

RESEARCH REPORT ON PILOT TEERE LOCAL GOVERNMENT FORUMS (TLGF)

FROM SEPTEMBER TO OCTOBER 2016 IN THE UPPER EAST REGION OF GHANA

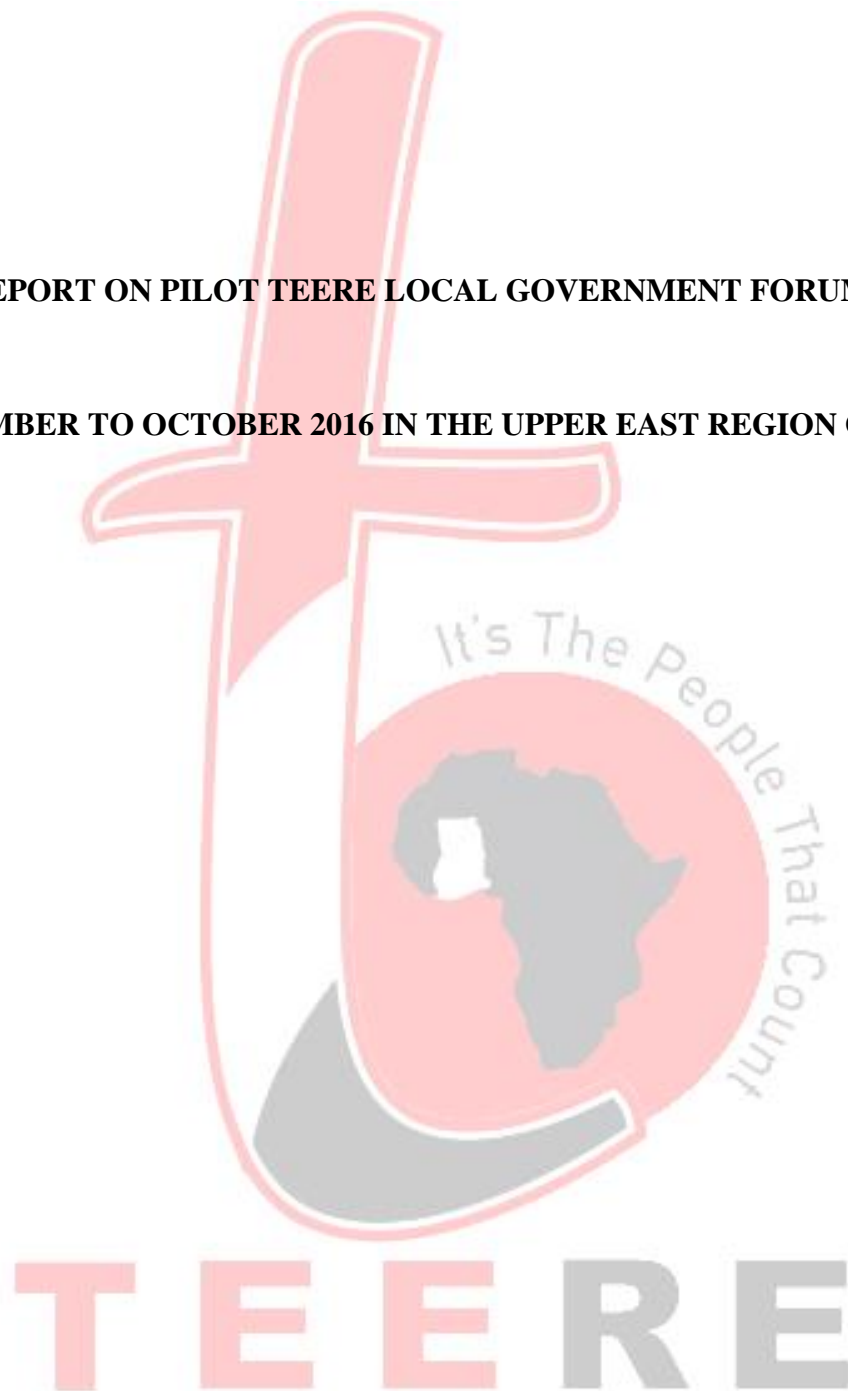
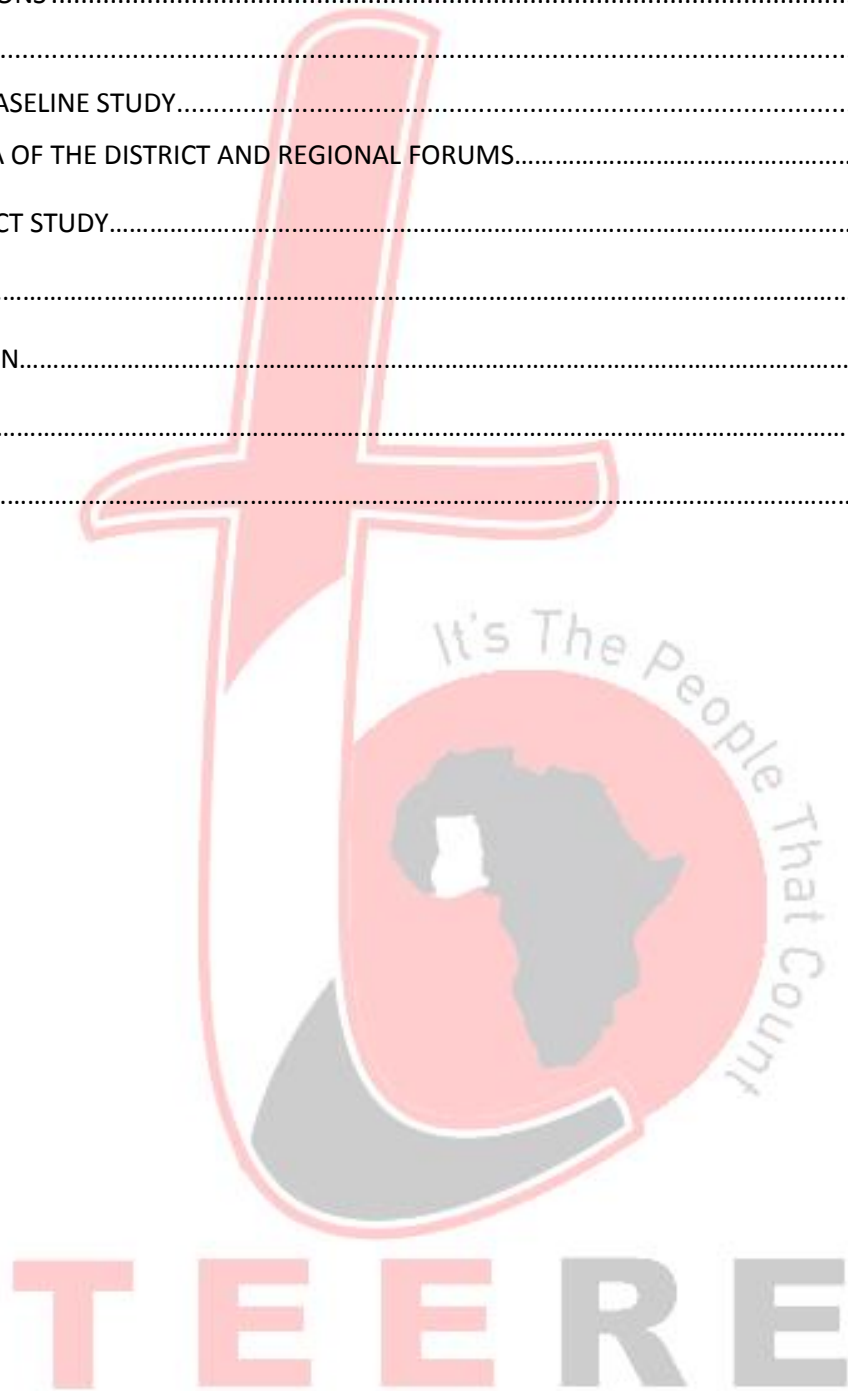


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ACRONYMS

TLGF- TEERE LOCAL GOVERNMENT FORUM

NGO - NON- GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION

NALAG- NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES OF GHANA

LGS- LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICE

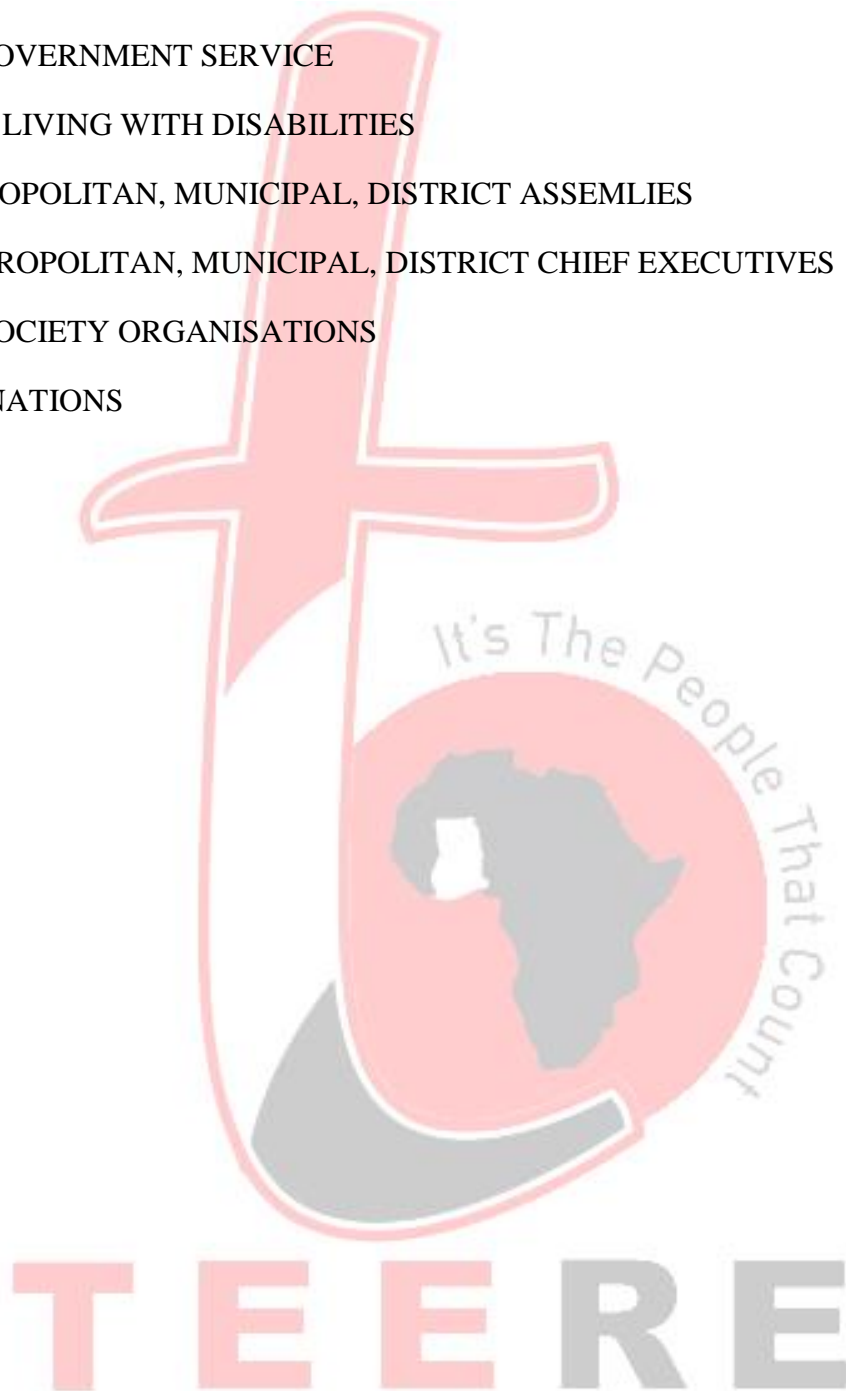
PWDs- PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES

MMDAs- METROPOLITAN, MUNICIPAL, DISTRICT ASSEMBLIES

MMDCEs- METROPOLITAN, MUNICIPAL, DISTRICT CHIEF EXECUTIVES

CSOs – CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

UN - UNITED NATIONS



ABOUT TEERE

TEERE is a nationally registered NGO with its headquarters in the Upper East Region of Ghana and with partners such as Local Government Service Secretariat (LGSS), National Association of Local Government Authorities (NALAG), Senior Experten Services and Robert Bosch Foundation of Germany. The name “TEERE” means change or more generally impact. The word derives from the Farefari language spoken in the Upper East region of Ghana. It exists in many of the other languages in northern Ghana. The choice of this word is to show the compelling and burning need for the transformation of lives in northern Ghana in particular and the country as a whole. TEERE is governed by a constitution and board of governors. TEERE’s main thematic areas include Local Governance, Youth and Women Empowerment, Local Economic Development (LED), Research, and Creative Arts and Culture. TEERE as an organisation is committed to providing every citizen the platform to demand for a transparent, accountable and responsive government. The foundation of democracy rests on the participation and engagement of citizens in the decision making process. In this regard therefore, TEERE has crafted its flagship programme, the TEERE LOCAL GOVERNMENT FORUM (TLGF) which complements the current local government system which excludes key stakeholders. It also offers TEERE as an organisation the opportunity to research into the local governance system of Ghana.



TEERE

INTRODUCTION

There is no law ensuring the representation of critical groups like women, PWDs, ethnic minorities, traditional authorities, CSOs, youth etc. in the District Assembly. Most of these groups are either underrepresented or totally absent. The situation is not different in our target region and districts. For example, it is only the Bongo district that met the proposed 30% quota for women representation in the whole of the Upper East region. Again, there are only two women appointees among the 13 district chief executives in the same region. It is well known that the 1/3 appointments to the Assembly have been unduly politicised. Even where there is a statutory requirement for citizens to participate in local decision making as it is provided in the Local Government Act, Act 462, no serious efforts are made to comply or enforce it. The MMDAs are also unwilling to fully involve communities and citizens in their activities or even implement legal provisions that confer benefits to disadvantaged groups. For instance, until recently most MMDAs did not know how the Disability Act (Act 715, 2006) applies to them let alone initiate processes to transfer resources to Person With Disabilities in the Districts.

Participation is considered a means to achieving sustainable development and poverty alleviation. Thus, the essence of grass root governance in Ghana is to formulate and implement appropriate policies at the grass root level to address under-development. It is a necessity to consult the people targeted to make the required input. However, it must be emphasized that the level of participation of a group of people in the grass root politics in Ghana is being hindered by many factors. These include the low income level weakening their participation in a process. Even though the relevance of the sub-district structure is widely recognized in Ghana's decentralization efforts they are mostly ineffective. This is due to lack of public interest, lack of funding and control from MMDAs. These factors limit the people's effectiveness in promoting grassroots participation in the development decision making process in Ghana.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

TEERE's research sought to answer the following questions;

1. What is the level of community participation in decision making process?
2. What is hindering the effective participation in decision making process?
3. How can participation in local government decision making be improved?
4. what were the outcomes/impact? of the TLGF?

METHODOLOGY

To answer the above questions, the researchers grouped the focus of this study into three namely baseline and impact studies, and evaluation reports. The study focused on the engagement of the excluded in society by seeking their opinion on their level of participation in local governance. To ground this study in the right context, the study provided pilot fora for citizen engagement dubbed TEERE LOCAL GOVERNMENT FORUM (TLGF) at the community level, district level and regional level. The forum brought local government practitioners to the local communities to engage the citizenry in the local decision making process. Thus, the fora sought to empower the hitherto excluded citizenry from the local governance to participate in their own governance. A major focus of the study was also to provide an informal platform for traditional leaders who do not have any constitutional role to play in local governance but have in depth knowledge to contribute to local development policy making. The study also focused on the participant's evaluation of the pilot TLGF and the impact or expectations of the Forum on the respective community.

In answering the questions the ultimate aim is to assess local participation of citizens in influencing public policies at the grass root level and the effect of TLGF on their perception of engaging in the local governance processes.

This study was conducted across the Upper East Region of Ghana. Bolgatanga and Bongo have population of 131,550 and 84,545 respectively. The study conducted a baseline study in the Zokko community within the Bongo district, evaluation studies of the TLGF in both Bongo and Bolgatanga and an impact studies of the TLGF in both districts. The study mainly relied on the mixed method approach by using structured questionnaires and interviews in gathering data. In each of the three categories of data collected 100 respondents at each forum making a total of 300 respondents and 10 interviews. The study used random sampling and purposive sampling techniques to arrive at its sample. At the community and district forums where the general citizenry is present the random sampling technique was adopted to choose respondents to the questionnaires and the interviewees. On the other hand, at the regional where regional heads of institutions were present; the purposive approach was employed to select respondents and interviewees that have knowledge of local governance practice and policies. These tools and techniques were effective because the target population at the community and the district level were the broad citizenry while the regional targeted the local government policy makers. The baseline questionnaires and interview were conducted by 10 field officers in the Zokko community a month before the TLGF project was rolled out. The evaluation questionnaires interviews were issued during the district and regional TLGF and finally the impact questionnaires administered a month after the project.

DATA ANALYSIS: BASELINE STUDY

The respondents were asked about whom they expect to organize meetings at the community level to discuss development in their communities or districts.

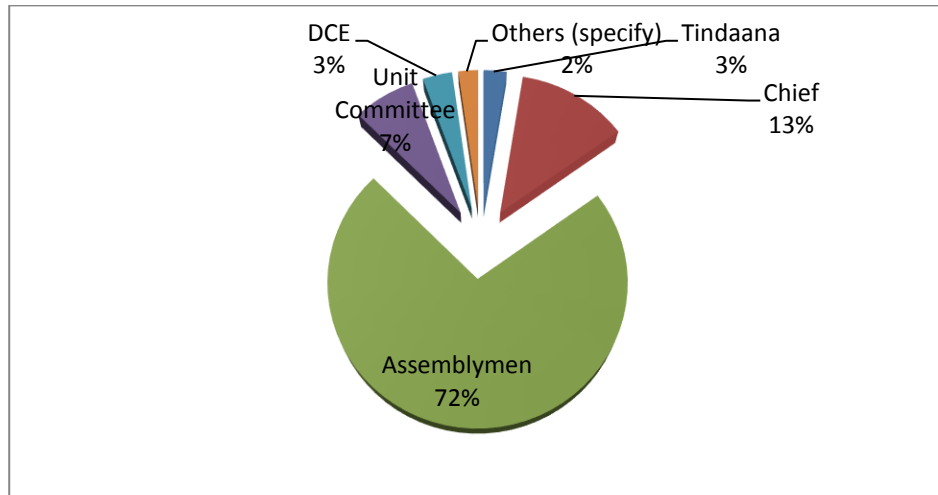


Chart 1

From the diagram above majority of seventy-two percent (72%) of respondents expect assembly members, thirteen percent (13%) expect chiefs, seven percent (7%) expect unit committee members, three percent (3%) expect DCEs and Tindaanas (land owners) to organize community meetings.

To gather data on the amount of support for the forums, respondents were asked if they would support regular district level forums for all citizens especially in their districts.

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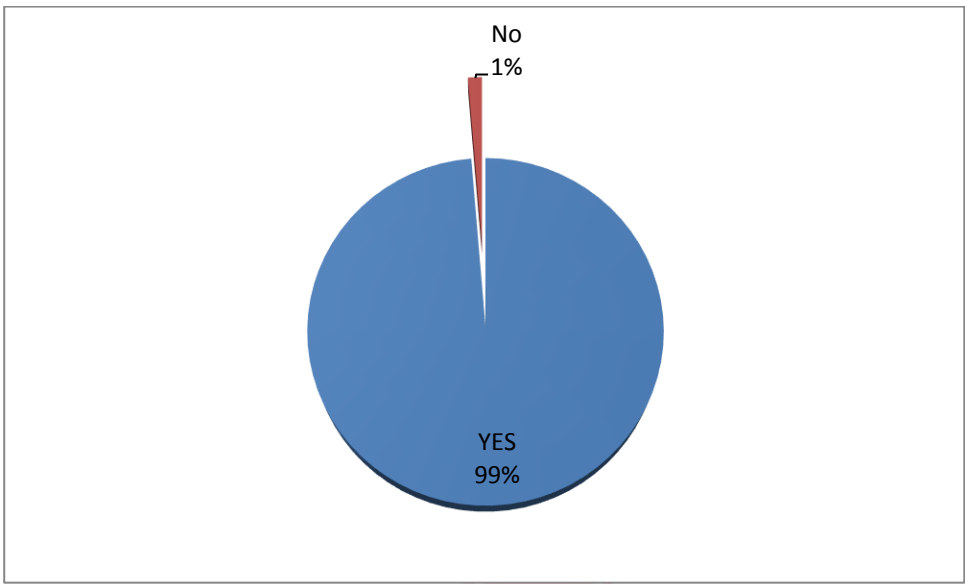


Chart 2

From chart 2 above a majority of ninety nine percent (99%) of the respondents indicated their support for regular district forums while one percent (1%) indicated they would not support the forums.

Having gathered the views of the respondents on their support, they were also asked about how many times they expect the forums to be organized in a year.

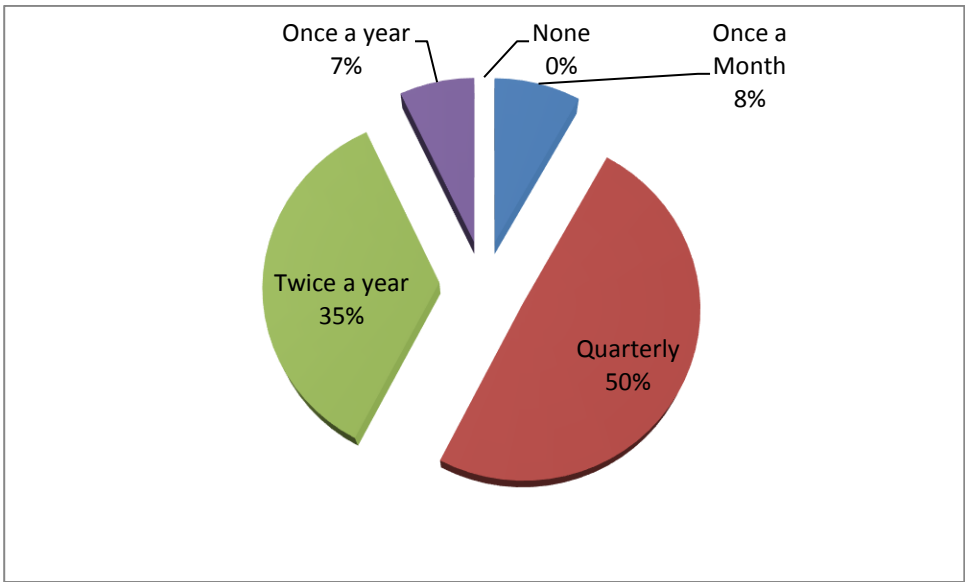


Chart 3

From the above, fifty percent (50%) of the respondents indicated they wanted the forums on a quarterly basis, thirty five percent (35%) wanted the forums twice a year, eight percent (8%) wants it once a month while seven percent (7%) wants the forums to be held on a yearly basis.

To ascertain the perception of the respondents towards their participation in local governance they were asked about their role as citizens of their district

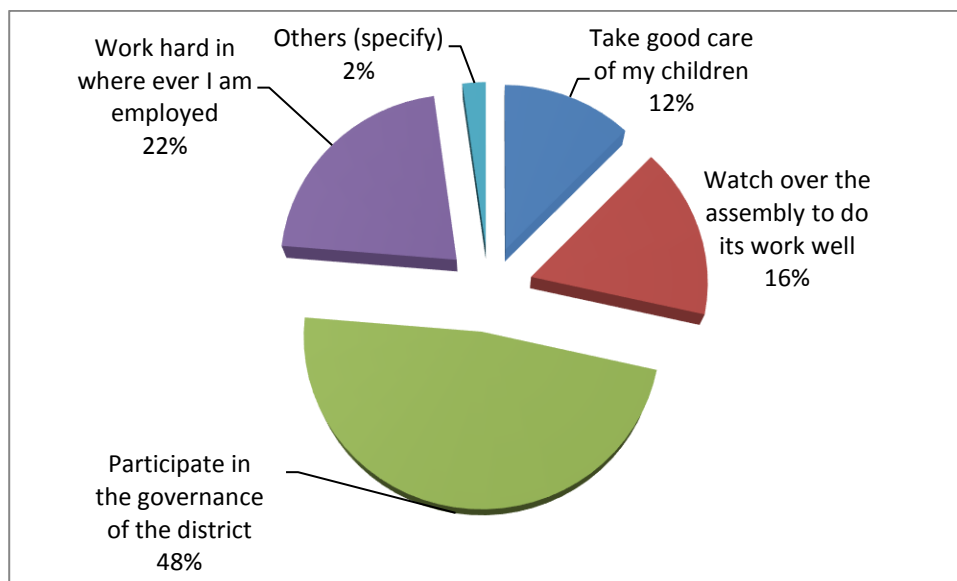


Chart 4

In testing the views of the respondents about their roles in the community forty eight percent (48%) said they participate in district activities, twenty two percent (22%) are committed to working hard where they are employed, sixteen percent (16%) view checks on the assembly as their role, twelve percent (12%) are committed to taking care of their children while two percent (2%) see other things as their responsibilities.

For the respondents to inform the topics for discussion at the forum they were asked about topics they would want discussed at the district forum.

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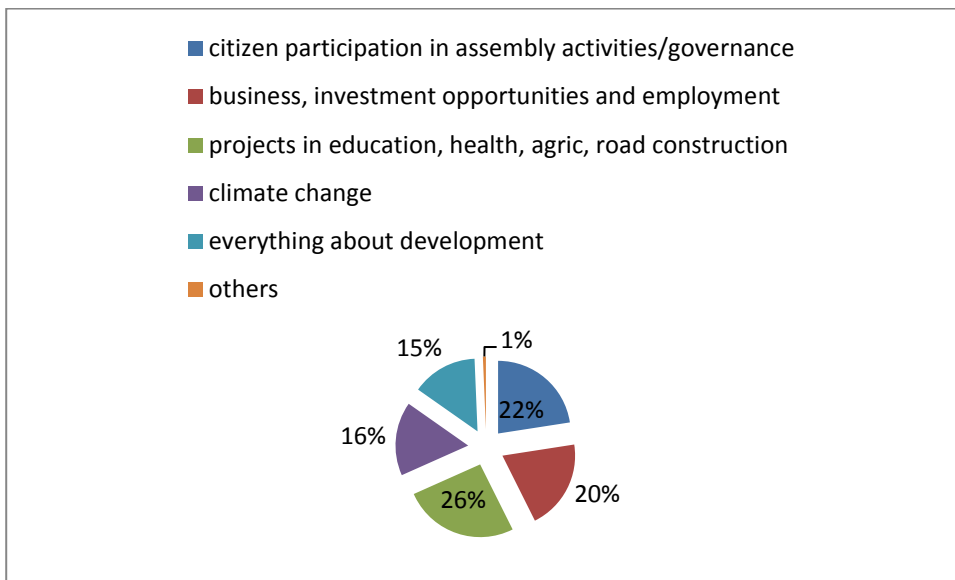


Chart 5

From the chart above, twenty six percent (26%) of the respondents want discussion on projects in education, health, agriculture and road construction, twenty two (22%) of the respondents want the forum to be used to address citizen participation in assembly activities, twenty percent (20%) wanted the forum to focus on business, investment opportunities and employment. Sixteen percent (16%) are concerned about discussing climatic change, fifteen percent (15%) wanted discussions to bother on all developmental issues while one percent (1%) prefer other matters to be discussed.

The perception of the respondents about the ideal role of the MMDAs and issues they consider pertinent in their district is captured in the following pie chart

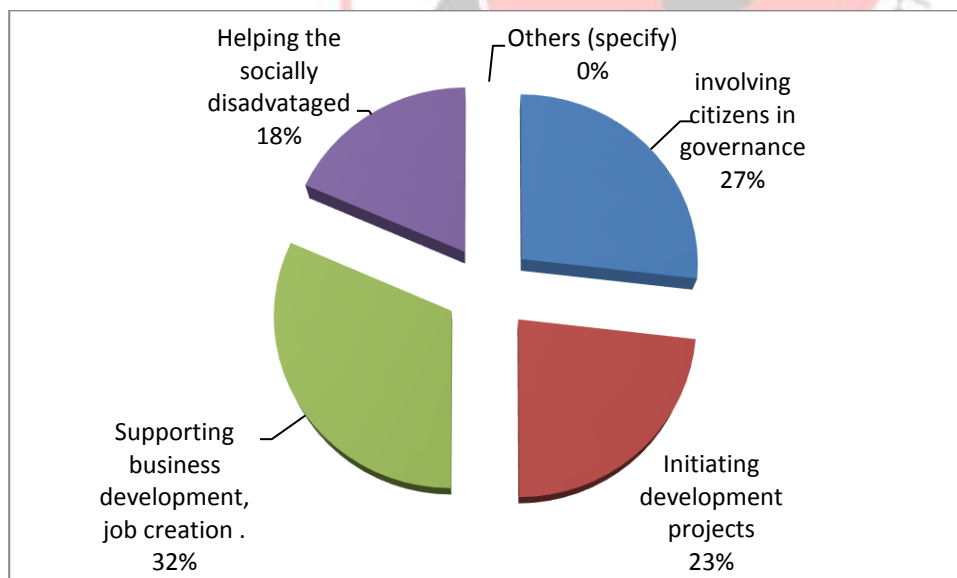


Chart 6

From above, thirty two percent (32%) of the respondents expect the assemblies to be concerned with business development and job creation, twenty seven percent (27%) expect citizen involvement in local governance, twenty three percent (23%) focused on development projects and eighteen (18%) expects assemblies to be focused on helping the disadvantaged in society.



EVALUATION DATA OF THE DISTRICT AND REGIONAL FORUMS

At both district and regional forum the respondents were asked about their satisfaction about the forum.

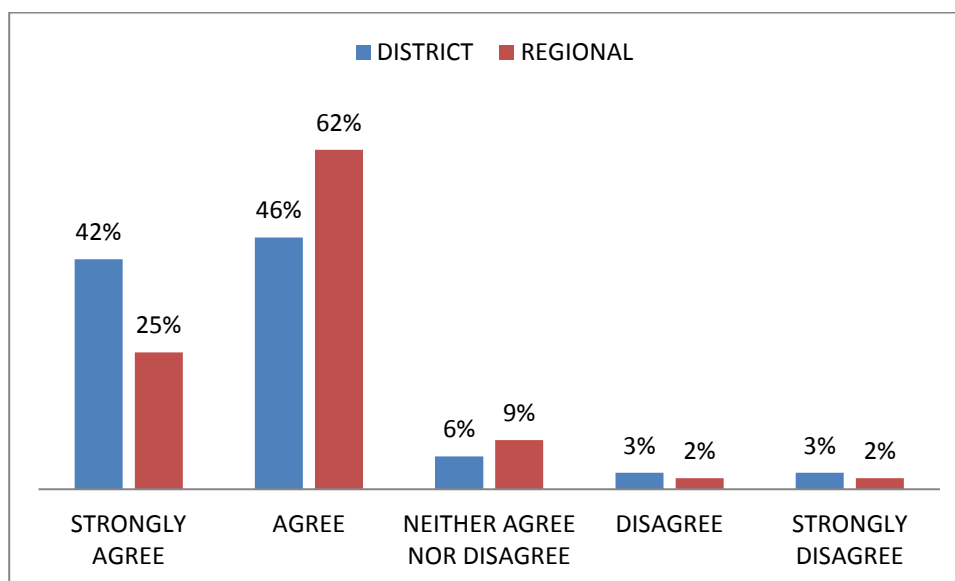


Chart 7

Sixty two percent (62%) regional participants and forty six percent (46%) district participants agree. Forty two percent (42%) district participants and twenty five (25%) regional participants strongly agree that forum lived to their expectations. Nine percent (9%) regional participants and six percent (6%) district participants neither agree nor disagree with the question. Three percent (3%) district participants and two percent (2%) regional participants of the respondents disagree strongly and agree respectively that the forum did not live to expectation.

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To evaluate the performance of the organisers the respondents were asked whether the activities were appropriate to the forum’s objectives.

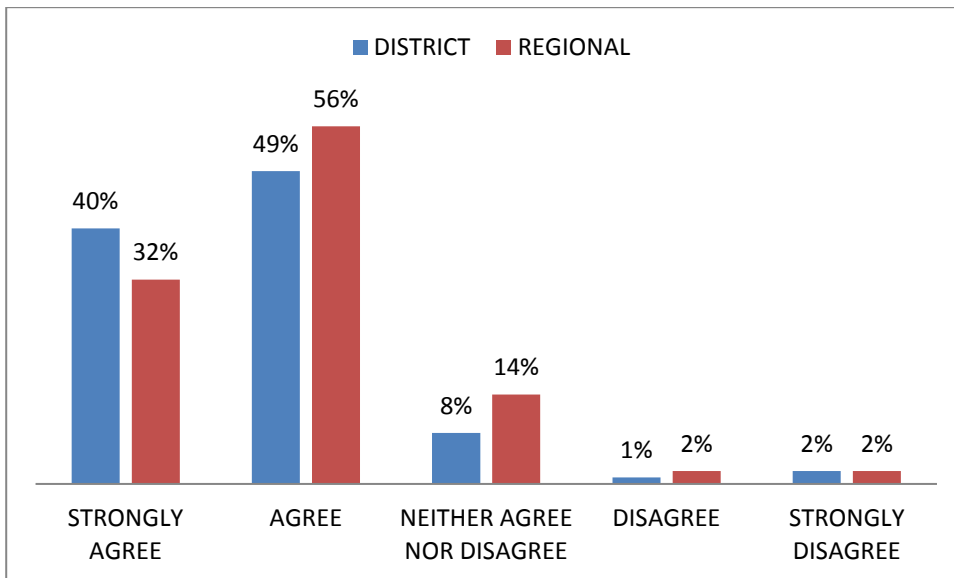


Chart 8

Fifty six percent (56%) regional respondents and forty nine percent (49%) district respondents agree. Thirty two (32%) regional respondents and forty percent (40%) district respondents strongly agree that all activities were appropriate for the forum. Fourteen percent (14%) regional respondents and eight percent (8%) district respondents neither agree nor disagree. Two percent (2%) regional respondents and one percent (1%) district respondents disagree while two percent (2%) of respondents in both region and district strongly disagree all activities were appropriate for the forum’s objectives.

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To evaluate the premium placed on the participatory nature of the discussion session respondents were asked how useful the forum was.

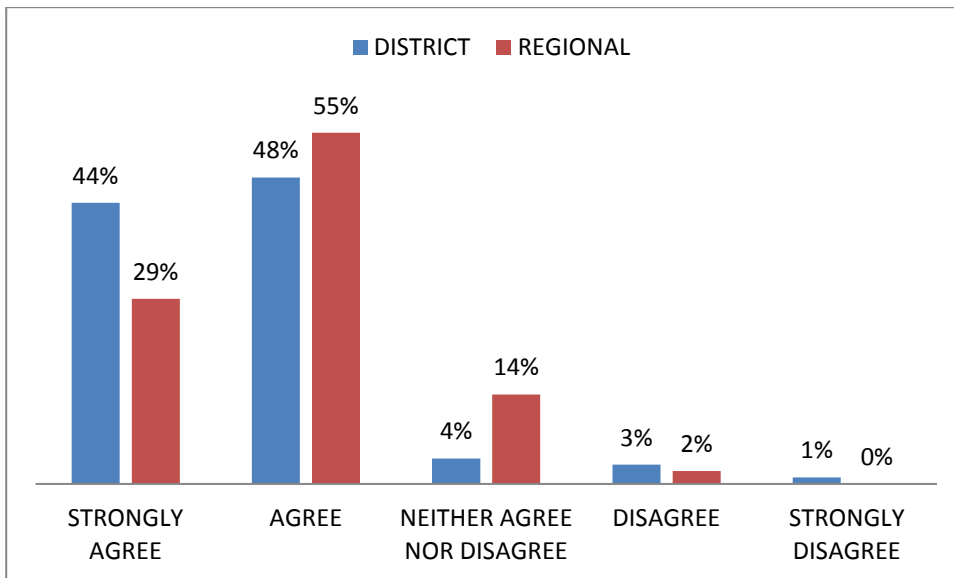


Chart 9

Fifty five percent (55%) regional participants and forty eight percent (48%) district participants agree and twenty nine percent (29%) regional participants and forty four percent (44%) district participants strongly agree that the discussion session was most useful. Fourteen percent (14%) regional participants and four percent (4%) district neither agree nor disagree. Two percent (2%) regional participants and three percent (3%) district participants disagree while zero percent (0%) regional participants and one percent (1%) district participants strongly disagree.

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The respondents were also asked about whether the forum was a good way for understanding citizen participation

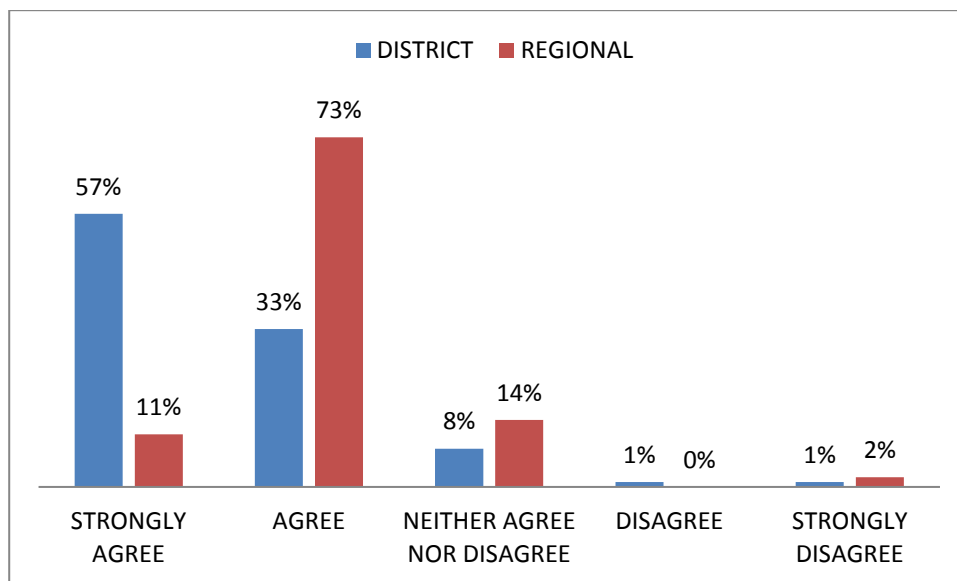


Chart 10

From the chart above, seventy three percent (73%) regional participants and thirty three percent (33%) district participants agree, and eleven percent (11%) regional participants and fifty seven percent (57%) district participants strongly agreed the forum was a good way for them to understand citizen participation. Fourteen percent (14%) regional participants and eight percent (8%) district participants neither agree nor disagree; two percent (2%) regional participants and one percent (1%) district participants strongly disagree. One percent (1%) district participants and zero percent (0%) district participants disagree.

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On the overall, the respondents were asked about the impact the forum will have on development

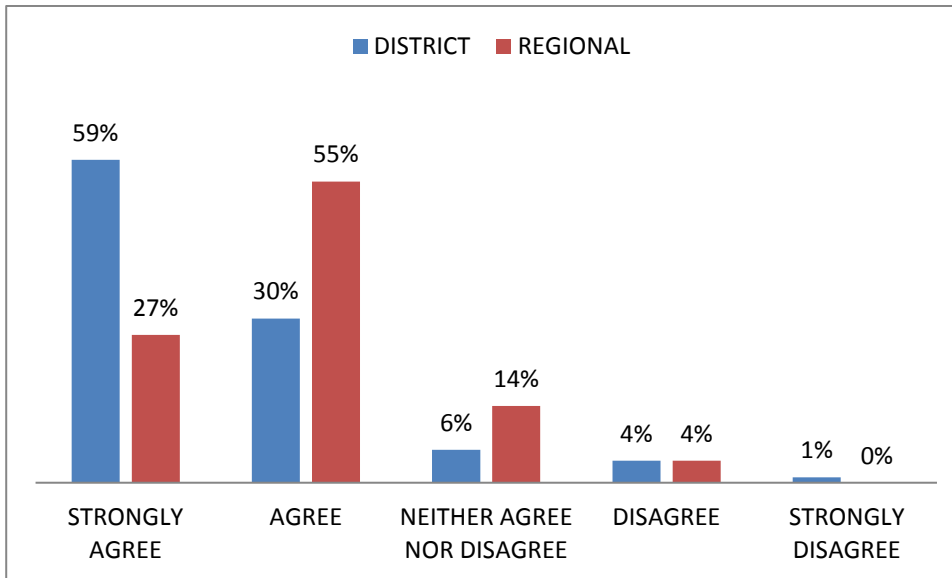


Chart 11

From chart 11, Fifty five percent (55%) and twenty seven percent (27%) regional participants strongly agree while thirty percent (30%) and fifty nine percent (59%) at district participants agree and strongly agree respectively the forum will have a positive impact on Upper East Region's development. Fourteen percent (14%) regional participants and six percent (6%) district participants neither agree nor disagree; four percent (4%) both regional and district participants disagree while zero percent (0%) regional participants and one percent (1%) district participants strongly disagree.

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The respondents were requested to indicate what was most useful about the forum at both the district and the regional level.

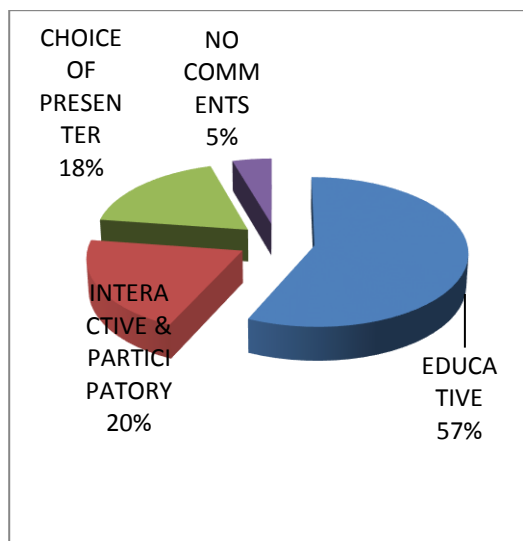


Chart 12, district forum

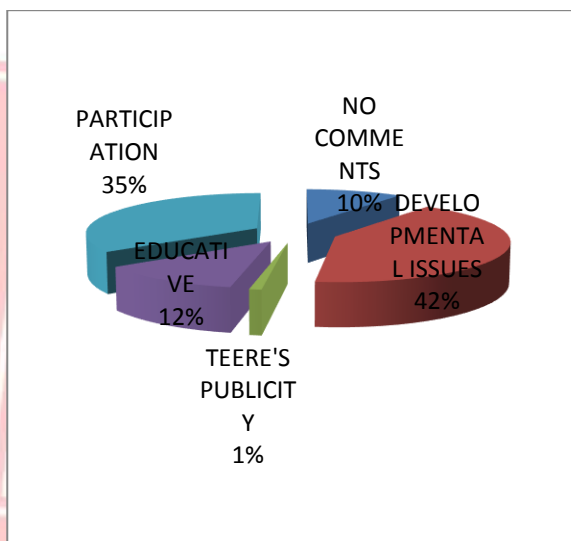


Chart 13, regional forum

From chart 12 above, fifty seven percent (57%) of the participants at the regional forum indicated the forum was educational, twenty percent (20%) view the interactive nature of the forum more useful whiles eighteen percent (18%) see the choice of presenter as most useful.

From chart 13 above, forty two percent (42%) of participants at the district forum indicated the discussion of developmental issues was the most useful component of the forum, thirty five percent (35%) saw the participatory nature to be more useful. Twelve percent (12%) of the respondents saw the educative nature of the program to be most useful. Ten percent (10%) of the participants made no comments about the most useful component. One percent (1%) indicated the publicity of TEERE as an organisation was most useful.

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DATA FROM IMPACT STUDY

In the course of the impact study respondents were asked about their presence at the TLGF citizen participation forum.

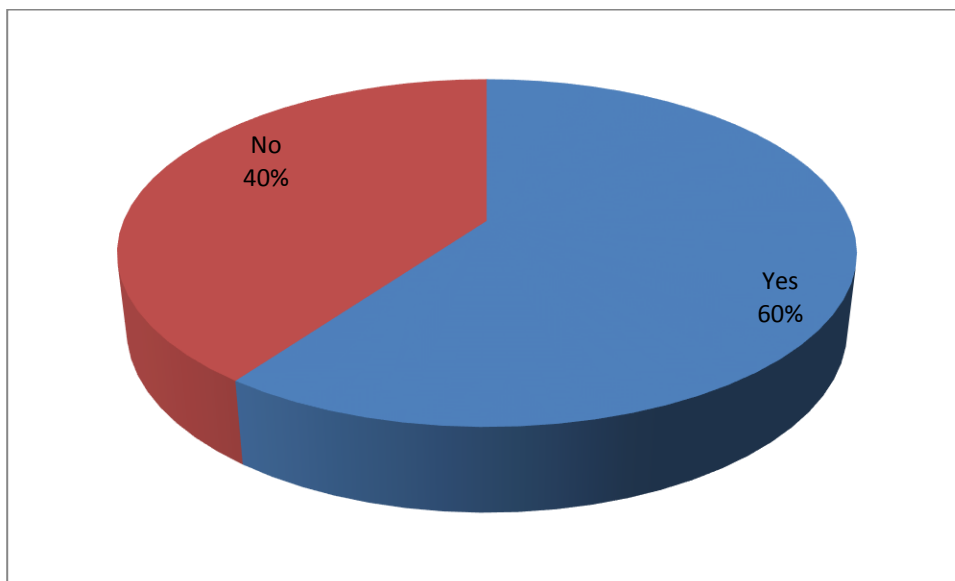
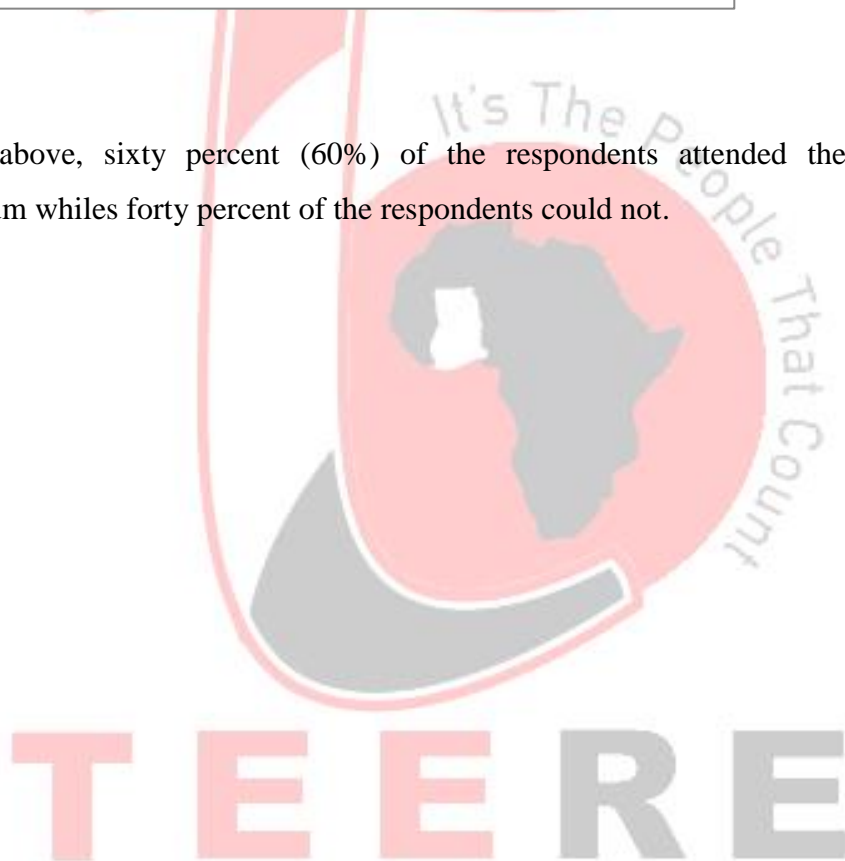


Chart 14

From chart 14 above, sixty percent (60%) of the respondents attended the TEERE Local Government Forum whiles forty percent of the respondents could not.



Of those respondents that were present were asked whether they have you seen any improvement in the issues raised at the forum

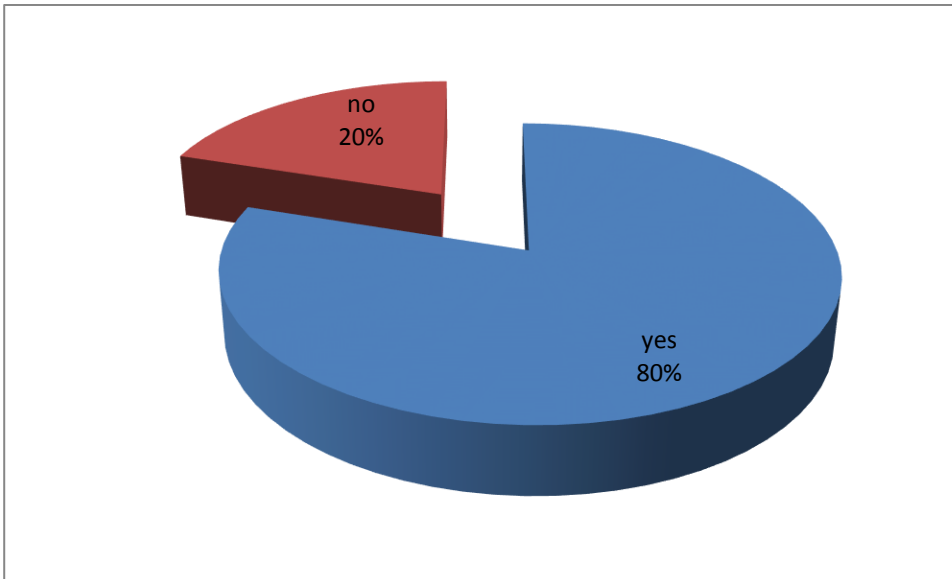
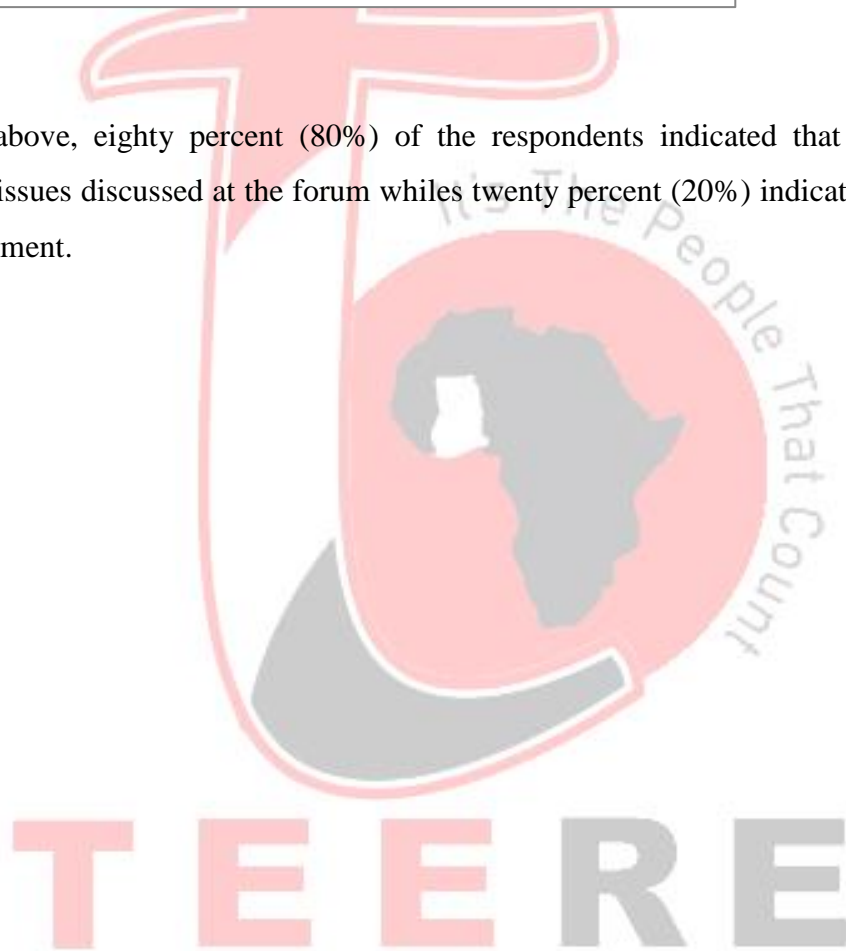


Chart 15

From the chart above, eighty percent (80%) of the respondents indicated that they have seen improvement on issues discussed at the forum while twenty percent (20%) indicated they have not seen any improvement.



The respondents were also asked if they have made an effort to get involved in their community development

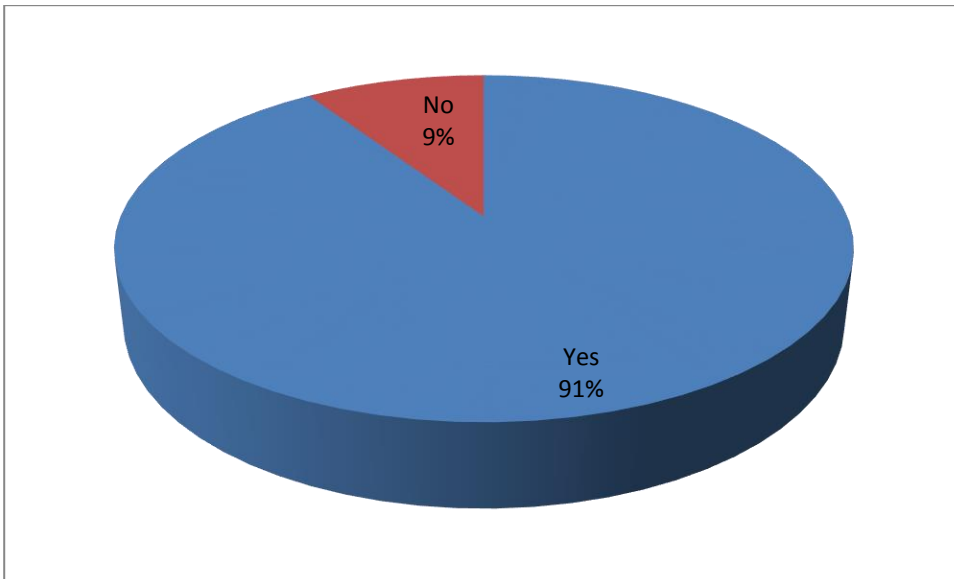
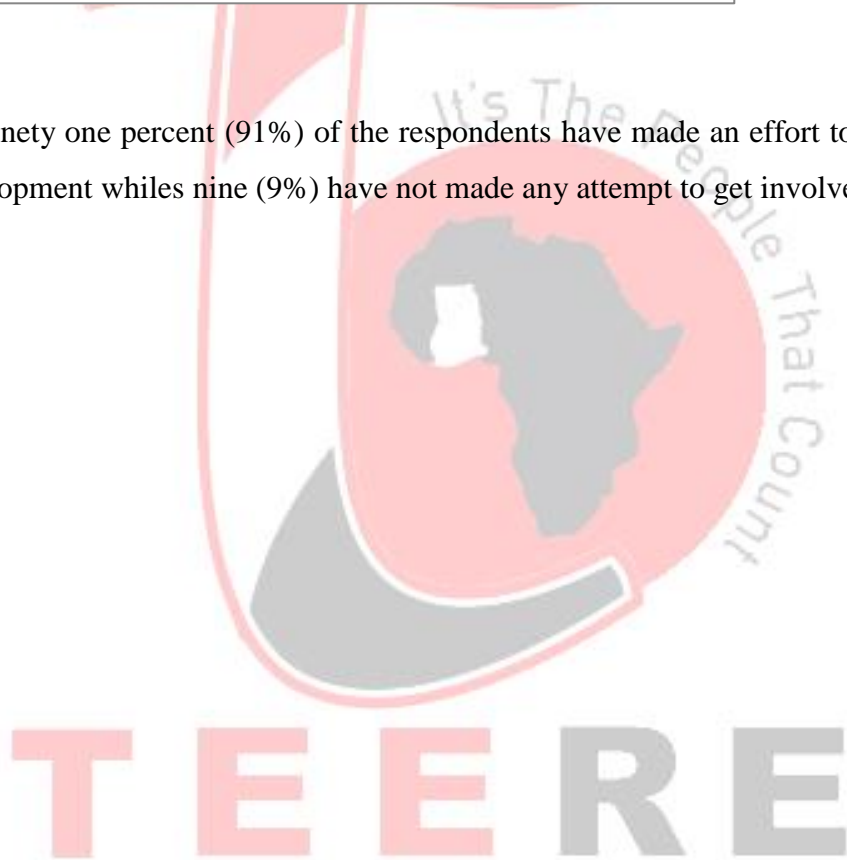


Chart 16

From chart 16, ninety one percent (91%) of the respondents have made an effort to get involved in community development whiles nine (9%) have not made any attempt to get involved in community development.



The respondents were also asked about any other citizen engagement forum after TLGF organised by the local authorities

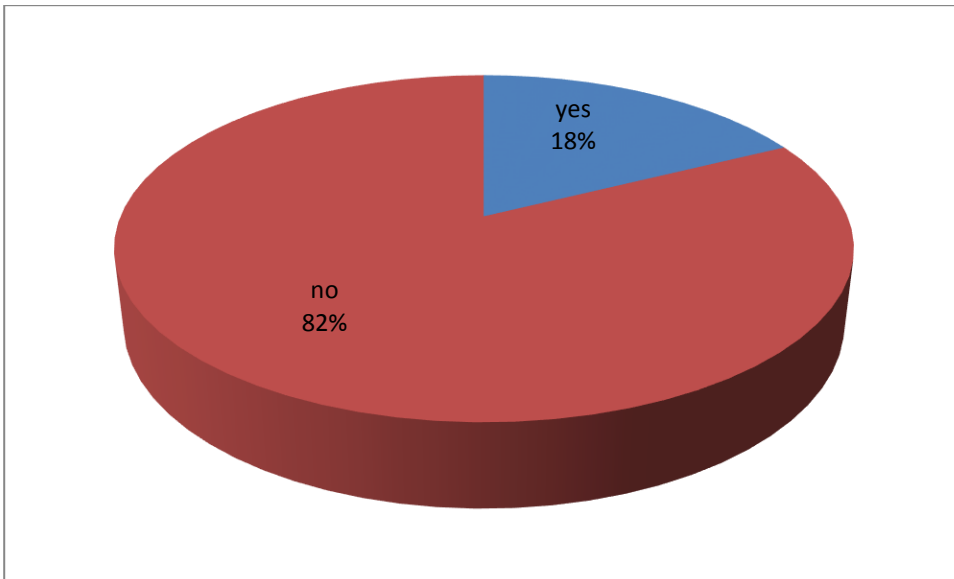


Chart 17

From chart 17 above, eighteen percent (18%) of the respondents has indicated that there have been other citizen engagement organized by the Local Authorities whiles eighty two percent (82%) of the respondents has indicated that there has not been any other citizen engagement forum after the TLGF forum.



The respondents were also asked to rate the impact of TLGF on citizen participation in your community so far?

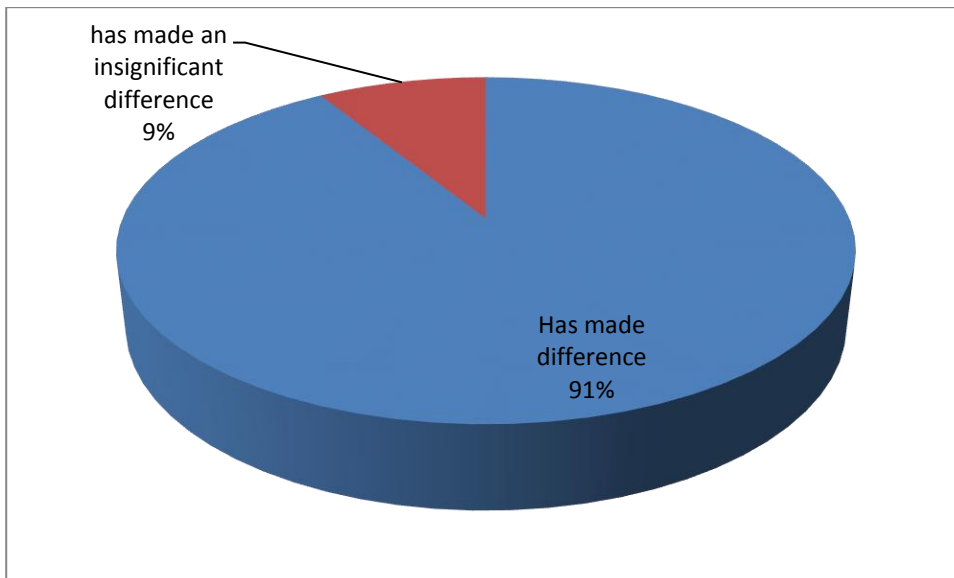


Chart 18

From chart 18, among the various stakeholders that the questionnaires were administered to, ninety one percent (91%) of the respondents indicated that the impact of TLGF on citizen participation has made a difference in their communities as citizens are now enlightened of their role. Nine percent (9%) of the respondents are of the view that the impact of TLGF on citizen participation has made an insignificant difference in their communities.

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DISCUSSION

The baseline study prior to the piloting of the TLGF project revealed the lack of appropriate platforms for citizen participation. The TLGF was the first kind of an opened platform of deliberation between citizens and their stakeholders. Evidently, eighty two percent (82%) of the respondents have indicated that there has not been any other citizen engagement forum after the TLGF forum. Though a majority of ninety nine percent (99%) of the respondents indicated their support for regular district forums as a means to engage in local governance system to provide grass root originated development policies for themselves there are no avenues to do so. Our research findings supported the claims that "...there are not enough effective platforms. Citizens have not been involved and the majority is not aware of the role they need to play..." (Larbi, 2015). This is in a sharp contrast of the claim that local government structures served as avenues for local communities to participate in decision making (Drah, 2003). Though the local government act makes room for district budget input and the appropriation of levies there is no clear indication on the assembly meeting with the populace, the respondents are of the firm conviction that open forum discussions must be organized by members of the District assemblies such as assemblymen and MMDCEs. Twenty seven percent (27%) of the respondents view their participation in the local governance as their responsibility to the state. Indeed cumulatively, the remaining seventy three percent (73%) respondents mentioned issues such as citizen participation, business development, investment, employment, social amenities, climate change, helping the disadvantaged in society and development issues should preoccupy their MMDA's forums. This captures the essence of the Local Government Act, 1993— Act 462 that defines their functions

1. To exercise political and administrative authority in the district, provide guidance, give direction to, and supervise the other administrative authorities in the district.
2. To perform deliberative, legislative and executive functions.
3. To be responsible for the overall development of the district and shall ensure the preparation budget

Though the citizenry largely understands the role of the MMDAs they are not involved in the governance process. This has resulted in the feeling of being relegated from a system that was originally crafted to ensure the active involvement of all locals in their own political, social and economic development. It is rather unfortunate that the conditions in the Ghanaian local government corroborate the claim of Renn & Webler that "...Public participation the way it has been performed has failed to fulfil citizens' needs and demands. Citizens feel the existing participation opportunities are inadequate..." (Renn & Webler,1995).

The data from evaluations of the TLGF at both district and regional levels have demonstrated the zeal of the citizenry to be engaged in the decision making process to bring about development into their localities. The total of eighty eight percent (88%) and eighty seven percent (87%) at the district and regional forums respectively indicated that the forums met their expectation. Eighty nine percent (89%) and eighty eight (88%) at the district and regional forums respectively indicated the forums were appropriate for achieving the objectives of the local governance system. This justifies our agreement with the opinion of Kathlene and Martin (1991) that even though a citizen participation component is included in nearly every major local government planning and policy initiative, current restricted citizen participation techniques have been judged to be less than adequate tools for informing policy makers about the people's will. Therefore to achieve the needed objective there must be the frantic effort to create the platform to engage their people to better appreciate their wants and needs. As a matter of fact, the meeting between the citizenry and their local leaders gave the people the impression that their deliberations on issues are peculiar to them. This feeling of inclusion in the process of solution seeking to developmental issues hand in hand with local government leaders is in tandem with the view of Irvin and Stansbury (2004) that citizen participation in development decision making eliminate dissenting views as a result of the collective collaborative efforts across board to reach consensus to bring about public goods. Thus, eighty four percent (84%) and ninety percent (90%) of respondents at regional and district forums respectively indicated that the forum was a good way of understanding citizen participation. This will eventually lead to equality among citizens by holding the ruling class up to public scrutiny and an orientation towards resolving conflicts in consensual other than adversarial ways (Renn & Webler 1995).

The impact study conducted to assess the effect of the forum on the citizenry revealed an improvement in the issues they raised on the forum. Eighty percent (80%) of the respondents indicated that they have seen improvement on issues discussed at the forum. This does not necessarily mean the local government took up all the challenges. Indeed the local citizens made commitments to get involved in their own development issues. Ninety one percent (91%) of the respondents have made an effort to get involved in community development. There were evidence of citizens engaging in cleaning exercises and planting of trees in response to climatic challenges discussed during the forum. Other issues such as saving discussed on the forum led to a surge in membership of village savings and loans associations. In this regard, the citizenry were doing things within their capacity. This development supports the UN World Public Sector Report (2008) that suggests that the involvements of citizens in a wide range of policy making activities lead to public support and encourage the sense of cohesiveness within the neighborhood. Ninety one percent (91%) of the respondents have indicated that the impact of TLGF on citizen participation has made

difference in their communities as citizens are now enlighten of their role. Many people feel a sense of commitment to their neighborhood and are actively involved in activities to improve the quality of life there.

In our study we found out that there is generally a very low level of participation of the citizenry in local governance. Indeed, the MMDAs have centralized themselves in district capital with the air of power around them that makes it difficult for the ordinary Ghanaian to engage them. The lack of general consultative meetings with the entire populace as it is in Latin America worsens the situation. Though the constitution does not give room for assembly membership to be partisan, our research uncovered high levels of partisan political participation in the assembly membership elections. The nomination of 30% from the central government is in no doubt also heavily politicized too.

We again found out numerous factors hindering the participation of citizens in local governance. These include high illiteracy rate. English as the main means of conducting assembly business intimidates citizens who have no literacy skills even including assembly members who cannot make submissions at assembly meetings due to this handy cap. The region has a high level of illiteracy rate of 52.5% (Population and Housing Census, 2010) which indicates more than half the population in the Upper East region is relegated from the governance system. Again very high levels of poverty rate have been a militating factor against people's inclusion. This study revealed that though some people are willing to be involved in the activities of the local government their remoteness from the locations of MMDAs and their lack of means to reach there is a problem. Again, some people would prefer to work to earn their daily meals rather than get involved in assembly businesses. Aside the lack of an open consultative assembly meeting for all citizenry being absent, the sub-assembly structures are not present or even if present are nonfunctional. To Issahaku (2012), "...duties are transferred to sub-districts structures without commensurate transfer of resources..." These structures have been starved of resource both human and monetary over time leading to their existence only on statutory books and not on the grounds. These structures though not the ideal case would have facilitated some level of participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TEERE as a civil society organization operating in this sector makes the following recommendations to improve the local government system.

- To ensure efficiency in the local government system, the government must make the commitment to stay away from appointing its 30% based on partisan basis. Thorough consultation should be done to select people who are able to galvanize local support and the commitment of the people towards developmental course. These selections, we recommend should give priority to the socially disadvantaged such as women, traditional and religious leaders, PWDs, the poor, rural dwellers, the youth, and the aged if an all-inclusive local governance system is the way forward.
- MMDAs must see reason with establishing unofficial open consultative meetings to rope in all citizens into the decision making process to curb the usual adversarial reactions that meet decisions of MMDAs. To ensure undue political meanings are not read into developmental issues and the needed support mobilised for projects everyone needs to be involved.
- To ensure the grass root engagement of the people there is the need to revive and resource the assembly sub-structures to carry out their mandate.
- In advocating for all-inclusive local governance we are of the conviction that this cannot be achieved in isolation from economic development. For this reason, we recommend that the MMDAs make effort in enhancing the economic fortunes of their people.
- Aside putting in place literacy programs we recommend MMDA businesses should be conducted in local languages to ensure the inclusiveness of all people in the locality.

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CONCLUSION

our research points to the fact that there is not much autonomy and sovereignty for Local Governments, which would enable them to meet the expectations of their respective communities. Neither the Citizens nor Civil Society Organisations are really involved in the decision making process. More over most women are not involved in demanding good service delivery from Local Governments. Traditional structures and institutions have not been made a major part of local governance and decision-making process. Acknowledging their role will however, help to find a distinct Ghanaian way to Local Governance. It is also important to integrate the media into the Local Government System to enhance the visibility and importance of Local Government to the broader public.

There is the need to involve all the stakeholders mentioned and many others in order to enhance the autonomy of the MMDAs, to strengthen the commitment and accountability of the public service and promote citizens pride as well as to pave the way for community engagement. These require a strong commitment on the part of duty bears at the local, regional and national level to either involve citizens and social groups in the decision making process or change/reform the legal framework/laws all together

In general, encouraging and involving citizens and other stakeholder groups would engender local ownership and the sustainability of local governance and participatory democracy.

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