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## INFLUENCE OF CORRUPT ACTIVITIES ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN A SOUTHERN MUNICIPALITY IN GHANA (2019-2021)

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### ABSTRACT

The issue of corruption is an increasingly social problem that affects many sectors of the economy of nations. Ghana, over the years, has continued, to battle the menace of corruption. Meanwhile, reducing corruption levels can substantively improve the quality of human capital and bring about improvement in human development. This article highlights the situation of corrupt activities at the grassroots level from the year 2019 to 2021 in a southern municipality in Ghana. It also identifies factors that facilitate corrupt activities and the effects of corrupt activities on community development. Using convergent parallel design based on the mixed-methods approach, primary data were gathered through face-to-face interviews and questionnaires. The study concludes that corruption has become rampant and institutionalized at the district level, to the extent that it disproportionately affects the governance systems of institutions of local communities, whose primary existence is to improve the quality of life of its citizens. Based on this, the study recommends that to eradicate corruption, the state must end impunity and promote transparency and access to information.

**Keywords:** Effects, Corruption, Corrupt Activities, Community Development.

## INTRODUCTION

Corruption is a social problem and a criminal activity that retards the progress of community development in many facets of community life. Ahmed and Amin (2013) posit that major international organizations have consequently begun probing the sources and solutions for corruption. Enste and Heldman (2017) are of the view that corruption is a phenomenon no country is immune to and it has been a well-known fact for quite some time that the classical view on corruption concerns only less developed countries, does not hold. Governments have fallen, the careers of world-renowned public figures ruined, and the reputations of well-respected organizations and business firms badly tarnished on account of it (Myint, 2000).

Corruption tends to hurt innovative activities (Mo, 2001). The stability of human capital development is greatly influenced by the high level of corruption (Absalyamova et al., 2016). This implies that reducing corruption levels can substantively improve the quality of human capital and bring about improvement in human development. Corruption is endemic in Ghana (Nsia-Pepa, 2017). Ghana over the years has continued to battle the menace of corruption. It thus appears that corruption as a social problem in Ghanaian society has become rampant and institutionalized affecting the smooth functioning of the governing system of the country and drawing the country backward. This study presents some revelations about the situation of corrupt activities in Ghana and at the grassroots level. It considers some corrupt activities taking place within the southern municipality assembly, as well as the factors that facilitate corrupt activities, and the effects of corrupt activities on community development. The study aims to create better awareness within the Ghanaian populace about how corruption affects the development of communities.

Corruption is receiving attention all over the world. Corruption is inextricably linked to community development. It has existed in all countries the world over throughout history. Due to the above, Lawal (2007) contends that in recent years there have been significant increases in the attention paid to corruption, in part due to (1) a series of high-level corruption cases in industrialized countries and (2) due to an increasing awareness of the costs of corruption throughout the world and (3) due to the political and economic changes which many countries are undergoing. Lagunes (2021) contends that corruption is common in Latin America, a fact that can be seen in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI). The gravity of this issue is reflected in the high-profile scandals embattling the region, and also in the available data (Rice University, 2019).

Corruption is not without in Africa. African countries cannot bear the costs of corruption, which impedes development and minimizes the ability of governments to reduce poverty (Rudolph & Moeti-Lysson, 2011). Combating corruption in African countries has become a development priority (Policy Forum, 1997) because corruption in Africa is a development issue (Lawal, 2007). This means that corruption greatly impacts community development. Also, African countries are therefore good examples of countries where development is hampered by the 'ugly head' of corrupt activities. Lawal (2007) postulates that a series of reforms have been carried out in all the African countries to make the system (African states) efficient and result-oriented. However, the anticipated gains of such efforts or reforms have not been visible due to a series of factors which include that of corruption. Without a doubt, corruption has permeated the African society and

anyone who can say that corruption in Africa has not yet become alarming is either a fool, a crook, or else does not live in this continent (Chinua, 1988).

According to Lawal and Tobi (2001), there is increasing evidence that the social and economic cost of corruption affects the poor, who not only suffer from the lack of services and a well-functioning government but also cannot fight off corrupt authorities. Different arguments have been put forward to explain the pervasiveness of corruption in Africa these include poverty, the personalization of public office, the political culture, and the inability of leaders to overcome their colonial mentality concerning their perception of public office (Lawal & Tobi, 2001).

In Ghana, a publication made by Nsiah-Peprah indicates that corruption increases the prices of goods and services denying ordinary Ghanaians their basic needs. Corruption also exploits the poor by diverting resources from them to rich Ghanaians (Nsiah-Peprah, 2017). In a similar vein, Chang and Chu (2006) contend that corruption lowers Ghana's human development capacity. They continued to contend that corruption decimates democratic values and engenders institutional distrust, eroding citizens' trust and confidence in state institutions.

According to Lawal (2007), development is seen as the process by which a type of (social) change is introduced into a system to produce a better production method and improved social arrangement. This implies that development is both quantitative and quality improvement in the social life of citizens. According to Lawal, the level and rate of development of any particular society are influenced by so many variables such as political culture, leadership, and corruption. Corruption is a term that is conceptualized differently because of human perspectives. It has been identified as the bane of most political and economic problems in societies (Lawal & Tobi, 2001). Corruption is again considered an enemy of community economic development because of its various vices. A nation that considers corruption as normal is often plagued with abnormality of economic, political, and social vices. This study is therefore designed to examine the influence of corrupt activities on community development in a certain southern municipality.

Corruption has gruesome developmental ramifications. Some scholars argue that corruption could positively impact states' economic and political development (Abu et al., 2015). Other scholars disagree with this assertion. Gunnar Myrdal points to corruption as a deliberate lubricant to a sluggish or dysfunctional economy (Myrdal, 1968). "Facilitation money" paid to public officials is recoverable through either increased cost or low-quality projects such as roads or materials used (Tanzi & Davoodi, 1998). This implies that local governments (communities or lower-level units) will spend more money shortly renovating such projects. Taxpayers become burdened with either costly or inferior-quality projects that would require costly upkeep (Kempe Sr., 1999).

Corruption increases the prices of goods and services denying ordinary Ghanaians their basic needs (Nsiah-Peprah, 2007). Corruption exploits the poor by diverting resources from them to rich Ghanaians (Nsiah-Peprah, 2017). This means that the poor in society will become vulnerable to any life threat the more. Corruption stifles initiative and creativity, nourishes mediocrity, feeds unemployment and undermines meritocracy (Shelukindo & Baguma, 1993). Corruption lowers Ghana's human development capacity. Corruption decimates democratic values and engenders institutional distrust, eroding citizens' trust and confidence in state institutions (Chang & Chu, 2006). Altruistic civic values have become more corrupt and people tolerate corrupt behaviors

because most corrupt officials go unpunished (IEA cited in Nsia-Peptra, 2017). Corruption humiliates, degrades, and violates the human rights of the poor (Nsia-Peptra, 2017).

Corruption is very real in municipal assemblies. For example, it was reported that assembly members of a certain municipality had initiated a motion of “vote of no confidence” for the removable of a Municipal Chief Executive (MCE), over what they described as corruption and abuse of office. According to the same source, the Management of the Municipal Assembly led by the MCE awarded projects to contractors without the knowledge of the Municipal Entity Tender Committee where the actual contract sums are not known to the General Assembly. This and many other acts raise eyebrows over how corrupt activities affect community development activities in the area. It thus appears that the southern municipality is lagging in terms of many aspects of development, education, vocational, infrastructure, tourism, and its ability to use natural resources to benefit community members. Therefore, identifying corrupt activities, evaluating the factors that facilitate corrupt activities as well and assessing the effects of corrupt activities on community development is very important. Despite the presence of studies on corruption in Ghana (Ibn Saeed et al. 2023; Nyendu, 2017), there is paucity of literature on the effects of corruption on community development. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the influence of corrupt activities on community development in a southern municipality. In doing so, the following questions were addressed; What are the corrupt activities in the southern municipality? What factors facilitate corrupt activities in the southern municipality? How do corrupt activities affect community development in the southern municipality?

### **Significance of the Study**

The outcome of this study will be beneficial in so many ways; first, the outcome of the study will help the government of Ghana on the need to strengthen audit services at the local level. Secondly, the outcome of the study will provide information to the legislature, the main body responsible for fighting corruption as well as the judiciary and the court system about how to deal with culprits. Thirdly, the findings of this study will help the media to be vibrant in exposing corrupt activities. Lastly, it will provide information to the general public about how corrupt activities have effects on the development of our communities. This will help the public on how to fight those who engage in it collectively.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Meaning of Corruption and Community Development**

Literature revealed that there is no single clear definition of corruption. This is because corruption exists in different forms involving different participants (Enste & Heldman, 2017). Using a popular definition (World Bank, 1997), corruption is defined as the abuse of public office for private gains. However, IMF (1998) posits that in several cases of corruption, the abuse of public power is not necessarily for one's private benefit but it can be for the benefit of one's party, class, tribe, friends, and family. Corruption according to Lawal (2007) is a systematic vice in an individual, society, or nation that reflects favoritism, nepotism, tribalism, sectionalism, undue enrichment, amassing of wealth, abuse of office, power, position, and derivation of undue gains and benefits. Corruption also includes bribery, smuggling, fraud, illegal payments, money laundering, etc., and abetting of any kind to the detriment of another person, community, society, or nation (Ojaide, 2000).

Community development on the other hand means a change that improves the lives of community members, disadvantages no one, and is sustained and managed by the community (PASTEP, 2002). This implies that community development is people-centered as they collectively generate solutions to their problems. It also means that community development occurs only when the people of a common destiny make their own decisions about their future and determine how they want to achieve it. From the above illustration, it can be seen that corruption is inextricably linked to community development. Thus, a community that is bedeviled with corrupt practices is inefficient in managing and providing resources that solve that particular community's problem and enhance individuals' well-being.

### **Corrupt Activities in Ghana**

Activities of corruption are classified into different categories. Thus, corruption can be bureaucratic (or petty) or political corruption by the bureaucracy or by the political leadership, cost-reducing (to the briber) or benefit-enhancing, briber-initiated or bribe-initiated, coercive or collusive, centralized or decentralized, predictable or arbitrary, involving cash payments or not (Tanzi, 1998). IEA (2016) stated that the perception of bribery among the people is very high in Ghana. Benefiting from basic services (like getting a document or a permit; getting water or sanitation services; electricity connection; getting treatment at a local health clinic or hospital; avoiding a problem with the police, like passing a checkpoint or avoiding a fine or arrest; avoid a problem with the local tax officer; getting a place in a primary school for a child; getting a place in a government senior high school for a child; and getting a place in a government tertiary institution for a child) is deemed to be a herculean task in many instances (IEA, 2016). No wonder, Agbele (2011, p. 11) noted that "since the beginning of the fourth Republican and multi-party parliamentary democracy in Ghana, various governments have declared their commitment to fight corruption, yet they have remained mere rhetorical gimmicks". The issue of corruption is very sensitive and difficult to measure since some of the corrupt activities are not transparent enough. A study conducted in Ghana by Brierley of the IGC (2017) found that bureaucrats also facilitate corrupt practices in response to threats from local politicians of being transferred to less desirable districts in the country.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of corrupt activities on community development in a southern municipality in Ghana (2019-2021). The study used the convergent parallel design based on the mixed-methods approach. Convergent parallel design is a form of mixed-methods design in which the researcher converges or merges quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. Both forms of data are collected roughly at the same time and then integrated into the information in the interpretation of the overall results, contradictions or incongruent findings are explained or further probed (Creswell, 2014). Interviews and questionnaires were used as the instruments for data collection. The study population comprises of 150 community members sampled using the simple random sampling technique. Twelve (12) participants were also purposively and conveniently sampled for the study based on a data saturation viewpoint. The inclusion criteria of participants include those who live in the municipality from 2019 to 2021.

The responses to the questionnaire items were designed on a four-point Likert-type scale and coded, Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Strongly Disagree (3), and Disagree (4). Yes or No questions were also framed for respondents to respond to. A pre-test was done to ensure the reliability of the instrument was at an acceptable level before data collection. The measure yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.83. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics and interpreted. The main statistical techniques for the interpretation were frequencies and percentages which were then presented in the form of tables. The data from the interviews were used to buttress the quantitative data.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Research Question 1

#### *What are the corrupt activities in the southern municipality?*

Under this research question, there were three (3) questionnaire items. These items were meant for participants to acknowledge whether or not corruption takes place in government institutions, and the authorities involved and identify the specific corrupt activities happening in the southern municipality. Respondents were asked to select the appropriate responses that correspond to their choice concerning the statements. Further, participants were interviewed concerning corrupt activities occurring in the municipality. These are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1

#### *Corrupt Activities in the Southern Municipal*

Item	Responses	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
1. Corruption takes place in the majority of government institutions within the municipality	Yes	144	96
	No	6	4
2. Which of the following authorities is usually involved in corrupt activities?	Municipal Chief Executive (MCE)	84	56
	Directors/Heads of Department/Sections	42	28
	Traditional Leaders	0	0
	Assembly Members	3	2
	Police	18	12
3. Which of these corrupt activities are they involved in?	Citizen	3	2
	Embezzlement	84	56
	Using part of the Municipal budget to secure personal assets	51	34
	Extortion	15	10
<b>Total</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

Item 1 on Table 1 gave respondents only two options that is either 'Yes' or 'No' to the statement, corruption takes place in majority of government institutions within the southern municipality.

Majority 144(96%) opted for 'Yes' while few 6(4%) opted for 'No'. This implies that corruption has become deep-rooted within the Municipality.

Item 2 asked respondents about the authorities who normally engage in corrupt activities. Results show that the majority of respondents 84(56%) indicated the MCE, 42(28%) indicated Directors/Heads of Department/Sections, 18(12%) indicated the police while no respondent indicated that Traditional leaders were involved in corrupt activities. Results imply that since the leading role engages in the act of corruption, other authorities are likely to be influenced.

Item 3 sought to identify the very activities authorities engage in. Respondents were provided with three choices to choose from as well as write when necessary. The majority 81(54%) indicated embezzlement is a common corrupt activity. Others 51(34%) indicated that using part of the Municipal budget to secure personal assets is also a corrupt activity taking place within the municipality while 15(10%) indicated extortion. This means that since corruption thrives within the municipality, infrastructure, education, health, and other sectors of the community become affected leading to slow community development.

An interview participant claims that:

*What I know is that speed ramps were supposed to be made at one location but the money leveled on that was so huge that the youth came in to stop the project.*

Another participant claims that:

*The government sent outboard motors for fishing men to buy at affordable prices. When the motors came, it was sold to some unknown individuals at higher prices meanwhile the government subsidized them.*

Another participant recounted that:

*The reclaimed land in municipal was just shared among some people anyhow. In some circumstances, there are no documents to show that these are the people to whom it was given.*

The data suggest that there is a diversion of public resources that was intended for community development in the implementation of infrastructural projects. Additionally, there is some form of profiteering and mismanagement of resources meant to support the fishing sector which is one of the main occupations of the area. There is also a lack of accountability and unfair distribution since at times there was no proof of transactions. The lack of documentation indicates favoritism or corruption in the allocation process. The findings point to a lack of accountability in the use of public resources. Thus, corrupt activities affect the community's development since infrastructure projects and economic activities are compromised.

## **Research Question 2**

### ***What factors facilitate corrupt activities in the southern municipality?***

Certain factors may facilitate corrupt activities in the southern municipality. In order to investigate this, a four-point Likert Scale questionnaire was designed. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they "Strongly Agree" (SA), "Agree (A)", "Strongly Disagree (SD)", or "Disagree (D)" to the statements. The outcome is indicated in the table below.

Table 2

*Factors that Facilitate Corrupt Activities*

Statement	SA		A		SD		D	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1. Awarding contracts facilitates corrupt activities	114	76.0	24	16.0	3	2.0	9	6.0
2. Regulation and authorization such as giving permits to community members to facilitate corrupt activities	57	38.0	75	50.0	0	0.0	18	12.0
3. Taxation is an avenue people in authority use to engage in corrupt activities	78	52.0	51	34.0	12	8.0	9	6.0
4. Administrative Procedures facilitate corrupt activities	18	52.0	60	40.0	9	6.0	3	2.0
5. People in authority engage in corruption during spending decisions	69	46.0	60	40.0	6	4.0	15	10.0
6. Procurement processes pave the way for people in authority to engage in corruption	87	58.0	57	38.0	0	0.0	6	4.0
7. Greed on the part of people in authority makes them engage in corruption	126	84.0	21	14.0	0	0.0	3	2.0

Table 2 item 1 asked respondents if awarding contracts facilitate corrupt activities in the southern municipality, 114(76.0%) strongly agreed, and only 9(6.0%) strongly disagreed. Respondents were also asked if regulation and authorization such as giving permits to community members facilitate corrupt activities, 75(50.0%) agreed, and only 18(12.0%) disagreed. Moreover, to the statement ‘taxation is an avenue people in authority use to engage in corrupt activities’, 78(52.0%) strongly agreed while only 9(6.0%) strongly disagreed. On the statement ‘administrative procedures facilitate corrupt activities, 60(40.0%) agreed while only 3(2.0%) strongly disagreed. To the statement ‘people in authority engage in corruption during spending decisions’, 69(46.0%) strongly agreed while only 6(4.0%) disagreed.

On the statement ‘procurement processes pave way for people in authority to engage in corruption’, 87(58.0%) strongly agreed while only 6(4.0%) strongly disagreed. The last item sought to ask respondents if ‘greed on the part of people in authority makes them engage in corruption’, 126(84.0%) strongly agreed while only 3(2.0%) strongly disagreed. All these factors show that corruption is endemic at the district level which greatly affects community development.

As pointed out by Lawal (2007), corruption in Africa is a development issue.

An interview participant shared that:

*Usually, there is no bidding for projects. They just award contracts to party members at higher prices.*

Another participant shared that:

*I think that greediness is the main problem we have. Some people in authority in the municipality see their positions as a means to amass wealth.*

The above indicates that there is a conflict of interest when it comes to awarding contracts in the municipality. This implies that the ability of the municipality to save money for other projects is impeded by the ‘ugly head’ of corruption. Both findings indicate that respondents perceive



corruption as widespread at the district level which then poses a considerable barrier to community development. The factors facilitating these corrupt activities include contract awarding, regulatory processes, taxation, administrative procedures, spending decisions, procurement processes, and personal greed. These factors form a core basis for understanding corrupt practices at the district levels in Ghana. According to Tanzi (1998) in many countries, and especially in developing countries, the role of the state is often carried out through the use of numerous rules or regulations. In these countries, licenses, permits, and authorizations of various sorts are required to engage in many activities such as opening a shop or getting a passport. The existence of these regulations and authorizations gives a kind of monopoly power to the officials who must authorize or inspect the activities. Thus, as the findings have shown, these become a means through which people in authority in the southern municipality. Again, in the views of Tanzi and Davoodi (1997) and Tanzi (1998), spending decisions such as procurement spending, that is, the purchase of goods and services on the part of the government, is another area affected by corruption.

### Research Question 3

#### *How do corrupt activities affect community development in the southern municipality?*

Where corruption is rampant, community development is hindered. In order to find out how corruption affects development in the southern municipality, a four-point Likert Scale questionnaire was designed. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they “Strongly Agree” (SA), “Agree (A)”, “Strongly Disagree (SD)”, or “Disagree (D)” to the statements. The outcome is indicated in the table below.

Table 3

#### *Effects of corruption on community development*

Statement	SA		A		SD		D	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1. Corruption impedes the development of educational/vocational infrastructure	138	92.0	12	8.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
2. Corruption affects the adequate mobilization of resources to empower community members	120	80.0	27	18.0	0	0.0	3	2.0
3. Corruption impairs the smooth and transparent functioning of governmental institutions	96	64.0	36	24.0	12	8.0	6	4.0
4. Corruption impedes the collective efforts of community members to solve the problems of the municipality	99	66.0	51	34.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

Table 3 item 1 asked respondents if corruption impedes the development of educational/vocational infrastructure in the southern municipality, 138(92.0%) strongly agreed while none of the respondents disagreed. Also, respondents were asked if corruption affects the adequate mobilization of resources to empower community members, 120(80.0%) strongly agreed while only 3(2.0%) strongly disagreed. On the statement, ‘Corruption impairs smooth and transparent functioning of governmental institutions, 96(64.0%) strongly disagreed while 6(4.0%) strongly disagreed.

On the statement, 'corruption impedes the collective efforts of community members in solving problems of the municipality, 99(66.0%) strongly agreed while none of the respondents disagreed with the statement. These results depict that human capital development is slow in the municipality as corruption impedes the development of educational/vocational infrastructure as well as affects the adequate mobilization of resources to empower community members. Interviews with some respondents indicated certain claims that showed that corruption is retarding the progress of the southern municipality.

A participant said:

*Do I have to tell you how corruption is affecting our community? Everything is showing clearly. A lot of things are happening which is affecting us. It is Jubilee Radio that helps us to hear some of these activities.*

Another participant added that:

*Corruption is affecting us as a community. We have mango trees producing mangoes all year round. We also produce tomatoes and other vegetables in abundance but we don't have factories for all these. The available government funds are used anyhow without proper accountability.*

A participant also shared:

*The corrupt activities are affecting youth employment. Most of our youths have migrated to the cities in search of greener pastures. They have become dissatisfied and frustrated with the governing system.*

The findings suggest that resources allocated for community development are not utilized efficiently, hindering the establishment of necessary infrastructure and facilities. In addition, opportunities for economic development are hindered since there is too much money spent on projects. With youth leaving for cities, it results in a loss of local talent and workforce which affects community development. The findings paint a picture of how corruption impedes various facets of community development in the Southern Municipality, including education, economic opportunities, and social cohesion. As pointed out by Abysalyamova et al. (2016), corruption negatively affects the development of human capital, but the most destructive factor is a reduction of costs on the development of education and health care as on the basic spheres of formation and development of human capital.

### CONCLUSION

The study revealed that embezzlement, using part of the Municipal budget to secure personal assets, and extortion were corrupt activities taking place within the municipality. It came to light that, factors such as awarding contracts, regulation, and authorization such as giving permits to community members, administrative procedures, spending decisions, and procurement processes including greed facilitate corrupt activities. It was indicated that corruption negatively affects community development. Funds meant to develop the community in various aspects of community life such as empowerment of citizens; educational/vocational infrastructure, health, road safety, etc. were pocketed by individuals who have power over resources. Thus, corruption has become rampant and institutionalized at the district level, to the extent that it disproportionately affects the

governance systems of institutions of local communities, whose primary existence is to improve the quality of life of its citizens.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the study recommends the following:

1. There is the need to end impunity. Those who engage in corrupt practices must face the full rigor of the law without mercy or favor.
2. Transparency is key to exposing corrupt officials in Ghana. To realize this, the Government of Ghana needs to have a strong policy on transparency. Videotapes about major administrative activities such as procurement processes, and meetings regarding spending decisions must be recorded mandatorily for future evaluation.
3. There is a need to promote access to information. The government of Ghana must initiate specific mandatory procedures such as collaboration between media and districts, municipalities, and Metropolitan assemblies to air information regarding funds released for community projects.

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