

To this end, the Bonsaaso Millennium Village Project was created to meet the stipulated Millennium Development Goals. Although Bonsaaso is one of the villages selected for the Millennium Project in the Amansie West District, the name of the village was attached to the title of the project in Ghana for identification purposes. In this case, and with respect to this study, Bonsaaso Millennium Village refers to the Project, while the use of Bonsaaso only refers to one of clusters of villages with the project named Bonsaaso.

### **The Millennium Village Project Concept**

The Millennium Village Project (MVP) is a community-based approach to achieving the MDGs informed by the recommended priorities of the United Nations Millennium Project (UNMP)<sup>12</sup>. The MVP, developed as a proof of concept, is the brainchild of the Earth Institute headed by Jeffrey Sachs, a renowned economist. The project is conceptualized in response to the fact that many African countries have made considerable efforts in preparing their MDG (Millennium Development Goals) based on national strategies, but with many limitations to their implementation. As a demonstration project, its primary goal is to implement interventions recommended by the UN Millennium Project using an enhanced integrated approach. Based on the G8 Gleneagles 2005 Summit commitment to double official development assistance between 2005 and 2010, the MVP is being used as a pilot demonstration of how financial support

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<sup>12</sup> See the Millennium Villages Handbook ; Millennium Villages Project

could be used to accelerate achievement of the MDGs. The Millennium Village Handbook (2008) demonstrates that the project is a community-based approach embodied in the established and known principles of stakeholder participation. It also entails targeted action at the local level that accounts for local needs and priorities, garners political commitment and local ownership, and strategically utilizes the most appropriate level of government in order to achieve the goals. Within a broader concept of participation, the MVP adapts the United Nations Millennium Promise (UNMP) recommendations to its community-level context through five strategic priorities for community development. These are strategic and mutually reinforcing priorities such as:

- Institutionalizing participation in local development processes, within and among organizations, and throughout the project cycle for community development, in a manner that enables an inclusive process in all stages of realizing village-based action plans.
- Strengthen communities' capacity for collective action to manage a self-determined, multi-stakeholder development process.
- Develop a community-based information system (CBIS) to support a local level development practice by enabling communities to generate, utilize, and manage information tools and services to reach individual and collective development aims.



- Build up a cadre of change agents and develop their capacity in technical areas critical to the achievement of the MDGs, including participation and gender relations expertise.
- Enhance an enabling policy environment that supports community development at multiple levels within communities, the project, and local government.

The underlying operational principles of the MVPs suggest that developing country governments should adopt development strategies bold enough to meet the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets for 2015. While fulfilling the goals of the MDGs are crucial aspects of the project, the strategies to ensure that goals are met seems to come from a rather nonconventional approach to development. The approach is based on the idea that impoverished villages can transform themselves and meet the Millennium Development Goals if they are empowered with proven, powerful, practical technologies. The Earth Institute (2007) has given some four key premises to guide the Millennium Village Model, which are:

- Africa's long-term and self-sustaining economic development requires a combination of public and private investments. To this effect, the MVP supports a basic set of integrated, science-based and community-led investments in the following sectors: agriculture, education, health, energy, infrastructure, and environmental management;

- A major boost in agricultural productivity is a necessary condition for rural sub-Saharan Africa to escape extreme poverty. Therefore, the MVP puts its intervention priorities on science-based investments to boost yields first in staple crops, and subsequently in cash crops;
- The MDGs must enable the empowerment of communities on their own terms, with their own reference points, and under their own effort; and,
- The lessons learned from the villages must inform national policy and strategy making processes.

It also underscores the fact that the challenges facing poor people in developing countries are intertwined, and any effort to emancipate them from chronic poverty should include a comprehensive, but affordable, approach where all the MDGs are considered simultaneously. This financing model, adopted by MVP, is built on the premise that funding and implementing a Millennium Village is a shared effort between the Millennium Village initiative, other donors, local and national governments, NGOs and the village community. The project stipulates that:

“Each Millennium Village requires a donor investment of \$300,000 per year for five years. This includes a cost of \$250,000 per village per year (5,000 villagers per village multiplied by \$50 per villager) and an additional \$50,000 per village per year to cover logistical and operational costs associated with implementation,

community training, and monitoring and evaluation. Note that this level of external support is fully consistent with the 2005 G8 commitments for official development assistance to Africa by 2010. The other \$60 per villager per year will come from village members, local and national governments and partner organizations, making for total funding of \$110 per person per year.<sup>13</sup>”

The cost of village per person, per year is summed up in Figure 5 below. It shows that partner organizations are contributing \$20, local and national governments are contributing \$30, the Millennium Village initiative donors are paying \$50, while the village members are paying \$10. It should be noted that the villages are not expected to pay in cash, but in kind, through labor, with time, through natural resource provisions, etc.

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<sup>13</sup> See The financial Model for the MVPs - [http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/mv/mv\\_cost.htm](http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/mv/mv_cost.htm)



Figure 5: MVP Shared Funding Model

Source: Millennium Project, 2006.

### **General Community Baseline Information on the Bonsaaso Village Project**

The Bonsaaso Millennium Village is located in the Amansie West District in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. It lies between Latitudes 6° 5' and 6° 15' North and Longitudes 1° 7' and 2° 2' West, at an altitude of 210 meters above sea level. The project office is situated in the district capital of Manso-Nkwan, which is about 57km away from Kumasi, the capital of the Ashanti region. Currently, the project is operational in thirty villages from which seven were selected for this study. The thirty villages where the Millennium Village Project is currently operational are: Aboaboso, Adagya 1, Akyerekrekrom, Apenamadi, Bonsaaso, Brechakrom, Datano, Groso, Keniago, Kojonsiakrom, Manukrom, Nkrumakrom, Nyamebekyere, Taabosere, Tontokrom, Wonipanadue Yawkasakrom, Datano, Dadease, Takorase, Afraso, Asaamang, Ayiem, Edwenanse, Fahiakobo, Hiamankwa, Eseiemyem,

Dunhura, and Watreso. Figure 6 shows the map of Ghana indicating where Bonsaaso is and also shows all 30 villages in the Bonsaaso Millennium Village cluster.

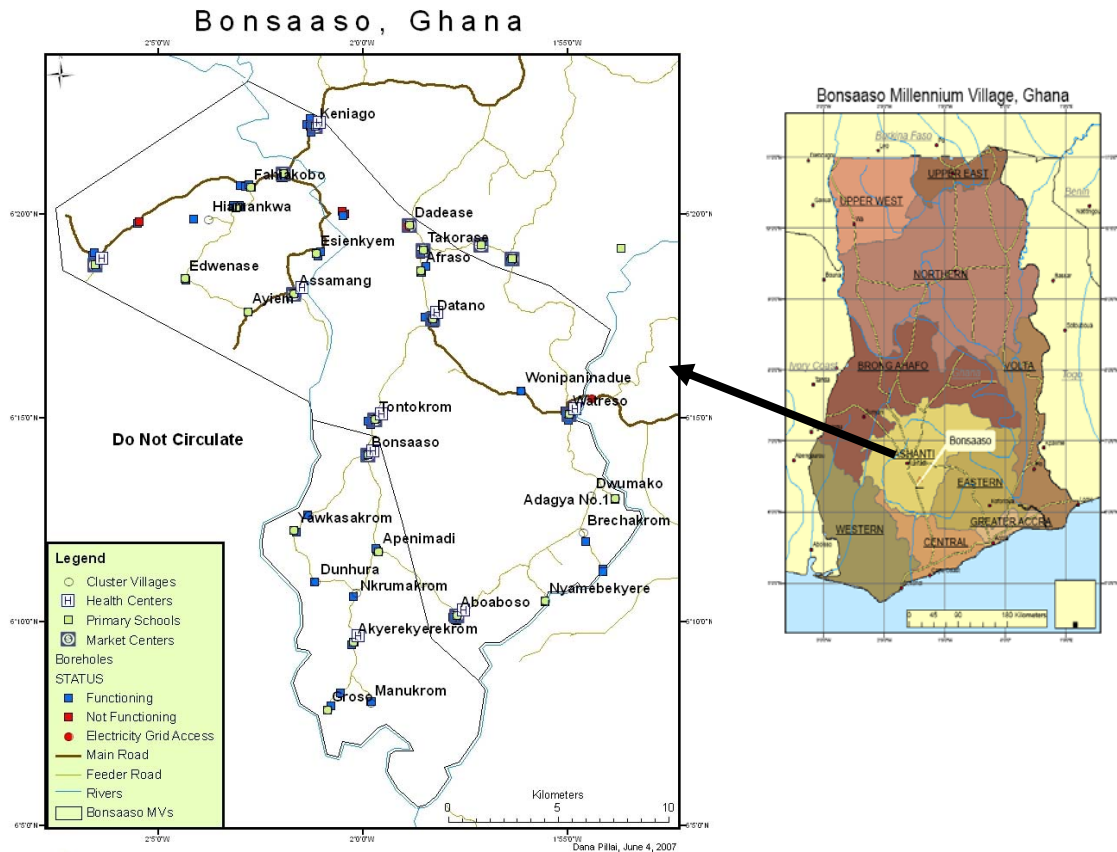


Figure 6: Maps showing Ghana and the Bonsaaso Millennium Cluster of Villages

Source: Earth Institute-Bonsaaso Millennium Village Project Baseline Report, 2008.

According to an MVP report, the criteria for choosing these villages for the Millennium Village Project were as follows:

- The villages should be located within the poverty hot zone of Ghana.
- The level of community enthusiasm for community project work should be high.

- There must be a close proximity of research institutions to the location.
- The District Assembly should be enthusiastic towards the community project.
- There must be ample accessibility to the villages.

With respect to the selected seven villages for the study, the greatest considerations, in addition to the aforementioned factors, were the presence of an on-going community-driven rural project using participatory processes to involve stakeholders within an active and involved rural society. The characteristics I considered in selecting the villages were their location in a poverty hotspot, village size, type of livelihood and being an active Millennium Village Project stakeholder.

### **Selected Research Villages**

First and foremost, I must indicate that background information for respective villages were very scanty and had to depend on oral traditions and some collected from the MVP file office. Information from the MVP project office also showed that the socio-economic and socio-political backgrounds of the areas are very similar. Nonetheless, I will present information gathered from the field through oral tradition. As earlier indicated, seven (7) out of thirty (30) villages within the cluster were selected for the study. The criteria for selecting the villages were primarily dependent on the type of livelihood, their proximity to the project center (i.e. Manso Nkwanta) and the population sizes of villages.

### Asaaman Village

Asaaman is one of the oldest towns in the Domi traditional area. The settlement shares a boundary with the Denkyira state in the central region. It has a population of 1,331 and 171 households. The predominant local economic activity is farming, with the illegal small scale mining as an important secondary activity, particularly patronized by the youth. In terms of hierarchy of settlement in the cluster, Asaaman is relatively important and enjoys a sphere of influence over many outlying communities.

### Edwinase Village

A small-sized rural settlement with a population of 762 people. The local inhabitants are all basically rural peasant farmers. The nearest rural marketing centre where local farmers exchange foodstuffs for semi-processed and manufactured goods is at Setwi-Bekwai (located in the western Region), about 32km away from Edwinase. The nearest clinic to Edwinase is at Keniago, 19 km away from the rural settlement. The ancestral home of the people is Nkoranza in the Brong-Ahafo Region, where they migrated from to settle at their present location. The strongest motivating factor for their migration was to undertake farming, which was and has always been a major occupation of the people. A strong traditional leadership offered by their ancestors (namely Fokuo and Kojo Amoah, Kwasi Nyame's nephew of Kojo Amoah, and the second occupant of the stool ruled for 20 years, while Kwaku Duah also enjoyed a reign of a total of 30 years) promoted a strong sense of unity among the people that facilitated a pioneering role in community

development. The original settlement consisted of 4 houses and about 40 people, including the Methodist and the Catholic churches.

#### Tontokrom Village

Tontokrom is a relatively big settlement with a population of 2,482 made up of 317 households. The settlement has the potential of a commercial outlook with illegal small-scale mining as a significant economic activity, which limits agricultural activity. The settlement has a clinic facility but needs rehabilitation. Historically, Tontokrom had been under the attack of diseases, including Guinea Worm and the Buruli Ulcer, which started in 1990 and 1965, respectively. There is an apparent breakdown of infrastructure, schools, health facilities, public toilets, and water supply, apparently due to the increasing pressure on facilities through significant increase in the migrant (mining) workers, mainly made up of youth.

#### Takorase Village

Takorase is a fairly big settlement with a population of 2, 674 and 219 households. The town was named after a big tree called Takora that was situated in the middle of the town. The tree was used as a gathering point for the leaders for their meetings. In terms of the hierarchy of settlement within the cluster, Takorase enjoys a relatively higher status with the potential for limited commercial activities. The local economy of the settlement is basically agriculture, within some of the women engaged in petty trading. Most of the



people are farmers and youth are into small-scale mining called galamsey (illegal small scale mining).

### Manukrom Village

Manukrom is a poor, relatively small community named after a woman called Maame Manu and has a population of about 300 people. The Manukrom is told to have migrated from Bonwire in the Ashanti Region and settled at Anwiaso, Denkyira. Due to the constant dispute between the Ashantis and the Denkyiras, the Manukrom y moved to settle at their present location within the Bonsaaso Village cluster. The village is one of the poorest communities within the cluster.

### Akyerekyerekrom Village

Akyerekyerekrom is also a community of about 880 people. The village was named after its founder, who, according to oral tradition, was very small and resembled an “akyerekyere,” which is a very small looking rodent. They migrated from Manso Nkwanta, Yawkrom and Atwere in the Amansie West District, with cocoa as the main grown cash crop. The community’s enthusiasm for participation in development projects is noted to be very high.

### Bonsaaso Village

Bonsaaso is also a community with a population of about 1,433 people. According to oral tradition, the community was named after the River Bonsaa, which is one of the major rivers in that part of the district. The people migrated from Denkyira in the central region. The main livelihoods for the villagers are mining (galamsey-illegal) and farming.

**Biophysical Characteristics of the Bonsaaso Cluster of Villages:**

The area falls within the equatorial climate zone with a rainfall regime which is typical of the moist, semi-deciduous forest zone. The rainfall pattern is bimodal with two well-defined rainfall seasons. The major season starts from mid-March and stretches to the end of July, with a peak fall in June, while the minor season commences in September and ends in mid-November. Between mid-November and mid-March, the main dry period is observed and brings the dry harmattan winds from the North Sahel Desert. Average annual rainfall ranges between 1200 mm and 1500 mm. The climate as a whole is cool and humid, with temperatures ranging between 23.0 and 29.0 °C, with mean monthly temperature values varying between 26- 27 °C. Mean absolute maximum and minimum temperatures are usually recorded in February and August, respectively (Adubia Weather Station 2007).

The soils in the area are reddish brown and moderately to well drained. The top-soil (first 10-20 cm) is dark reddish brown to yellowish red in color, characterized by slightly humus and porous loam. It contains occasional to frequent sub-angular quartz gravel and stones, which become abundant with depth. There are few to occasional ironstone concretions. The sub-soil is usually underlain by a slightly indurate substratum consisting of red mottled yellowish red clay. It contains few to rare ironstone concretions and patches of decomposed phyllite. Both the top- and sub-soils are characterized by a high content of stones and gravel, resulting from the break up during the weathering of veins

and stringers of quartz injected into the phyllite. The contents of quartz gravel and stones are variable, ranging from frequent to very abundant and are, in many parts, exposed due to soil erosion. The most dominant soil is the Mim series, or Ferric Luvisols (Asiamah 1998).

### **Livelihood Strategies**

Agriculture is the main livelihood in the Amansie West District. The agricultural sector alone employs about 82% of the total population in the district (comprising of about 80% of the men and 90% of the women). There are other livelihoods, which include professional workers such as teachers; nurses; commerce and service workers, such as those in the hair industry; tailoring; carpentry; furniture making; etc. (See Figure 7). There are very few administrative and management workers in the district. Although mining is prevalent in this region, it is most often overlooked as a formal livelihood because the majority of mining activities are illegal in nature. Almost all the mining companies and the galamsey operators are involved in surface or open pit mining, which contribute greatly to land devastation, soil degradation, pollution of water bodies and the immediate ecosystem, with the exception of the major mining companies, who most often recruit mine workers outside of the area.

Most farming households in the area depend on rain-fed agriculture. Their farms are small, individual holdings averaging usually one hectare or less. The cultivation of cocoa

and food crops continues to compete as an agricultural activity. It is estimated that about 75-80% of the total planted area is under cocoa cultivation, while the remaining 20-25% is under oil palm, fruits, vegetables and rare food crops (i.e. plantain, cocoyam, cassava, vegetables, etc.) as monoculture. Due to relative high prices of cocoa, the expansion of cocoa cultivation is both pushing crop farms further away from settlement areas and expanding the agricultural frontier to secondary forests.

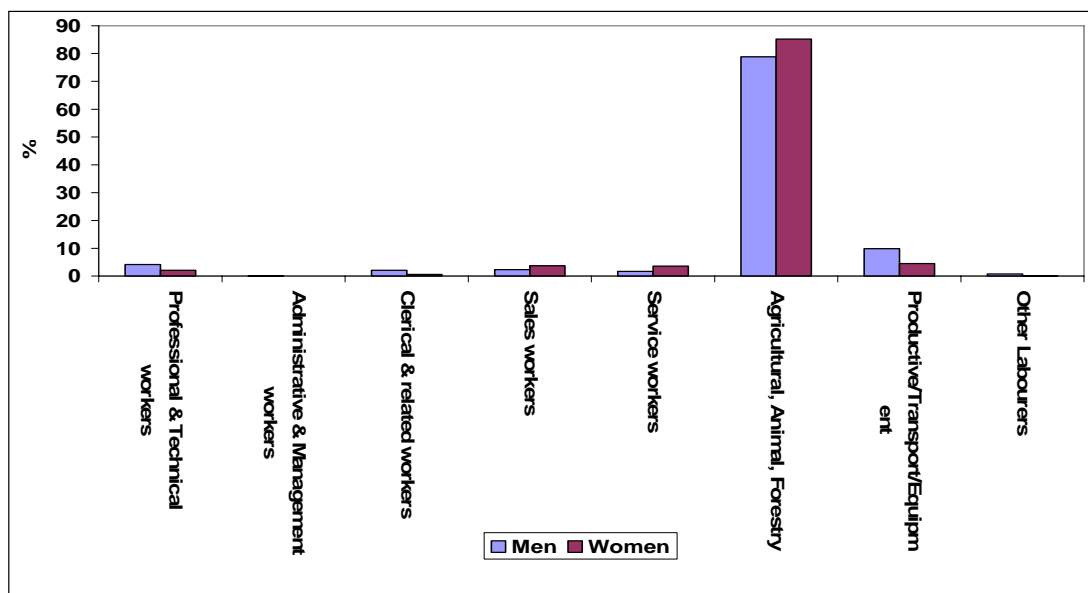


Figure 7: Livelihood Strategies for the Amansie West District  
Source: Ghana Statistical Service, 2005.

Poor planting materials, together with no usage of fertilizers, poor shade management and poor agricultural practices, have negatively affected yields. Yield levels are very low, from 200-400 kg of cocoa beans per hectare per annum. Fertilizers are used only by very few cocoa growers and usually when plantations are old and production levels are very low. Cocoa is purchased by authorized procurement companies, while most food crop

production is consumed locally. In some instances, part of the produce is sold in the large cities and towns, such as Kumasi, Obuasi, Bekwai, Dunkwa and elsewhere far beyond the borders of the region.

Cocoa production is based on two main types of labor: family labor and hired labor.

Family members, including men, women, children and extended family, carry out some activities such as pruning, bean collection and drying. Hired labor is employed either locally from the indigenous population or consists of migrants from the northern regions of the country to perform most farm activities (i.e. planting, weeding, pruning, bean collection, etc.). Cocoa farms in the area are managed using two very distinct management systems:

*a)* “Abunu” system: where a cocoa farm is divided equally between the landowner and the hired labor. The hired labor enjoys perpetual ownership of the land, including the cocoa grown on the land as legitimate entitlements/rewards for his/her role in developing the cocoa farms;

*b)* “Abusa” system: where a cocoa farm is handed over to the hired labor to take care of it, after the plantation is fully established. Hired labor is entitled to one-third ( $1/3$ ) of total proceeds after annual harvest and has no ownership rights over the land. This arrangement could be abrogated or terminated at the discretion of the landowner.

## **Household Characteristics**

The total population in the cluster of villages is about 30,000 people. Amongst them are 14,700 males and 15,300 females (MVP Population Data 2008). A typical household in the area is comprised by the head, spouse, children and other relatives. There are several types of household types within the cluster of villages. These include male-headed (with a single wife), male-headed (polygamous), male-headed (divorced or single, widower), female-headed (divorced, single or widower), female-headed widow (single), female-headed widow (polygamous), and female-headed (with husband away). Demographic reports prepared by MVP suggest that the male-headed households constitute the largest proportion of households, followed by female-headed households.

## **Poverty**

Poverty within the Bonsaaso Cluster of villages can be described using the old Akan adage, which states that, “the one wearing the shoe knows better where it pinches.” In general, the communities in Ghana have different, but definite, categories of poverty, which appear to be related more to the language used or ethnic group and sometimes gender. The Bonsaaso cluster of villages falls within the forest zone of Ghana with typical definitions and categories of poverty. These are:

- Ohia Bubroo – meaning “the very poor”

- Ahiafoo – meaning “the poor”
- Ahokyere – meaning “facing difficult times”
- Mmodembofoo – “potentially rich person,” but not necessary rich
- Asikafoo – meaning “the rich”
- Adefoo – meaning “the very rich”

Generally, however, the *Ahiafo* is the common term used to mean "poor people," who are unable to satisfy their needs. Most people in the cluster fall within the “very poor” and “the poor.” It is for this reason that the area attracted the Millennium Village Project with the goal of engaging the rural population to reduce poverty. The most frequently identified consequent impacts of poverty within the communities are the following:

- Physical - ill-health, death, food insecurity
- Psychological - stress, madness, broken homes
- Behavioral or Social - theft, crime, alcoholism, prostitution, illiteracy and high school dropout.



## Wealth Classes

The available data on wealth indicators suggests that perception of women and men on wealth in these villages differ. Table 3 summarizes perceptions of wealth indicators according to gender.

Table 3: Wealth Indicators according to Gender

Men	Women	Both
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage in kiosk operation (provision stores)</li> <li>• Engage in drinking bar operation</li> <li>• Owner of local transport facility</li> <li>• Engage in cocoa purchasing business</li> <li>• The quality and quantity of housing units owned</li> <li>• The size and number of farms</li> <li>• Number of farm laborers permanently engaged</li> <li>• The number traditional “kente,” or mourning clothes, owned</li> <li>• The size of extended family dependants</li> <li>• Engage in money lending business</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage in petty trading activities</li> <li>• Engage in chop bar operations</li> <li>• The quality of cooking utensils owned</li> <li>• Number and quality of clothes and headgear (for church services, mourning, etc.)</li> <li>• Number and quality of jewelry owned</li> <li>• Size and number of farms owned</li> <li>• Type of house owned</li> <li>• Degree of financial independence and self supportive</li> <li>• Engage in money lending business</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Size of farm owned</li> <li>• Farmland ownership</li> <li>• Sponsor children’s education</li> <li>• Ability to donate at church and other public events</li> <li>• Ability to feed family members, i.e. children, even during the lean agricultural season</li> <li>• Persistent increase in annual crop production and sales</li> <li>• Engage in money lending business</li> </ul>

Source: Earth Institute-Bonsaaso MVP Institutional Analysis Report, 2007.

The MVP Annual Report of 2007 on Bonsaaso (one of the villages selected for the study) revealed this categorization, which according to the project staff, is a reflection of the entire villages in the cluster. Class A is the upper tier, followed by Class B, which is the lower upper tier, Class C, which is the medium tier and Class D is the lower tier. It is important to note that a majority of the population falls within class C and D. Table 4 shows the various classes of wealth in the Bonsaaso village. It is also important to note that the population of class B is represented higher than class D, which represents the very poor. Further discussions with the project staff indicated that Class D populations seem to be reducing, which was a probable indication that the project is benefiting some of the very poor who might have improved their status to Class C. It would be very interesting to study how these wealth classes change over time.

Table 4: Wealth Classes in the Bonsaaso Village

Bonsaaso Village			
Class A	Class B	Class C	Class D
16%	25%	36%	23%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harvests 20-60 bags of cocoa (\$60.5 per annum) per annum</li> <li>• Harvests 15 bags of maize (average of \$27 per bag) in a planting season</li> <li>• 50 bags of cassava</li> <li>• 6 baskets of vegetables</li> <li>• 10 bags of rice</li> <li>• 10 bags of plantain per annum</li> <li>• Has money during lean season</li> <li>• Can sponsor children's education to secondary level and higher</li> <li>• Has house outside community</li> <li>• Manages local poultry, in addition to farming.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harvests 10-15 bags of cocoa (\$60.5 per bag) per annum</li> <li>• Harvests 8 bags of maize(average of \$27 per bag) per annum</li> <li>• 15-20 bags of cassava, 4 baskets of vegetables</li> <li>• 4 bags of rice</li> <li>• 5 bags of plantain</li> <li>• about 3 acres of palm plantation</li> <li>• Has money during lean season</li> <li>• Can sponsor children education to secondary level</li> <li>• Owners of chain-saw machines</li> <li>• Engages in petty trading, drinking bar operator</li> <li>• Can feed the family 3 times a day during the lean season with little difficulty.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harvests 5-7 bags of cocoa(\$302.5 - \$423.5) per annum</li> <li>• Harvests 4 bags of maize (average of \$27 per bag) per annum</li> <li>• 8-10 bags of cassava</li> <li>• 2 baskets of vegetables</li> <li>• 2 bags of rice</li> <li>• 3 bags of plantain, about 1 acres of palm plantation</li> <li>• Can feed the family mostly 2 times a day during the lean session</li> <li>• Can sponsor children's education at only the basic level</li> <li>• Can sometimes feed the family once a day especially during the lean season (May to September)</li> <li>• Mostly casual labors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harvests 1-2 bags of cocoa (\$60.5 - \$121) per annum</li> <li>• Harvests 1 bag of maize(average price of \$27) per annum</li> <li>• 5-7 bags of cassava</li> <li>• 1/2 baskets of vegetables</li> <li>• 1 bag of plantain</li> <li>• Sick, apprentice, under employment,</li> <li>• Find it difficult to provide basic school needs for their children. Children mostly walk bare footed to school.</li> </ul>

Source: Earth Institute-Bonsaaso MVP Institutional Analysis Report, 2007.

## **The Manso-Nkwanta Traditional Area**

The selected villages for the study fall under the Manso-Nkwanta traditional area under the chieftaincy of Nana Bi-Kusi Appiah II, Omanhene of the Manso-Nkwanta Traditional Area. According to oral sources, the history of the traditional area goes back to the immediate period following the Ashanti-Denkyira war of 1699-1700. The Asantehene decided to settle some Ashanti warriors close to the borders of Denkyira, southward of Manso-Nkwanta. The site was strategic for watching movements of travelers and potential enemies of Ashanti, especially the people of Denkyira, due to its special hilly geographical area. Other oral sources claim the growth in the population of the Manso-Nkwanta traditional area to the discovery of alluvial gold.

According to Guri (2006), the traditional authority system comprises of:

- Chiefs (Ohene)
- Queen mothers (Ohemia)
- Linguists (Akyeame)
- Family / lineage / or clan heads (Abusuapanyin)
- Heads of Asafo Companies (Asafohene)
- Priests and Priestesses (Okomfo)

These groups, collectively and individually, command a lot of influence in both the urban and rural areas because they are considered as the people, with customary legitimacy in

those areas of jurisdiction and, therefore, can be seen as important unifying and stabilizing factors in local governance. They also proved to be a very important source of mobilization of physical, human and financial resources for local development. It is in this capacity that they are to provide resources for projects as those provided for the implementation of the Millennium Village Project. The functions of the traditional system are legislative, executive, judicial and spiritual. The legislative function of the traditional system is conducted through the chiefs, in consultation with their elders, to make the rules governing the social, economic and political life of the communities, including the exploitation of resources. Their executive function as chiefs is to see to the day-to-day running of communities. The chiefs also play crucial roles in governance at local levels by interpreting rules and laws governing the social, economic, and political life, as well give judgment in arbitration. In consultation with the priests and priestesses, the chief plays his spiritual function by serving as an intermediary between the living and the dead. The chief and the fetish priest are seen as powerful symbols of authority and they could evoke sanctions on members. It is by this spiritual authority that the chief can mobilize all the people for communal work.

The Manso-Nkwanta traditional area predominantly follows the Asante tradition kinship system, which is the largest in the country. A matrilineal system of kinship is followed where inheritance and succession is passed along the female line. Villages have prescribed statuses and roles, and also determined the rules, duties and obligations of individuals for interaction through kinship relationships. Nukunya (2003) has suggested that kinship is the basis for the

organization for many groups and relationships in Ghana. There are two main descent groups, namely clans and lineages, within the traditional area. The fundamental principle of the Ashanti kinship structure is summed up in the concept of abusua, where people are bonded together through the lineage of their mothers, not fathers. In this case, the father and child do not belong to the same abusua. The basis of the father-child relationship is rather based on another system called the ntoro, which is named the group whose membership is acquired through partification (Rattray 1929). Associated with this is the belief that while the child obtains his/her blood from the mother, his/her spirit and personality is derived from the father. Unfortunately, this kinship system tends to weaken, following development and the arrival of migrants. Inheritance from fathers goes to their nephews, rather than sons, which has serious implications on wealth creation, particularly among women. This explains the reason why traditionally women are disadvantaged in the development process.

## **Gender Issues**

Although women form the majority in population, as already indicated, they form the most disadvantaged. This directly ties to the centrality of land as a resource for livelihood and social recognition. Women's unequal land rights affect their access to other resources and their economic, social and political status. Particularly in agriculture, women's interests in family lands are limited. They often are given land of poor quality and size. In situations of marital conflict or divorce, the insecurity of a wife's interest in land belonging to her husband becomes quite clear because customary law does not

recognize marital property or non-monetary contributions to the acquisition of property during marriage. On the question of education levels, there are big differences between men and women. According to The Ghana Living Standards Survey in 2000 (GLSS 4), 44.1% of women, as opposed to 21.1% of men, have no formal education. Given that formal sector employment now requires secondary or higher levels of education, it follows that women are disadvantaged in terms of access to work in this sector.

Also, in spite of the pivotal role Ghanaian women play within the family, community and society at large, they do not occupy key decision-making positions in any of the sectors of economic, political and social life. They are relegated to the background, as far as public decision-making is concerned. This is because no concrete policy measures are in place to ensure that the structural inequalities between women and men are taken into account in promoting participation in development decisions. Traditional prejudices, beliefs and perceptions, gender discrimination and low levels of literacy have contributed to the low level of women's participation in the developmental decision-making process. Within communities, there are several norms and practices, which are for the purposes of social control. Apart from defining the roles of women and men, these norms also determine the space within which women and men operate. Often, the space women occupy is constrained by norms which control their presence in the public sphere. In community decision-making, women's voices are muted. In some situations, they are either not allowed to speak in public when men are present or are expected to express their views privately or through men. This characteristic of the traditional woman is

sometimes perpetuated by local practices and proverbs, such as “women are to be seen and not to be heard,” reinforce these practices, which automatically strengthen the community decision-making power of men. Unfortunately, women who do not conform to these rules find themselves accused of immorality or witchcraft and have to face sanctions and humiliation.

On the other hand, women’s participation at community forums is showing some improvement according to an MVP staff. What is lacking is the inability of women to accept leadership positions that could facilitate effective mobilization to support gender intervention. The reason for this inertia is likely due to the rather low literacy rate among women in the community, which influences their confidence in public life.

### **Ethnicity and Religion**

The population is made up of four main ethnic groups, which are the Akans, Northerners, Ewe and Ga. The Akans form the majority, followed by Northerners, Ewe and Ga, respectively. Also, the population is predominantly made up of Christians, followed by traditional worship groups, and Muslim. Dominant churches in the area include: Roman Catholics, Pentecostals and Methodists.



## **Village Governance and Traditional Structures**

The coexistence of the traditional governance systems with that of the formal, decentralized structures continues to challenge village and local governance in Ghana. Ghana is divided into ten administrative regions, with each region headed by an appointed Regional Minister supported by District Assemblies, councils and unit committees. Refer to Figure 8 showing the order of hierarchies in the decentralized system of government. The Unit Committee was formed in 1994 through a Legislative Instrument, which derived its authority from the Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462). The Unit Committee was put in place to deepen the decentralization structures, as part of the government's effort to improve the process of development decision-making and make the local government more relevant and effective. On the other hand, at the village level, governance is operated within the embodiment of the Chief, who is the head of the traditional authority and his council of elders. Every village has a Chief and Council of Elders who continue to command power and influence in decisions made at the village level. Chiefs continue to play an effective role in community initiatives, community planning and resource mobilization for development. Community initiatives that have the personal involvement of the chief tend to receive more attention and importance, and therefore, tend to be more successful than initiatives promoted without them.

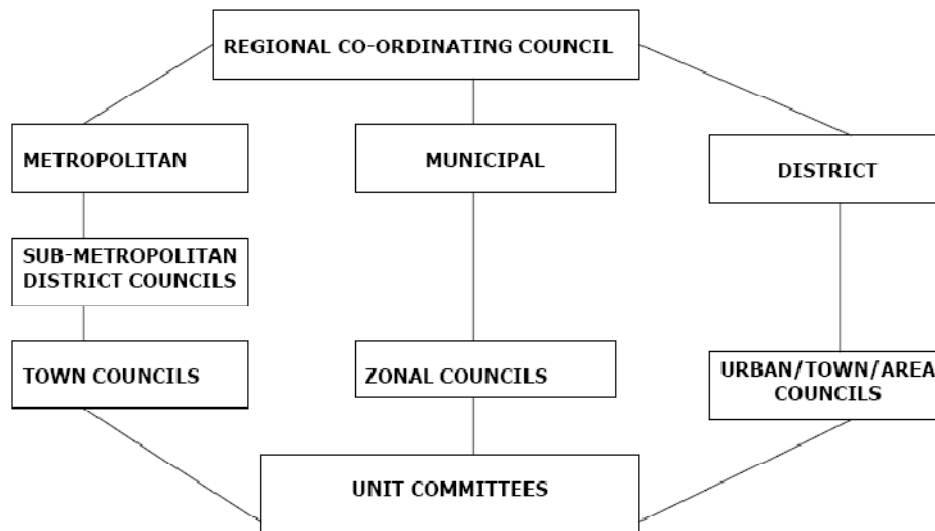


Figure 8: Ghana Local Government Structure

Source: Adapted from the Ghana Local Government Structure, 1996.

Whereas the decentralized local government system makes constitutional demands for communities in planning, implementing, and managing local development programs within the framework of development imperative, the village traditional governance is rooted in the social structure and controlled by indigenous or traditional norms and institutions. Figure 9 shows the local governance structure and its roles in the traditional system of authority and decision-making.

TITLES	FUNCTIONS
Paramount Chief – Omanhene (Inherited, President of the Traditional Council)	Maintenance of Law and Order, Settlement of Disputes Community Policy, Oversight Responsibility over the Development of Subsisting Communities
Village Chief (Inherited)	Land Administration on behalf of the Paramouncy, Settlement of Family, Marriage and Land Disputes, Initiate Development Programs
Village Elders Appointed and some inherited	Advise Village Chief management and Land Administration, Assist in the implementation of community projects
Assembly Members (Elected)	Articulate the development concerns of the community. Seek settlement in defined jurisdiction, Provide a liaison between the District Assembly and the local community
Unit Committees (Elected and Appointed)	Undertake educational campaigns, organize communal labor, raise revenue, ensure environmental cleanliness, register births and deaths, implement and monitor self help project

Figure 9: Local Governance Structure (Mixture of both formal and informal)  
Source: Earth Institute-Bonsaaso MVP Institutional Analysis Report, 2007.

The Millennium Village Project, as an operational strategy, combines some of the roles of the District Assembly and that of the traditional authority to support the goals of the projects. By doing so, the fifteen (15) Assembly members, 3 Area Councils and 34 Unit Committees representing the various villages within the District Assembly are amalgamated into a sectoral committee with the goal of bringing all stakeholders to discuss development at the village level. However unfortunate, since the amalgamation of the unit committees and the MVP sector committees is not backed by any law, it has created parallel institutions collectively responsible for offering progressive leadership to local communities as indicated in Figure 10. Consequently, the sub-district structures or

unit committees and the traditional council now play parallel role, which hitherto, were the role of the chief and his council as vanguards of community development. The parallel institutions represent potential sources of rivalry and tension between two main power centers i.e. traditional chief and Unit Committees and Assembly members. On the other hand, the institutional set-up between traditional chieftaincy institution and local government sub-district structures offers tremendous opportunity for harnessing available human resources capable of providing collective leadership to facilitate consistent community development.

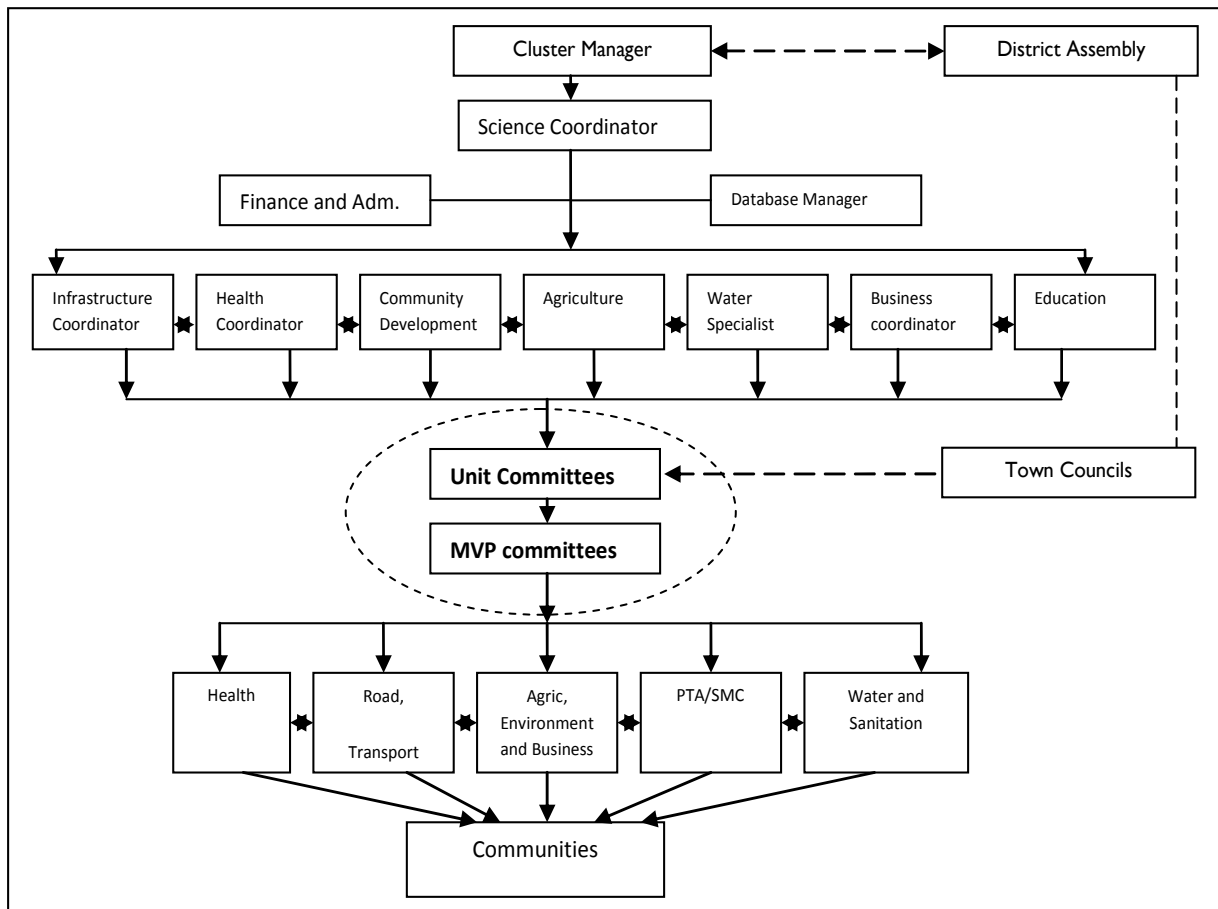


Figure 10: Mapping the MVP Sectoral Committees with the District Unit Committees

Source: Own Research based on Interviews

One major role of these village committees (sector, unit and traditional) is to ensure participation in the preparation and implementation of community actions plans (CAP). The Village Committee Action Plans is an action plan detailing the ‘what needs to be done (activities), ‘when’ it is supposed to be done, ‘who’ is to do it, ‘how’ it is supposed to be done, and ‘how much’ it will cost to do it. This involves the entire community in setting up community goals. The steps toward preparing the community action plan

included a brainstorming session to guide the village committee and community members to identify the development opportunities and problems present in the community. After the preparation of the action plans, it is important that the plan is reviewed by the whole community in a meeting. Necessary changes can be made to the plan, and final approval made for its adoption and immediate implementation. The community action plan process is shown in Figure 11.

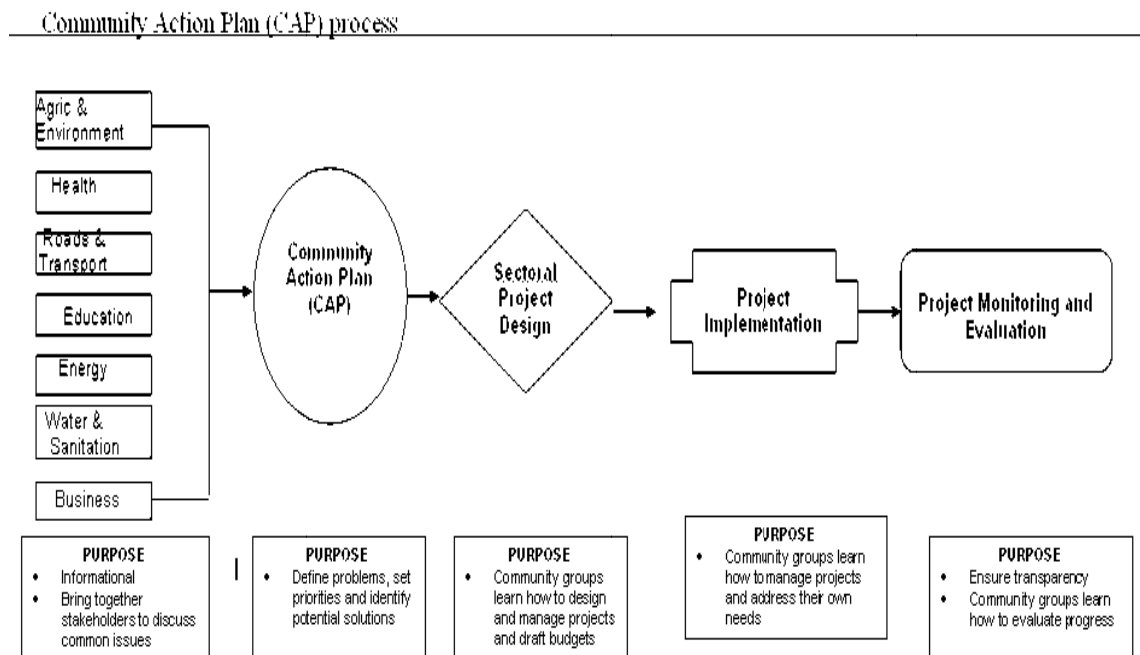


Figure11: The Community Action Plan (CAP) Process  
Source: Earth Institute-Bonsaaso MVP Institutional Analysis Report, 2007.

Participatory tools used during the CAP preparation include durbars, meetings, observations, focus group discussions, semi-structured questionnaire / interviews, historical profiling of communities and cognitive approaches in creating asset based maps (see figure 12). Generally Participatory Rural Assessments (PRA) procedures are followed. PRA tools offer tremendous opportunity for participation in the development decision making process for local communities. Through PRA exercises, the cluster team and local communities are able to forge some sort of partnership for community development. The goal is to ensure that the final output of the CAP adequately reflect the interests, and addresses the priority of the project beneficiaries. Although using the CAP is an important step to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of investments and to promote processes of empowerment there is little evidence of its effectiveness in identifying vulnerable and socially marginalized groups.

Moreover, it is not very clear exactly who is being empowered. Is it the individual, community or categories of groups such as the poor, rural elites, or the socially excluded? Finding ways with which different categories exercise agency is highly essential. Then again, the CAP as a procedure needs to better understand the non-project nature of the local people and their complex livelihood interlinkages and the potential for unintended consequences arising from the Millennium Village Project. Also the CAP fails to adequately address issues of power and control. Understanding the intricate complex interplay of informal and formal institutions could be highlighted.

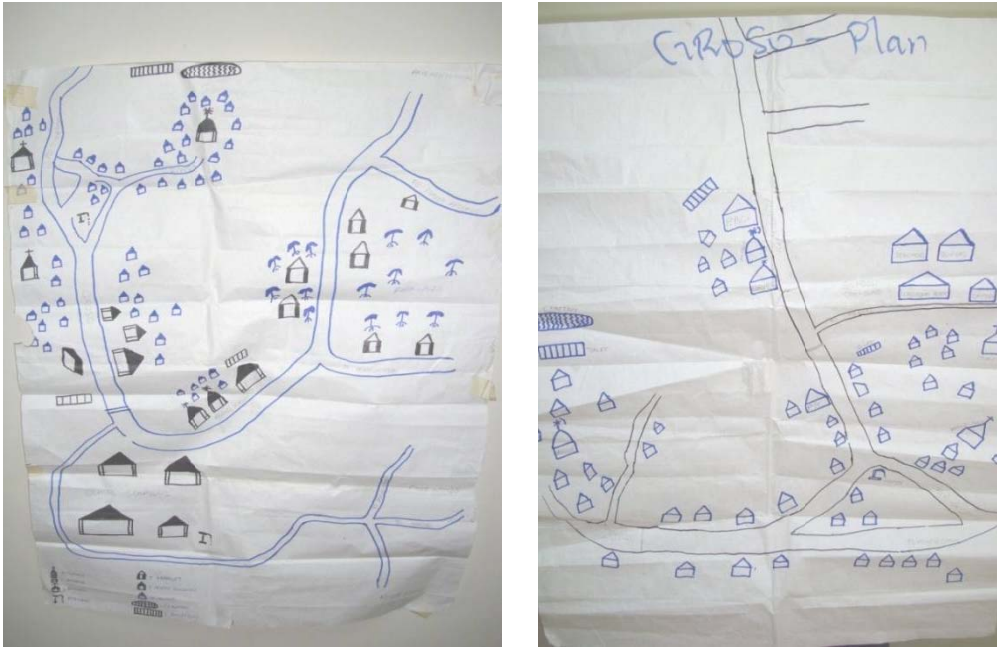


Figure 12: Samples of Asset Based Cognitive Maps

Source: Earth Institute-Bonsaaso MVP Community Action Plan Reports, 2007.



## **CHAPTER 4 - RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN**

In this chapter, I will explain the development and rationale behind the research design. I discuss the key descriptions concerning the overall research design and methodology for understanding participation in project intervention and also capture some of the complexities in participatory development. The study is mainly descriptive in helping us understand the implicit issues that may be of importance to practitioners in the field. I also discuss the research techniques and sources of information.

### **Research Questions**

For this study, I use qualitative research methods since the underlying problem is comprised of a number of complex relationships where people's actions are to be understood from the subjects' perspectives (Bryman 1989). I was guided by these questions:

- (i) What perceptions exist on communities' historical experiences in participatory development?
- (ii) How is participation occurring in the selected villages?

- (iii) How do the selected villages perceive and interpret participation?
- (iv) What are the perceptions of their motivation?

### **Choosing a Qualitative Approach**

Qualitative methodologies are useful because they are persuasive and acquire a degree of permissibility that fits the cultural context of the selected villages in Ghana. A qualitative approach was selected for this research because of its ability to help people understand and interpret the social world with methods of analysis that involve understandings of complexity, detail and context (Mason 1996; Yin 2003; Patton 2002; Creswell 1998). Glesne (1998) noted that, “the research methods you choose say something about your views on what qualifies as valuable knowledge and your perspective on the nature of reality or ontology” (4).

Rubin and Rubin (2005) have suggested that qualitative approaches consider both sides of the issue and observing life from separate, yet overlapping, angles makes the researcher more hesitant to leap to conclusions and encourage a more nuanced analysis. The constructivist posits that reality is constructed through human interaction and also assumes individuals seek to understand their surroundings through direct experience (Kukla 2000; Fox 2001; Crotty 1998; Smith 1995; Okrah 1999). As a researcher, I naturally ask questions about how useful and how valuable an activity such as participation is, within the historical environment of the study setting. By applying

qualitative methods, I was able to gather intricate information on people's participation in the Bonsaaso Millennium Villages Projects and even able to go beyond that and understand why they participate, and even the extent to which they interpreted participation.

Placing the research within a qualitative approach helped me make sense to the varied socially constructed experiences explained by the interviewees. I selected a naturalistic approach to allow an investigation based on multiple perspectives. Since, the focus of this study is to understand and analyze the perceptions of different groups of people, it was an obvious choice to allow participants to voice their opinion. Listening to interviewees from the selected villages, the District Assembly and project officials in many ways helped me understand the various dimensions of participation and how varied participation can be interpreted by various project stakeholders. Within a holistic perspective approach, a broader and holistic way of gathering information was used for this study. Patton (2002) has indicated that the advantages of qualitative portrayals of holistic settings and impacts are that greater attention can be given to nuances, settings, interdependencies, complexities, idiosyncrasies, and contexts. In this case, I did not focus narrowly on specific aspects of the concept of participation but was able to broaden investigation involving key people for multiple and varied perceptions.

## **Grounded Theory**

To ensure a strong research design, I chose a research paradigm that is congruent with my beliefs about the nature of reality. I employed principles of grounded theory to guide data collection and analysis. Originally developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), I used grounded theory's purposive sampling to guide my selection of participants. Creswell describes that data "collection is a zigzag process, where data is gathered out from the field, information is gathered, data is analyzed, and the researcher goes back to the field to gather some more information and goes on and on" (Creswell 1988). I performed open coding, as suggested by Straus and Glaser (1967), to capture as closely as possible what participants deem significant and also what led to the identification of concepts. I identified emergent concepts and used them for further questioning (Dey 1999).

I adopted grounded theory approaches such as observation, conversation and interviews to gather information for the research. I conducted focus groups to gather information from the community groups such as leaders, women, and the youth. One-on-one interviews were also used to gather information from individuals and other participants who wanted to remain anonymous. I took notes during the interviews, and, where possible, recorded them using voice recorders. Voice recorders were necessary particularly during the focus group meetings because it allowed the discussions to move on with little control. Notes were taken using notebooks so that comparisons would be

made with the recoded data. Much attention was taken to not allow the data gathering to interrupt developing rapport with the participants.

### **Site Selection**

Selecting the site for research depended particularly on my research interest and what I wanted to learn in the process. Glesne (1998) suggests that in locating sites for research, the researcher's interest and learning goals are crucial. Although there are thirty (30) villages within the Bonsaaso Millennium Cluster of Villages, seven (7) were selected for interviews. This short listing was informed by Patton (2002), who comments that there is no rule of thumb that exists to tell a researcher precisely how to focus a study. Also, the greatest consideration, in addition to the aforementioned factors, was the necessary presence of an on-going community-driven rural project using participatory processes to involve stakeholders within an active and involving rural society. The characteristics I considered in selecting the villages were their location in a poverty hotspot, village size, type of livelihood and being a stakeholder to the Millennium Village Project. Although all the villages were situated within a poverty hotspot, some of the villages were larger than others. I therefore selected two relatively larger villages, three relatively smaller villages and two smaller villages. I also found out that while some these villages were predominantly dependent on agriculture as a livelihood, some of the villages rather depended on small-scale mining. The smaller villages were typically farmers, while the big villages combined small-scale mining with farming.

## **Gaining Entry**

My deepest concern was how to gain access and entry on the field. Glesne (39) suggests that access is a process. It refers to “your acquisition of consent to go where you want, observe what you want, talk to whomever you want, obtain and read whatever documents you require, and do all of this for whatever period of time you need to satisfy your research purposes.” I followed Lofland and Lofland’s (1984) instruction that researchers are more likely to gain successful access to situations if they make use of contacts that can help remove barriers to entrance, if they avoid wasting respondents’ time by doing advance research for information that is already part of the public record, and if they treat respondents with courtesy. Before getting to the field, I made several contacts with the District Assembly and also the MVP office at Manso Nkwanta. As a native to the area, I used personal contacts via telephone calls to establish some rapport with some of the knowledgeable elderly persons in the villages before going to the field. Letters of introduction were also received from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). They served as a clearance note for almost every place that I visited. After participants agreed to be interviewed, I made appointments to conduct the interviews within an agreed-upon and stipulated period of time based on their availability.

## **Data Collection Techniques and Procedures**

### **Deciding on Techniques:**

Deciding on data collection techniques is one of the most important aspects of any research. In order to gain a broad understanding of the underlying reasons and motivations for participation, I adopted mainly qualitative research techniques. Eisner (1991) claims there are a "paucity of methodological prescriptions" for qualitative research, because such inquiry places a premium on the strengths of the researcher rather than on standardization (169). Since the study was more exploratory and more in the form of inquiry that analyzes information through language and behavior in natural settings, tools that capture expressive information that may not be conveyed in quantitative formats were necessary.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the use of qualitative research tools to capture expressive information not conveyed in quantitative data about beliefs, values, feelings, and motivations that underlie behaviors. Harmon & Gleason (2006), studying the opportunities and challenges of using a remotely operated vehicle (ROV), included qualitative tools to gather perceptions from individuals to help understand their expressions on the use of ROVs and the natural environment. It would, therefore, be imperative for a study like this to focus on qualitative tools in studying participation of local people in rural projects within culturally sensitive locations. Applying tools such as interviewing, observation and focus groups can provide invaluable practical information.

## **Sampling Frame**

I interviewed one hundred and eighteen (118) interviewees in this study. A preliminary investigation on stakeholder participation has revealed that researchers have to look for specific individuals and contact persons who have an in-depth knowledge about the phenomenon under review. This was in cognizance of Rubin and Rubin's (2005) emphasis that to ensure credibility of research, the researcher should interview people who understand and have deeper information on the issue. They also conclude that the credibility of the interviews depends on the knowledge of the interviewees or participants of the study. It confirms that selecting an interviewee with varied perspectives can add to the richness and quality of information. I used purposeful and snowball sampling approaches to choose my interviewees. While purposive sampling allows you to select a sufficient number of particular cases to provide enough in-depth information for you to build a credible analysis of the issue under study, snowball sampling allows the researcher to inquire where, or from whom, to obtain the best information in exploratory research. Patton (2002) has noted that the logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for the study. Information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about on an issue of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry.

Since the knowledge base of interviewees was key to the study, a set of criteria was designed to assist the selection of interviewees. These included the following:



- a. Participant lives in a Millennium Village
- b. Participant has a background knowledge of the village
- c. Participant has lived in the area before the commencement of the project and may or may not be participating in the project
- d. Participant may or may not be involved in local decision-making
- e. Participants are aware of the activities going on in their villages and also understand the goals and objectives for constructing those projects

Finding the most knowledgeable interviewees who have ample knowledge on how the Millennium Village Project operates was a challenge from the start. However I employed snowball sampling procedures to help identify interviewees with most information regarding the historical and background participatory experiences of the communities. I made use of a preliminary interview process where I focused on inquiring who would most often be most knowledgeable in villages with regards to community development processes. I was told that meeting the chiefs and his elders before beginning any interviews is one good and appropriate way of getting to know those who are most knowledgeable. Some of the interviews mentioned that the most knowledgeable people are most often among the elders surrounding the chief. However, having access to their needs requires the researcher to follow the necessary local visiting protocols, some of which are making an appointment before coming to meet the chief and his elders, and also meeting the chief and his elders as first contact when one gets to the village. Where necessary, I gave a bottle of local wine to the chief as a token gift and to ensure access to

information. Then again, at the end of each interview, I asked participants to identify knowledgeable people who may have information about the participatory experiences of the community and the MVP participatory processes. Snowballing assisted me in identifying very informative elderly persons who otherwise may not have spoken to me.

One of the major challenges faced on the field was when to decide to stop sampling. Guba (1978) has suggested few strict guidelines for when researchers can stop sampling. The criteria included: i) exhaustion of resources; ii) emergence of regularities; and iii) overextension, or going too far beyond the boundaries of the research. With respect to this study, the decision to stop sampling was based on achieving enough data to help respond adequately to my research questions.

## **Interviews**

Rubin & Rubin (2005) describe interviewing as the art of hearing data so that the researcher gets insights into the multiple perspectives of the different interviewees. Interviewing gives the interviewer the opportunity to establish a personal relationship with interviewees in order to obtain the necessary information for the study. Qualitative interviewing is a systematic process of asking and answering questions toward the end view of better understanding a given problem and finding appropriate steps for its resolution (Glesne 1998). This technique of interviews was resorted to because my goal was to understand interviewees' perspectives on participation and the various dimensions

that it can be understood. The three basic types of qualitative interviewing identified are: a) informal, conversational interviews; b) semi-structured interviews; and c) standardized, open-ended interviews (Patton 2002). Some scholars suggest that open-ended interviews should be guided with an interview schedule. The interview guide was a very helpful schedule, particularly when dealing with active groups who can easily sway discussions to issues that may not be important to the study (Rubin & Rubin 2005; Patton 2002; Glesne 1998).

I also designed an interview guide based on predetermined thoughts and other issues that I find important to investigate. This is sometimes referred to as a "schedule" or "interview guide," which comprises of general issues and topics that the researcher wants to explore during each interview. It helped me ensure consistency, especially when engaging interviews in the selected seven (7) different local communities. Efforts were made to capture their responses in a comprehensive manner. Unclear questions were repeated for participants to understand the questions before answering.

## **Focus Groups**

The use of focus groups provided a forum for leaders and women groups. They were able to discuss issues together, which provided richer insights and a wider range of information. Grouping interviewees according to gender was most helpful. It was interesting to find out that some of the female participants were much more vocal and informative when interviewed one-on-one and during the female forum. In most cases, the women groups were extremely informative and active in discussions, but that was lacking when their male counterparts were present.

## **Recording Data**

I used a digital recorder to record most interviews. Although I did not use digital recorders for every interview, it was found to be a helpful tool for this study. The use of recorders in qualitative research is, however, debatable. While Patton (1990) comments that a tape recorder is "indispensable," Lincoln and Guba (1985), on the other hand, do not recommend recording except for unusual reasons. Lincoln and Guba argue that recorders are intrusive and there are possibilities of technical failure, which could be very disastrous for the researcher. Although these limitations are real, the exceptional usefulness of recorders cannot be underestimated. The potential of a recorder was much tested, particularly when discussions on the interpretations of participation began. The use of focus groups necessitated the use of recorders. It was important that discussions

were allowed to move on without active control and allow the focus group to discuss as freely as possible. In this case, I had to use recorders so I could be free enough to observe how people were participating in the discussion and most importantly to be able to capture the entire discussion.

There were, however, cases where recorders were not allowed. In such situations, I took notes. For instance, my conversations with some of the chiefs were done without a recorder. Reasons were not given. In essence, the recorder allowed me to capture data more efficiently than hurriedly written notes might and also made it easier for me to focus on the discussions.

### **Methods of Analysis**

As earlier mentioned, this study applied principles of grounded theory during the collection of data, as well as during the analysis of data. I worked with data, organized it, broke it into manageable units, synthesized it, and searched for patterns to help discover what is important and what is to be learned about participation as a developmental concept. The analysis literally involved many pages of interview transcripts and field notes. Patton (1990) suggests applying some creativity when indulging in qualitative analysis by placing raw data into logical, meaningful categories in a holistic fashion. At this level, some principles of grounded theory were needed. Originally developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), the analysis began with the identification of

the themes emerging from the raw data, a process sometimes referred to as "open coding" (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Glaser (2002) posits that analysis can start during the first interview if the researcher identifies concepts that are striking. However, Glaser continues that it is not sufficient simply to inspect data and label interesting points; the data has to be analyzed in a systematic and rigorous manner to discover the concepts leading to the categories. This is an iterative process that requires a great deal of time, patience and analytic skill.

Unfortunately, Strauss (1967) and Glaser (1992) do not prescribe an exact mechanism for coding, but they do describe the concept of coding. The challenge for me was to look through the data for what I want. In order to overcome this difficulty, I decided to code the data and determine categories based on my research focus. Using grounded theory principles to identify themes and categories for this study proved most beneficial. The decision not to go the whole extent of a grounded theory was informed by both Patton (1990) and Guba (1978), who hold that naturalistic inquiry is always a matter of degree. The more "pure" the naturalistic inquiry, the less reduction of data into categories there is. The analysis in this study was informed by a number of texts but focused specifically on the work of Miles & Huberman (1984), Walker and Myrick's (2006) grounded theory exploration and process, Field & Morse (1985) and Riley (1990). Miles and Huberman's (1984) framework for qualitative research is depicted in Figure 13 below illustrating the components of data analysis.

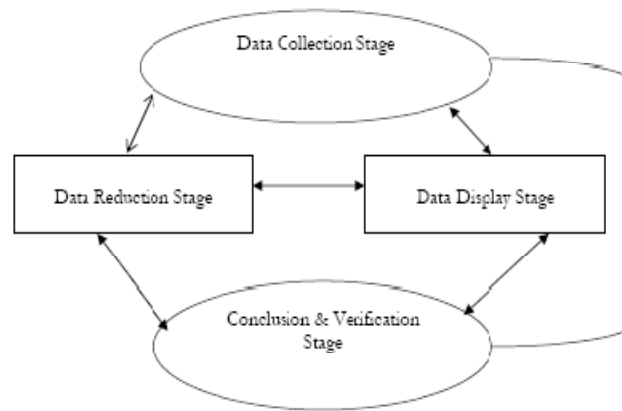


Figure 13: Miles and Huberman's Components of Data Analysis

Source: Miles and Huberman, 1984.

## Data Reduction

Data reduction, the first element advocated by Miles and Huberman's framework (1994): "... refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written up field notes or transcriptions" (10).

The volumes and sheer sizes of interviews and data acquired could make qualitative data analysis daunting and challenging. Getting rid of data not important to the analysis is usually the first, and arguably the simplest, form of data reduction. As Miles and Huberman (1994) explain,

"Data reduction is not something separate from analysis. It is part of analysis.

The researcher's decision-which data chunks to code and which to pull out, which evolving stories to tell-are all analytic choices. Data reduction is a form of

analysis that sharpens sorts, focuses, discards, and organizes data in such a way that “final” conclusions can be drawn and verified” (11).

Performing reduction would require the researcher to frame the analysis in terms of the sources of data or the categories of participants from whom the data would be collected (MacQueen and Milstein 1999). In order to comfortably manage the collected data, I condensed the collected information through a careful process of deduction and induction taking into account the research questions and emerging ideas and themes using grounded theory principles. I used open, or generative, coding to process and develop categories of concepts and themes that emerged from the interview data. Systematically coding the data helped avoid assumptions of data interpretation. For instance, focusing on “motivations for participation” as a theme led to the framing of subcategories like the identification of “development needs” and “project ownership.” I also wanted to know how the various villages “interpret participation.” Also, I employed both open and thematic coding processes analyses to the perspectives of the different stakeholders in the different villages. Initially, I estimated that participants’ interpretations may or may not differ among village leaders. I designed questions for respondents to express their perceptions, which were later codified to ease identification and generated into categories and themes. The processes provided the opportunity to meaningfully assess the nature of the data and compare them for respective understanding.



## **Member Checking**

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) have advised that in qualitative research, we should never collect data without substantial analysis going on simultaneously, and letting data accumulate without preliminary analysis along the way is a recipe for unhappiness, if not total disaster. With this in mind, I made sure that I compared key themes emerging from the interviews and cross checked with other sources of information, particularly existing primary documents and reports. Also, I made sure that during the interviews, I restated, summarized, or paraphrased the information received from respondents to ensure that what was heard or written down is in fact correct. I also made sure that I reported back preliminary findings to respondents or participants, asking for critical commentary on the findings, and potentially incorporating these critiques into my findings. Member checking actually added accuracy and richness to both the data collection and analysis.

## **Judging the Quality of Research**

There is a considerable debate about what constitutes good quality research. Guba and Lincoln (1991) observed some distortion that may affect the credibility of a study. Checking the credibility means cross checking findings and interpretations of the different groups and audiences from whom that information was collected and making sure that information presented is trustworthy. Lincoln and Guba (1985) hold that the determination of research, which is the exact nature of the reality, is impossible in reality.

In that, one would have to know the "precise nature of that reality," and if one knew this already, there would be no need to test it. Lincoln and Guba (300) have identified one alternative set of criteria that correspond to those typically employed to judge quantitative work (See Table 5).

Table 5: Comparison of Criteria for judging the quality of quantitative and qualitative research

Conventional Terms	Naturalistic Terms
Internal Validity	Credibility
External Validity	Transferability
Reliability	Dependability
Objectivity	Conformability

Source: Lincoln and Guba, 1985.

Since this study was much more naturalistic than conventional, the criteria appropriate for judging the overall trustworthiness and quality of the research were discussed under credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability terms, as indicated by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

### **Credibility**

The credibility criteria involve establishing that the results of qualitative research are credible, or believable, from the perspective of the participant in the research (Trochim 2006). Patton (1990) postulates that credibility, analogous to internal validity, depends less on sample size than on the richness of the information gathered and on the analytical

abilities of the researcher. Also, checking credibility means cross checking findings and interpretations of the different groups and audiences from whom that information was collected and making sure that information presented is trustworthy. I tested for credibility by crosschecking information gathered from interviewees with other differing perspectives from other interviewees and existing information where available. Since little information currently exists on the participatory experiences of the people in the selected villages, “member checks” were the most appropriate tool for checking for credibility. In this case, respondents were asked to corroborate on findings to confirm credibility, a qualitative technique highly recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985). I asked interviewees questions that related to themes that emerged from previous interview transcripts in order to confirm the accuracy of responses or identify some inaccuracies within the responses.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings (Trochim 2006). Some researchers have argued that transferability of research would depend on the degree of similarity between the original situation and the situation to which it is transferred. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have noted that the researcher cannot specify the transferability of findings. Rather, he or she can only provide sufficient information that can then be used by the reader to determine whether the findings are applicable to the new situation. Considering

the participatory mechanisms that the Millennium Village Project operates with, how would the researcher know that the findings of the study would be applicable in different situations or project environments? This study, however, does not make any generalizations about participation in rural intervention project. However, there is a great tendency toward the belief the findings from this study will could be used to support the understanding of participation as a concept in development for the other eleven (11) Millennium Villages located in Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda. Each Millennium Village is located within a hunger hotspot and areas with the highest rates of rural poverty and hunger. Understanding how participation unfolds in such rural settings could be useful for the UN Millennium Project and any other project that is based on inciting rural people's emancipation from poverty. The similarities in cultural diversity, particularly in Africa, give room for the applicability of the study in the various African Millennium Villages.

Guided by the concept of "thick description" originally proposed by Geertz (1973), the cultural context, norms, attitudes, and motives were considered as a reflection typical of rural Africa. The issue of generalizing or transferring the findings of this study is, therefore, placed upon the individual(s) who is (are) considering applying this original work to his/her own circumstances. Referring to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) assertion, the researcher cannot specify the transferability of findings but can only provide sufficient information that can then be used by the reader to determine whether the findings are applicable to the new situation.

## **Confirmability**

Confirmability, analogous to objectivity, refers to the degree to which the results of a study could be confirmed or corroborated by others (Trochim 2006). Conventional wisdom suggests that qualitative research is subjective because it relies on interpretations and is admittedly value-bound. Admittedly, maintaining confirmability, otherwise known as objectivity and neutrality, is critical in a naturalistic research project where the researcher's subjectivities are part of the process. This makes the researcher's ability to document the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study a crucial exercise that must be done with all eagerness. Thus, the degree to which the researcher can demonstrate the neutrality of the research interpretations, through a "confirmability audit," is necessary for the study (Lincoln and Guba 1985). In order to make sure that the findings of the study are confirmable, I maintained a considerable degree of accuracy in records and documents. I also maintained thoroughness in getting information from the participants of the study. According to Rubin & Rubin (2005), thoroughness "means investigating all the relevant options with care and completeness, checking out facts and tracking down discrepancies" (70). Using member checking provided an effective approach of confirming the results, as well helped avoid misrepresentation of interviews, desisting from substituting my own opinion and experiences for those of the interviewees.

## **Role of Researcher**

Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to the role of the researcher as the "theoretical sensitivity" of the researcher. As a useful concept, the researcher's skills and readiness in qualitative enquiry are evaluated. According to Lincoln and Guba, (1985) before conducting a qualitative study, a researcher must do three things. First, the researcher must adopt the stance suggested by the characteristics of the naturalist paradigm. Second, the researcher must develop the level of skill appropriate for a human instrument, or the vehicle through which data will be collected and interpreted. Finally, the researcher must prepare a research design that utilizes accepted strategies for naturalistic inquiry. In doing so, the researcher is considered the instrument with two main roles---that is the role of the researcher as intrusive, and the other as interpretive. My intrusive role as a researcher was evident when I began taking the interviews on the field. Going to the various meetings and homes to interview participants was considered intrusive, but assuring participants the anonymity of the responses helped.

## **Ethical Considerations**

This study observed research standards established by the Office of Research Subject Protections at George Mason University and Columbia University for research with human subjects. The concern for the individual participants is formulated in three demands: the demand of informing, confidentiality and use. I informed the villagers and

project management the aims of the study and how their responses may affect or be affected by the study. All participants have the chance of refusing to participate in the study. Some interviewees agreed that their interview was recorded. While others felt intimidated by it, others thought it was appropriate to have them recorded. I offered them an opportunity to express their feelings and experiences during the recording by giving them my contact information. No coercive elements were enforced during the study and participants had the freewill to withdraw at anytime.

I treated the issue of confidentiality with utmost caution. The request for confidentiality was to protect the identities of the participants. To honor this request, I have not used the data for any purpose other than sharing them with a group of researchers and to a limited extent in my education. In no circumstance did I reveal or personalize discussions with any participant. In some cases, I had prior contact with participants as a result of my personal professional connections within the geographical area and some of the participants by virtue of my previous environmental work in the area. Throughout the thesis, I have changed the information in the transcripts that otherwise could reveal the identity of the participants. Names were changed; however, gender was maintained because gender aspects were a guiding principle for the design of my study. Age was also maintained to help the classification of groups, such as youth and elderly people.

## **CHAPTER 5 - FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **Introduction**

The focus of this dissertation, as discussed in earlier chapters, is explorative, grounded in participants' interpretations of participation in project interventions at the local level.

This chapter summarizes the main findings of the study and examines their implications in participatory development. The findings are descriptive and explorative in nature, conveying how we can understand participation and the significant dimensions associated with it in rural development interventions. I selected seven out of the thirty (30) villages within the Millennium Village Project cluster in Ghana for the study. The selected villages were Bonsaaso, Edwinase, Tontokrom, Akyerekrekrom, Manukrom, Asaaman and Takorase. I grounded the findings based on the community's experiences gathered through their interactions with the Millennium Village Project participatory processes. In all, I interviewed about 118 people of which some were chiefs, unit committees' members, Millennium Village Project Sector Committee Members, Assemblymen, District Assembly Officers and some community individuals. The findings are descriptive, obtained and analyzed, guided by grounded theory principles.



The research began with a broad focus and later built towards more narrowly defined questions that emerged from the concerns expressed during interviews and observations. These concerns constitute the four main tasks of the study. These are: knowing “what” participation is, “who” is participating, “how” participation is occurring and “why” participation is going on. During the interview, I saw several threads of ideas running and evolving throughout the research. Although these were initially identified as concepts, they were elevated to the status of themes or categories. Not only did these concepts run throughout the interviews, but they also seemed to pull together some related ideas that were of lesser importance to the study.

The four main themes I identified during the research were:

- i. “How” participation transpires within the selected communities. Under this theme, I traced historical data on the participatory experiences of the selected villages. I also sought interpretations of participation from communities to support how participation was unfolding within the communities. For the purpose of this study, “interpretation” of participation is defined as an opinion or mental representation of the meaning or significance of participation.

- ii. “Who” is involved in participatory projects? I prepared a stakeholder analysis to verify who participated and under what capacity.
- iii. “What” participatory approaches or methods have been used? Here, my intention was to establish a census of approaches supporting participation initiatives.
- iv. “Why” communities choose to participate. This theme helped me to understand the various motivations of why the selected communities were participating. Motivation here signifies communities’ or local people’s reasonable expressions for participating in project interventions. Sub-categories identified under the motivation theme were captured under issues such as “project ownership” and “preferences of developmental needs.” Project ownership for this study is defined as an entity that initiates a project, finances it, contracts it out, and benefits from its output<sup>14</sup>.

Altogether, these themes and sub-categories emerged to support the research question probing the understanding of participation and its dimensions in rural interventions. By understanding, I mean that participation has an understanding of its own, which can be understood in context, and constructing it can be affected

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<sup>14</sup> See Bussinessdictionary.com

by pertaining local people's participatory development experiences, and interpreting it can also be guided by people's motivation and goals for participating in project interventions. Although some of the findings showed some respondents' romantic and enthusiastic notions about participation, others felt disillusioned and disenchanted about the process. I structured my presentation of the findings to reflect the perspectives of community leaders whose information I gathered in the context of focus groups and individual interviews. I present these results in the following sections:

- Descriptions of interviewees
- The related themes and sub-themes of the findings
- Discussion
- Conclusions

### **Background of Research Site**

The socio-demographic characteristics of the research are tabulated in Table 6.

The communities I selected from the Bonsaaso Millennium Village cluster for the study were Bonsaaso, Edwinase, Tontokrom, Akyerekrekrom, Manukrom, Asaaman and Takorase. As defined by the project, a Millennium Village is defined as a community of about 5,000 impoverished people located in a hunger hotspot. The location of the Bonsaaso Millennium Village is presented in Figure 14. The Bonsaaso Village Cluster is

located in the Amansie West District in the forest region of Ashanti. The reasons given for the choice of location for the poverty reduction project were said to be:

- i. The existence of acute poverty indicators and the area's location within the poverty hot spot in Africa.
- ii. The desire for progress and a high community spirit to enable community participation.
- iii. Proximity to research institutions where experiences can be expanded into larger surrounding communities.
- iv. The community was accessible.
- v. The presence of a strong District Assembly to ensure project sustenance.

Table 6: Characteristics of communities

Community	Population	No. of people Interviewed	Informants	Gender	Type of Livelihood
Bonsaaso	1433	22	Chief, Unit and MVP committee members, Individuals	Male: 16 Female: 6	Predominantly Mining and Agriculture
Edwinase	762	19	Chief, Unit and MVP committee members, Individuals	Male: 11 Female: 8	Predominantly Agriculture
Tontokrom	2482	20	Unit and MVP committee members, Individuals	Male: 14 Female: 6	Predominantly Mining with Agriculture
Akyerekrekrom	885	14	Chief, Unit and MVP committee members, Individuals	Male: 8 Female: 6	Predominantly Agriculture
Manukrom	294	12	Chief, Unit and MVP committee members, Individuals	Male: 6 Female: 6	Predominantly Agriculture
Asaaman	1331	16	Chief, Queen mother, Unit and MVP committee members, Individuals	Male: 9 Female: 7	Predominantly Mining with Agriculture
Takorase	2674	15	Chief, Queen mother, Unit and MVP committee members, Individuals	Male: 10 Female: 5	Predominantly Mining with Agriculture

Source: Earth institute-Bonsaaso MVP 2006 Socio-Economic Survey  
Report 2007 and Own Research

The Communities are scattered but are all within the Amansie West District Assembly.

The Takorase and Tontokrom villages were the most populated villages with populations of 2,674 and 2,482, respectively. The populations of Bonsaaso and Asaaman are 1,433 and 1,331, respectively. All of these communities are dependent predominantly on mining but are also involved in agriculture. The population size of Edwinase and

Akyerekrekrom were 762 and 885, respectively, but Manukrom had a population of about 294. An interesting livelihood pattern with the sizes of the villages is that the larger villages are predominantly into mining, while the relatively smaller villages are more into farming. Also, women were more active in discussions at the smaller villages than the larger villages. All the villages have had projects either completed or on-going with the exception of Takorase. The community leaders, in most cases, were represented by the chief, some of the community traditional elders, the queen mother, Assemblyman, members of the unit committee and members of the Millennium Village Project (MVP) sector committees.

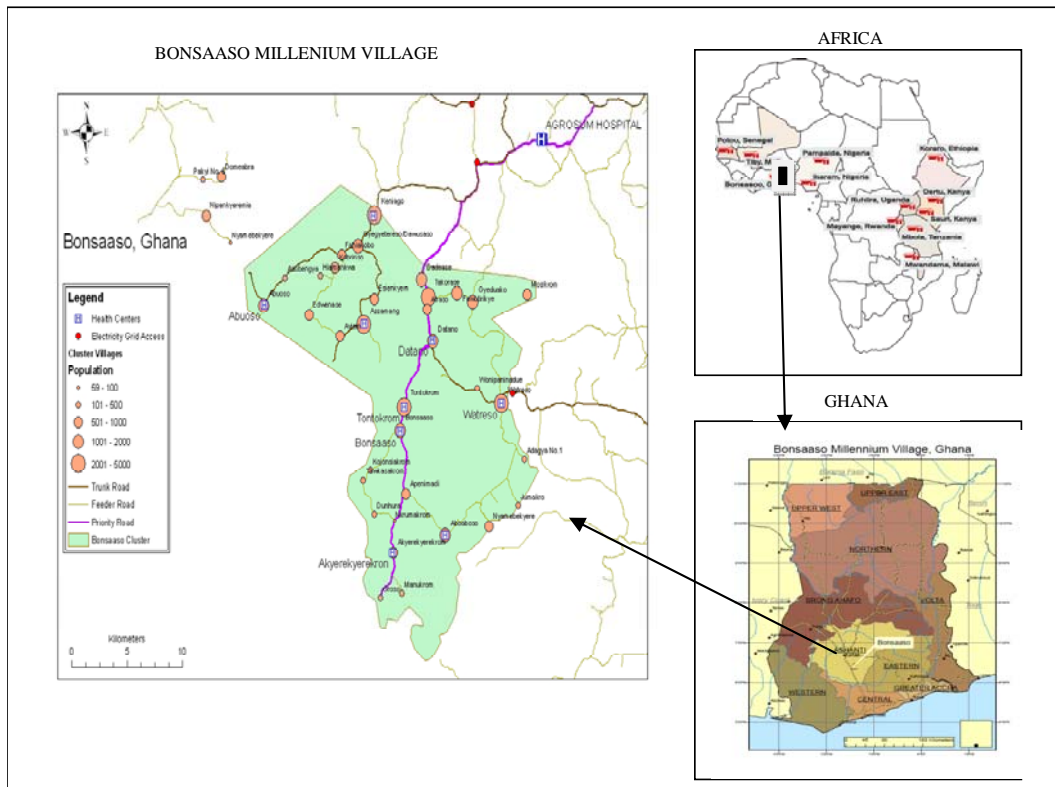


Figure 14: MVP Bonsaaso Cluster Map the Ashanti Region and Africa  
Source: Earth Institute-Bonsaaso MVP Project Report, 2007.

Traditional governance systems coexist with the new governmental formal structures. Every village has a chief who is the embodiment of traditional authority at the village level and a council of elders who help in traditional decision-making. Both the chief and council of elders are highly respected by community members and continue to command power and influence decisions made at the local level. Chiefs continue to play an effective role in community initiatives, community planning and resource mobilization for development. Community initiatives that have the personal involvement of the chief tend to receive more attention and importance, and therefore tend to be more successful than initiatives promoted by individuals in the community or external agents. The Bonsaaso population is made up of four main ethnic groups. The largest are the Akans, followed by the Northerners, Ewes and the Ga people. In-depth information on these groups has been provided in previous chapters. According to the 2006 MVP Socioeconomic survey, 82% the population are below the international poverty line of US\$ 1 a day, while 91% live with less than US\$ 2 a day. The average income in Bonsaaso is \$192 per person, per year, with the median income at \$82. These are certainly striking statistics, indicating that Bonsaaso is a poverty hotspot.



## **RESEARCH QUESTION 1**

### **What are these communities' historical experiences in participatory development?**

I observed that the region has faced serious discrimination in terms of access to basic social services (education, health and nutrition, water and sanitation, housing, etc.) and the essential material conditions for a satisfying life. In order to understand why this has been, I needed some knowledgeable elderly persons who have observed over time how the history of the settlement has affected participation. The historical factors identified were in two main parts. These were the consequential effects of colonial dependency (pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial) and ineffective governance by the local government i.e. District Assembly. With the help of some interviewees, I was able to identify some elderly persons with an immense knowledge on the history of the region

#### **Pre-colonial Era: Before 1900**

I began by asking interviewees if there were historical participatory experiences that can be shared for the purposes of the study. I then asked about how the nature of participation was before the onset of the colonial era (before 1990). Tracing back before the colonial era revealed a striking contrast. The interviewees indicated that before the colonial era and during the initial period of the colonial era, local communities were organized around chiefs in chiefdoms. There were no formal districts or regions except tribal boundaries.

Traditional elders were the close advisors surrounding the chiefs, who in turn, have sub-chiefs. However, popular participation was never an important facet to rural governance. This was rooted in the fact that chiefs were handpicked or selected by the elders, which was not done by democratic means. Everything was managed by the chief and his elders. In this case, the decisions of the chief and his elders are final. According to these interviewees, the participation of the mass in projects based on their decisions of the entire village is a recent development. Gyau, (86, male) a village leader, observed that,

“People were consulted in diverse ways but it wasn’t that their views could supersede that of the chief and his elders. Sometimes the house-heads were consulted, but most times it was an effort to let them know what was coming up. Besides, the nature of projects was not as massive as we have now. It was mostly helping build some community places such as football parks, clearing of roads, and building of mud huts for guests, clearing waterways and things that were in the community’s capacity to do. Providing electricity, health post, and classroom blocks was not crucial at that time. In effect, massive participation as needed now was not the case.”

The big question is: why is massive participation desired now, but not back then?

Reasons given by the interviewees included the smallness of settlements at that time and the low level of appreciation for developmental projects, such as schools, hospitals,

building of bridges, and a high level of illiteracy. Papa Kom, (81, male) an elderly farmer, stated that,

“There is no way that we can compare the way we see development now and how we saw it then. Back in those days, there was no motivation for massive participation. The importance of big hospitals had not been realized because we depended on traditional medicines. Even making bridges over some rivers were taboos because of their cultural significance as traditional boundaries. Big developments that need a high level of mobilization of people began after the introduction of the decentralized local governance.”

Other interviewees further revealed that a much needed interaction of people on projects such as roads emerged as a result of the colonial authority's effort to open up the villages to allow the exploitation of natural resources. However, in some cases, the provision of health care facilities, schools and other social amenities were provided alongside. In essence, the necessity of massive participation was a rather introduced concept during the colonization era and could be better understood within a western frame of development. I find this assertion interesting, considering the argument that popular participation in development emerged in the 1960-70s in the ideas of Paulo Freire (1972) and Fals Borda (1969), and it was Chambers who brought participation into mainstream development by emphasizing it in the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) (1993, 1994, 1997). This probably suggests that massive participation, as designed to fit development as

modernization, has been based on western preconceptions and not on indigenous cultural processes.

### **British Colonization Era: 1900 to 1957**

The interviewees as well traced their participatory experiences during the British colonization era, which was between 1900 and 1957, when the country gained its independence. The interviewees stated that the main problem that affected participation was the involvement of local chiefs in formal governance at the local level during the colonial era. The interviewees stated that during the colonial era, the help of chiefs was solicited by the colonial powers to implement colonial policies captioned under the indirect rule protocol<sup>15</sup>. The indirect rule was a type of colonial policy in which the traditional local power structure, or at least part of it, was incorporated into the colonial administrative structure. In many cases, colonial authorities empowered local leaders such as chiefs to govern local jurisdictions based on written laws designed by the colonial powers.

According to the interviewees, these written laws replaced oral laws, changing the social nature of governance in most villages. According to these elders, these laws and the involvement of chiefs in formal governance was new and was not supported by the local populace. Hitherto, chiefs were only involved in local governance guided by cultural

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<sup>15</sup> See the Iliffe: Africa the history of a Continent. (1994). Indirect rule is the effective occupation of British rule by British authority which required a form of governance with which the local Chiefs would comply willingly, rather than coercively. It involved the use of local chiefs to implement colonial policies hitherto was not the case.

beliefs and traditional rules and norms. While indirect rule, as practiced by the British, largely rested on the false belief that it was only sanctioning the status quo, they were, in fact, actively involved in the invention of a new tradition. According to these interviewees, indirect rule was a cost-effective means of directing the communities into a mode of production and imposing British hegemony over many local regions in Ghana for which the Bonsaaso cluster of villages is of no exception. To these interviewees, by increasing the power of the chiefs at the expense of local initiatives and impinging on the already established local traditional systems with formal systems, they permitted the colonial government to avoid movement toward any form of popular participation in the colony's government. Most importantly and unfortunately, the chiefs were seen as operatives against their own people and by this inhibited popular participation a great deal. Opanin Dua (85, male, and a retired educationist) commented that,

“Son, the schools that was established by the colonial powers that time gave us scholarships so some of us can go to school and become the eyes of the colonial powers. Even though we were educated but our values were to emulate the British. I found this later in my career that to some extent we have been set against our local system and transformed into ethnic power brokers. In the name of education and enlightenment we created another kind of social class which did not support the involvement of the mass. The chiefs did the same and we the educated representing the formal administration also did the same. Popular participation was least desired at this stage and had to continue through to the

post colonial times.”

One would want to therefore conclude that although popular participation emerged as a concept for development during the colonial era, it did so meagerly with exploitative tendencies.

### **Post Colonial Era: 1957 to Date**

Participation in the beginning of the post-colonial era was identified by interviewees as a continuation of colonial rules with little motivation for massive participation in rural development, except in political participation. The interviewees commented that while the colonial state had sought to borrow legitimacy from traditional chiefs, the post-colonial state sought the involvement of chiefs and their communities particularly for political gains. The state manipulated traditional authority by seeking to convert chiefs into clients by promising them development for their votes during elections. According to the interviewees, the ability of the state to manipulate and control the chiefs increased by the fact that the chiefs, as do others, have financial needs. To this end, the involvement of the chiefs and their communities was left at the mercy of political manipulations with no agenda for genuine involvement of local people in their development. Development, therefore, became a political tool. Fredua (69, male), an elderly school teacher, commented that,

“The post colonial government did not inculcate participatory development and participatory governance in the general citizenry. They rather sought after socialist approaches which placed government into the singular provider thus weakening popular participation and threatening our traditional institutions. Fortunately some of our local traditions have stood the test of time and resisted from being crushed totally. Having our chiefs to participate effectively in our general development is only recent. The chiefs were reduced to political rubber stamps and only needed to rally rural citizens towards election. It was only by playing this role well they could attract the attention of government. In this case we have looked at government as ‘father Christmas’ who showers us with gifts annually. It was as if development starts with government alone. Our dependence for economic and infrastructural needs has totally been on government and has negatively impacted us over the years as a people. I think real development should begin with us and not government.”

Supporting the problem of over dependency on the government, also referred to as the “dependency syndrome,” Kwakwa (68, male), a cocoa farmer, endorsed Fredua’s assertion by saying that,

“The only times we see the government actively interested in our affairs is when election is coming and our votes will be needed. They provide temporary solutions particularly during elections times and we don’t hear from them again.

We take anything they provide for us because if don't take it other villages will take it. It is a matter of survival. However the consequences are grave. In that, we look towards such campaigning times when the villages become important again. We have done this throughout the years and it has become part of us.”

This was supported by Nana Yaw (70, male), an old farmer and staunch supporter of the ruling government. He commented that,

“See, for over 20 years or so, we now have our own person in power. So see the goodies coming to us now though MVP. We have never seen such goodwill to this geographical region for ages. If the government wants to do anything good it would have to come through the District Assembly but our present conditions with the district assembly will speak for itself.”

I posed further questions to the District Assembly officers to gather their views on the subject of participation. They commented that the government has made some attempts to galvanize local support by involving the citizenry through the Local Administration Decree (1974), which makes the local government structure a single hierarchy model, abolishing the distinction between local and central government at the local level. This model created a common monolithic structure of government known as the District Assembly at the local level, to which was assigned the total responsibility of government at the local level. Though well intentioned, the system has never worked as expected due



to several problems. In 1988, in order to strengthen the local government, the local Government Law (Law 207) was passed and later amended into the Local Government Act (Act 462) 1993, and in addition, Article 240 of the 4<sup>th</sup> Republican Constitution<sup>16</sup>. The legislation sought to strengthen local governance with the intent of devolving power and authority, means and resources, competence and capacity from the national level to levels lower down the territorial hierarchy and to the community at large<sup>17</sup>.

The decentralization strategy was to propel participation and ownership of developmental processes within the framework of national policy where all stakeholders of projects and programs would participate in, or be a part of, the development process. According to these officers, decentralization policy envisages that development should be a shared responsibility between central government, local government, nongovernmental organizations and more importantly, the people themselves, who are the ultimate beneficiaries of development. Unfortunately, this has not been the case due to budget shortages, inconsistency in governance, and lack of capacity to administer effective participation models. Afuakwa (47, male), an officer at the District Assembly, concluded by saying,

“See, we understand the plight of the villagers but some of their demands unfortunately cannot be met by the district Assembly due to shortage of funds.

We see MVP as complementing our efforts and it is good. They operate in

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<sup>16</sup> See Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462). The Local Government System in Ghana ([http://www.clgf.org.uk/index\\_profiles.htm](http://www.clgf.org.uk/index_profiles.htm)).

<sup>17</sup> See 1992 Constitution of Ghana Article 35.

different rules than us. We do what the Assemblymen votes on. Has anybody checked how much MVP is spending on the Bonsaaso cluster alone? I bet you it is far over the amount vetted for us to develop the entire district. Can you imagine that?”

My discussions with the MVP staff confirmed that some of these comments are true reflections of what is at stake. Until today, Ghana still lacks a consistent policy on representation of chiefs in local government units. The independence constitution and subsequent ones did not make an adequate provision for participation of the chiefs in local governance and development. In the 1961 constitution, chiefs were banned from participating in the developmental processes. The reason was that political partism had infected the traditional system such that the role of chiefs was being confused with the demands of political parties. Even so, the constitutions for 1969, 1979, the decentralization policy adopted in 1988, the 1991, and the 1992 were silent on how the traditional systems were to interface the local decentralized system of government. The MVP official interviewed commented that although there are pending institutional issues that need to be addressed for effective participation in the villages, some of them are already identified in their institutional development processes and project phases. Table 8 throws some light on efforts made by the MVP project to meet some of the challenges.

Accordingly, MVP has employed the relevant structures of the District Assembly into their operational framework to gain legitimacy. To this end, the indication is that the

Bonsaaso cluster of villages lacked any richness and tradition in stakeholder participation, except that provided through engagements with the Millennium Village Project. This background perhaps informed the central thrust of the Millennium Village Project to use the poverty intervention as a means of building up community strength and mobilizing the communities to participate and manage their own development. A probable reason why the Millennium Village Project developed the slogan “*se wobo wo kakyire a ye be soa wo*<sup>18</sup>” which is translated as “*If a community gets themselves organized for development, they (Millennium Village Project) will give support*”.

In other words, the ability of the villagers to mobilize themselves for development can attract support from MVP. Informed by this background, the study began placing more emphasis on the community experiences with present participatory engagements in the Millennium Village Projects.

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<sup>18</sup> ‘Kahyire’ is an Akan dialect representing a head pad usually placed on the head to support items carried on the head. The expression is used usually when a high level of involvement is expected from project beneficiaries.

## **RESEARCH QUESTION 2**

### **How is participation occurring?**

Participation has occurred in four main ways, which are incentive based, initiative based, through direct or indirect representation, and mandatory/communal norm based.

As earlier indicated, the historical background provides some general basic information on the community's participatory experiences; however, the study probed further to know how participation was occurring in order to make some qualitative judgments. The idea is that in knowing how participation is occurring, we will understand why it continues to increase, decrease or maintain the status quo. I will also caution that I am not in the position to establish the extent and effectiveness of participation, but its form since establishing the extent and effectiveness of participation was not the intention of this study. An important consideration to the existing form of participation was to know under whose instigation the people entered into participation activities for the project. Was it out of their own recognition, or they were prompted to participate? I posed these questions to ascertain whether participation was an initiative generated from the grassroots or coerced from the top<sup>19</sup>. The interviewees suggested four main ways that participation occurs, which are (a) Out of their own initiative (b) Induced by incentives

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<sup>19</sup> See Larrison Christopher R. (2002). *A Comparison of Top-Down and Bottom-up Community Development Interventions in Rural Mexico Practical and Theoretical Implications for Community Development Programs*. Edwin Mellen Press.

(c) Direct or indirect involvement and (d) Communal norm. Table 7 shows the categories and how they defined those categories.

Table 7: Some characteristics of how participation occurs in the communities

Characteristic	Definition
Incentives Based	Villager's participation where the primary stakeholders are induced to participate. They cited examples of how they are induced to participate in the seedlings program with free cocoa seedlings.
Initiative Based	Villager's participation based on the basis of their own recognition of need. They further clarified that in most cases, they see the need, but they do not have the necessary capacities to address or solve the problem. In this case, they can be asked to contribute labor or other resources by an external body and it will be their initiation. They cited the construction of schools with the help of MVP as typical examples.
Direct or Indirect Representation	Villager's participation is either by attending individually to project meetings or offering self-help, or being represented by the Assemblyman in district meetings on behalf of the community. The Assemblyman representing them at the district meeting was cited as an example.
Mandatory Communal Norm/Labor	Villagers are mandated to participate. This is popularly known as communal labor. It occurs on special days in the week set by the community and based on traditional days of rest for the communities. These days are usually referred to as taboo days.
Source: Own Research from Interviews	

### Who is participating?

The proceeding discussion provides information on the stakeholders participating in the project.

Stakeholders are persons, groups or institutions with interests in an MVP program. I identified the types of stakeholders to provide a basis for considering who is participating in the project.

Stakeholders are most often divided into two groups, that is, primary and secondary. While primary stakeholders are those ultimately affected, either positively (beneficiaries) or negatively, secondary stakeholders are the intermediaries in the aid delivery process. This definition of stakeholders includes both winners and losers, and those involved or excluded from decision-making processes (ODA 1995). I observed that the community and their leaders play key and primary roles, while decentralized departments and donors play secondary roles. I will refer to primary stakeholders as the “insiders” and secondary stakeholders as the “outsiders.” Table 8 shows both the primary and secondary stakeholders involved in the MVP. The project donors were differentiated from the secondary stakeholders only for the purpose of easing understanding, but they are, however, part of the secondary stakeholders.

Table 8: MVP Institutional Development for the Communities

THEMES	ACHIEVEMENTS	CHALLENGES
Identifying And Involving Vulnerable Groups In Decision-Making	<p>Vulnerable groups are identified, which include single mothers, orphans, widows, landless (migrant) farmers, physically challenged people (buruli ulcer patients) and women.</p> <p>Steady improvement in attendance to community meetings and communal labor (including women) provide continuing evidence of increased participation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rallying community mobilization around the youth is an important challenge. The youth is most often engaged in small-scale mining and spend disproportionately less time on community governance issues.</li> <li>• Need to observe proper timing of meetings to facilitate women participation.</li> </ul>
Decision-Making	<p>The formulation of community action plans (CAPs) to improve the processes of transparency, legitimacy and ownership. All stakeholders make an input into the process of decision-making during series of community interface sessions.</p> <p>The establishment of sector committees with clear boundaries of action and responsibility have improved the quality of decision-making</p> <p>The involvement of local government structures (unit committees and assembly members) have significantly contributed to democratic governance at the community level in terms of quality of decision-making</p> <p>Through persistent advocacy role, over 20% of the total composition of sector committees' membership is now made up of women. Two (2) women have now assumed executive positions on sector committees at the community level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The activities of those who hold clout at the community level always seek opportunity to manipulate the process of decision-making through subtle means. Though assertive at the household level, women in the cluster are unable to take responsibility in decision-making at the community level, especially those that require electoral contest to public office.</li> </ul>
Control Over Resources	<p>Through a combination of local government mandates to unit committees and assembly members, as well as an empowered sector committees, control over community resources are directed by these integrated community leaderships. These include public lands, public recreational facilities, social facilities like schools, communal toilets, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Men disproportionately control resources (especially household incomes), contrary to the weight of domestic responsibilities and other economic roles played by women.</li> </ul>
Links With Decentralized Participation Processes	<p>Institutional collaboration with district planning methodology in CAP preparation.</p> <p>Submission of quarterly reports of MVP activities to the district political</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Synchronizing activities with decentralized programs, especially in the area of district budgeting, to facilitate the accommodation of district share of project cost as spelled out in the cost sharing principle.</li> </ul>

Strengthen Communities' Capacities For Collective Action	<p>leadership consistent with institutional requirements of consolidating district development. Programs through the oversight role of the local government authority (district assembly).</p> <p>Reviews actions have been taken related to the framework of project implementation. Specifically, sub district structures of local government institutions at the community level (unit committees and assembly members) have been integrated to provide critical coordinating role in supporting project implementation.</p> <p>Again, sector committees have been reviewed to enhance complementarities of functions and avoid duplication of effort and with a clear mandate in terms of roles and responsibilities of various committees.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The perception of district assembly and its subsisting departments in recognizing the value of this level of interdependence.</li> <li>• Virtually non-existent NGOs. No partner organization in the cluster.</li> </ul>
Institutional Capacity Development	<p>Training/orientation workshops organized for stakeholder groups. This includes unit committees, assembly members, and sector committee members, field extension workers including community health extension workers, community facilitators, and queen mother's associations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity building initiatives need to be extended to other decentralized public sector officials through joint working sessions.</li> <li>• The challenges to pursue a process-oriented approach to behavioral change among traditional stakeholders. The challenge of forging a partnership framework with private sector institutions as a means of transferring knowledge and skills to such organizations. The process to institute a transformation of organizational culture to decentralized departments to enhance efficiency in public service delivery.</li> <li>• Requires more collaboration to sustain the current momentum.</li> </ul>
Improving Links To Local Government	<p>Functional relationship exists between MVP and District Assembly bureaucracy. All field operations are conducted through the unit committees, assembly members who constitute an integral part of the local government structures at the community level.</p> <p>Have been able to establish a strong interface between district development objectives and MVP agenda as bedfellows and mutually interdependent activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The commitment of the health extension workers to provide a constant update on the data collected.</li> </ul>
Develop Community-Based Information Systems	<p>The compilation of community register to capture basic information on birth and deaths is an on-going process by the community health extension workers resident as field staff.</p> <p>Information materials are currently being developed across sectors that focus on basic information systems for the communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needs constant review due to frequent changes in the movement of people in the cluster. This is due to the status of the</li> </ul>
Documentation	<p>Basic statistics compiled through the data unit and published as the baseline report.</p>	



Sharing And Storing Information	Exchange and sharing of information is on-going. This has been facilitated by the process of CAP preparation and implementation. Community debriefing session also offers another opportunity for exchange of information between project staff and community members.	<p>economic engagement of some of the people as migrant farmers and also as illegal small-scale miners of no permanent stay.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to have a more structured approach to information storage and sharing that will have a bearing on community livelihood.</li> </ul>
Building Up Cadre Of Change Agents For Achieving MDGs Mapping Of All Change Agents	An identification of change agents designated as traditional gate-keepers have been undertaken. These include chiefs, queen mothers, pastors and Imams, clan heads. The formation of community-based associations are being facilitated around these Gatekeepers to provide front liners role in the series of engagement on sexual reproductive health issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to sustain the orientation of these people to carry on the job of continuous advocacy role.</li> <li>• Need to increase their wealth of knowledge on the subject-matter through constant workshops and to sharpen their skills in social communication.</li> </ul>

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Source: Earth Institute-Bonsaaso MVP Institutional Report, 2007.

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Considering the stakeholder table, the chief, other traditional and religious leaders, unit and MVP sector committees are distinguished from government personnel. This group of people, in most cases, generally visualizes economic and social development stakes in a manner different to that of government personnel. My concern was to distinguish between conventional trends of project stakeholders mostly populated with external specialists. I observed that the background of the primary stakeholders ranged from chiefs, clan leaders or similar leaders of other kinship groupings, religious leaders such as priests (Muslims, Christians and traditional) and professionals such as teachers, midwives, traditional doctors, and notable people of influences who are landlords, wealthy farmers or moneylenders. With regards to the governmental personnel, the focus was on government decentralized organization bodies that participate in the project for reasons other than those connected to their official duties. Some of them lived outside the

project area. The donors were foreign personnel or expatriates who have some long-term interest in the area, which may be research, economic, or social-based reasons.

Stakeholders' characteristics are discussed in previous chapters. Surprisingly, with reference to Table 9, very little Community Based Organization (CBO) and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) activities have happened within the Amansie West District, where the Bonsaaso Cluster is situated. The exception is the community water and sanitation schemes (WATSANS). In this case, CBO's and NGO's community with focus on radical advocacy, poverty alleviation and social reordering as suggested by Cowie is absent (Cowie, 2000). Though CBOs have a lower status and engage in a more limited range of activities than non-governmental organizations (NGOs), they play an increasingly dominant role in vital development programs and in providing local institutional support in rural areas (Arrossi et al. 1994). Although community residents have often found it necessary to come together to pool available resources for their common good, expressing it through organized entities such as credit unions, farmers' associations, cooperative societies, youth clubs, faith-based groups and women's groups is very recent and has primarily been engineered by the presence of Millennium Village Projects. They suggest that the rather late operation of CBOs and NGOs within the Bonsaaso cluster has prevented the organization of voices and people to serve as vehicles for participation.

Table 9: Stakeholders and their Roles

STAKEHOLDERS	ROLE AND INTEREST IN MVP
<i>Primary Stakeholders:</i>	
Communities	Key stakeholders in need of socio-economic development and enhanced quality of life
Traditional Chiefs	Trustees of the land, major stakeholder at all levels of governance in the community and vanguards of community development for the community
Unit Committees	Mandated to initiate, facilitate, manage and monitor development activities at the community level. Organization of communal labor
Village Intervention/Sector Committees	Facilitate sectoral implementation and monitoring of local projects
Assemblymen	Articulate the developmental concerns and liaison between District Assembly and community
Traditional and Religious organizations	Encourage and urge members to actively participate in programs and projects
<i>Secondary Stakeholders</i>	
Rural Enterprise Project	Development of operational capacity. Application of rural credit/loans model to facilitate rural development and the reduction of rural poverty. Support in technical advice in business development services
Care International	Development of operational capacity. Help to sustain girl's education in some primary schools with girl-friendly teaching and learning materials
Amansie West District Assembly	Provision of 30% financial contribution towards MVP interventions. Provision of documented information needed in the cluster i.e. number of road contracts awarded
Ministry of Food and Agriculture	Supports MVP with technical staff and advice to improve agricultural activities
Ghana Education Service	Provide facilitators during in-service training programs by MVP. Post teachers to the cluster. Provide text books and stationeries
Ghana Health Services	Provision of Community-based Health Workers and Community Health Volunteers.
National Commission on Civic Education	Provision of information on MVP's first community entry
Non formal education (MOE),	Sensitize community on government policies and laws in the cluster
Department of cooperatives	Collaborate with MVP to organize and promote adult education in the cluster
Member of Parliament	Collaborate with MVP to form cooperative groups and develop them
District Chief Executive	Oversight over effective governance in the constituency. Increase in influence by fulfillment of community or constituency development aspirations. Political head of the District. Increase in influence by fulfillment of District Development Plans/Objectives
<i>Donor Agencies:</i>	
Millennium Promise	Mobilizing private sector to support MVP. Fulfillment of Policy objectives
Japan Government	Funding Project and Fulfillment of policy objectives
UNDP	Providing project oversight and fulfillment of policy objectives
Earth Institute/Columbia University	Provide research and hard science oversight to gain a better and informed understanding of clusters before proposing relevant interventions

Source: Earth Institute-Bonsaaso MVP Institutional Report, 2007 and Own Research from Interviews.

My discussions with the project staff and some of the interviewees from the District Assembly revealed some perspectives on the influence and importance of stakeholders on the project. I collated the main themes into a stakeholder influence and importance matrix

(see Figure 15 below). This was a general, but subjective, attempt to assess the influence and importance of each stakeholder. While “importance” here is defined as the priority given to satisfy the needs and interests of each stakeholder, “influence” represents the power of a stakeholder to facilitate or impede the achievement of an activity.

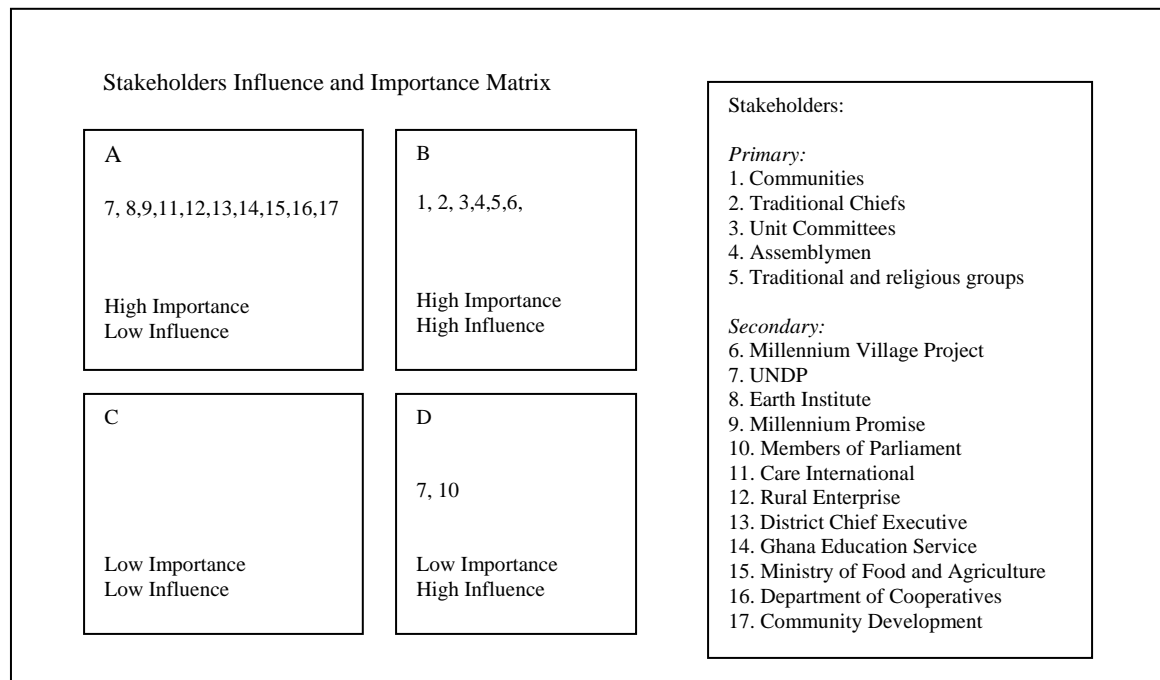


Figure 15: Stakeholders Influence and Importance Matrix

Source: Own Research

It is expected that the decision-making machinery for the MVP should come from category B, which is stakeholders of high importance and high influence, with category A and D supporting the efforts of category B stakeholders. None of the stakeholders, however, fitted into category C, which contains stakeholders of low importance and low influence. Staff from MVP commented that people that fit into this category cannot be called stakeholders, and as such, might not be needed for decision-making. Discussions

with the villagers indicated some disappointment on the role of the Member of Parliament (MP). They expected the MP to be the political voice for the project due to his/her high political influence which was not the case. To them, the MP is of low importance to the project until proven otherwise.

### **What approaches are being applied?**

Four main approaches were identified. These are information sharing/consultation, joint assessment, collaboration/shared decision-making and empowerment approaches.

Perspectives to approaches were found to differ between the Millennium Projects and the District Assembly projects.

In order to also establish a census of participation initiatives, I asked the interviewees to identify the different methods of participation that they are familiar with regarding their experience with MVP. Information on community participation experiences before the commencement of the Millennium Village Project was very scanty. Participation pointed to community engagement with the water and sanitation project, which was more or less committee-based. However, communities' participation in the MVP showed some amount of a wider interaction. I summarized interviewee's responses in Table 10.

Table 10: Approaches to Participation

Traditional Information Sharing	Joint Assessment	Collaboration/Shared Decision Making	Empowerment
Dissemination of documents	Participatory needs assessment	Public review of draft documents	Capacity-building activities
Public meetings/ Information seminars	Beneficiary, Assessments	Participatory project planning workshops to identify priorities, resolve conflicts, etc.	Self-management support for stakeholder initiatives
Orientation workshops	Stakeholder assessments Community debriefing	Training workshops Farmer Field Schools	
Awareness and Sensitization workshops	Field visits Interviews Consultative meetings Daily contacts through stationed staff e.g. CHEW Gatekeepers	Joint committees /working groups with stakeholder representatives Formations of sector working groups, task force Stakeholder groups given principal responsibility for implementation e.g. Care International	
Source: Own Research from Interviews			

For the purposes of analysis, I divided the different forms of participatory methods into four main categories:

*i. Information Sharing/Consultation:* Forms of participation, which comprise of informational seminars mainly concerned with awareness and sensitization and orientation workshops. In many cases, this method tends to flow information one-way and is extractive in nature. This has a long history of use by external experts who seek mainly to consult stakeholders on particular issues, rather than involve them in a sustained dialogue.

ii. *Joint Assessment*: Method that seeks to encourage project beneficiaries to reflect on needs and issues affecting them through some form of a joint deliberative process.

iii. *Collaboration/Shared Decision Making*: Public review of draft documents, such as the community action plan (CAP), to identify priorities for development. In this context, project collaboration mechanisms ensure the formation of joint committees and working groups.

vi. *Empowerment*: This method involves capacity building, strengthening the legal and financial status of project stakeholders focusing on hand over and self-management processes and initiatives.

This categorization may be an oversimplification of the processes, but displays some important distinctions between different forms of participation mechanisms applied in these village contexts where I performed my research. A striking feature among the mechanisms used is the shifting of emphasis from the traditional consultative processes to the sharing of decision towards community empowerment. Of greater interest is review of draft documents, which are prepared and reviewed by the locals as a Community Action Plan (CAP). During these sessions, the community's understanding of what constitutes a plan is sought; the inventory of community assets, such as natural, social and human assets are identified; and projects identified and prioritized.

The range of methods used raises important points. First and foremost, less attention has been paid to the strengthening of avenues for local accountability and responsiveness to involve the project beneficiaries. Secondly, there is the lack of bridging platforms for both formal and informal institutions in the short and long term. Also, while the implementation stages would require institutional integration, there are no governance network mechanisms to highlight the harmonization and alignment of policies at all levels in order to achieve joint solutions and make stakeholder participation effective in achieving its goals. Reviewing the stages of the project cycle, as shown in Table 11 and Figure 16, illustrates that the Millennium Villages Project (MVP) is a community-based approach to achieving the MDGs and is informed by the recommended priorities of the United Nations Millennium Project (UNMP); however, the focus on enabling formal and informal structures for good governance has been inadequate. Stage one indicates an important community entry stage backed by the preparation of an institutional review. The second stage, however, represents the all-important identification and project formulation stage, but unfortunately omits avenues of policy validations bringing together policy stakeholders to possibly align project policies to that of national policies.

Having validation meetings with heads of departments and the District Assembly could help the alignment and fulfillment of policies' directions and also prevent the duplication of projects. Stages three and four represented the project implementation and monitoring, but it was observed that no monitoring activities were considered during the community action plan. The perceptions from the local people reveal that less attention paid to issues



relating to power and politics within the framework of the Millennium Village Project can only serve as a recipe for exposing the concerns of the people, but not necessarily giving them power to influence the direction of these interventions.

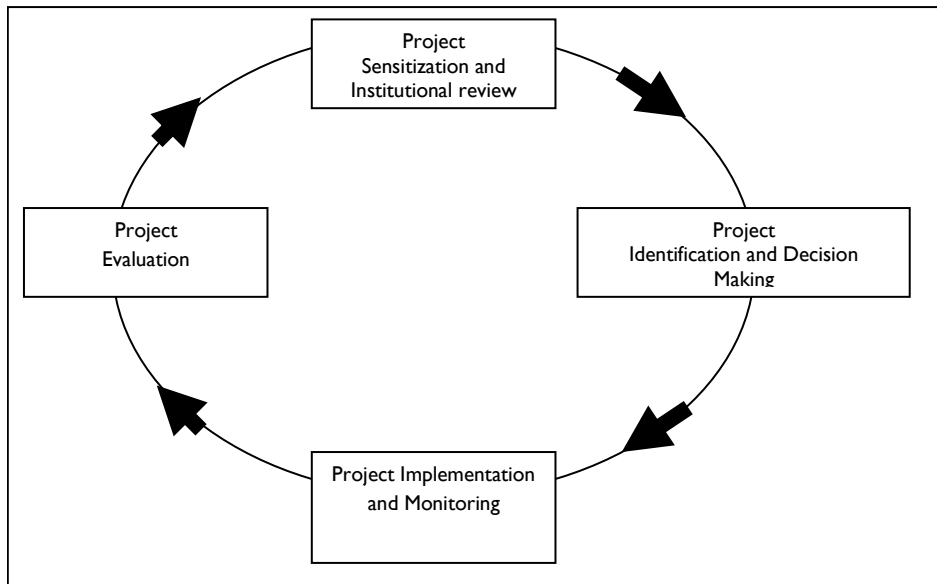


Figure 16: Stages of the MVP Project Cycle gathered from Own Research Interview

Table 11: In-depth Information Relating to the Stages of Project Cycle

STAGES OF PROJECT CYCLE			
STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4
Project Sensitization and institutional Review. Community Entry	Project Identification and decision making	Project implementation and Monitoring	Project Evaluation
<i>Review:</i>  Relating macro view to macro view. Review of baseline local social and economic conditions based on the 8 MDG indicators and District Assembly plans. Insisting on the interconnection of problems among many parts within the community.	<i>Preparation of Community Action Plan:</i>  Identification and definition of project problem using the Community Action Plan for objective assessment. Community strategy undertaken and project criteria developed based on needs and asset approaches.  <i>Stakeholder Analysis:</i>  Preparation of a stakeholder analysis indicating primary and secondary stakeholders, their role and agreement to support the project	<i>Inception of Implementation:</i>  Project inception to begin implementation of the activity scheduled for the approved Community Action Plan.  Central roles played by the village unit committee, sector committees, and the engagement of qualified supervisors to support execution of physical projects.	<i>Participatory Evaluation Assessments:</i>  Assessment of the project results against objectives through community debriefings.
<i>Institutional Review:</i>  Institutional review of existing relevant local socio-cultural and central government policies and initiatives.  Examine available capacities and institutional bottlenecks	<i>Budget Preparation To Support Project Implementation:</i>  Determination of project cost  Identifying sources of funding  Distribution of cost among stakeholders  60% MVP, 30% District Assembly, 10% community	<i>Monitoring:</i>  Monitor progress of project with processes already spelt out in the Community Action plan	<i>Feedback:</i>  Evaluation lessons influence future projects
Source: Own Research from Interviews.			

According to some interviewees, from the early stages of the operations at Bonsaaso, MVP's commitment to participatory development was evident. Oforiwaa (54, a female resident from the Bonsaaso community) commented that,

“Their processes were clearly different from what has been experienced with that of the District Assembly. They did not act as a foreign relief agency exclusively presenting poverty alleviation solutions to the people but instead sort the concerns of the people first before project commencement. This new way of doing projects is very interesting. We have never experienced such an approach before.”

Further interviewees revealed two broad processes. These were mechanisms applied through MVP and those expressed through the District Assembly projects and programs. While the MVP projects are being implemented on the basis of a comprehensive strategy to realizing a community-based approach to achieving the MDGs, the District Assembly project conformed to the conventional top-down, but decentralized, approach to project implementation. The difference in approaches is depicted in Table 12. The table indicates a summary of the varied perceptions of interviewees on the District Assembly and MVP approaches to participatory development.

Table 12: Community Perceptions about the Difference in District Assembly and MVP Project Processes

Perceptions of Project Processes	
Millennium Village Project	District Assembly Project
Participation is active	Participation is passive
All inclusive needs oriented	Infrastructural needs oriented
Both Internally and externally supervised	Projects externally supervised
Both internal and external contractor based	External Contractor Based
Limited by level of participation	Limited by budget
High communal spirit	Adamant communal spirit
Shared cost and responsibilities	Assembly bears all cost
Based on local training, and training of trainers	No communal training except for WATSANS
Community vigilance and commitment is high	Minimal vigilance and commitment
Available avenues for open discussion	Little or no avenue for discussion
Involvement alternative decision making	No discussion after contract is given
Well resourced	Inadequate resources
Complement governments programs	Most often politically motivated
Focused only on cluster (30 communities)	Focused on 147 communities in District
Source: Own Research from Interviews.	

Most respondents were with the view that it was the participatory nature of MVP that has ensured the high level of participation by the locals. While participation by the locals within the MVP was active, participation in the DA project was marginal. Emphasis was placed on the fact that the DA projects employed external contractors, but the MVP relied on both local and external contractors to complete projects. Explaining the differences in participation, the officers interviewed at the DA's office remarked that the limited resources available to them are tailored for the needs of the entire district and not selected villages. Moreover, their projects tie into national goals designed, which are designed to fit sometime incompatible community goals. Further, I questioned interviewees for more information on why the MVP approaches were much more accepted than that of the District Assembly. Nana Gyimah (56, male), a local village elder, commented that,

“We are a people governed over the years by our chiefs and elders. It should be made clear that decentralization has come to us with mixed blessings. On one hand, government has found a way to reach the local people through the District Assembly; however, on the other hand, the local people are yet to find ways to reach out to government. We had expected that the local government would find ways of relating with the traditional system for mutual benefits but it was not so. As it stands now, there is the absence of a structured and formalized arrangement or partnership between traditional councils and the local government units such as the District Assemblies. What we see is the local government filled with representatives from the communities without specific representation of chiefs or their representatives. I think our role in local governance have only been reduced to land leases and participation in ceremonial functions.”

Adu-Tutu (60, male), an elderly community leader and farmer, supported the chief’s submission by noting a resistance between the traditional system and the local government system. He commented that,

“I do not think the District Assembly recognizes the traditional system as partners. They rather see the traditional system as competitors. It is as if we are competing with them to govern our communities. That is a big no. I also suspect that the District Assembly fears the traditional system will demand some of the monies given to them through the national common fund. I am with the thought

that we the traditional heads cannot present ourselves as competitors when it comes to development. We see the local government dealing with the villages without real participation of the chiefs. I think the chiefs are not in deed seen as major stakeholders. Why can't we have a system where the traditional system, the local government and local people themselves share in decisions regarding their communities? Now it's only the local government and the local people bypassing the traditional system.”

Papa Agyeman (61, male), an elder and a retired educationist, contributed by placing the blame on the 1992 Constitution of Ghana. He commented that,

“Although the 1978 Constitutional Commission confirmed that grassroots democracy can effectively be achieved with chiefs, the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, however, did not make adequate provision for participation of the chiefs in local governance and development. I think it has always been lip service and lip service alone”.

It is quite accurate that the role of chieftaincy, or the engagement of the traditional system in rural development, cannot be underestimated. Reconsidering the involvement of the traditional systems and the decentralized government systems will be helpful.

Knowing and being sensitive to these various contextual forms of participation for these areas is of particular importance when designing project operations and the extent to

which communities are going to accommodate those project participatory demands. It is, however, difficult to look at these characteristics as mutually exclusive. The interviewees recognize, however, that there is some sort of coercion in all the forms suggested. In that, local initiatives can involve some kind of coercion, while interventions initiated by the government can also attract an entirely local voluntary participation. On the issue of coercion, Papa Akom (60, male), a community leader, clarified that,

“Most often we are coerced to participate. But I think it is wrong when you are coerced before you can participate in your own development. When it comes to decision-making, we are more than ready to participate. When it comes to evaluation, we are more than ready. It’s only when it comes to implementation where the actual work is that we feel the issue of coercion rises. That includes our time and time spent on voluntary projects is lost time for farm.”

Yaa (45, female), a farmer and a single mother, also elaborated on the issue by saying that,

“We should be mindful of the fact that some people may have to be coerced even in decision-making. I am a woman and sometimes I need that. How I am treated and how my suggestions are received makes public decision-making a very difficult issue for us women and sometimes the youth. Not only that, take for example payment for water user fees. It is highly dependent on affordability and

sometimes the men forget that we fetch water for them. Participation in such economic ventures would mean that some of us have to be coerced maybe through incentives. I am a single mother with five children and participation for me comes in many undesired ways”.

Yaa’s statement is a reflection on the argument that the involvement of women in development planning should be looked at critically in ways that can empower them, rather than inhibit their capabilities to participate equally. The basic question is: what kind of participation would empower women in development planning? Should their participation be passive or active, considering the cultural and traditionally limiting roles they find themselves in? Most importantly, can their participation in development decision-making be seen as a positive change by the society to which they belong? While the reality is that women in these villages have minimal and often superficial participatory roles, their decision whether to participate or not cannot be founded solely on the individual’s want or unwillingness, but rather strongly informed by the norms, roles, values and perceptions embedded in the home and community. Any form of empowerment would require an engagement of both the community spheres of power and the private household spheres of everyday family life where gender inequalities are more easily reproduced.



### **RESEARCH QUESTION 3**

#### **How do you interpret participation?**

Participation was interpreted differently by different communities and individuals.

The purpose of this discussion is not to establish how the usage of the term “participation” has deviated from suggested definitions, but to look at its interpretations with the expectation that its usage has evolved and adapted to different practice settings. So, how do respondents interpret “participation”? I posed questions so interviewees would interpret participation in their own context with the intent of gaining their understanding about participation. I made interviews specific to the village’s leaders and some individuals who were purposively selected.

In the field, differences in interpretation and the understanding of the concept of participation were observed. Among the seven selected communities, four communities, that is, Edwinase, Tontokrom, Asaaman and Akyerekrekrom, used descriptions that aligned with participation proponents whose definition connotes issues of engagement, consensus building, inclusion, consultation and the voluntary coming together of people for an activity (Pretty 1995; Tosun 1999; Tandon & Cordeiro 1998). While Takorase and Bonsaaso leaders used descriptions that followed issues of trust, increased control and empowerment (Lubell 2001; Webler & Tuler 2001; Michener 1998; Nelson and Wright 1994; Cernia 1985; Chambers 2000; Ostrom 1980), that of the Manukrom community

leaders communicated the idea of self-help with external assistance (Care 1994; Cullen 1996; Oakley et. al 1991).

### **Interpretation of Participation by the Edwinase Community**

Collectively, the above statements capture the essence of the participatory debate for the selected villages within the Bonsaaso cluster. The leaders of Edwinase interpreted the participation as "Consensus building through consultation, collaboration and training in order to positively benefit from projects."

An emphasis was placed on the fact that all stakeholders work together to review prevailing conditions and to identify issues and opportunities by educating each other based on respective interest toward an agreed course of action. An interesting aspect of their interpretation is the fact that the final decision should not be based on voting since it will create a win or lose situation. In this case, not all stakeholders will unanimously be in agreement with the outcome. However, addressing and balancing complex and conflicting interest by building consensus and increasing capacities should be the purpose for participation. Furthermore, they suggest that capacities for skilled listening, understanding and discussion facilitation is most important for participation. They, however, differentiate between listening and hearing. To them, a sense of mutual relationship is formed when they are listened to and not just heard. Fredua (69, male), one of the leaders from Edwinase, commented that,

“The politicians have always come around to hear us, even our own District Assembly always hears us, but it is high time that we are listened to. This is the first time I have been part of a project discussion like this where I can see my contribution and decisions turned into action. I really do not know if this will continue throughout the projects, but I feel satisfied somehow.”

Agyeiwaa (45, female), a community nurse, added that the most important characteristic of the MVP processes is the Community Action Plan (CAP), which gives the opportunity for the communities to formulate their own annual action plan. She said,

“When I go to the community action plan meeting, I am allowed to voice out my ideas which are inputs for the village’s development agenda. It is a very interesting time for me and my people. We are able to assert our strengths and potentials, as well as our weaknesses. The most important thing is the things we talk about are the things that MVP acts on. This means we are not only listened to, but rather heard as well.”

## **Interpretation of Participation by the Tontokrom Community**

Participation in this sense means power is shared and community needs are an integral part of a desired outcome. The interpretation from the Tontokrom leaders is widely influential, particularly in participatory development. It suggests that if the process lacks inclusive participation, it will not likely develop solutions that address the interest of all stakeholders. According to the Tontokrom leaders, participation can be interpreted as “engagement by inclusion,” focusing on who is included and why they need to be included. Although the term inclusion lacks clarity among grassroots workers (Bigby et. al 2007), its interpretation here is based on the capacity to fairly select participants for projects and supporting it with reasons for doing so. Although the Tontokrom leaders recognized issues of reinforcing marginalized groups, such as women and children, their main focus was on the criteria for selecting villages for the projects. To them, they are all disadvantaged and poor, and the whole village is already marginalized from an earlier project selection. Apparently, the Tontokrom village was skipped during the pilot project selection stages for a next village, which was relatively smaller by size and both economically and culturally less important. Although the village is now involved in the second phased pilot projects, they still do not understand why they were not included on the onset. Akwagyei (56, male), a leader in the village, commented that,

“How come that Tontokrom was not selected during the earlier selection of pilot sites? Look at the many projects that have gone to Bonsaaso, our neighbors, even

though they are a smaller town with little influence. See, so many projects are there but we don't even have one. What we have is this clinic which is being refurbished, but even that has taken ages. Was this done to spite us against our Bonsaaso neighbors? The project people should be careful the way they choose sites. Some sites are traditionally important than others and choosing places which are relatively less traditionally important over traditionally stronger areas can affect participation badly.”

This is one situation where inclusion was identified with the selection of project sites and not so much of marginalized groups, such as women, children, etc. In effect, unless the process for participation addresses socio-cultural elements that range from the seen to unseen, legitimate participation may not occur.

### **Interpretation of Participation by the Akyerekrekrom Community:**

Akyerekrekrom, one of the most vibrant villages with a high community spirit, had their leaders interpret participation as, “the voluntarily contribution of residents coming together to perform an activity in the interest of both the community and themselves.”

Although the focus was on the ability to rally people to serve the community, little was their concern on if the projects were predetermined or not. Contributing their different resources in diverse capacities was a major element in their interpretation of

participation. According to their leaders, community work, or the commonly called “communal labor” is a must-participate for every resident in the village. Each taboo day, i.e. non-farm days, is set for communal work where every person citizen, resident, migrant or non-migrant must participate in a community project. Taboo days are days set apart according to traditional and cultural practices when work, such as farming or fishing, is not performed. Anyone who dares to break this tradition undergoes severe sanctions. Not only have they set severe sanctions, but also the entire taboo norm is engulfed within a system of myths to ensure reverence. For example, in Tontokrom, it is said that anyone who goes to farm on the taboo day will be bitten by a snake and one may die instantly. The villagers attest to situations where culprits were bitten by snakes. In addition to taboo days, communities may also come together on weekends, which are normal, national non-working days. A typical secular governmental contemporary superimposition on the traditional non-farming days, which has doubled the resting days, has possibly affected the agricultural productivity and production in general in some rural areas. As earlier indicated, there is a whole variety of ways that a community can contribute, however, to the Akyerekrekrom leaders, residents’ contribution is key to any interpretation of participation in rural interventions. Abrompah (51, male), a leader in the community, stated that,

“For us, communal labor is everything when you want to talk about participation. The district authorities have permitted us to use by-laws that suggest the payment of fines up to about 50, 000 cedis (\$5) if one exempts themselves from communal

labor. Nananom (the gods) also supports us when we all participate. In fact, I come, you come, we work, we are happy.”

According to the 2006 MVP socioeconomic survey, 82% of the population within the Bonsaaso Cluster of villages is below the international poverty line of US\$ 1 a day. A fine of \$5 perhaps suggests the amount of importance placed on participating in communal labor.

### **Interpretation of Participation by the Manukrom Community**

The leaders of Manukrom somehow introduced a new dimension as to how they interpret participation. Responding to my questions, they emphasized more on their self-help capabilities and the benefits that they envisage participation would bring. According to their leaders, participation can be understood as “self-help but with the support and provision from of a stronger external organ where tangible material benefits or incentives can be realized.”

Although they posit that participation must break the mentality of dependence, it also calls for investments that are well beyond their local peoples’ capacities. In essence, participation lays the groundwork for them to effectively utilize resources that may be external, while gaining some level of control over projects and their lives as well.

Another interesting aspect of their interpretation aligns with the participation argument

that often links participation to some kind of immediate material benefit. In this case, people participate because there is an expectation of some individual or because of immediate benefits. Akwasi (58, male), a leader at Manukrom, commented that,

“As far as I am concerned, there is no way we can think of participation if benefits cannot be realized both in the short term and the long term. However, it is the short-term, tangible benefits that determine how sure we can wait for a long-term gain. We need to see the roads, schools, electricity, water and health centers now before we can talk about anything else.”

Fosu (45, male), also a leader in Manukrom supporting this position, added that, “the short-term benefits should be looked at as incentives for more participation. We need credit facilities to buy and market our produce, which has sustained us over the years. That is why in my view, external help is always important.”

When I asked the question of whether the withdrawal of incentives later in the project can cause reductions in participation, Adu-Tutu (48, Male), a leader at Manukrom, answered,

“We need not look at incentives alone but back it up with some level of trust and transparency. In most cases, the incentives fail to materialize the first case. Our people are so poor that immediate visual improvements either in their pockets or infrastructure can stimulate participation. That is why the issue of external help is



so important for us. Let's keep self-reliance as our long term goal, but for now, let's get immediate physical help.”

The central issue of the Manukrom leader's interpretation combines alternatives of development endorsing both capital-centered approaches and its opposing people-centered alternative, an approach the Millennium Village Project concept is practically based on.

### **Interpretation of Participation by the Asaaman Community**

The leaders at the Asaaman community interpreted participation as “a direct and continuous consultation on project activity decisions with beneficiaries throughout the project cycle.”

The focus was placed on local people's direct, but continuous, involvement in the making of project decisions throughout the project cycle. Critical to the project cycle is the project formulation, or identification stage, which they claim is where real negotiation takes place. It is important to note that the project identification, or formulation stage, has been noted as one of the most important phases of a project, particularly in rural settings. (Oakley et. al 1991; World Bank 1994; Cooke and Kothari 2001). Although there is a growing acceptance of the need and value for the marginalized poor to participate at this stage, very little participation happens in most cases. It has been suggested that involving

community people at this stage would unnecessarily raise community expectations long before project activities begin (Aycrigg 1998). It is at this stage that many fundamental decisions are made regarding the overall thrust of the project. The leaders felt that this is the stage that they can essentially play their decision-making role as primary stakeholders and that could further lead to the establishment of trust between them and the project staff or implementing agency, and most importantly develop a sense of ownership that can be sustained even after the project completion. Reacting to these issues, Amoyaw (44, male), a leader at Asaaman, commented that,

“I am surprised that if we the poor people know best our own economic and social needs and problems and probably have more insight about what might be done to solve it, how come that we are not involved in the project identification stages, but rather involved after certain major decisions are already made? Involving us in all the stages is what participation is all about.”

Aycrigg (1998) has suggested that this has been one of the major problems facing international development organizations, such as the World Bank. It is emphasized that involving the poor before the project preparation phase will raise expectation long before the project begins. Then again, slowing down the preparation phase of projects to gradually infuse all the necessary voices before project implementation may not be practicably easy due to scheduled deadlines, etc. According to a DFID study, primary stakeholders have marginal involvement in project identification and design stages

because project proposals are often prepared by programmed managers and expatriate consultants (INTRAC 1998; Forrester 1998). Nonetheless, the other phases of the project cycle were important for the Asaaman leaders. They observed that just as there is little participation of the poor in the earliest phase of project formulation, likewise there are problems regarding evaluation and monitoring. Kwaku (68, male), a leader among the Asaaman team, asked.

“Who is the project answerable to? To the people of Asaaman or to the project headquarters in New York? Of course the project staff should be accountable to their supervisors but attention to clients should be held most important if adequate participation is the goal of this project.”

### **Interpretation of Participation by the Takorase Community**

The Takorase leadership interpreted participation as “meeting agreed promises and communicating it for project efficiency.” Their form of interpretation suggested the role of trust in facilitating cooperation and participation for community projects. Issues about trusts are perhaps the central question that spans the general sentiments of the people within the cluster. The leaders emphasized that there is probably a reciprocal relationship between trust and behavioral expectations. Thus, cooperating with the project staff to a greater extent depended on how far they trust them in delivering their promises. Adu (56, male), a teacher, commented that,

“We have met with the project staff for several times and agreed on projects for the area. However, we have not yet seen any action on their part to deliver as promised. Whatever they need as suppliers for the project that must come from the Takorase people has been provided to the sites. What then are they waiting for? How can there be participation when agreed promises are not met?”

Apparently, the projects in the Takorase community have not begun and all my discussions with them pointed to the fact that they have been neglected by MVP for no apparent reason.

### **Interpretation of Participation by the Bonsaaso Community**

The Bonsaaso community, on the other hand, has benefited mostly from the project and almost all the projects there were just about completed. According to their leaders, the term participation can be interpreted as “an active process where community is empowered to increase their control of project decisions in an open and transparent manner.”

In essence, they interpret participation as a process where the beneficiaries influence and control the direction and execution of the development project. They bring to the front issues of control and power, which most often unfolds when projects approach

completion stages. An interesting aspect of my interaction with the leaders revealed alternative explanations to the word empowerment. While some saw empowerment as the development of skills and abilities to enable them to manage and negotiate their interests better, others thought it was fundamentally an enabling process to help them identify actions and decide on issues essential to their development. Whatever the line of distinction was, participation was interpreted based on the level of influence and control necessary for taking over the project and managing it themselves. Papa Adu (80, Male), a cocoa farmer, commented by saying,

“Well, I am more interested in issues where we are made to decide on the contractors and technical people handling our projects. What is participation when we don’t have any say in the technical people handling our projects? We may have the technical expertise ourselves and being able to use our local people may increase our influence on the project.”

He further concluded that,

“An honest evaluation of the projects will indicate that we have done our possible best to participate in the projects. It is for our own good. However, the projects have not as yet completed. In my view, our participation will make real sense if we are made to take more control of the project so that when they leave, we can take care and maintain them. I think participation makes sense this way.”

The Bonsaaso community leaders actually were keen in demanding transparency in the process and also asking about how much the entire project costs. It was obvious they have moved from the “we need external dependence for solutions” stage to “taking control in ownership.”

Efforts were made to also solicit individual perceptions on participation. Individual perceptions sought from interviewees in many ways conformed to the differing nature of interpretations.

Table 14 shows a compilation of some of the individual interpretations. A close look at these differing interpretations to the concept of participation brings important lessons. It stresses how participation can be understood in different ways and, as such, may be applied within a strong understanding within a local context. As a concept, participation defies any single attempt at both interpretation and definition.

Table 13: Individual Interpretations of Participation

*“I can only think about transparency when it comes to participation. The practice where we are not informed or allowed to know the details of any project should be likened to non-participation.” (Addai, 44, Male)*

*“A process whereby people, both individuals and/or groups can exercise their right to play an active and direct role in the development of appropriate projects for the sustained betterment of the people.” (Adu, 57, Male)*

*“If participation is the coming together of people voluntarily to do communal work, then there is participation. However, if participation is where the people are totally in-charge of the project, then we are yet to reach there. Presently, no one knows the amount of money being injected into these projects. They say that is not important, but we how can we totally own the project when the level of transparency is not a concern for MVP?” (Buaben, 64, Male)*

*“(Bo wo kahyire na yen sua wo – mobilize yourselves and we will help you). I like the MVP adage which says MVP helps those who are ready to help themselves. To me this is an accurate description of participation. However, we have helped ourselves by making available resources, such as providing wood, land and even labor, but till today all the projects that was discussed with MVP has not come to fruition. Do mobilizing ourselves and resources matter in this case?” (Maame Yaa, 40, Female)*

*“My greatest issue about participation is how later alternative plans are decided on. We all decided on a project and supported it with both human and material resources. However, during the implementation of the project, the nature of the plans changed with no recourse to the local people. This shows that we are not in control. For me, participation must incorporate plans for involving all stakeholders during project implementation decision-making.” (Munumkum, 28, Male)*

*“See, seeing is believing. Participation is where you see those you are dealing with. You meet them constantly, engage them in discussions regarding the progress of consensual agreements. Consistently seeing those you are dealing with gives the hope that the project is not a nine day wonder.” (Frema, 42, Female)*

*“How can we talk about participation when you cannot share your feelings? We need to be totally heard, response from all stakeholders must be timely and most importantly people should be included in all the major decisions not the left-overs.” (Acheampong, 30, Male)*

*“In fact, participation is mainly identifying a problem with the local people and deciding how it can be solved with the affected people. Identifying and designing projects by donors in consultation with the central government or District Assembly within rigid implementation plans means non-participation.” (Isaac, 47, Male)*

*“Participation is like a person riding on a horse with no knowledge of how the earth or soil feels. How do you determine if the soil is hot or cold when you are riding on a horse? Similar is participation, how do you drive a local project when you don’t know the prevailing local or socio-cultural conditions? In this case, I will define participation as stepping into the shoes of the local people in order to help them.” (Mansa, 70, Female)*

*“To be candid, I see the early involvement of people in projects a challenging one. Many at times it evokes an increased expectation of the local people. We were told we were going to receive airstrips, hotels, etc. in our villages. Maybe these were to entice us to accept projects. On the other hand, it could be possible that without this early enticement we may not have accepted the project like we did. I am really confused how to interpret participation now.” (Dada, 45, Male)*

*“Reversing the elite dominance in project decision-making. Sometimes it is not just the elite but the elderly people who most often make the decisions. Participation, therefore, can be interpreted as including and involving everyone to participate in project decision-making. Many times they think we the youth can only help with our strength, but it’s not always true. We can contribute with wise decisions too.” (Abena, 18, Female)*

*“One thing that I can say is, although at some stages it’s our leaders who does the decision making, however, they periodically account to us in every detail what and how things are going. We usually have community meetings after communal labor where everyone meets and we discuss village issues. While accountability is being rendered to the people, we also have the chance to speak our minds on issues we don’t understand. This, I think, is participation.”(Maame Aso, 39, Female)*

Source: Own Research from Interviews.

Konadu (88, female), an elderly farmer, passed on an interesting comment on the issue of participation that is worth noting. She said,

“Tell me, why do we rural people always have to give something in the name of participation before our needs are met? During construction of school or health buildings, we are asked to provide manpower. During the construction of roads, we are asked to provide timber and so on and so forth. Electrification projects never take off without rural people’s manpower. Are the people in the cities treated this way? Don’t they use our taxes to provide free roads, better water facilities and better living for them in the urban centers? They have needs, we too have needs. Why can’t the government do the same for us? Is it because we are



poor? Or those in the centers are participation exempted? Honestly, I think participation means nothing. It's only a convenience concept?"

Konadu's comment generated some debate within the focus group. Essentially, it highlights the inquiry why rural people are required in most cases to participate in rural projects, while people in urban centers are most often not expected to be physically engaged that much in urban projects. Ofori (55, male), a farmer and trader, supported Konadu's comments on participation as a convenient concept by contrasting participation in projects and participation in democratic elections. According to Ofori, the village people are deemed as second-class citizens when it comes to seeking and locating development projects in their villages, but first-class citizens when it comes to political elections. In effect, the villagers are not able to exercise their voice and choice when it comes to the allocation of rural projects. If Konadu's interpretation holds, then it will be necessary for development practitioners to make careful considerations in studying circumstances under which participatory processes can be convenient for project beneficiaries.

Notwithstanding these challenges, however, I conclude that participation represent different things to different people. Table 14 indicates the summary of the interpretations supported by community leaders in the various communities.

Table 14: Summary of Respective Community Interpretations of participation by Village Leaders

COMMUNITY	INTERPRETATIONS OF PARTICIPATION
Edwinase	“Consensus building through consultation, collaboration and training in order to positively benefit from projects”.
Tontokrom	‘Engagement by inclusion’ focusing on who is included, and why they need to be included.
Akyerekyerekrom	“Voluntarily contribution of residents coming together to perform an activity in the interest of both the community and themselves”.
Manukrom	“Self-help with the support and provision from of a stronger external organization where tangible material benefits or incentives can be realized”.
Asaaman	“Direct and continuous consultation on project activity decisions with beneficiaries throughout the project cycle”.
Takorase	“Meeting agreed promises and communicating it for project efficiency”.
Bonsaaso	“An active process where community is empowered to increase their control of project decisions in an open, transparent and trustful manner
Source: Own Research from Interviews	

I identified an interesting pattern while analyzing the various interpretations of participation given by the communities. Interviewees’ interpreted participation was based on their interest and how they felt about the on-going projects in the respective communities. The leaders at Edwinase, which is a typical cocoa farming village, expressed the need for agricultural inputs, such as agro-chemicals, on-farm training, etc. Although they stressed consensus, their interpretation included training. The leaders in Tontokrom, Manukrom and Takorase evidently translated their sentiments and interests into the interpretation of participation as well. Inclusion was emphasized by the Tontokrom leaders all throughout the discussions because they were left out during the project pilot search. The Manukrom leaders indicated that the support from external

organizations was necessary, especially in providing them a school for the children. Takorase muted the idea of trust in the discussions. They felt the MVP staff did not “fulfill their promises” and it reflected in their interpretation. The leaders in Bonsaaso emphasized on “empowerment and increased control” and it as well reflected in their interpretation.

Generally, the bigger villages were not as enthusiastic about participation for development as the smaller villagers. Although interpretations from leaders were a reflection of the status of projects going on in respective villages, the intensity with which they expressed these perceptions were different. Relatively smaller villages, like Akyerekrekrom, Manukrom and Edwinase, were more enthusiastic about discussions much more than Tontokrom and Takorase.

I also find that although the concept of participation keeps evolving its many characteristics and connecting concepts such as social inclusion, transparency, empowerment, trust and social accountability, it also has definition problems. I compiled some of the connecting concepts mentioned during the interviews and looked at their definitions. Table 15 shows that most of the connecting terms themselves wrought with definition and interpretation difficulties. It would be wrong, of course, to argue that these concepts are mutually exclusive, but they can represent different forms of participation and that the general thrust of most development projects can be located within one concept or the other.

Table 15: Definitions of Selected Concepts Related to Participation

Concept	Definitions/Interpretations
Social Inclusion	It is a value-based concept with differing understanding but ensure that the marginalized and those living in poverty have greater participation in decision making which affects their lives, allowing them to improve their living standards and their overall well-being. <sup>20</sup> (World Bank, 2004).
Voluntary contribution	It is the citizen's free -ill contribution in kind or cash in support of project. Community projects often seek voluntary contributions from local people as a way of supposedly building up links between the people and the project. Although some of the projects are dependent upon these voluntary contributions, it is not always the certain whether the contributions are genuinely voluntary or not. <sup>21</sup> (Oakley et. al., 1991).
Empowerment	There remain many questions about what empowerment means. However it can be expressed as the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives <sup>22</sup> . (World Bank, 2002).
Trust	Trust is a fundamental component of almost all social interactions. Although not easily defined but refers to the level of confidence we have that the other person will act in ways that will fulfill our expectations. <sup>23</sup>
Collaboration	There is no comprehensive definition but leads to a myriad of possibilities each having something to offer and none being entirely satisfactory on its own. Collaboration in simple terms means 'to work together'. It can be explained as a process of shared decision-making in which all the parties with a stake in a problem constructively explore their differences and develop a joint strategy for action <sup>24</sup> Wood and Gray, 1991).
Social Accountability	It can be described as an approach or process towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement, i.e. in which it is ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations who participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability. <sup>25</sup> World Bank (2004).
Transparency	Transparency is more a process than a product. It is a dialogue about what exchanges of information are appropriate and how fairly to assess that information in order to ensure trust and empowerment <sup>26</sup> .
Source: Assembled from cited sources	

<sup>20</sup> See the Combat Poverty Agency <http://www.cpa.ie/povertyinireland/glossary.htm>. Also See the working paper series on Social Inclusion at <http://www.laidlawfdn.org/cms/page1436.cfm>.

<sup>21</sup> See Oakley et al (1991). Projects with people. The practice of Participation in Rural Development. International Labor Organization.

<sup>22</sup> See World Bank (2002). Empowerment and Poverty Reduction. A Source Book. IBRD, World Bank.

<sup>23</sup> See <http://family.jrank.org/pages/1712/Trust-Defining-Trust.html>

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, Donna J. Wood and Barbara Gray's analysis "Toward a Comprehensive Theory of Collaboration" in *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (June 1991), pp. 143- 149.

<sup>25</sup> See World Bank (2004). Social Accountability: An Introduction to the Concept and Emerging Practice."Participation and Civic Engagement Group, World Bank, Washington, DC.

<sup>26</sup> See GEMI/Pacific Institute Transparency Workshop Proceedings.

[http://www.pacinst.org/topics/globalization\\_and\\_environment/management\\_and\\_reporting/transparency\\_workshop\\_proceedings.pdf](http://www.pacinst.org/topics/globalization_and_environment/management_and_reporting/transparency_workshop_proceedings.pdf)

#### **Research Question 4**

##### **What are the motivations for participating?**

Motivations for participating were varied among communities and individuals. However, they were predominated by the meeting of tangible needs and the attainment of project ownership. Despite the apparent and substantive reasons for local participation in rural developmental projects and its importance in rural development, many researchers have sought to understand community participation only from the viewpoint of the government, focusing on how it can lead to efficiency and reduce the possibility of local opposition. However, for this study, attention was rather focused on perceptions from the local people, seeking how their understanding can help practitioners develop better approaches. The question of “why participation?” refers to the motivations of why people in the selected villages choose to participate in projects. I collected lists of reasons why community members participate in the projects from community leaders under a focus group discussion. A five-point scale was designed for community leaders to assign scores, indicating how they favor those factors. See figure 17 below.

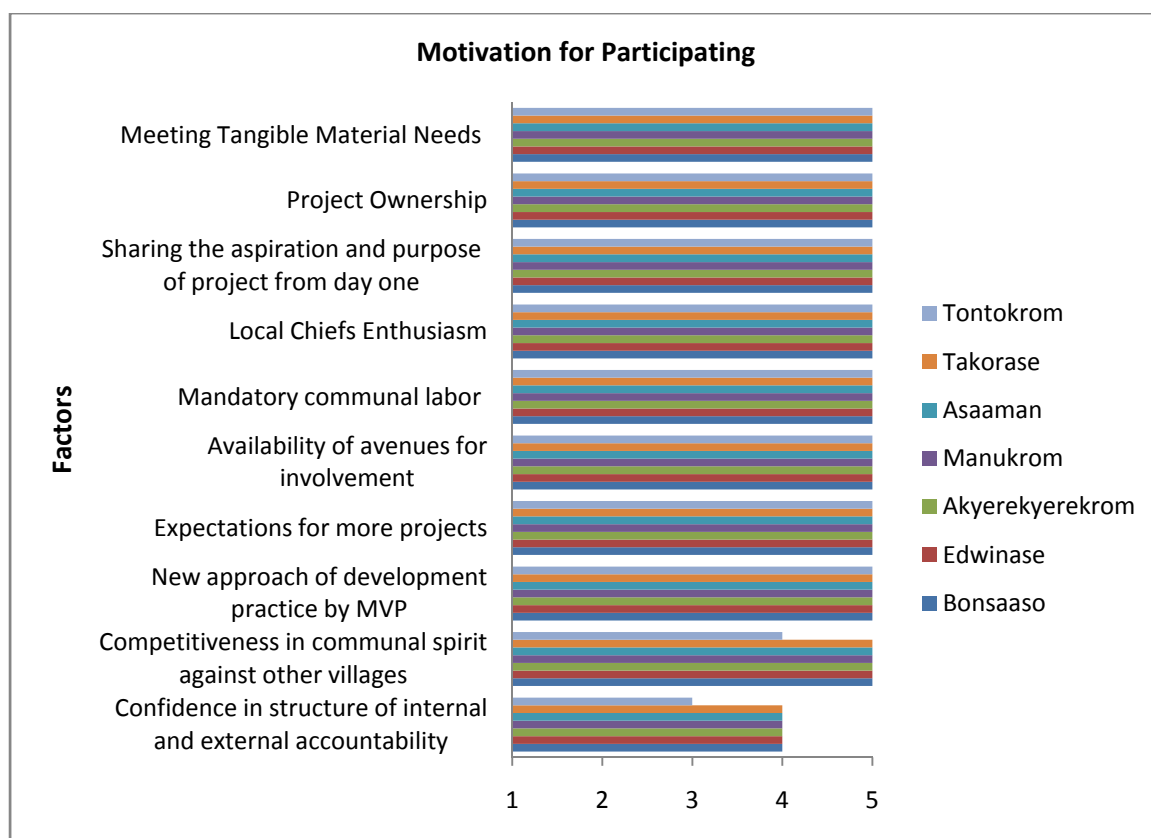


Figure 17: Factors Motivating Communities to Participate

Source: Own Research from Interviews: Based on five point scale where 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3=Undecided, 4=Agree, 5= Strongly agree

I gathered ten factors that motivate interviewees to participate. Although there were many others, these ten stood out as the most important for the leaders. The rest of the factors included the community's aspiration for project ownership, being able to share the aspiration and purpose of project from day one, enthusiasm shown by the local chief, compelling nature of mandatory communal labor, the availability of avenues for involvement, the expectation of more projects as a result of participation in previous projects, the new approach of development practice introduced by MVP, the competitiveness in communal spirit against other villages and their confidence in

structure of internal and external accountability. Clear patterns of relationship between the factors were not sought, but rather efforts were made to show the extent to which the various community leaders agree with those factors. Generally, factors such as tangible material benefits, project ownership, being able to share the aspiration and purpose of project from day one, enthusiasm shown by the local chief, compelling nature of mandatory communal labor, the availability of avenues for involvement, the expectation of more projects as a result of participation in previous projects, and the new approach of development practice introduced by MVP were unanimously agreed upon by the leaders. However, some communities differed in their agreement with the community's competitiveness in communal spirit against other villages and their confidence in structure of internal and external accountability. Although agreement on the confidence in internal and external structure of accountability was somewhat favorable among all the community leaders, that of Tontokrom was somewhat unfavorable.

As earlier indicated, the leaders in the Tontokrom community were highly disgruntled because they were not selected as part of the original set of pilots for the project, which affected their zeal and enthusiasm to participate. They also felt that decision-making, particularly with regards to project sitting, was not fairly addressed by the MVP staff. Generally, the issue of accountability among all the communities with reference to their confidence in the structure of both internal and external accountability was relatively lower as compared to other factors. They, however, commented that they do not have any problems with the internal accountability structure since there are public spaces for the

control of local or community decisions enshrined in the traditional norms and laws, and enforcing accountability is derived from such norms and bylaws. They all supported the idea that the lack of confidence in external accountability structures emerged from the fact that they do not know the original budget designated for the projects, and as such, cannot confidently say if the MVP project staff is making judicious use of assigned project money. Francis (49, male), a community leader, commented on this issue by saying,

“It is hard to talk about this issue with MVP. We are not saying they should give us the money. We just want to know how much is allocated for respective projects. I believe accountability will trickle down if they would want to begin with themselves.”

It was vehemently argued that their contributions of about \$110 per local person annually put the whole poverty reduction program in the likeness of a social fund that should embrace community participation as key operative principle in budgeting. Essentially, they suggest the inclusion of a public participatory audit and accounting system built into the design of the project. To them, this could motivate and expand participation. I interviewed the MVP officers on this issue and they explained that the process of funding and implementing a Millennium Village is a shared effort between the Millennium Village initiative, other donors, local and national governments, NGOs and the village community. This financing model is built on the premise that, with modest support, Millennium Village economies can transition over a period from subsistence farming to



self-sustaining commercial activity. Each Millennium Village requires a donor investment of \$300,000 per year for five years. This includes a cost of \$250,000 per village, per year (5,000 villagers per village multiplied by \$50 per villager) and an additional \$50,000 per village, per year to cover logistical and operational costs associated with implementation, community training, and monitoring and evaluation. The other \$60 per villager, per year will come from village members, local and national governments and partner organizations, making for a total funding of \$110 per person, per year<sup>27</sup>. In this case, funds for the projects are already worked out with the communities.

As a follow up to the factors motivating participation, I asked the leaders to select and rank the four most important factors affecting motivations to participate. Amongst the factors, meeting tangible material needs and having expectations for more projects were most predominant. This was followed by the participatory concept of development introduced by MVP. The leaders stressed that the MVP project could not have come this far had it not been the injection of capital into the villages and also creating alongside the atmosphere that ‘there is more coming if they participate’. Also, the participatory approaches initiated by MVP were acclaimed as strong motivation for participation. While some leaders thought that those participatory processes set the platform for active engagement, others thought the next most important motivation was rather local ownership of projects.

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<sup>27</sup> [www.unmillenniumproject.org](http://www.unmillenniumproject.org)

It was evident that the villages were going through different paradigms of participation as depicted in figure 18. Bonsaaso leaders for example, have the notion that all efforts must be made to ensure that they have complete control of projects before MVP comes to completion. On the other hand, Akyerekrekrom, Edwinase, Asaaman and Manukrom leaders observed that sustaining the on-going participatory processes was a key motivation for participation after meeting their respective tangible needs. I also found out that ‘ownership’ as a concept is not well understood by the leaders. While some thought that signing release documents signified ownership, other leaders share the view that ownership should be assumed whenever there is participation. Another interesting observation I made was the role of local chiefs versus that of the external agency such as MVP. The leaders felt that the role of the local chiefs in the development process seem to have been overshadowed by the tangible benefits that MVP has provided. Gyimah, (59, Male), a community leader commented on this issue by saying,

“In as much as we hold our local chiefs in high esteem, it all sums up to how they are able to facilitate the development process of the villages. For so long a time, the chiefs and government have not been able to provide much for development. Rather, we look up to external agency like MVP to fulfill our development needs. Also, the role of the local chief is most often been internalized. It is however important to note that success of participatory development chalked by respective villages is not solely based on the enthusiasm of the chief (though very important) but by the support of an active unit committee and strong opinion leaders.”

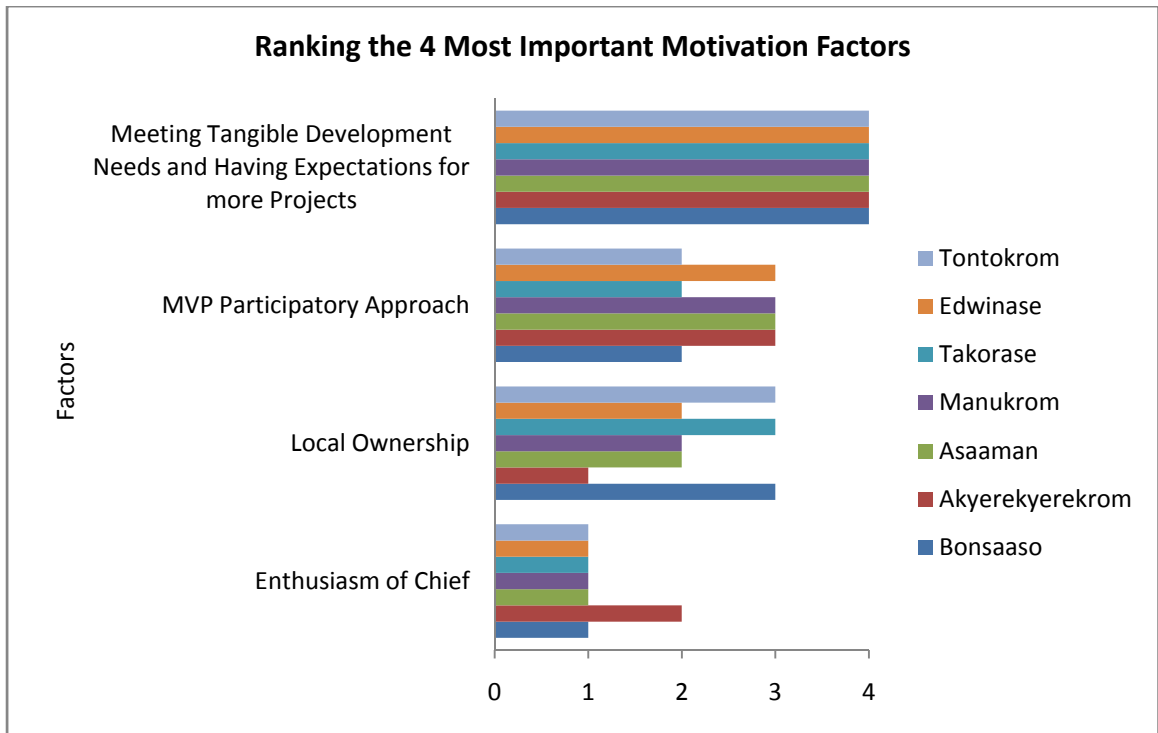


Figure 18: Ranking the 4 Most Important Motivating Factors

Source: Own Research from Interviews. Ranking based on scores between 1 and 4, where 1=Least of Factors and 4=Most Important Factor

## Disincentives to Participation

While individual interviews on the motivation for participation revealed similar responses to that of the leaders, a further exploration was made to groups such as women, men and the youth inquiring why people may not participate. Group's perceptions were sought and summed in Table 16.

Table 16: Group Perceptions on Motivation for not Participating

Group Motivation 'for not' Participating		
Men	Women	Youth
Attitude of external agencies. They are not transparent and cannot be trusted.	Projects that do not directly target women and children, such as health facilities, water provision, schools, etc.	Opportunities for employment are not immediate, but long-term.
Most often our own needs are not determined by us.	Illiteracy is high. No empowering programs to empower and build capacity of women, such as training and education programs, micro credit enterprising, etc.	Lack of avenues to participate in decision-making and project implementation.
Duration of participation.	Marketing avenues for agriculture and other produce. Markets, pricing information, etc.	Competing projects with quick benefits, e.g. illegal small scale mining.
Minimal influence of local knowledge and the observance of local norms.	Traditional role of women against the duration of projects. Left out of project decision-making due to women's traditional roles at home, which do not favor schedules and timing for decision-making.	Duration of participation.
Focus on projects <sup>28</sup> is low as against programs. The need for electricity, roads, etc.	Risk averse. We wait and see how program benefits would emerge. Particularly on agriculture.	
Local involvement in budgeting and project oversight is low. Handling money confers power.		
Source: Own Research from Interviews.		

Asking why groups such as women and men do not participate revealed some interesting information. Most interesting was the duration of project participation and its impact on

<sup>28</sup> It is important also to clarify that the communities have categorized MVP's activities into projects and programs. The projects were considered to be the activities such as roads, electricity provisions, water utilities, building of schools, health facilities, and markets etc while programs were classified as trainings and education, alternative applications of agricultural inputs, technology transfers, micro credit enterprising, etc.

participation. To most interviewees, the length of project involvement is crucial because it impacts their availability to attend to other livelihood programs. It is important for us to understand that participatory development in the area has largely focused on the perceptions of men rather than women. An interview with several men and women over their respective motivations for participating showed that men constructed their motivation based on their individual wants and interest, whereas that of women was not solely based on individual wants or disinterest, but a decision strongly informed by the norms, roles, values and perceptions embedded in the home and community at large. While women were focusing on potential empowerment programs such as education and training programs, men were more interested in material and physical economic benefits such as electricity and other infrastructure for the village. Fowaa (68, female), a farmer, made this comment that has captured my thoughts for a while,

“Do you know why we go through the hassle of registering to vote? I can tell you that it is not only because we want to vote but importantly because we need the voter ID cards. It’s our way of expressing that we are equal with the men. It empowers us when we see our thumbprint and picture on it and even use it to make our choices. See how just an ID card can motivate my participation.”

In essence, the motivations that stimulate active participation can be very innate and sublime. An interesting dialogue between Agya Manu (55, Male), a community leader, and Maame Mansah (44, Female), a community health worker, both from Takorase,

captured how the construction of needs and motivation for participation can differ between gender groups. During one of the group interview sessions, Agya Manu (55, Male) commented that, “All I want to see is electricity. It’s even important than roads. Can you imagine how the entire town’s atmosphere changes when there is an outdoor program and we have to use an outdoor power generator?”

Maame Mansah (44, Female), a community health worker, responded,

“Have you ever thought about you getting sick and there are no transportation or better roads? How can our agricultural produce get to the market if the roads are not good? You men always think about how you need electricity in order to watch your television and talk about politics. Electricity is necessary, but let consider the things that benefits the most than few.”

Agya Manu responds back and says,

“Okay roads are good, but remember it’s the weekend entertainment at Keniago that has gotten most of our youth migrating. They come and tell the rest about the dance parties and all the youth wants to live there. We need the electricity so that we can be entertained just like the other villages with electricity. In fact, for the entire community sake, let’s develop our roads while erecting electricity poles.”

Women in these villages have limited mobility, limited access to information and a limited capacity for analysis and decision-making. Interestingly, women are, however, influential in nutrition, the rearing of children and agriculture, but have minimal spaces for a voice in decision-making at the community level. The advent where women are seen as equal constituents and partners would constitute a major shift for increased participation and also a major challenge to existing perceptions of the participatory development process. It would be valuable at this point for husbands and/or males to be involved in the processes of empowering the women so that their awareness develops parallel with their female counterparts. Although they are equal partners, there are fundamental differences in the way each accesses and processes information.

### **Analyzing Communities Social Development Priorities**

What are your prioritized developmental needs?

Developmental needs were varied among communities and individuals, although they share similar demographic and socio-economic needs.

Guided by interviewee's choices in prioritizing factors, I asked a question to find out what their needs are and prioritized them according to their interests. Although "need" is an inherently complex concept, for the purpose of this study, it is understood as basic human needs that can be attributed to personal, mental, and community needs, which can be physical, economic, social, cultural and psychological. Identifying these needs

requires knowledge of the wishes and aspirations of the people and meeting those needs can be described as the degree of responsiveness to the voice of the people. I asked what their developmental needs are, and how they would prioritize them. Since the provision of tangible material needs dominated the motivations for participation, it was hoped that identifying those needs and how they have been addressed respectively by the Millennium Village Projects may help us in understanding the community's level of participation.

Figure 19 shows the various developmental needs indicated by the leaders of the selected communities. I prioritized the stated needs on a scale of one to ten, with ten (10) being the most important development need, and one (1) representing the least desired need.



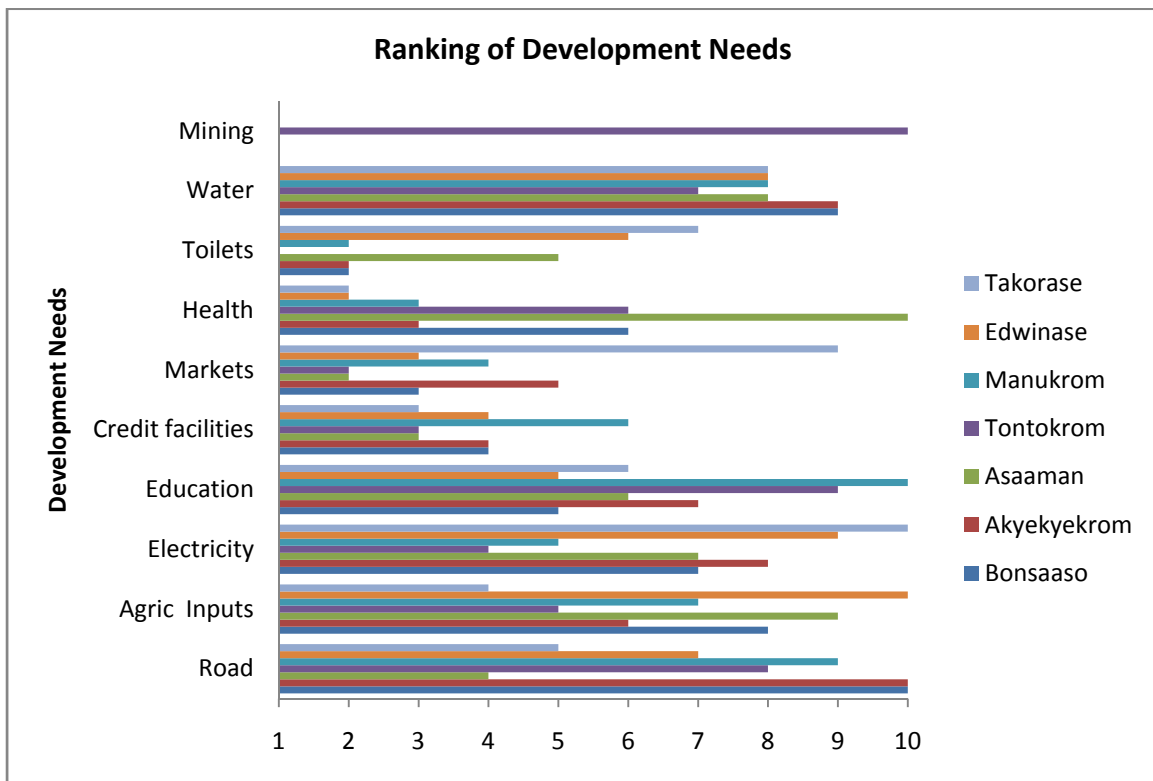


Figure 17: Ranking of Community Development Needs

Source: Own Research from Interviews. Ranking based on scores between 1 and 10, where 1=Least of needs and 10=Most important need.

The above is a summary of development needs ranked by the leaders of the selected villages. Figure 19 evidently shows how needs can extremely vary even with communities who have so much in common. Although only Akyerekrekrom and Bonsaaso ranked roads as their main developmental needs, it has still not been addressed until today. The MVP staff indicated that road refurbishing is not part of their budgetary allocations. They maintain that refurbishing roads is a capital-intensive activity that remains the duty of the government. The need for quality water featured prominently for

almost all the villages. The soil in the area is noted for high manganese infiltration into the water table, thus affecting their drinking water. Striking among the needs is Tontokrom, ranking the need for mining as its most desirable need. It is worth noting that by mining, they meant the formal regularization of small-scale mining in the area. Apparently, Tontokrom is noted for its illegal small scale mining known as “galamsey.” A majority of the youth and able men and women find their sustenance from mining. As such any project with little attention of mining activities does not attract the most attention. Takorase selected the provision of electricity to the village, while Edwinase chose the provision of agricultural inputs for their farmers. Agriculture is an important livelihood for all the selected communities, and by inputs, they meant the provision of cocoa inputs such as seedlings, agricultural fertilizers and chemicals.

A later discussion with the MVP staff revealed that MVP provided to the farmers some cocoa inputs with the exception of fertilizers and chemicals. The communities have wished that MVP provide for them agricultural chemicals and fertilizers because they are very costly. For the Takorase leaders, electricity was a sign of modernity and does attract other societal activities, such as funerals ceremonies, public video shows, and other entertaining activities. Manukrom, a predominantly agricultural village, selected education as the most important need, while the Asaaman leaders picked the provision of health care as the most important motivator. Education, according to the Manukrom leaders, is crucial because children after kindergarten have to walk to Gross, a nearby

community about 5km away in order to attend primary school. Sera, (56, female), a mother, commented sadly on this by saying,

“Sometimes I wonder how these kids are able to make it. When they set off to school, all you think about is: are they coming home safely? No wonder our children cannot go to school that much. However, MVP understands to build a school here at Manukrom is a great relief for us. At least I don’t have to worry about schooling for the children while I concentrate on my farm”.

The Asaaman leaders, however, were enthusiastic about the building of health facilities. Although the highest cocoa producing community in the entire district, they stated that the nearest health facility was at Ken ago, a nearby community about 20km away. They, however, indicated that the provision of agricultural inputs was necessary, but does not surpass the need for health facilities.

In summary, it was found that each rural community (although has so much in common) has a unique environment, history and economic base, which influences the requirement for development needs such as health care, roads, water, markets, and other socio-economic facilitates. This presupposes that community needs are varied and different. Also, these needs are inherent in their aspirations and wishes as a people, and rightly identifying them can motivate and galvanize the community’s participation.

## **Determining Project Ownership**

Do leaders feel listened to? Are they able to influence project decisions? Are they satisfied with the project and the way it is being managed?

Satisfaction toward project ownership was not only affected by the level of influence and how much participants are listened to, but also by the actual implementation of the provisions designed for communities based on agreed promises.

Community ownership is often identified as an important objective in community participatory programs in rural areas. I collected perceptions of ownership factors from the respective community leaders to help understand the perceived ownership of community projects. “Project Ownership<sup>29</sup>,” in the context of this study, is the increased responsiveness and influence derived through project participation. Identified as a major motivator towards participation, I asked questions about whether 1) the selected communities felt listened to; 2) were able to influence project decisions; and 3) were satisfied with the projects and the way they were being managed. My goal was to verify whether the communities have some level of satisfaction to the projects and why they thought so. I also ascertained the level which the community leaders perceive project ownership due to its prominence in the factors the community leaders selected as motivation for their participation. This approach to understand community participation has been studied in social learning theories of community behavior (Bandera 1977;

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<sup>29</sup> See Bracht *et al.* (1994) & Thompson and Kinne (1990). The issue of community ownership continues to be a controversial term in participatory development.

Wellston and Wellston 1978) and in broader concepts of empowerment and competence in the community organization literature (Eng and Parker 1994; Israel et al. 1994). Based on a five-point agreement instrument, I gave three main statements: (a) We feel “listened to” (b) We are able to “influence” project decisions (c) We are “satisfied” with the project and the way it is being “managed.” Figure 20 sums up how the leaders responded.

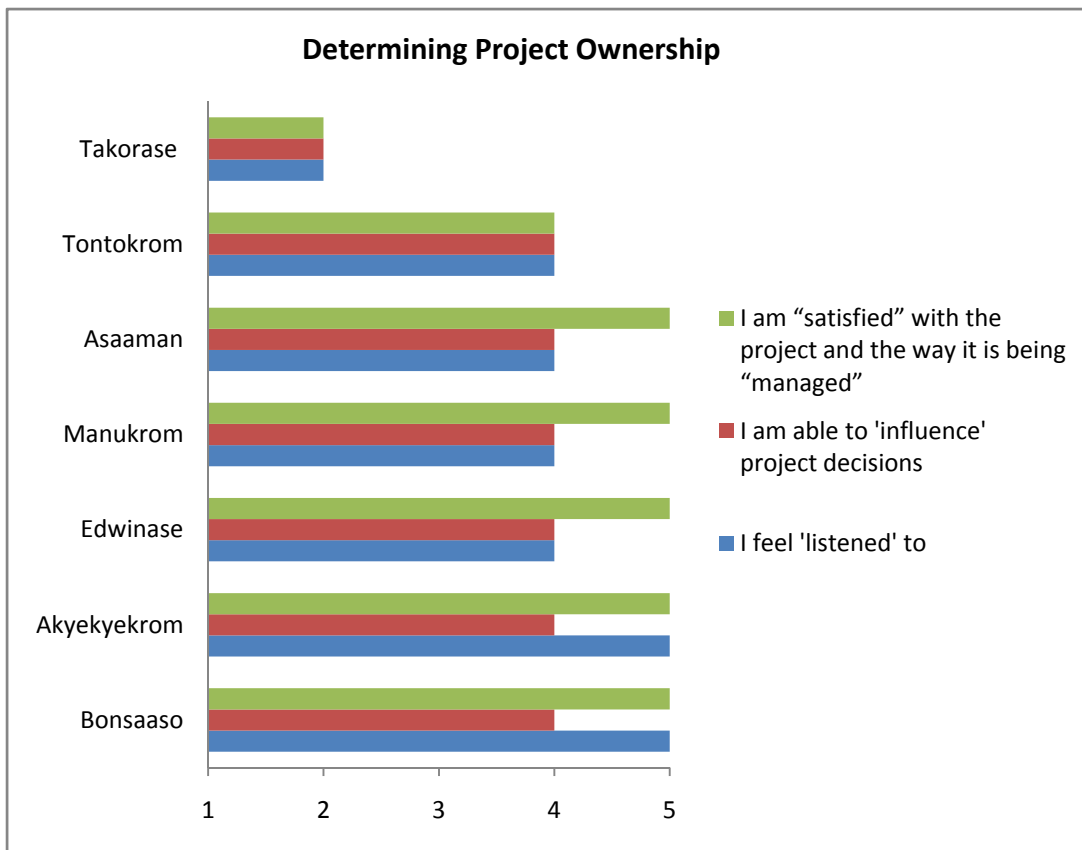


Figure 20: Community Leaders responses to Project Ownership

Source: Own Research from Interviews. Based on five point scale where 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3=Undecided, 4=Agree, 5= Strongly agree

Deducing from the above, almost all the community leaders were strongly satisfied with the project and the way they were being managed, with the exception of Tontokrom and

Takorase. While the Takorase leaders disagreed on the level of satisfaction on the grounds of mistrust, the Tontokrom leaders were in agreement, but with some reservations. Further discussion with the Takorase leaders revealed that at the moment, there was no physical or infrastructural program going on at Takorase. They felt MVP has not followed through with their promises to provide for them electricity, a market and a mechanized water facility. In this case, they disagree also on both factors, whether they are able to influence project decisions or felt listened to. Verifications with the MVP staff revealed that Takorase communal spirit was very low during the early stages of community selection. Furthermore, the criteria for locating sites for the project were strongly influenced by the community's communal spirit and local initiative. The leaders of Tontokrom, however, did agree to all the issues, but indicated that they are rather applying a "wait and see" approach to the projects discussed with MVP. They cannot at the moment give a strong indication of their satisfaction but will only wait and see how things improve with time.

A striking element of the analysis is the fact that although none of the community leaders strongly agreed to the given statements on "influence" and being "listened to," they felt strongly satisfied with the way the projects were being managed. They explained that, in their context, lacking the capacity to "strongly influence" project decisions, and not being "listened to" as expected, are not the only strong indicators of their general satisfaction that can lead to project ownership. However, seeing that the projects are actually completed sends stronger signals for increased participation. The reason being that the

communities have been neglected by the government for decades and these have contributed to the acute level of deprivation. As a result, nothing is more important to them than to tangibly seen projects completed. Thus, seeing the fruits of their labor is a greater determinant. Akoto (63, Male), a farmer and community leader in Manukrom, reacted to this issue by commenting that,

“We are happy with the project even though there is more room for improvement from MVP. We see MVP as all in everything and hope they can solve everything for us. It’s an issue of survival and when you are applying your survival instincts, nothing more is important than having a better life than the previous. We are not able to influence every aspect of the project, nor are all our views taken into consideration, but we are happy and satisfied with the project so far.”

Thus, the issue of satisfaction goes beyond being listened to or having influence on project decisions. Ampadu (57, Male), a community health worker, exclaimed that,

“We do not necessarily need to own projects financially and administratively speaking in order to strongly identify with it. In fact, we will identify with whatever project as long as it’s making our lives better. Not allowing us to help you to identify our right needs and what we are willing to participate for free and what we are willing to pay for represents forcible ownership. In this case, we will not value it and cannot own it.”

Thus, in many ways satisfaction toward project ownership is not only affected by the nature and type of project going on, nor the mere sense of influence or being listened to, but most importantly the process of identifying needs with the people and making sure that implementing projects conform to those community desires and identified needs.

## **Discussion**

Tabulating respective developmental needs, the status of projects, level of satisfaction and the respective interpretations of participation in Table 17 shows some interesting observations for discussion.



Table 17: Summary of Needs, Level of Satisfaction, Project Status and Interpretations

Community	Needs	Level of Satisfaction on Project Management	MVP Projects and Status (*As at Sept 2008)	Interpretations of Participation
Edwinase	1 <sup>st</sup> : Agric Inputs 2 <sup>nd</sup> :Electricity	Strongly Agree	Provision of cocoa seedlings and farm/ field training: School feeding program-100%	“Consensus building through consultation, collaboration and training in order to positively benefit from projects.”
Tontokrom	1 <sup>st</sup> :Mining Regulation 2 <sup>nd</sup> : Education	Agree	Rehabilitation of Clinic Block and the provision of nurses quarters: 60% completion	“‘Engagement by inclusion’ focusing on who is included, and why they need to be included.”
Akyerekryere krom	1 <sup>st</sup> : Roads 2 <sup>nd</sup> : Water	Strongly Agree	Construction of Clinic with attached Staff Quarters: Construction of six classroom blocks : 100% Completion	“Voluntarily contribution of residents coming together to perform an activity in the interest of both the community and themselves.”
Manukrom	1 <sup>st</sup> : Education 2 <sup>nd</sup> : Road	Strongly Agree	Construction of Kindergarten School: 50% Complete	“Self-help with the support and provision from of a stronger external organization where tangible material benefits or incentives can be realized.”
Asaaman	1 <sup>st</sup> : Health 2 <sup>nd</sup> : Agric	Strongly Agree	Construction of clinic : 95% clinic	“Direct and continuous consultation on project activity decisions with beneficiaries throughout the project cycle.”
Takorase	1 <sup>st</sup> : Electricity 2 <sup>nd</sup> : Markets	Disagree	No project yet	“Meeting agreed promises and communicating it for better engagement in development work.”
Bonsaaso	1 <sup>st</sup> : Roads 2 <sup>nd</sup> : Water	Strongly Agree	Construction of Teachers quarters – 74% completion: Dispensary block -83% completion: Nurses quarters – 8% completion: Maize Storage facility- 12% completion. Pilot Mwacafe Iron and Manganese in Water Removal Plants	“An active process where community is empowered to increase their control on project decisions in an open, transparent and trustful manner.”

Source: Own Research from Interviews.

The respective interpretations of participation given by the seven communities differed.

The difference in respective interpretations of participation substantiates the argument suggested by various authors that participation defies any single attempt in definition and

packaging it into a single statement would be a myth rather than reality. Oakley and Marsden (1984) reviewed a whole range of interpretations in a continuum to illustrate the direct relationship between interpretation and development analysis and summarized this range of interpretations, stating that participation can be considered as people's involvement in developmental decision-making in their organized effort to increase control over resources.

Cohen and Uphoff (1977) and Midgeley et al. (1986) similarly sought to distinguish between the vast amount of interpretation and dimensions of participation, suggesting the need to be skeptical about criteria uniformly applied to all projects. Oakley et al. (1991) have emphasized on the nature of participation, which was concluded as evolving and as such project staff should be at least conscious that they are dealing with an unfolding process. However, simply recognizing that there are no universal interpretations and applications does not answer the questions for better directions in applying the concept of participation in rural development. Perhaps the various applications and definitions provide different kinds of answers to different kinds of problems. More in-depth research to produce frameworks that can adapt to various theoretical approaches and project environments is necessary.

The widespread conception that previous development has circumvented the majority of rural communities perhaps has led to the conception that the majority must participate in development. However, this failure to involve the majority rests with the fact that very

little attention has been paid to understanding how the majority in collective action deals with different developmental issues. Without attention to this critical issue of who participates and how they participate in participatory development, issues such as the empowerment of women and the youth risk failure. The problem, perhaps, will be how to understand where collective action emerges as beneficial to the project and where it is unlikely to emerge as an important aspect of the project. Also, ascertaining the willingness and ability of people to work together is very crucial. Table 8 has shown the various stakeholders and their roles, but the extent to which their willingness to participate may rather be engulfed in the political economy of development, which can either foster or inhibit effective collective action (Ostrom 1990 & 1992; Ostrom, Gardner, and Walker 1994). Ostrom (1990) suggests that some people may participate one time, others another, with none of them knowing exactly who is involved, but all identifying with the collective action. Unlike the Bonsaaso Cluster of villages, communal labor is traditionally enforced with sanctions; however, the shared knowledge, understandings, norms, rules, and expectations about patterns of interactions that groups of individuals bring to a project activity needs much more consideration. Issues relating to trust, transparency, common rules, connectedness, networks and groups are important mechanisms to build social capital and ensure an effective collective action (Pretty 2001).

Although it appears to be self-evident that proponents of community participation do refer to communities when discussing “who” participates in development, community as a concept is poorly defined. It has been used in the case of the the Bonsaaso Project to denote a socio-spatial entity related to the notion of deprivation and disadvantage. In this

case, the relatively affluent elites or rich farmers are clearly not identified as the project target. The Bonsaaso Cluster of villages boasts as one of the main cocoa growing areas in Ghana, and it is expected that these farmers would be rich. While some authors argue that only those sections of the village that are most disadvantaged should be mobilized for participation, others support the notion that the whole community should be involved. Hollnsteiner (1982) emphasized that people's participation refers not to any one identifiable community or social grouping, whether elite or not, but rather to the poor majority with little access to power. Emphasizing on the importance of an "organized community," White (1982), on the other hand, insisted that community participation should not be concerned with the mobilization of some individuals who should be regarded as beneficiaries of participation, rather it should involve the participation of the organized community. Although most authors take different sides on this issue of "who" participates in rural development, it is quite obvious that the capacity of community to engage in participation changes over time. The reason being is communities comprised of individuals who differ in their desires to become involved, or who are constrained by diverse factors that impacts participation either positively or negatively. This presupposes the importance of understanding the sociological factors, which this study has strived to expose.

A major element to promote rural community development, as illustrated in Figure 16 and Table 11 on the project cycle, is the notion of institution building. Many authors use this term to connote the establishment of decision-making that is fully representative and

accountable (Majeres 1997; Midgley et al. 1986). Institutional building may involve processes that are diverse, and as Mosse (1998) point out, institutional building entails the acceptance of unpredictable elements that are central to the success or failure of respective community development programs. These uncertainties, according to Dale (2004), results from fairly immediate and strong exposure to varied and most often changing external forces that may interact with the internal process in less than predictable ways. These features of change may call for reassessment of current procedures in use. In that, the complex level of uncertainty would require that both internal and external forces of change are reassessed and not managed through conventional blueprint planning. The difficulty, however, will be identifying these institutions and how to measure them. Ostrom (2007) stated that institutions are fundamentally shared concepts that exist in the minds of participants and most often not shared in an explicit and written form, but rather through implicit knowledge. The challenge, perhaps, facing scholars will be the adequate identification of these institutions on the field. Recognizing the potential invisibility of rules, as well as identifying institutional rules-in-use rather than focusing on rules-in-form, has been captured by Ostrom (2007) as a collective action dilemma.

Many authors have warned against the excessive reliance on projects as a basis for promoting participation, particularly the over-reliance on external support for rural community projects. With reference to the interpretation of participation by the Manukrom leaders (see Table 14), the argument for “external help” in community development finds its roots from the dependency theory proponents with Neo-Marxist

approaches to development and underdevelopment (Foster-Carter 1976). This is in contrast with proponents for “self-reliance,” sometimes referred to as self-help.

According to Chambers (1983), self-help begins the fundamental shift away from the domination of the modernization paradigm reexamining the nature and purpose of community development.

However, there is the danger that rushing communities through participatory processes without taking pains to strengthening their local capacities and capabilities in decision-making. Although Majeres (1977) has argued that a local council must be empowered to assume responsibilities within a decentralized governance system to initiate a variety of infrastructural and social development, it would be more useful if they were integrated into the informal administrative and planning processes. The ability to secure a useful integration of grassroots interest and decentralized formal governance continues to be an overarching problem. How can local communities approach external and formal authorities from a position of strength? To what extent can local traditions accommodate formal institutional processes without weakening the community’s position? Rightly suggested by Midgley (1986) is the fact that true decentralization only occurs when local decision-making bodies have control over financial resources. For Stiefel and Pearse (1982), participation is an encounter between local people and the rest of the society, and should be recognized, argued by Hollnsteiner (1979), as building an upward dialogue for mobilized community solidarity. Overcoming this challenge would suggest the proposal of a new deal between informal and formal structures at the local level and as such

prevent the growing faddishness of community participation. As De Kadt (1982) noted, community participation “has popularity without clarity and is subject to growing faddishness and a lot of lip service.”

A quick look at the stakeholder Table 9 reveals a minimal presence of Non-Governmental Organizations within the Bonsaaso project. It is argued that voluntary organizations such as NGOs and community-based groups (CBOs) are more effective in promoting community participation because they are innovative and adaptable (Midgley 1986). Their innovations in reformulating existing approaches resistant to change have benefitted many local communities. The minimal presence of NGOs and CBOs may have prevented the organization of voices and people to serve as vehicles for participation. Marsden and Oakley (1982) have argued that radical community action is unlikely to emerge without organization outside the formal arrangements of statutory sponsorship, since the formal state has a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Nonetheless, there is little evidence to show that a reliance on NGOs results magically in the emergence of genuine participation. Concepts of participation from some of these NGOs, in some cases, do not conform to the expectations of the local people. However, their general role in supporting traditionally marginalized communities in their efforts to improve the economic, social, ecological, and political conditions cannot be underestimated. As these grassroots NGOs gain experience and credibility in development work, many are adding formal policy influence to their agendas. Focusing

on how such organizations help strengthen civil society and good government through institutional and coalitional efforts influences developmental policies.

Research exploring project environments supported by group networks forging coalitions of accountability, while exploring their relationships in effective decision-making, can provide insights that may have great relevance to rural development (Robbins 2006: Covey 1992). It can be argued based on evidence from this study that NGOs can bring some tangible benefits to local people. However, the argument for financial incentives to spur participation continues to be debated on various development platforms. Are decisions to participate made altruistically, or are they based on the benefits that can be accrued? Lessons could be gathered from Guagnano and Gibbs (2007) who suggest that the willingness to participate in clinical trial programs cannot be easily predicted. While grassroots action decision-making in community development cannot be overestimated, it is also very true that behavior in community development is not easily predictable at the local level.

Establishing a relationship between the concept of decentralization and that of traditional councils as each depend on the other to ensure rural development and distribution of power is important. However, granted that there is a meaningful engagement between the decentralized institutions and the traditional system, how can this relationship be reciprocal? Studies show that in general, public participation in the decision-making process, transparency in program implementation, accountability and the involvement of



the local people is still a myth (Ayee 1992; Nkrumah 2000). Guri (2006) has described Ghana's decentralization as "deconcentration," rather than "devolution," as claimed in the legislation, since decision-making power is still in the hands of the government appointees. Under the 1992 Constitution and the Local Government Act (Act 462), 1993, there is no provision for the automatic membership of chiefs on the District Assemblies. The Act recognizes that, "not more than 30 per cent of the total membership of the District Assemblies appointed by the President in consultation with the traditional authorities and other interest groups in the district."

It is contemplated that this lack of institutional representation has diminished the influence of the traditional authorities at the district assembly level and negatively affected their capacity to lead the processes of enhancing the participation of the rural poor in local development. This lack of institutional representation is also reflected under Legislative Instrument (LI) 1589, 1994, where no provisions were made for the automatic membership of traditional authorities in the sub-district structures such as the Urban, Zonal and Town Councils, as well as Unit Committees, even though it is widely recognized that they hold an enormous amount of influence at that level, especially at the rural areas where the majority of the people reside. See Figure 8 and 9. The question is: how do we position the traditional system of governance using the position of strength, and not weakness, to reform the colonial heritage of "power over their people" and focus on leadership for the improvement of the "lives of their people"? Also, will traditional leaders be able to communicate their vision in a way that reaches and motivates local

people? The United Nations (2006) has commented that the prescription of membership for grassroots structures places emphasis on representation, which restricts the extent to which local people take part in decision-making (UNDP 2000).

In essence, if the argument is for representation, as emphasized in decentralization, then the dominance of the elite is an obvious result. It is also true that through decentralization, power is invested in bureaucrats, and political appointees mostly owe allegiance to the political party in charge. Perhaps organizing local people to constitute a countervailing force that will make them politically relevant to bureaucrats and political power seekers will be essential. This will need the active role of traditional rulers who are in the best position to mobilize the local communities and provide leadership for this, due to their legitimacy and proximity to the people.

## **CHAPTER 6 -CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

In this chapter, I summarize the main findings of the study, examine their implications and suggest some recommendations. Although I based the study on the Bonsaaso Millennium Village Project in Ghana, its potential for policy application is wider, since the findings and discussions are likely to be relevant in other developmental contexts.

### **Summary of Findings**

The preceding chapters have dealt critically with issues regarding local people's participation in community interventions and how participation as a developmental concept can be meaningfully understood in the context of rural development.

In chapter one, I emphasized that participation involving rural populations in projects will continue to be a challenge unless participatory development strategies become sensitive to the contextual experiences of respective communities' historical and socio-economical perceptions. For more than two decades, development practitioners have tried to find ways of resolving the growing concern over the lack of understanding of participation in the context of rural community projects and its potential for project success. On one hand is the need to effectively involve local people in projects that will benefit them. On the

other hand, the ideals for such an engagement are not characteristic to the contextual and evolving nature of participation interpreted through respective communities' histories and their socio-economic needs. This suggests that participation for development is far more than a requirement and much more a condition for success, based on the contextual aspirations and expectations of local project beneficiaries.

In chapter two, I reviewed the relevant literature underpinning stakeholder participation in rural development. I focused on the theories of stakeholder participation, problems regarding its definitions and some typologies designed to facilitate participatory processes. Discussing the literature, I reveal that in practice, participation processes and approaches have not considered the importance of context, history and the socio-economic dimensions of local people's engagement in developmental projects. Although highlighted in some literature, it was done without in-depth field level testing. To this end, I focused my attention by taking the argument to the grassroots to address this gap and used my findings to substantiate the argument for projects' processes to be sensitive to local people's contextual, historical and socio-economic needs.

In chapter three, I situated the study in seven villages participating in the Bonsaaso Millennium Village Project. The project is community-driven and located in the poverty hotspot of Ghana. I examined the characteristics of the village setting, its geography, socio-economic, cultural and political structure. The planning processes of the MVP project had included participatory strategies based on the United Nations Millennium

Promise's (UNMP) recommendations for community development in the rural context. Their approaches were based on the idea that impoverished villages can transform themselves and meet the Millennium Development Goals if they are empowered with proven, powerful, practical technologies. The concept for the project also underscores the fact that the challenges facing poor people in developing countries are intertwined and any effort to emancipate them from chronic poverty should include a comprehensive, but affordable, approach.

In chapter four, I dealt with the methods and approaches used in constructing knowledge in the local Ghanaian environment. I used grounded theory tools for both data collection and analysis. I also discussed approaches and procedures by which data for this study was conducted and analyzed. Primarily, the work of Miles and Huberman (1984) and that of Strauss and Corbin (1990) guided the study.

In chapter five, I presented my findings and analyses. As a requirement for increasing the credibility of the research, participants were given the needed flexibility to express their views and perceptions freely. Guided by the "thick description" concept, numerous quotations from the respondents were used to justify their opinions. By using an in-depth qualitative inquiry, I interviewed 118 people of whom were chiefs, local community individuals, village committee leaders, some officials at the local district authority and some project staff. The study included four main tasks. The first task was to gather the existing perceptions on communities' historical experiences in participatory

development. The second task was to find out how participation was occurring in the selected villages, and thirdly, to ascertain how the selected communities perceived and interpreted participation. Last, I examined community perceptions on motivation for participation. The findings significantly substantiate and correspond to the difficulties in generalizing about rural development interventions. Participation, with regards to this study, is simply perceived differently by different communities, and confronting participation for development, as a concept, will require some understanding on communities' contextual characteristics, histories regarding participatory development, and perceptions on socio-economic priorities.

The principal result of this study is summarized as follows, “confronting the issue of participation for development will require an in-depth understanding of communities' contextual characteristics, its history regarding participatory development and meeting their social development priorities.”

As development practitioners seek to improve participatory approaches to development, it is essential that they not only classify participation as an idle tool or a strict requirement, but consider it as a social learning process. This will include the realization that participation for development evolves based on the deep-rooted community issues, while bringing about impacts and benefits to key project beneficiaries. This new thinking will focus not only on how participation is managed, but also how management will adapt to participation.

Another way to look at this study's main contribution is depicted in Figure 21. It illustrates the suggested new foci for participation for development. From the literature review in Chapter 2 (see Figure 3), I showed that, in practice, participatory approaches over the years have not been sensitive to communities' contextual characteristics, histories on participatory development, and perceptions on their social development priorities. This contrasts the reviewed typologies and approaches for participation and attempts to fill in the gap identified by the literature review in chapter 2. The gap identified was that, although sensitivity to social needs in participation for development have been highlighted in theory, its focus in practice still remains to be explored. To this end, I stressed the importance of context, history and meeting the social development priorities in development projects. I caution that these are not the only elements necessary for participation effectiveness at the project level.

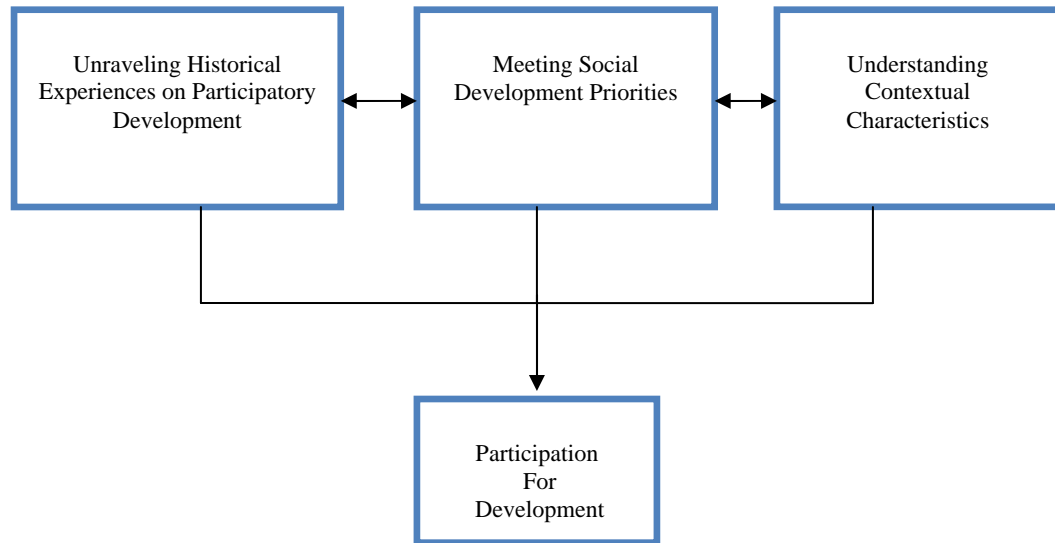


Figure 21: Historical, Social Development Priorities and Contextual Characteristics for Participatory Development Framework.  
Source: Own Research.

Figure 20 illustrates that participation for development can be affected in three ways at the grassroots and project level. First, historical experiences over time. The findings show in chapter four that participation for development within the selected villages has followed different patterns during the pre-colonial, colonial and the post-colonial era. While participation for development was limited during the pre-colonial era and was centered around chiefdoms, the colonial era realized the introduction of massive participation as a development mechanism. The post-colonial era, however, continued to encourage massive participation based on an exploitative political motive similar to that of the colonial period. Consequently, projects introduced in the area are first and foremost foreseen by the local people as politically motivated and tagged with suspicion. This



understanding, which has been established through historical experiences, weakens sustained involvement of local people in projects, particularly those extended by government and external donors. Recognizing communities' histories on participatory development may provide significant information for project planning and implementation.

Second, the findings in chapter 4 also indicate that meeting villages social development priorities reflected how satisfied leaders were with the management of the project. For example, as depicted in Figure 17, the leaders of Manukrom, Asaaman and Edwinase were strongly satisfied with the management of the projects because their respective socio-economic priorities were met by the Millennium Project. This contrasts the level of satisfaction of the Takorase leaders, who rather disagreed being satisfied with the project management because none of their needs had been met by the Millennium Project.

Third, the varied interpretation of participation for development expressed by the village leaders, as depicted in Table 14 in chapter 4, attests to the fact that participation for development meant different things to different people. Attention drawn to this diversity of interpretation suggests the need for varied participatory constructs and approaches.

Fourth, examining the association between a given village's economic base affected how these communities defined participation and their level of participation overall. In many of the study's villages individuals' and leaders' perceptions or choices were strongly

influenced by the nature of their village's economic context within which participation was unfolding. For example, the relatively smaller agricultural dependent villages attached more importance to participation than the bigger villages with alternative livelihoods such as small scale mining. In general, the relatively smaller villages, like Manukrom, Akyerekrekrom and Edwinase, were more enthusiastic in discussions on participation for development rather than bigger villages like Tontokrom and Takorase. Probably the relatively poorer villages cannot easily absorb the outcome of wrong project decisions. Also, the context of groups such as men, women and the youth expressed different views about participation for development. For instance, Table 16 shows that while men desire more infrastructural projects such as roads and electricity, women desire programs and projects that target women and children, such as health, water and education facilities, vocational programs clinics, and market avenues for their produce. The youth, however, preferred mainly projects with employment opportunities. This probably indicates that, making provisions for development without paying attention to these contextual desires of respective groups can potentially undermine participation. This was also reflected in Figure 17 where motivations for participation were expressed based on villages' unique context. For example, while all the leaders agree being motivated by the provision of tangible needs and the expectation for more projects, agreement on the next most important motivation factor differed. While Bonsaaso leaders, for example, conceive the importance of increased control over projects, Akyerekrekrom, Edwinase, Asaaman and Manukrom leaders on the other hand observed that, sustaining the on-going participatory processes was a key motivation for

participation after meeting their respective tangible needs. The disparities in motivation for participation also suggest the view that not all the villages are operating on the same participatory paradigm. The probable explanation is that, participation within the villages are evolving but at different levels. Bonaaso village, for example has evolved from ‘simply collaborating’ to gaining ‘increased control’ of projects. If this is accepted as a trajectory, then it can logically be hypothesized that each village could be experiencing different paradigms of participation at certain points in time. My point here is to suggest that there is no single paradigm for participation for development.

It is therefore imperative that practitioners acknowledge the very many different paradigms which elucidate participation for development as an interactive eclectic learning process. This is important because there are many shades to participation and its application continues to evolve with uncertainties. Clearly, it weakens any claim for a universal blue-print, particularly when operating within rural populations. Rather, participation should reveal patterns of local perceptions and experiences, which potentially define the state of their involvement, and most importantly, recognize that local people’s involvement can shift with changes in experiences and perception over time. In this case, practitioners should acknowledge participation for its diversity, and as well, embrace its uncertainty. With high levels of diversity of backgrounds, expectations and uncertainties, it then becomes essential that participation is understood as the platform for social learning. To this end, participatory processes are made sensitive to the contextual characteristics, historical experiences over time, with the specific purpose of

meeting social development priorities of project beneficiaries'. We may well know that participation is a vitally important strategy; however, I suggest the need for practitioners to facilitate the process, rather than to direct it.

### **Holistic Institution-Based Community Project Model**

Based on these conclusions and lessons gained from the field study, I propose a holistic institutional-based project model which may be used to conceptualize the design of participatory rural projects (see Figure 22). Although many elements in the model have been suggested in theory and in practice, I highlight the recognition of history, social development priorities and contextual characteristics as a rather small part that seems critical for successful participation for development. The model consists of four main steps that can assist development practitioners in finding ways to involve local stakeholders in rural interventions.

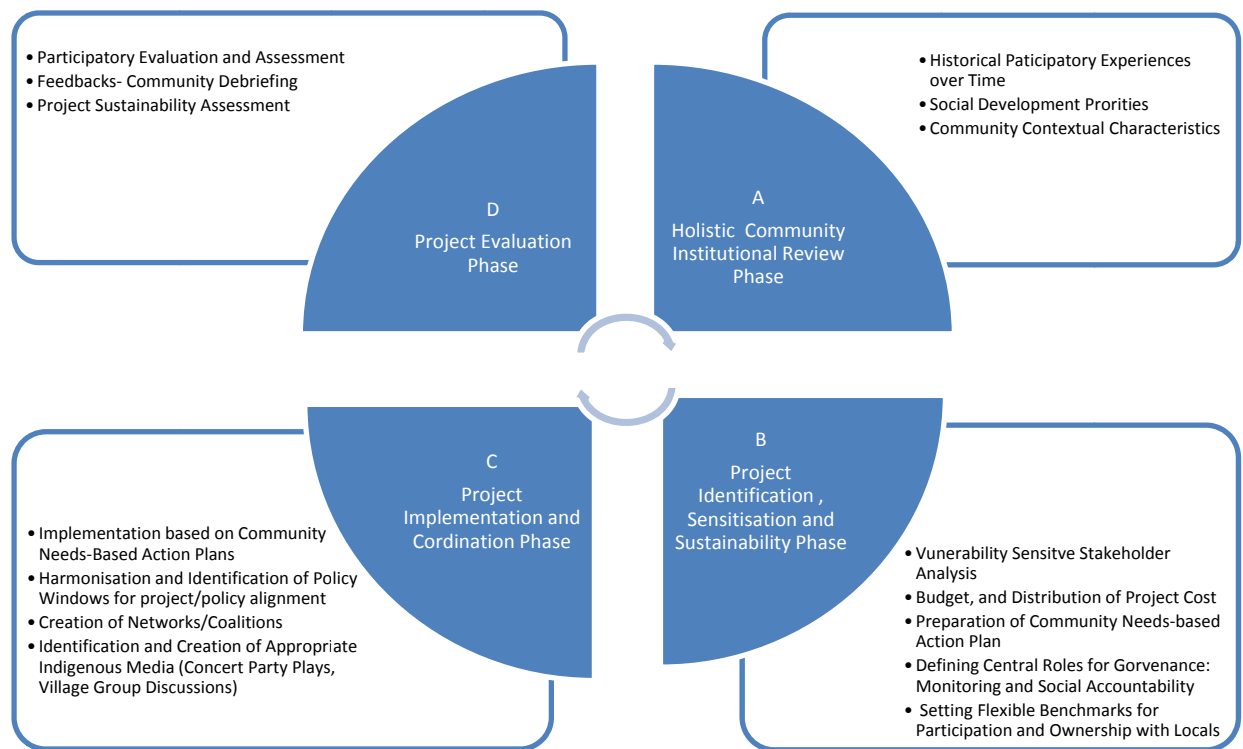


Figure 22: Holistic Institution-Based Community Project Model  
Source: Own Research.

The four-stage process begins with an in-depth analysis on the communities slated for the project. This study can be summarized as the first stage of the model. It includes an in-depth holistic community institutional review on the people in the project area, focusing on the historical experiences, social development needs and contextual characteristics of villages that can impact participation. This will help in understanding local people's participatory behavior and expose the institutional bottlenecks that can impact the participation processes in development. Also, it will ensure that village and community based planning approaches place greater emphasis on indigenous potential and initiatives.

Following the holistic institutional review stage is the project identification, sensitization and sustainability stage. This stage purposely considers the analysis of stakeholders. It is important to ensure that the poorest, most marginalized and vulnerable groups fully participate in project interventions and share in all project benefits. At this stage, the local people are involved in the identifying and distribution of project funds and cost sharing. Crucial at this stage is the preparation of the community needs-based action plans. This plan should be prepared by the local people with some facilitation by project staff where necessary. The idea is that the locals are experts in their own capacity and know best what their needs are. Central roles are developed for project monitoring and social accountability. It is expected that these roles are built into the community needs-based action plans with clear understanding of project sustainability based on flexible participation and ownership benchmarks developed with the local people.

The third stage, which is project implementation and coordination, focuses on implementation based on the community needs-based action plans. The implementation stage will include the identification of policy windows, coupled with the harmonization and alignment of project aspirations with national goals. Finding ways to bring together traditional, administrative, private, public and donor representatives to discuss and push society in a new direction and, hence, rid the social fabric of inertia and apathy is essential. Outputs for this stage should include seeking potential communication methods for project information dissemination, such as indigenous media, folklore, village concert parties and village group meetings. It is expected that the creation of appropriate

information dissemination tools, coupled with an enabling network coalition environment, will strengthen implementation while building on the potential of the local people.

Stage four, the project evaluation phase, draws on lessons learned in terms of project approaches and multiple issues relating to project relevance, effectiveness and efficiency. Feedback processes are designed to evaluate the sustainability of project objectives towards increased participation, control and project ownership.

I wish to indicate that this conceptual model is still in its nascent stage and requires substantial empirical work to substantiate its key propositions. Although some of the elements mentioned in parts B, C and D in the model emerge in part from participatory and policy based Strategic Environmental Assessment literature and my personal experiences on the field, they however do not have sufficient empirical basis in grassroots projects. To this end, part A of the model remains as my contribution to development practice. Without a framework to differentiate between the particular combinations of circumstances that exist in each community setting, the question of “what works?” will either remain unanswered or will only be answered in the most general sense.

## **Policy Implications for Rural Development**

The overall implications of the study put forward the rethinking of how participation of rural communities is understood for rural development. It might not be sufficient to only cultivate community participation into projects; attention must be paid on understanding the form of involvement and the tools designed for the process. Most importantly, a participatory approach more sensitive to the complexities of communities' perceptions, histories and social development priorities are suggested. In this approach, communities' intricate social environments have to be widely studied in-situ to inform project participatory processes before project commencement is recommended. For example, before a project commences, an anthropologic or ethnographic expertise would be needed to seek the perceptions on participation from the communities where the project will be located. Consequently, in-depth historical and social development priorities will be gathered to guide and integrate into project participatory processes. Gathering information from community members before project commencement can help inform and shape community projects and also ensure social connectedness of communities to the projects. Under such circumstances, practitioners, at least, will have some sort of understanding on the participatory behavior of the local communities before project commitments are made.

Nonetheless, a number of questions will need to be addressed. Would it be cost effective? How much of the complexities of ethnographic findings can be transferred and



effectively used to support participation for development? Will it necessarily lead to the emergence of a new type of project cycle better than the current processes? Reflecting on the wide variety of contexts and paradigms for which participation is conducted, it seems likely that a number of different types of protocols and approaches will emerge. In this case, practitioners will be allowing perceptions of the local people to guide the innovation of participatory processes in-situ rather than ex-situ.

Furthermore, it is important for rural communities to recognize that practitioners also face barriers and challenges that hinder progress in responding to, and recognizing, the context and socio-economic priorities of rural people. Most often they are challenged by the traditional structures at the grassroots level. Traditional structures remain very important in organizing community life. For example, the roles of traditional leadership in the study area are complex and also not rooted in any formal constitution and electoral processes but by inheritance and informal ordinances. While it might be difficult for some traditional leaders to ensure an all-inclusive system of participation, some traditional systems are designed to ensure the exclusion of some social groups. This kind of complex social construct poses a great challenge to grassroots development. Perhaps, this reality will have to be understood in its context and not how it necessarily unfolds in theory.

Then again, if the bottom-up development governance approach should be given a chance, then it is imperative that all stakeholders understand what it means, why it is

necessary and how it should operate. In this case, the local people, policy makers and practitioners in general should find the need to be educated about bottom-up approaches for development and how it ties up to improve the quality of life and the effectiveness of programs. I do not claim that perceptions from the historical and social milieu are the only ways with which participation can stimulate understanding for development. As we continue to observe participation for development as a social process, it is imperative that we also understand its connectedness to history, community's characteristics context, and the social development priorities of project beneficiaries. In this regard, rather than providing strict constructs for participation, I identify new avenues to explore and examine stakeholder participation for developmental projects.

### **Future Research**

In order to investigate more thoroughly the nature of participation for development, it is of the essence that detailed case studies are undertaken. Ideas in the Holistic Institution-Based Community Project Model could be tested and refined. Focusing on wider context within different historical, socio-economic, cultural and geographical backgrounds would be useful for a comparative assessment of participation for development. To this end, involving an interdisciplinary research team can help establish some of the ideals promoted by the model. This may well pave ways for better understanding the varied socio-economic conditions that could lead to greater participation effectiveness, given the fact that villages participate under different motivations, levels, and context.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

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