



# BRIEF

## Towards inclusion of community Action planning into National planning policies and mechanisms



**April, 2013**

*Community Action Planning (CAP) aims to connect the voice of citizens at the lowest administrative levels, especially in rural and hard to reach areas to the governance planning processes in Ghana. Despite the good intention and the policy breakthrough on decentralisation, especially the role played by district assemblies in the development planning processes, CAP is yet to be fully integrated as a mechanism for enhancing citizen participation and voice in the MDTP processes. This brief calls for a wider adoption of a harmonized Community Action Planning process and commitment to Community Action Plans by (District Assemblies) DAs. The adoption of a policy and enforcement guidelines on CAP will contribute to institutionalise CAP as part of MDTP in order to assure citizens voice and community participation in planning, implementation and assessment of local and national development processes.*

**Key words:**

<i>CAP</i>	<i>Community Action plan</i>
<i>MDTP</i>	<i>MidiumTerm Development plan</i>
<i>RCC</i>	<i>Regional Coordinating Council</i>
<i>NDPC</i>	<i>National Development Planning Commission</i>

**Introduction**

District Assemblies were instituted to fill the governance gap between the central and the lowest administrative level, and to facilitate community participation in planning and managing the development process. According to the Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462) District Assemblies' are supposed to ensure the overall development of the district and be responsible for facilitating the preparation of local development plans. In line with the national planning systems Act (Act 480), community action planning (CAP) must be designed in such a way that it enables local communities to effectively engage in preparing their own action plans. Apparently, the planning process has received some support including the establishment of the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) under Act 479, to coordinate the decentralized planning process in terms of policy formulation and the issuance of planning guidelines. Recently, a National Training Manual has also been designed to provide systematic methodology for preparing community level plans and for mainstreaming these plans into the Medium Term Development Planning (MTDP). However, despite the good intention and the policy breakthrough on decentralisation, CAP is yet to be fully integrated as a mechanism for enhancing citizen voice and community participation in local development planning and implementation processes, to enable CAP become an integral part of the MDTP processes. The District Assemblies that have attempted or planned to adopt CAP face challenges in relations to limited human and financial resources, weak/non existent Unit Committees, short time between the release of guidelines by

the NDPC and submission deadline for the consolidated district plans, and long and complicated planning processes/requirements among others. These challenges are factors that need to be addressed seriously in the CAP implementation process.

Policy guidelines are important for effective and wider use of existing mechanisms for promoting and enforcing participatory governance processes. Unfortunately, whereas there exist guidelines for the preparation of the District Monitoring and Evaluation Plan under the Medium Term Development Policy Framework 2010-2013 (NDPC, 2009), guidelines for the preparation of District medium Term Development plan under the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA 1) 2010-2013 (NDPC, 2011) and guidelines for Operationalisation of District and Regional planning Coordinating Units (NDPC/MLGRD, 2004) are silent on the use of CAP as a mechanisms for seeking and enhancing citizen voice and participation in local development planning and implementation processes. Thus, the CAP as a model has continued to be used differently by various actors in their quest to fill the gap.

NDPC together with Africa 2000 Network had taken a stab at filling the policy gap by publishing a national CAP standard manual. With leadership of NDPC, and Africa 2000 Network and drawing on the findings from a DFID funded CARE Ghana 2012 evaluation study, the second edition of National CAP standard manual have been developed and published. Despite this development, the main challenge remains the alignment of existing CAP models to the national standard guidelines, hence the adoption of a policy and enforcement guidelines on CAP will contribute to institutionalising a harmonised CAP as mechanism for enhancing citizens voice, and community participation in planning implementation and assessment of local and

National development processes. This brief policy and accompanying guidelines to steer and enforce alignment of existing CAP methodologies and guidelines in relation to citizens and community participation in local and national development planning, implementation and assessment processes. The brief explains the need for making CAP integral part of the MTDP process. The brief relies on results of CARE's Ghana's evaluation study already referred to in this paragraph. .

### **Community Action Planning (CAP)**

Community action planning is designed to allow community members to be part of the planning, implementation and monitoring of District level plans. The CAP process provides an opportunity for the poor, marginalized, vulnerable and opinion leaders in the communities to make their inputs into the planning process. CAP allows the people themselves to collectively spell out their needs and be part of the definition of strategies to achieve those needs. CAP has proven to be an effective mechanism to reaching out and involving citizens at the lowest level in local development processes. Hence CAP can be a fundamental building block for the planning processes in Ghana that will contribute to achieving Ghana aspiration of building a bottom-up approach to rural development (Republic of Ghana, 2013). Generally, CAP process aims to *i)* ensure effective mobilization and increased

flags the need and relevance of a participation of citizens in local development planning, particularly in the identification of needs, concerns and priorities, *ii)* empower poor rural communities, including the vulnerable and marginalised groups (largely women and youth) to voice their needs and concerns and actively participate and influence the formulation of local development priorities and plans, *iii)* create and enhance dialogue between citizens and their leaders on local development needs and priorities at the DA level, and to, *iv)* foster responsiveness and accountability at both community and DA levels. Again, because of its participatory nature CAP has the potential to de-politicising local development planning and priority setting in the country. Figure 1 shows community participation in a planning process.

The varied needs and concerns raised through CAP make the process an open, interactive and gender sensitive community participation mechanism. The process is supposed to involve the preparation of an indicative financial plan and district annual action plans, which must be linked with the district annual budget. The concluding steps are the implementation of agreed CAP action plans that include a plan for community own actions, a plan for advocacy and monitoring of responses from the district assembly and finally a plan for monitoring and assessing district response

**Figure 1: Community Participation in CAP**





## CAPs, District Assemblies and Community Empowerment

CAP is essential for the preparation of DA MTDPs. Through CAP districts can be able to programme and implement projects that are directly responding to citizens' needs and priorities as shown in figure 2 and 3. This is largely due to the advantage of CAP process in brokering interaction and dialogue between local leaders and their constituents on local development. Districts that implemented CAP have confirmed that the mechanism allows people themselves to collectively spell out their needs and be part of the definition of strategies to achieve those needs. According to officials of districts where CAP have been successfully implemented over the years, community members had garnered the knowledge and skills to mobilising community action on what

can be solved locally, interacting, and negotiating their development needs and priorities throughout the steps of developing the DA MTDP. The Planning Officer of Garu-Tempane District summarises this by stating that *"without inputs from the community the district assembly plans would have been worthless"*. In most communities (Takore, Tariganga, Pialoko, Gozesi, Konkomada, and Burankuon near Kpikpira, Farfar, Kugri and Naate) where CAP has taken place, communities have been empowered and they have started planting trees, diversifying crops, changing their planting seasons, and moving away from valleys where floods destroy crops as ways of adapting to climate variability.

Fig 2. Blind Woman fetching water for gardening in Eremon- Buree



Fig 3 borehole provided for dry season gardening in Eremon- Buree



The CAP models have contributed to filling the gap in the local development planning process in regards to citizen voice and participation, interface and dialogue on local development needs, concerns and priorities, and accountability and transparency in local development planning and implementation.

For instance, the CARE LEAD CAP methodology has allowed the community to identify and prioritise their needs leading to the acquisition of social infrastructures such as schools, latrines, boreholes, clinics, etc. The box below feature some of the benefits of CAP documented from the upper east region.

### Benefits of CAPs from various communities in upper East region

*"We the people of Tariganga like our community. Our vision is to be empowered with increased income and food so that men and women can work together to ensure sustainable agricultural practices, environmental management, access to credit facilities to expand business, improved roads network, and modern educational and health facilities. We have prepared a number of action plans for the DA and most of them have become part of the MTDP. We can boast of an established 7 hectare Mango Plantation in which women and men and the vulnerable are paid Gh 6.00 a day for watering the plants, market sheds, 2 boreholes, a CHPS compound, an Council Block, rehabilitated classroom block, motorable Gagbiri -Tariganga Feeder Road, a pickup for our community clinic and electricity. All these gains are as a result of participation in the CAP process. With CAP the community voice is loud and strong in the ears of the Assembly".* **Tariganga**

*"This (Akara) community has a vision of being a community whose citizens enjoy good living standards with available services such as agriculture, health and education with emphasis on vocational training. The CAP process has helped us in a number of ways. Our action plans have been part of Area Council meetings (validation) and the MTDP. For instance, the DA has constructed a 1No 3Unit and 1No 6 Unit Classroom Blocks with furniture and other ancillary facilities for us and has rehabilitated our school infrastructure. Our community got a borehole through the CAP process and had the Woriyanga Bridge constructed easing our transport challenges".* **Akara**

*"We the people of Pialoko community wish to see our community to be a place where we have adequate and sustainable access to food, water, health and education. We also want to live in a clean and a well-managed environment free from filth and regular degradation. We take part in the CAP process because we want to achieve all that I mentioned. So far, the DA has given us a borehole and has put our school under the Ghana School Feeding Programme. This shows that our action plans are not waste of time".* **Pialoko**

*"We have been part of the CAP process and MOFA has helped us a lot. There have been a few achievements and the few achievements include a primary school provided to our community by the Assembly. Our children no longer learn under trees. They now learn in a nice environment. Before the school was built for us we (parents) faced lots of problems in controlling our children but now the problem it is over. We are happy!"* **Takore**

Further to the benefits quoted by the community, CARE study also identified the following benefits in DA that adopted the CAPs:

- Gender sensitivity into DA decision making on development planning
- Improved community-DA relationship
- Active participation of district level CAP monitoring committees or teams
- Increased capacity of community members in CAP processes engaging and negotiating their needs with

different service providers working at community level. Increased voluntary contributions towards local development initiatives like funding water points (communities operate bank accounts)

## Conclusion

Decentralisation is the transfer of power, authority and finances from central to local entity. It is a system of governance wherein the central government disperses power, authority and finance to sub-national government bodies to create an incentive for close relationship and meaningful involvement of citizens in the management of public affairs, especially decision making in planning, implementation and assessment of local development, and on the other hand, the equal realisation of rights and access to justice. Irrespective of how decentralisation is conceptualised, it stands to reason that a country practising decentralisation would have in place a decentralised planning system that is open, responsive, participatory and self-sustaining. It is unlikely that Ghana's decentralisation system will achieve its objective of citizen participation unless guidelines are put in place to ensure the effective implementation of community action planning process. The integration of community inputs into development planning is not only a key indicator of empowerment but also, it is a requirement for sustaining Ghana's District Assembly system.

CAPs need to be adopted widely in terms of depth and breadth. DAs need to move their planning process beyond the current area council level in order to effectively mobilize community members and to have broader inputs from them. NDPC must ensure effective guidelines to support the institutionalization and enforcement of CAP at DA level. District level resource allocation mechanisms such as

the Functional Organisational Assessment Tool (FOAT) must not only include CAP as part of the assessment criteria or guidelines but must provide a quota on the minimum number of CAPs that should inform the development of MTDPs in a particular district and we call on NDPC to ensure this. Also, support to DAs or communities must be based on plans originating from the beneficiary communities and donors or NGOs. are called upon to ensure this.

Community members should be recognised as fully fledged actors and embraced as equal partners in the decentralisation process. The role of the state and civil society is central in this direction. A strong, proactive state setting the conditions for effective community participation to happen successfully and a supportive donor community willing to work with the state and community members is required.

District Assemblies and donors seriously need to strengthen community participation in the CAP process through enhanced capacity building of community members as well as the provision of adequate funds through conscious budgeting for the development of CAPs. Similarly, the RCC (Regional Coordinating Council) as part of its coordinating functions need to put in place mechanisms that compel DAs to promote CAP.

## References

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