

# Ghana's decentralization: Locally centralized decision making ill serves its public

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 23 | Mina Okuru and Daniel Armah-Attoh

## Summary

Metropolitan, municipal, and district assemblies (MMDAs), along with complementary sub-structures, are the major features of Ghana's decentralized local government system initiated in the early 1990s. The core functions of MMDAs, as set out in the 1993 Local Government Act (Act 462), include ensuring the overall development of the district by a) preparing district development plans and budgets, b) initiating programs for the development of basic infrastructure, and c) providing municipal works and services in their jurisdictions.

In 2009, MMDA responsibilities were extended with the establishment of 16 new decentralized departments under their remit to support the local delivery of services, including a) managing public health/sanitation and environmental protection, b) maintaining roads and public transport, and c) planning and budgeting.

At the heart of Ghana's decentralization is the idea of giving "voice" to citizens in local governance. A critical requirement of the Local Government Act is the regular interface between elected local government representatives and citizens. For instance, the law requires that elected councillors meet constituents before every meeting of the assembly and that they consult the electorate on issues to be discussed in the assembly, collate their views and proposals, and submit them to the assembly for consideration. In addition, elected councillors are expected to provide their constituents with feedback on the general decisions of the assembly and the actions taken to address their problems or concerns.

In recent years, Ghana's decentralization process has suffered some setbacks. In 2010, local government elections were administered in bits and pieces. In late 2014, the Electoral Commission (EC) initiated processes for the next local government elections, scheduled for March 3, 2015. However, in response to a court action brought by a disqualified aspirant, the EC was ordered to start over again, leading to an indefinite postponement of the elections. The verdict has created a major constitutional challenge in local governance; the local government ministry has directed metropolitan, municipal, and district chief executives to take charge of development activities at the local level until new local councils are constituted after elections.

This analysis of 2014 Afrobarometer survey data explores whether ordinary citizens have been given a voice in local governance by examining the extent to which they believe that their elected local officials keep them informed and listen to them, their perceptions of corruption in local government, and their assessment of how local officials are doing their jobs. The image that emerges is of a "decentralized" system in which decision making is locally centralized and ill serves its public.

## Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is an African-led, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and Round 6 surveys are currently under way (2014-2015). Afrobarometer conducts face-to-

face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of between 1,200 and 2,400 respondents.

The Afrobarometer team in Ghana, led by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), interviewed 2,400 adult Ghanaians between May 24 and June 10, 2014. A sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Ghana in 1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, and 2012.

### **Key findings**

- MMDAs and local councillors appear to have failed to effectively operationalize the idea of giving voice to electorates, as more than seven of 10 Ghanaians say that their elected local councillors "never" or only "sometimes" listen to what ordinary people have to say (according to 71% of respondents) and that MMDAs largely do not inform constituents about their work programs (76%) and annual budgets (78%).
- These negative assessments have been increasing: The perception of non-listening local councillors rose by 16 percentage points between 2005 and 2014, and the perceptions of councillors not making work programs and budget information known to citizens went up by 29 and 23 percentage points, respectively.
- In addition to the failure of the system to give electorates a voice in local governance, four of five Ghanaians consider "some," "most," or "all" MMDA chief executives and local councillors to be corrupt (affirmed by 84% and 83% of respondents, respectively), and 62% say they trust MMDAs "just a little" or "not at all."
- Moreover, seven of 10 Ghanaians say MMDAs have failed in delivering on maintenance of local roads and marketplaces, and about six of 10 disapprove of the job performance of district chief executives and local government councillors.

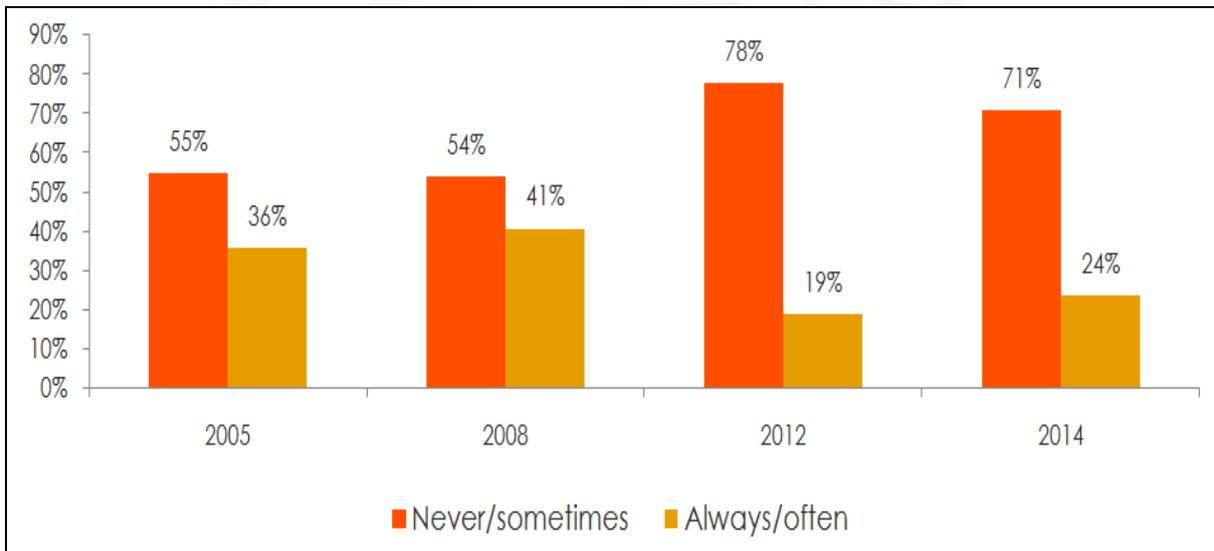
### **Local councillors and MMDAs not open to views of constituents**

Three proxy variables conceptualize the idea of giving voice to the electorate in local government: elected councillors listening to the opinions of ordinary citizens, MMDAs making assembly work programs known to the electorate, and MMDAs making information on assembly budgets known to the electorates.

The analysis shows that a majority of Ghanaians (71%) say that their elected local government representatives (i.e. assembly men and women) "never" listen or only listen "sometimes" to what ordinary people have to say (Figure 1).

Three previous Afrobarometer surveys also found majorities expressing similar sentiments about local councillors (55% in 2005, 54% in 2008, and 78% in 2012), but the proportion increased by 16 percentage points between 2005 and 2014.

**Figure 1: Opinions on whether local councillors listen to ordinary citizens | 2008-2014**

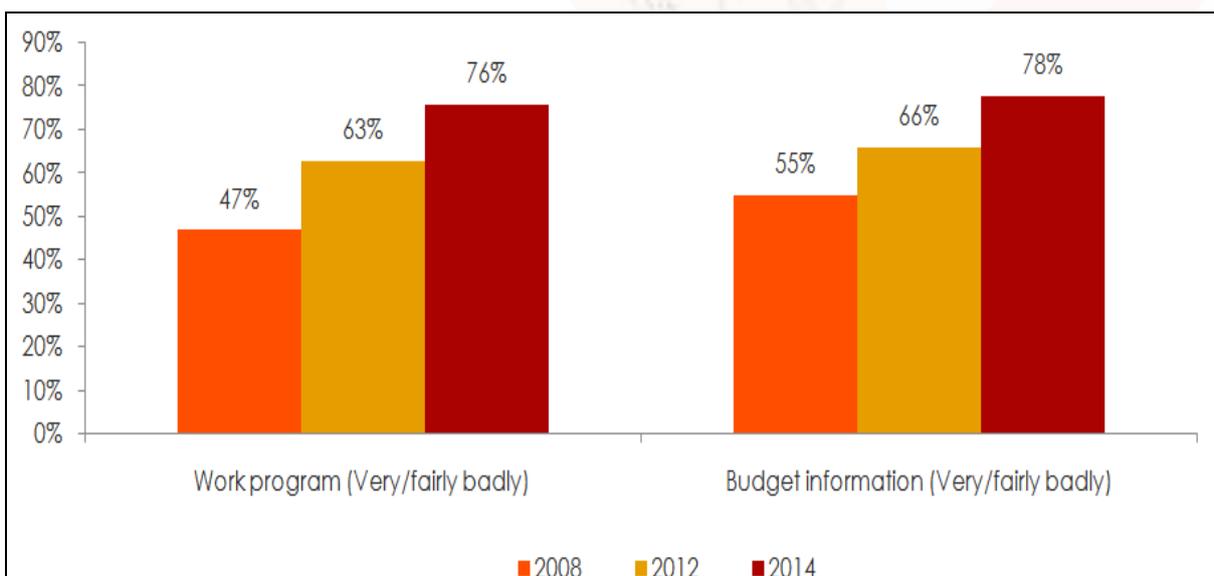


**Respondents were asked:** How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what people like you have to say: Assembly men and women?

Similarly, a majority of citizens say that their MMDAs perform "very badly" or "badly" in making their work programs known to the people (76%) and making information on annual budgets available to citizens (78%) (Figure 2).

From 2008 to 2014, the proportion of citizens who rate MMDA performance negatively increased sharply, by 29 percentage points on the issue of making their programs of work known to citizens and by 23 percentage points regarding making information on annual budgets available to citizens.

**Figure 2: Views on whether MMDAs make work program and budget information available to citizens | 2008-2014**



**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say your local government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: a) Making the assembly's program of work known to ordinary people? b) Providing citizens with information about the assembly's budget?

A statistical test (independent samples t-test comparing mean scores for different survey rounds) confirms that the increasingly negative survey results over the years in fact represent increasingly negative public assessments (rather than chance variations) of how MMDAs are doing their jobs, adding strength to the argument that citizens perceive a locally centralized decentralization that gives them no voice.

### Corruption, poor performance seen as undermining local governance

In addition to the analysis showing that the much-anticipated voice for citizens in local governance is not being heard, citizens perceive negative tendencies in other aspects of local governance.

The legitimacy of specific local government officials is quite low in the eyes of constituents, as shown in Table 2. A large majority of Ghanaians perceive corruption among "some," "most," or "all" chief executives of MMDAs (affirmed by 84% of survey respondents) and local government councillors (83%). In line with the high perception of corruption in the system, 62% of those interviewed say they trust their MMDAs "just a little" or "not at all."

Furthermore, a majority say MMDA are performing "very badly" or "badly" at maintaining local roads (affirmed by 70% of respondents) and marketplaces (69%). Small wonder, a majority "strongly disapprove" or "disapprove" of the performance of their local government councillors (58%) and district chief executives (63%). Over time, these negative perceptions are generally on the rise.

**Table 2: Trends in perceptions of corruption, job performance | 2005-2014**

	2005	2008	2012	2014	Over time
Local government councillors corrupt (Some/most/all)	60%	71%	86%	83%	<b>+23%</b>
District chief executives corrupt (Some/most/all)	--	--	89%	84%	<b>-5%</b>
Trust local government bodies (Not at all/just a little)	41%	42%	55%	62%	<b>+21%</b>
Local government maintaining roads (Very/fairly badly)	51%	43%	60%	70%	<b>+19%</b>
Local government maintaining marketplaces (Very/fairly badly)	--	43%	58%	69%	<b>+26%</b>
Local government councillor job performance (Strongly disapprove/disapprove)	39%	31%	43%	58%	<b>+19%</b>
District chief executive job performance (Strongly disapprove/disapprove)	--	--	47%	63%	<b>+16%</b>

**Respondents were asked:**

- 1) How well or badly would you say your local government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: a) Maintaining local roads? b) Maintaining local marketplaces?
- 2) How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: a) Assembly men and women? b) District chief executives?
- 3) How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't heard enough about them to say: a) Your metropolitan, municipal, or district assembly?
- 4) Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: a) Your assembly man or woman? b) Your district chief executive?

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Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

Core support for Afrobarometer Rounds 5 and 6 has been provided by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank.

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**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 23 | April 2015**