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Stakeholder perspectives on participatory monitoring and evaluation in educational projects in Upper West Region, Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The paper assesses stakeholders' perspectives on their involvement in and benefits of participatory monitoring and evaluation as well as the differences between conventional monitoring and evaluation (monitoring and evaluation) and participatory monitoring and evaluation in two districts: Nadowli-Kaleo and Daffiama-Bussie-Issa in the Upper West Region, Ghana. The paper employed convenient and purposive sampling methods for the study. Key informant interviews were used to collect data. Thematic and qualitative content analysis of participants' voices were used in analysing the data. Findings reveal that participatory monitoring and evaluation gives primary stakeholders power and control over project execution and use of monitoring information to take actions to remediate deviations. However, it emerged that the youth and women were not fully involved in the process. Also, some beneficiaries had limited capacity and understanding of their roles in the participatory monitoring and evaluation process. Besides, the mode of involvement was ad hoc due to resource constraints. The study concludes that despite its implementation challenges, participatory monitoring and evaluation has an edge over orthodox monitoring and evaluation in enhancing effective implementation of educational projects. The paper recommends education of and capacity building for beneficiaries on their roles in the participatory monitoring and evaluation process to enable them more actively and meaningfully participate in it. Policy decision-makers should make conscious efforts to timely free more resources to the monitoring teams to facilitate their work. The monitoring teams should also make frantic efforts to engage the youth and women to achieve the right level of participation in the process.

1. Introduction

Recent decades have seen increasing calls to infuse participatory processes into monitoring and evaluation (monitoring and evaluation) of development interventions, culminating in the development of the concept of participatory monitoring and evaluation in decentralized development planning and management. Participatory monitoring and evaluation evolved out of the need to improve or address the shortfalls of orthodox monitoring and evaluation (see Kumar, 2006; National Development Planning Commission, 2006), also referred to in this article as conventional or traditional monitoring and evaluation. The development planning process is made up of series of components that play together to shape development interventions towards the realization of the aspirations of the citizenry. Among these components is monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring is the regular gathering of information to check and ascertain conformity of progress against defined directions of development interventions involving timely communication on the outputs, activities and use of resources (Continuing Professional Development, 2012). Evaluation, on the other hand, involves a systematic process by which information is acquired on a programme's activities, impacts, and effectiveness with the purpose of improving its activities

and describing its accomplishments, with conditions and best practice lessons for subsequent interventions (Akanbang et al., 2013; Continuing Professional Development, 2012; Otieno, 2000).

Monitoring and evaluation is very important in the development planning process because it facilitates the identification of potential successes and challenges to aid timely decision-making by development managers (Otieno, 2000; Akanbang & Bekyiere, 2020). According to Continuing Professional Development (2012), monitoring and evaluation provides the only amalgamated source of information showcasing project progress and allows educators to learn from each other's experiences to build on expertise and knowledge and subsequently minimise the risk of project failure. Building on these, evaluation helps determine the degree of objective achievement, associated problems, data generation for cumulative learning and improves reformation of project/programme targets (Otieno, 2000).

Despite the importance of traditional monitoring and evaluation, it has been argued that it has fallen short in various respects in practice (Rolf, 2000). As noted by Ofosu and Ntiamoah (2016), traditional monitoring and evaluation deprives local people of the opportunity to build

their capacity in manning projects and programmes at their doorsteps and relies on externally pre-determined quantitative indicators for the measurement of success, which often impact negatively on the sustainability of these interventions.

To surmount the shortfalls of conventional monitoring and evaluation, participatory monitoring and evaluation has increasingly been adopted by policy makers and practitioners in development (Ofosu & Ntiamoah, 2016). In this paper, participation is conceived of both as a means, which comes in the form of mobilization of people to get them involved in the execution of predetermined objectives of development (Parfit, 2007; Agbenyo et al., 2017), and as an end, which takes the form of capacity building and empowerment of a people to afford them the capability to initiate, execute, monitor and evaluate their own development interventions which must translate into the economic and political relationships of the whole society (see also Kumar, 2002). Participation became popular in the 1980s because of its cost effectiveness and efficiency in the planning and implementation management of development projects (Cornwall, 2000; Agbenyo et al., 2017).

Participatory monitoring and evaluation is an approach that gives credence to the views and opinions of all key stakeholders of a particular project/programme and gives room for all key stakeholders to conduct self-assessment of progress through which they generate knowledge and collectively decide on evaluation issues, gather, and analyze data and execute follow-up actions (Ofosu & Ntiamoah, 2016). It puts power in the hands of local people to contribute to all stages of the project, develop indicators for monitoring and evaluation and bring their vision of development towards its success (Katja, 1997). Despite these positive features of participatory monitoring and evaluation, some authors hold the view that it costs more than traditional monitoring and evaluation (see ASTSWMO, 2011; Bessette, 2004; Van Heck, 2003). This view is at variance with the position earlier held by Jennings (2000) that in the long-run and on the aggregate, participatory processes cost less than non-participatory ones.

The growing need for participatory monitoring and evaluation has led policy makers to consciously include it in the national level guides that are being issued on medium term basis for the coordination of development at all local levels in Ghana. This can be seen in all the monitoring and evaluation guidelines that have been issued to District Assemblies (see National Development Planning Commission, 2007; 2009; 2014; 2017). This is in recognition of beneficiary participation in monitoring and evaluation in 2003 and the consequent inception of participatory monitoring and evaluation in 2004 (National Development Planning Commission, 2006).

Even though the need for participatory monitoring and evaluation in the decentralized planning and management

efforts has been recognized and communicated as far back as 2003, there has been very little, if any at all, systematic documentation on the distinction between participatory monitoring and evaluation and conventional monitoring and evaluation as well as the benefits of participatory monitoring and evaluation at the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) level in Ghana, particularly in the Upper West Region. The decentralized development governance in Ghana starts with the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD), which represents the executive arm of government at the apex. It proceeds through the Regional Coordinating Councils, which is the intermediary between the local governments (MMDAs) and central government in Ghana's decentralized governance system. The Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies constitute the fulcrum on which Ghana's decentralization revolves and are charged with the initiation, implementation, and oversight responsibilities of development interventions within their jurisdictions. The Urban, Zonal, Town and Area Councils and the Unit Committees are the sub district and the lowest levels of the decentralised governance system providing support and as ultimate beneficiaries of the governance system (see Agbenyo et al., 2017; Government of Ghana, 2016; Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, 2010; Sana, 2011).

The facets of development which can be decentralized include disaster management, control, and preparedness (Ahmed & Iqbal, 2009; Aryabandu & Duryog, 2006), the fight against corruption (Odd-Helge, 2004), service delivery (Government of Ghana, 2016), and governance/good governance/political institutions (Enikolopov & Zhuravskaya, 2007; Dreher, 2006). This paper focuses on the educational sector in Nadowli-Kaleo District (NKD) and Daffiama-Bussie-Issa District (DBID) in the Upper West Region in line with what has been asserted that each idea expressed on decentralization makes effort in concluding on development (Work, 2002). Educational facilities and services planning, and implementation management are within the ambit of the District Assistant/Deputy Director of Education in charge of Planning, Monitoring, Data Collection, Research and Records. Technically, it is this unit within the District Education Office that represents the education sector on the District Monitoring and Evaluation Team (Ghana Education Service, 2019). Participatory monitoring and evaluation is given meaning in the education sector when there is involvement of the key stakeholders at the Education Office as well as the community level structures such as School Management Teams, Parents Teacher Associations, Unit Committees, Assembly Members and Chiefs. The study focused on the differences between conventional monitoring and evaluation and participatory monitoring and evaluation using the stakeholders' point of view and assessed the level of their involvement as well as the benefits associated with participatory monitoring and evaluation.

The study was conducted in the Nadowli-Kaleo (NK) and Daffiama-Bussie-Issa (DBI) Districts in Upper West Region of Ghana. The Metropolitan Municipal and District Assemblies are empowered as the highest political and administrative bodies in the districts charged with the responsibility of facilitating the implementation of national policies, which usually come in the form of projects and guidelines (Government of Ghana, 2016; Ministry Local Government Rural Development, 2010). In terms of content, the context of this paper is essentially, on participatory monitoring and evaluation of educational projects, which is a subset of services delivery within the Metropolitan Municipal District Assemblies.

Using this context, this paper sets out to analyse the practice of participatory monitoring and evaluation in decentralized service delivery as a contribution to strengthening monitoring and evaluation in service delivery at the local level of governance. Specifically, it: (a) distinguished between orthodox monitoring and evaluation and participatory monitoring and evaluation in practice and (b) assessed the benefits of participatory monitoring and evaluation at the operational level in Metropolitan Municipal District Assemblies, using the Nadowli-Kaleo District and Daffiama-Bussie-Issa District as comparative cases. The rest of the paper is sub-divided into the theoretical underpinnings, methodology, results and discussions and conclusion.

2. Theoretical underpinning of the paper

Many authors who contributed to the concept of participation have developed models in their bid to put forth various understandings of the concept. This paper dwells on three of such models to formulate a framework which foregrounds its exploration (see Figure 2). First is Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation which gained prominence and strides of influence on most theories of participation (Creative Commons, 2012). Arnstein's model centres on her assertion that citizen participation is citizen power. She came up with a ladder of eight (8) rungs further sub-categorized into three corresponding to the extent to which citizens exercise power in determining a plan or programme (Arnstein, 1969). Second is Pretty's (1995) typology of participation. This focuses on the users of participatory approaches (Cornwall, 2008). It describes the motive with which users of participation involve people at each level outlined. It is this element of the motive of users of participation that sets Pretty's theory apart from that of Arnstein. However, just as Arnstein's ladder, Pretty's typology also represents progression from weak forms of participation (manipulative & passive) to better forms (interactive & self-mobilization). Finally, White's (1996) typology is also of interest. It highlights actors, terms, and power, arguing that it is the tensions around these three components that found the politics of participation (Creative Commons, 2012). White focuses on the interest within participation; that is, interest from the point of users of participatory approaches (top-down), interest from the point of participants (bottom-up) and the function of participation at each level (see Oxford Policy

Management, 2013; Creative Commons, 2012; Cornwall, 2008). Figure 1 amalgamates the three theories.

White's theory is distinct from those of Arnstein and Pretty in that she concentrated on how citizen's participation benefits them by bringing power into their hand while Pretty fills in the lacuna of the users of participation and what their drivers are in pushing for participation with Arnstein concerning herself with degrees of power in the hands of beneficiaries of participation. White on the other hand focuses on the conflict generated between the two main actors in the participation enterprise which has to do with interest of participants which generates a force from the bottom-up and that of the users of participation which also generates a force from top-down. These forces shift power between the two sets of actors which White refers to as 'the politics of participation'. From these theories, though each theory differs from the other in terms of perspective yet the desirable point (referred to as 'better forms') is when the people/citizens gain control over the decisions concerning their development (Agbenyo et al., 2017). The amalgamation of these theories taking into consideration their focal points and ideas serve the purpose of their complementarities to give a solid foundation for this paper.

From the left of the framework in Figure 1, Arnstein has emphasized in her theory that the apex of the participation ladder has to do with power and control; at the centre, Pretty also places emphasis on the importance of motivations of the people or agencies who employ participatory approaches as a factor at various stages. Then at the right, White brings to the fore, differing interests of the different stakeholders in the various forms of participation (Cornwall, 2008). Thus, the stake that the people have in monitoring and evaluation, the motives of the technocrats and the interests of both parties can be ascertained through amalgamation of the three theories. The interplay of 'power and control', 'motivations' and 'interest' as a base will help shape the focus and enhance the exploration of the distinctions between orthodox monitoring and evaluation and specifically effectiveness of participatory monitoring and evaluation at the operational level in Nadowli-Kaleo District and Daffiama-Bussia-Issa.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study context

In setting the context for the study, this section has been used to present information on the background of the two study districts, institutional structure of decentralised education planning, monitoring and evaluation in Ghana, which is targeted at the subject matter or content of the paper and the research participants. The study was conducted in the Nadowli-Kaleo and Daffiama-Bussie-Issa Districts in the Upper West Region of Ghana. The Nadowli District was split into the Daffiama-Bussie-Issa District and Nadowli-Kaleo District in June 2012. Nadowli-Kaleo District was established under Legislative Instrument (L.I) 2101 with Issa as the capital of Daffiama-

Bussie-Issa District and Nadowli as the capital of Nadowli-Kaleo District (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014). Nadowli-Kaleo District has seven area councils (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014). It has a total of two hundred and seventy-seven (277) educational institutions comprising Seventy (70) Kindergarten Schools, Sixty-six (66) Primary Schools, Thirty-Six (36) Junior High Schools, One (1) Technical/ Vocational School and four (4) Senior High Schools. Out of these, four (4) Kindergarten Schools, three (3) Primary Schools and one (1) Senior High Technical School are private. Some of the schools seriously lack furniture and textbooks which are crucial for effective teaching and learning. Schools in the District are distributed among five (5) circuits (Nadowli, Kaleo, Jang, Takpo, and Charikpong). More than 95% of the current District School Age Population can now access primary education within 4-5km distance. Gross enrollments for primary and Junior Secondary School are 110% and 76% respectively; 111.3% and 110.3% for girls and boys respectively at the primary level.

The district has 212 teachers with 60% and 71% having requisite qualifications for primary and Junior High School respectively. Teacher-pupil ratio in the district is 1:78, 1:50 and 1:21 at the kindergarten, primary and Junior Secondary School respectively (Nadowli-Kaleo District Assembly, 2015). Daffiama-Bussie-Issa Districts on the other hand, was carved out of the mother Nadowli District by the L.I 2100 and was inaugurated on 28th June 2012. It has three area councils (Daffiama-Bussie-Issa District Assembly, 2014). In all, Daffiama-Bussie-Issa Districts has 72 educational institutions comprising Twenty-Eight (28) Day Nurseries, Twenty-Nine (29) Primary Schools, Thirteen (13) Junior High Schools, One (1) Technical/Vocational institute and One (1) Senior High School.

There is a fair distribution of the schools, especially the basic schools among the four circuits in the district (Daffiama, Fian, Issah and Kojokperi). However, the quality of school buildings is poor. Most of the schools do not have proper toilet facilities, urinal pits and drinking water. Over 65% of the district's school going population can access basic education within 4-5km range. Gross Enrolment Rates stand at 91% and 58.4% for Primary and Junior High School respectively. Enrolments of girls and boys are at 94% and 85%. In terms of staffing, the district has 201 teachers for pre-school, primary and JHS with 55% trained and 44% untrained. Teacher pupil ratio is 1:62 and 1:27 for primary and Junior High School respectively (DBID, 2015).

Decentralized education planning, monitoring and evaluation forms part of the broader decentralized services planning and implementation management in Ghana. Since education as a service has not yet been fully decentralized in Ghana, at the operational level, it is partially subsumed under the MMDAs headed by the MMDCEs and is an integral part of the Metropolitan.

Municipal & District Planning and Coordination Units (see Pre-Tertiary Education Bill, 2019; Republic of Ghana, 2016).

Figure 2 is used in this paper to present the sub-structures, relationships/linkages in the form of lines of authority and communication among these structures as well as functions of planning, monitoring and evaluation within the decentralized educational system at the Metropolitan Municipal and District Assembly level in Ghana (Government of Ghana, 2016; Ghana Education Service, 2019). As depicted in Figure 2, the District Director of Education is at the apex of Education Department at the local level and in part, supposed to report to the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Coordinating Director at the assembly. At the base of Figure 2, which represents the Education Office and immediately following the Assistant Director of Education are three Principal Superintendents of Education each in charge of planning, monitoring and data collection, and research and records respectively. The three superintendents confer among themselves and either jointly or individually report to the Assistant Director of Education in the education office of the district (see Figure 2).

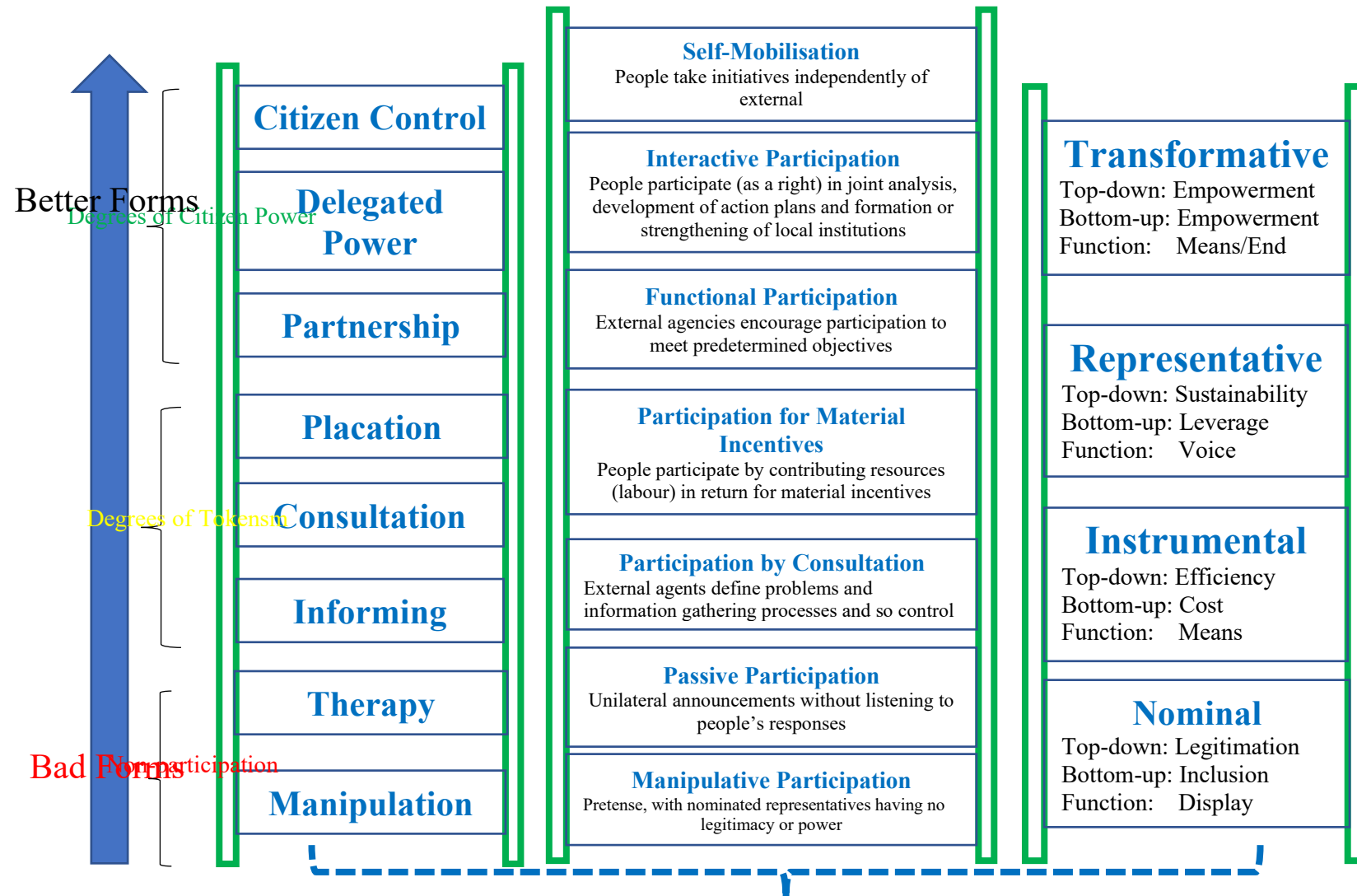


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework of Participation monitoring and evaluation of Educational Projects in MMDAs in Ghana
 Source: Adapted from Arnstein (1969:3); OPM (2013: 11); Creative Commons (2012: 6); Cornwall (2008: 5 - 6)

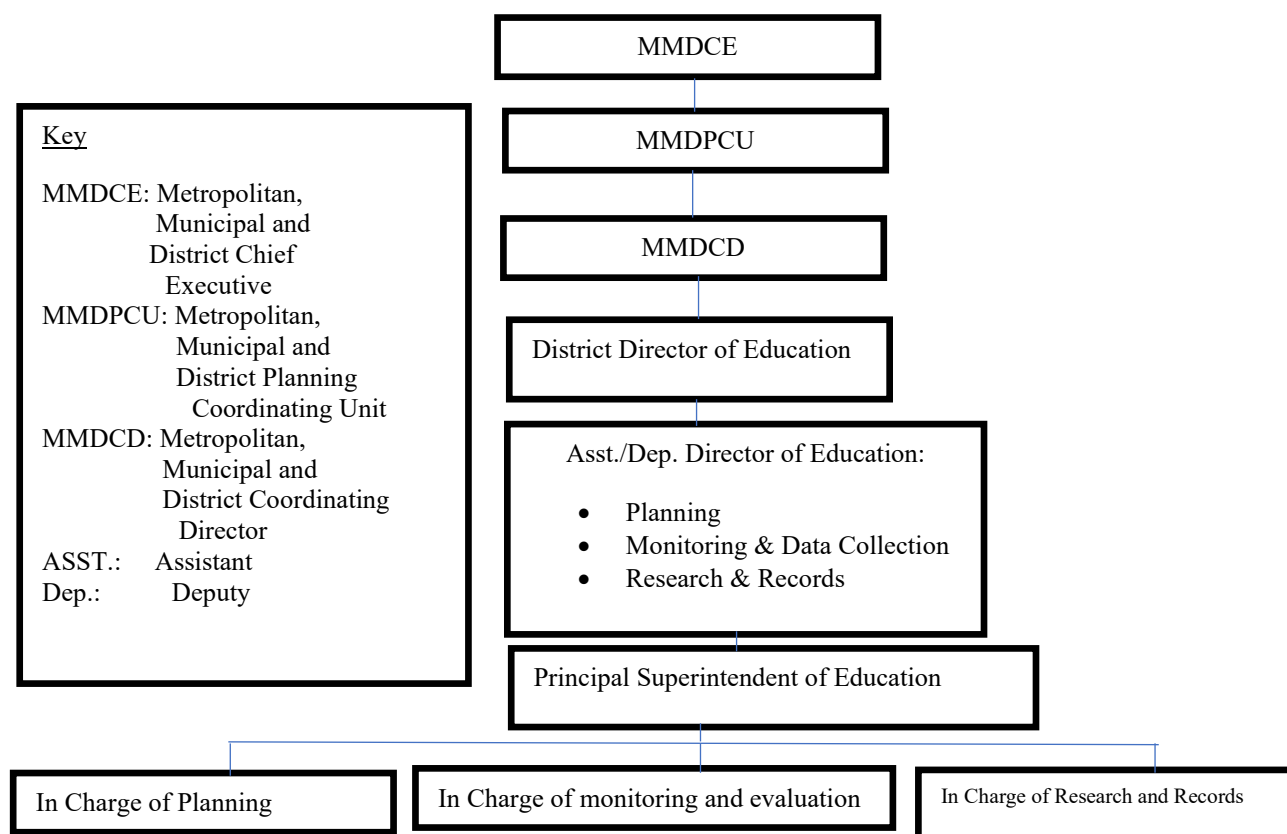


Figure 2: Institutional Arrangement for Decentralised Education Planning, monitoring and evaluation in Ghana
Source: Derived from Ghana Education Service, 2019 and Ghana Government (2016)

3.2 Research design

The paper made use of a multi-case study design within the qualitative research approach. A qualitative cross-sectional survey (see Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2012; Jansen, 2010) was used to gather in-depth information about participatory monitoring and evaluation in the study area. The multiple case study design helped in comprehensive exploration of how participatory monitoring and evaluation has been effectuated. The study population was made up of staff/officials of the Nadowli-Kaleo District and Daffiama-Bussie-Issa District Assemblies, Ghana Education Service and community members represented by chiefs and assembly persons in two (2) beneficiary communities each. In sum, the research involved thirteen participants comprising two planning officers, two internal audit officers, one Assistant Director of the Ghana Education Service (GES), four community chiefs and four assembly members from two beneficiary communities in each district, all selected on purpose of the study.

Convenient sampling was employed to select the two study districts and educational projects in four beneficiary communities (Bryman, 2012; Cohen et al., 2007; Malhotra & Birks, 2006) while a purposive sampling method was used for selecting the interviewees in the communities.

The authors had over the years established rapport with key staff of the two districts. It was thus convenient and for ease of data collection to select the two districts. It is worth stating that participatory monitoring and evaluation has been applied to projects in the educational sector across all the districts in the Upper West Region and Ghana as a whole (see NDPC, 2007; 2009; 2014; 2017). Convenience sampling was also used to select two communities each (Kalsegra and Samatigu in Nadowli-Kaleo District and Daffiama Nayi-kori and Issa in the Daffiama-Bussie-Issa District. Three of these communities had 1 No. 6-unit classroom block with ancillary facilities constructed while in Issa, 1 No. classroom block for the Vocational School was constructed). The decision to use the multiple-case studies was to take into consideration the differences between the two sampled districts and the fact that the intent of the study was not to generalize results but rather to engage in in-depth investigation of participatory monitoring and evaluation in the selected study areas (see Greener & Martelli, 2015; Kothari, 2004). Purposive sampling was employed to select interviewees, who are the chiefs and assembly persons from the study communities and the other statutory monitoring team members. This is because the data needed for this investigation could best be provided by chiefs and assembly persons from project communities since statutorily, they are part of the monitoring team of the projects being implemented in their communities (see Neuman, 2012).

Data were elicited from primary sources through key informant interviews using interview guide/checklist in October and November 2019. The interviews were note-recorded and complemented with audio recordings which were transcribed later, and the texts merged from the two sources for analyses. Data gathered were edited and validated with interviewees before analyses (see Berg & Lune, 2012). Thematic and qualitative content analyses were used in the paper. After transcription of the audio and textual recordings of interviews into a unified text, units of meaning and codes were identified from the data. These were grouped according to emerging sub-themes and finally the two major themes under which the findings have been discussed (see Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Under the content analysis, the voices of the interviewees were subjected to analysis with the view to exploring human experiential contexts and bringing out the true meaning in their voices as captured during the interviews.

4. Results and discussion

The results and discussions section has been organized under two broad themes, viz. differences between traditional monitoring and evaluation and participatory monitoring and evaluation and benefits of participatory monitoring and evaluation all at the Metropolitan Municipal and District Assemblies level. Since educational qualification of participating stakeholders in the research could help shed light on the views they have expressed, their levels of education have been presented in the sentence that follows. The expanded monitoring and evaluation team members from the two districts hold graduate level certificates with a minimum of First Degree and a maximum of Second Degree, one chief holds a master's degree, another, Diploma, yet another, Middle School Leaving Certificate and the last one, Vocational Training Institute Certificate.

4.1 Comparison of orthodox monitoring and evaluation and participatory monitoring and evaluation at the local Level

This section of the paper has been organized under sub-themes which include reason, initiators and responsible agencies of monitoring and evaluation, monitoring and evaluation methodology, measuring success during monitoring and evaluation, role of primary stakeholders in monitoring and evaluation, and response to and use of monitoring and evaluation outcomes. A summary of these distinctions according to the sub-themes is as displayed in Table 1 and followed with detailed discussions.

With respect to reasons for the conduct of monitoring and evaluation, it emerged generally that participatory monitoring and evaluation allowed for the integration of efforts, actions, and decisions of all stakeholders from initiation through to execution of projects and taking of collective corrective measures for desired results. This runs counter to orthodox monitoring and evaluation which purpose focuses more on accountability and usually dons

the character of fault-finding. The ensuing statements are illustrative of the above points:

Participatory monitoring and evaluation is expected to give room for more hands to be on deck in the monitoring of progress of educational projects for holistic corrective action by stakeholders. One of the reasons for employing participatory monitoring and evaluation is to make it possible for the results to reflect the efforts and minds of the larger society and not just the technocrats as in the case of traditional monitoring and evaluation (Leader of the monitoring team, Daffiama-Bussie-Issa District Planning Officer, Sept. 2019).

TABLE 1 Summary of Distinctions between Orthodox monitoring and evaluation and PME at MMDAs: Local stakeholder perspective

THEME/SUB-THEME	VIEWS OF DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS					
	PLANNING OFFICERS		CHIEFS		ASSEMBLY MEMBERS	
Purpose of monitoring and evaluation	Orthodox	Participatory monitoring and evaluation	Orthodox	Participatory monitoring and evaluation	Orthodox	Participatory monitoring and evaluation
	Implementer Accountability to donor (to provide checks on implementers as to the proper execution of projects).	To hand over power to control the processes and act on issues in connection with the project for desired results and quality to stakeholders.	Fulfilment of duty and ensure project is executed as awarded	Empowerment of project beneficiaries	To be able to render accounts to donors	To give a sense of ownership to the beneficiaries of the project
Process of monitoring and evaluation	Orthodox	Participatory monitoring and evaluation	Orthodox	Participatory monitoring and evaluation	Orthodox	Participatory monitoring and evaluation
	Focus on scientificity, objectivity; uniformity of results, complex procedures; delayed and limited access to results. Measurement mainly from donors and project implementers, usually rely on quantitative indicators. Primary stakeholders earmarked for Information giving. Usually, large-scale evaluations	Stakeholders reason around simple methods to fit context-specificity. Multiple engagements leading to triangulation boost results sharing and taking of collective actions. Qualitative judgements based on stakeholder defined indicators, mixed with quantitative indicators. Primary stakeholders demand and ensure accountability, monitor, and evaluate, take corrective actions; serve as link between contractors and the assembly. Usually, small-scale mixed with sparing large-scale evaluations.	Long bureaucratic and complex procedures unknown to beneficiaries	Simple practical methods	Very distant and complex methods with much delay	Self-examination with simple and adaptive methods
Outcomes of monitoring and evaluation	Orthodox	Participatory monitoring and evaluation	Orthodox	Participatory monitoring and evaluation	Orthodox	Participatory monitoring and evaluation
	Predetermined with reports submitted from within the project management to external players (donors).	Adaptive: appreciation of local realities; modification of project strategies to meet results; final reports circulation in-house and to external players.	Reports never shared with beneficiaries and silence on local realities	Key stakeholders jointly produce reports with local realities well appreciated by all participants	Reports never shared with beneficiaries	Self-known and appreciated practical issues with reports shared both within and outside

Source: Authors' Construct in discussions with participants, 2019

[...] The communities were not involved because the process was seen purely as a technical exercise for the technocrats. Orthodox monitoring and evaluation in the education sector was aimed at ensuring accountability by educational project implementers. So, the people who received the project did not matter in the process since they were accounting for nothing; but now it is recognized that the facilities are for the people, and they can help correct anomalies and build a sense of project ownership among the communities (Daffiama-Bussie-Issa District Internal Auditor, Sept. 2019).

The above statements from educational monitoring and evaluation practitioners are in line with the view of Ofosu and Ntiamoah (2016) and Rolf (2000) who indicated that monitoring and evaluation are generally aimed at tracking the progress of plan implementation and to generate feedback for a holistic improvement in execution of development interventions from initiation, control and taking of corrective actions. Additionally, the experiences of operational level actors demonstrate that the reason for participatory monitoring and evaluation transcends that of orthodox monitoring and evaluation which is limited to tracking of progress and accountability to giving primary stakeholders the power and control over project initiation and execution in their jurisdiction together with taking corrective actions for desired quality outcomes. This characteristic of participatory monitoring and evaluation in the educational sector reflects the better forms of participation as postulated by Arnstein (1969), Pretty (1995) and White (2011).

Orthodox monitoring and evaluation was also often initiated from external sources who are mostly the donors while participatory monitoring and evaluation is a result of joint efforts among all stakeholders; internal and external alike as opined by the Daffiama-Bussie-Issa District Planning Officer in the following quote:

Orthodox monitoring and evaluation followed the practice of project execution before decentralization when projects were packaged from afar and bundled to communities which did not know the source of the projects. The same packagers and donors were those who initiated and monitored the projects (Sept. 2019).

Both District Planning Officers and their District Internal Auditors including Nadowli-Kaleo District Education Planning and Implementation

Management, and data collection converged on the view that the District monitoring and evaluation team drawn from the District Planning and Coordinating Unit (DPCU) which comprises heads of various departments and units of the districts initiated and conducted monitoring and evaluation. This view partially contradicts with Ofosu & Ntiamoah's (2016) and Rolf's (2000) who noted that initiation of project planning and for that matter monitoring and evaluation is now a joint effort of the donors, facilitators/technocrats and the communities or primary stakeholders, since in their narrations, the communities are not represented in this process. Again, Nadowli-Kaleo District Assembly Planning Officer Daffiama-Bussie-Issa District Planning Officer and Daffiama-Bussie-Issa District Internal Auditor disclosed that there are still projects such as the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GETFund) projects which still have their packaging and for that matter monitoring and evaluation from outside the districts.

Key in the measurement of success is education indicators which can either be quantitative and/or qualitative. Regarding measurement of educational project success under the orthodox monitoring and evaluation and participatory monitoring and evaluation, the Nadowli-Kaleo District Assembly Planning Officer indicated that "the monitoring plan already tells what the team should be looking for at each stage of the project" so as they get to the field, they look out for progress in relation to what is expected, then "the level of progress is discussed and together, they rate the level reached as a measure". Daffiama-Bussie-Issa District Internal Auditor added that success is measured based on indicators derived from objectives and targeted outputs of the educational projects. Ofosu & Ntiamoah (2016) concurred with the above views that in participatory monitoring and evaluation the measurement is based on stakeholder defined indicators which deal with stakeholders' judgement in a qualitative sense rather than externally determined indicators which are usually quantitative in the case of orthodox monitoring and evaluation. The two research participants, who expressed their views on this issue revealed that the challenge is how to constitute the actual monitoring teams expected to be two, made up of seven members each and drawn from the expanded District Planning and Coordinating Unit to operationalise the monitoring plan for every monitoring session. They intimated that because they are unable to follow the monitoring schedule in the plan, the team is usually reduced to two or three members with non-involvement of the assembly members and their traditional authorities from the onset; their roles are reduced to taking corrective or remedial measures in the event of challenges arising in

the process. Reasons assigned to this shortfall include untimely availability and inadequacy of resources including vehicles, fuel, and District Planning and Coordinating Unit members.

The essence of every monitoring exercise is to track project implementation progress taking due cognizance of challenges in terms of deviations and successes chalked. Nadowli-Kaleo District Assembly Planning Officer revealed that after every monitoring session of any educational project, the team meet to discuss and generate a report that contains all the implementation challenges and achievements with recommendations based on their findings. This is submitted to the District Chief Executive through the District Coordinating Director. Management meeting is then held, and appropriate actions taken based on the recommendations. Daffiama-Bussie-Issa Internal Auditor added that when the contractor submits his certificates for payment, the unit goes and confirms that he/she is on schedule in terms of standards used in the education sector and time. Based on the findings, an approval letter is issued before payment is made. Thus, despite the challenges, participatory monitoring and evaluation ensures appreciation of local realities, decision-making around analysis and evidence-based recommendations.

In summing up on the distinction between orthodox and participatory monitoring and evaluation in the education sector in the study communities, what has emerged from the study is the fact that while orthodox monitoring and evaluation can mostly be considered as comprising manipulative and nominal forms of participation, which are otherwise referred to as non-participatory and weak forms of participation, participatory monitoring and evaluation has been hailed by all the research participants as having characteristics of better forms of participation, which find expression in local control, self-mobilisation particularly at the institutional level and transformation (see Arnstein, 1969; Pretty, 1995; White, 2011). This modest success has been chalked amidst resource constraints leading to non-compliance with monitoring schedules and non-involvement of assembly members and traditional authorities from the onset but at problem-solving stages of the process.

4.2 Practice and benefits of participatory monitoring and evaluation amidst practitioners' misunderstanding of their roles

Participants' awareness level and perceptions of participatory monitoring and evaluation reveal yearnings for more involvement borne out of lack of understanding of the process. The quotes that follow,

which are supportive of the above argument are worth reading:

[...] actually, the district assembly did the monitoring, the then Engineer use to come here very often. I also use to go and share with them my layman's understanding of building and construction" (An assembly member in Nadowli-Kaleo District, Sept. 2019).

[...], we all monitored the project because the community members were part of the construction and I used to go there and observe how the work was going (Assembly Member in Daffiama-Bussie-Issa District, Sept. 2019).

I personally have been going there regularly. The works committee also took part. I used my little knowledge in construction; because of shoddy work when they mould the block you [sic] go and touch and see whether it's of good quality (Assembly Member in Daffiama-Busia-Issa District, Sept. 2019).

The Assembly did the monitoring alone because I was not aware about the project (sic). However, because I have my community at heart, I used to go there often to see how the work was going (Assembly Member in Nadowli-Kaleo District, 2019).

Participation of stakeholders, including the community representatives, who are the chiefs and assembly persons, in participatory monitoring and evaluation is beneficial for them themselves, the community and the project. From the voices presented, it ensured capacity building of the participants, efficient and effective execution of the project and accountability of project implementers to stakeholders. It is important to note that these benefits are derived from participatory monitoring and evaluation practice or participation in it.

The voices of these participants who are all representatives of their communities show that they have been part of the monitoring and evaluation exercises in their communities. However, their phraseologies and presentations depict that they are unappreciative of the participatory monitoring and evaluation system. This can be attributed to lack of understanding of their role as community and assembly representatives and expectation of participatory monitoring and evaluation in education projects. Their comments reveal that the community leaders are the first port of call when there are issues

on site. However, they are not to solve technical but social issues. So, it is expected that when they discover technical deviations, they report to the assembly for the appropriate technical action. However, this is at variance with what is elicited from their voices. The excerpts that follow illustrate this point:

I also use to go and share with them my lay man's understanding of building and construction. There was a time I went there and saw that some part of the building was not good, so I instructed them to pull [sic] down and they did (Assembly Member in Nadowli-Kaleo District, Sept. 2019).

This mix knowledge of the assembly representatives is also shared by their chiefs except for one chief who opined:

The process is still the same, I have not seen anything participatory about monitoring and evaluation in the implementation or monitoring of this classroom project. Whatever recommendation was given for participation, I can say, they have not heeded to it (A Community Chief in Daffiama-Bussie-Issa District, Sept. 2019).

Notwithstanding the complaint of the same assembly member of the community of non-inclusion in the monitoring of the construction of the classroom block, he confessed to supervising the project and making an impact. The misunderstanding of the concept makes some of the actors in participatory monitoring and evaluation to still picture themselves at the bottom of the participation ladder (see Arnstein, 1969) despite their operation at the apex.

Accessibility to the Decision-Making Process in Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation participatory monitoring and evaluation in decentralized educational development projects has empowered local people who are beneficiaries of the process to take charge and contribute to controlling the execution of these projects in their communities. Thus, the decision-making process at the Metropolitan Municipal and District Assembly level, particularly, on educational development begins with the people and ends with the people.

The communities are fully involved through the needs assessment. That is where they make all their submissions and inputs into the decision making (Daffiama-Bussie-Issa District Internal Auditor, Sept. 2019).

The Nadowli-Kaleo District Internal Auditor added:

Things have changed, it's more accessible. [...] project beneficiaries are involved from day one of the project initiation and there are lots of platforms available for the people to make their views [sic] and ensure successful monitoring and evaluation (Sept. 2019).

4.3 Representation and integration of diversified stakeholder interests/views into the process

A major enigma presented by participatory processes concerns the amalgamation of diverse stakeholder views and the cost associated with sieving these views (ASTSWMO, 2011). During monitoring and evaluation, the diverse interests/views are well represented in site meetings, where the whole community is invited to express their views and concerns at various stages of the project. The voices that follow clarify this argument.

Depending on the duration of the project there can be two or three site meetings before the end of the project, especially at the beginning and the end (Nadowli-Kaleo District Assembly Planning Officer, Sept. 2019).

These days the youth are very active; it is usually the women that are missing out and most times when it comes to monitoring issue/need identification and assessment stage they have the useful information: so, it is very difficult to do without them. We often try our best to get their voices heard (Daffiama-Bussie-Issa District Planning Officer, Sept. 2019).

The point made by Daffiama-Bussie-Issa District Planning Officer shows that the youth in the district actively participate in the decision-making process. On the other hand, in Nadowli-Kaleo District, the subservient position of the youth and women vis-à-vis the domineering one by the elders came to the fore as depicted in the assertion that follows:

It is also very difficult to get some community members such as the youth and women to actively participate. When the elders speak, they prefer to keep their (sic) quiet even if they disagree with them; but the assembly does not also have the time and resources to hold separate site focus group meetings (Nadowli-Kaleo District Planning Officer, Sept. 2019).

This statement by Nadowli-Kaleo District Assembly Planning Officer corroborates the view expressed by (Van Heck, 2003) about the extra cost in carrying through participatory monitoring and evaluation initiatives.

In terms of integration of primary stakeholders' views into the monitoring and evaluation process, several expressions converged on the point that through participatory monitoring and evaluation, beneficiaries' views are often taken on board as indicated in the ensuing excerpt. Stakeholder interest and concerns lead to plan modification and adjustments. For example, in one community in Nadowli-Kaleo District, the contractor started work amidst concerns of inappropriate location

[...]. We had to relocate to a more appropriate place; [...] the committee saw that it was better to bear that initial extra cost than put up a facility that will not achieve its purpose. In another instance, the community proposed and opted for corridors with loose-sand floor over cemented floor for a kindergarten block, which they said was more suitable for the kids. This was considered and implemented (Nadowli-Kaleo District Assembly Planning Officer, Sept. 2019).

This expression reflected in Daffiama-Bussie-Issa District Internal Auditor's words who also indicated that when new interests emerged and the assembly was able to afford, necessary adjustments were made to the educational projects planned. It is seen here that beneficiaries' interest and concerns are considered and do lead to plan modification/reprioritization, changed actions and adjustments. This is a clear testament of non-involvement of assembly members (community members) in the process from the onset but only when challenges arise; most of which arise because of their non-involvement.

4.4 Information exchange and mutual learning

There exists consensus in the voices of Nadowli-Kaleo District Assembly Planning Officer, Daffiama-Bussie-Issa District Planning Officer and Nadowli-Kaleo District Assembly Internal Auditor that after monitoring, there is usually a meeting where observations/findings are discussed, minutes taken, and quarterly reports generated. The monitoring and evaluation meetings in both districts take the form of conference meetings, where multiple dialogues take place with hearty exchange of observations and debates from varied viewpoints. There is also willingness to engage in joint problem-solving and compromise for mutually acceptable solutions. It was,

however, noted that timing and arrangements of community level meetings were sometimes not conducive and that even though the team recognizes this challenge it was constrained in that almost all the time when a meeting was fixed, women especially, were disadvantaged and could not attend; and because of resource constraints, they could not organize separate meetings for them.

Monitoring and evaluation reports are forwarded to the District Chief Executive through the District Coordinating Director, and to the Regional Coordinating Council and National Development Planning Commission as in the case of Nadowli-Kaleo District. Nadowli-Kaleo District Assembly Planning Officer indicated that, there is usually no effort to feed the communities back with the findings. She said, "Sometimes if the assembly member or the community team is very active in the process, they may give the community a copy". But she thought that was not effective because many times those people do not share such information with their community and called for improvement in that regard. She recommended that information should be disseminated to the larger community using occasional display of progress pictures on assembly's notice board for the public and the districts' website. In the case of Daffiama-Bussie-Issa District, monitoring reports are either forwarded in soft copies to heads of department or shared in hard copies during meetings. According to the District Assembly Planning Officer:

We also brief the general house during our assembly meetings on our monitoring results; then, we submit copies to Regional Coordinating Council and National Developing Planning Commission and other civil society organizations that might request for them (Daffiama-Bussie-Issa District Planning Officer, Sept. 2019).

4.5 Project efficiency

On timely completion of projects, both planners and their auditors mentioned that it depended on resource flow and that there were educational projects that were executed within schedule while others delayed because of delayed payments to contractors. A respondent stated the following:

For timeliness of project completion, it is a serious issue; sometimes project times are doubled or tripled and that has a negative effect on cost. Once the project goes beyond the deadline, the contractor will start talking

about inflation and other things [...]. Because of that projects most times are not able to complete on time (Daffiama-Bussie-Issa District Planning Officer, Sept. 2019).

All the research participants share the opinion that participation has enhanced quality of project outcomes and reduced cost. The monitoring and evaluation team now has access to very useful information without even going to the field. One participant elucidated thus:

[...] there are many instances where communities have reported defects which the engineer has to follow up on, confirm and correct". Also, because the people are involved from the beginning, they build the sense of ownership; so, you don't have to struggle to get people for site meetings. All these have greatly impacted the cost of projects positively (Nadowli-Kaleo District Assembly Planning Officer, Sept. 2019).

Because more hands are involved and regular tracking is carried out, defects are corrected in time, helping to avoid huge costs associated with shoddy projects that will not last. Nadowli-Kaleo District Assembly Internal Auditor opined that when the people do their work well, the waste that would have gone unnoticed is checked and the quality of the educational project is not compromised. Even though these views are in line with Jennings (2000) who holds that participatory processes cost less in the long-run, others such as Bessette (2004) argues that their operational costs are higher than their non-participatory counterparts.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The experiences of operational level actors show that participatory monitoring and evaluation rises above orthodox tracking of progress of educational projects implementation and accountability. Orthodox monitoring and evaluation is wholly driven by donors and other external technocrats while participatory monitoring and evaluation now gives primary stakeholders or beneficiaries the power and control over project initiation and execution in their jurisdiction, tracking of progress and influencing corrective actions for desired and quality outcomes. The sum of the various responses given by all the primary stakeholders shows that they are active participants in the monitoring and evaluation of educational projects in their communities. However, presentations and posture of some of them reveal that 'they think' they are not appropriately engaged; an indication that they have limited understanding of their

roles in participatory monitoring and evaluation. Resource limitation and inappropriate meeting times have also caused the youth and women not to be appropriately involved in the process. Technical stakeholders should strengthen their efforts to educate and build the capacity of community stakeholders and make adequate and timely release of resources to enable maximum benefits of community level involvement in participatory monitoring and evaluation. The District Planning and Coordination Units should make conscious efforts to schedule convenient meeting times for engaging stakeholders, particularly the youth and women, within the communities.

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