

MPs Use of the District Assembly Common Fund in Ghana; “Perception meets Practice”

Authors:

Alhassan Sayibu Suhuyini ^{a, b}, Joseph Antwi-Boasiako ^c and Abdul-Rashid Iddrisu ^d

^a Parliament of Ghana, Accra

^b Department of Public Administration and Health Services Management, University of Ghana Business School, Accra, Ghana

^c Governance for Inclusive Development (GovID), GIZ Ghana, Accra, Ghana

^d Department of Marketing and Corporate Strategic Management, School of Applied Economics and Management Sciences, University for Development Studies, Tamale, Ghana.

Abstract

Parliaments generally perform functions including oversight, legislation and representation. In many developing countries, this representation function portrays Members of Parliament (MPs) as Developmental agents in their communities. In many developing countries, this representation function portrays MPs as Developmental agents in their communities. One of the main sources of funds for MPs has been from the District Assemblies Common Fund. The Constitution of Ghana has created the District Assemblies Common Fund to transfer financial resources from central government to local governments. Out of this has been the creation of the MPs share of the DACF. The allocation is made to help MPs directly address developmental challenges in their districts. This study attempts as one of the first studies to assess the MPs Common Fund from both citizens as well as MPs perspective. This is what we term as “perception meeting practice”.

Keywords: DACF, Ghana, Parliament, perception, practice

Introduction

Parliaments generally perform three functions; legislation, representation, and oversight (Lindberg & Yongmei, 2008). The legislation function entails introducing legislations, amending, approving or rejecting government bills. Their oversight function is to ensure that governments properly and judiciously utilize resources and implement policies and programmes in accordance with the intent and wishes of the citizens (Appiah-Agyekum, Danquah & Sakyi, 2013). They also perform representation function by representing the will of the people (Stapenhurst et al., 2005). The representation function has sometimes been extended to service to constituents. Scholars like Lindberg (2003) assert that in modern democracies, service to constituents remains the most widespread activity Members of Parliament engage in. Loewenberg (2011) explains that with service to the constituents, Members of Parliament sometimes hold office hours, give advice, obtain information and explain activities in the capital to the constituents, and most importantly sponsor developmental projects in their communities.

Appiah-Agyekum et al. (2013; 91) posit that most citizens in the sub-Saharan are poor and therefore in the bid of their parliamentarians to win votes “one may say that parliamentarians become a lightning rod for poverty-related problems that affect their constituents”. To meet the demand and expectations of constituents in Ghana, Kunbour (2012) narrates that Members of Parliament (MPs) lobbied for a share of District Assemblies Common Fund in 2004 to carry out developmental projects in their constituencies. Article 252 of Ghana’s 1992 Constitution created the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF) otherwise known as the Common Fund as a statutory arrangement backed by the Constitution to transfer financial resources (not less than 5% of national tax revenue) from central government to Metropolitan Municipal District Assemblies (MMDAs) for investment in development projects and other purposes as defined in the Act that established the fund. The distribution of the fund is based on the recommendation of a formula by the Administrator of the fund, subject to approval by Parliament before disbursement to the District Assemblies (DACF Act 1993 (Act 455)).

Out of the DACF has been the creation of the MPs share of the DACF which is 5% of the total allocation of the DACF to MMDAs. With the notion that even as legislatures, MPs are expected by their constituents to provide public goods and services and this requires funding which must come from the state (Boachie, 2001; Kubour, 2012). In the 2020 formula for the sharing the DACF, the projected amount of GHc115.6 million (5% of DACF) was to be shared equally for all 275 MPs for Constituency Labour Project with an additional GHc69.4 for monitoring and evaluation of these projects by the MPs. The allocation is made for MPs to help them directly address certain developmental challenges in their districts. Abbey, Azeem and Kuupiel (2017, 74) assert that “there has been no serious assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of the use of these substantial resources or of their impact on poverty reduction. Moreover, the general public has complained about financial improprieties in the use of these resources”.

This study attempts as one of the first studies to assess the use of the MPs Common Fund from both citizens as well as MPs perspective. This is what we term as “perception meets practice”. From the two viewpoints, the study assessed the source of funds available to MPs, how resources from the MPs Common Fund are used and the process for utilization, and lastly the challenges that are associated with the use of this fund. The rest of the paper proceeds as follows: Review of the literature on the political and administrative context of Ghana, financing of local government in Ghana and a review of the DACF as well as the MPs share of the DACF. The paper proceeds to present the methodology as well as present the findings and discussion and ends with the conclusion and some recommendations.

Political and Administrative Context of Ghana

Ghana is a unitary state located in West Africa with an executive president and a Unicameral parliament based on the 1992 constitution. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (2021), Ghana's total population stands at 30,832,019 in 2021. This figure is five times that of 1960 which stood at 6,726,815. Currently, Ghana is divided into 16 Administrative Regions and has 275 constituencies with each constituency having an elected Member of Parliament (MP). These 275 MPs are elected from single-seat constituencies by a universal suffrage under first-past-the-post election for a four-year term. Since 1992, the country has witnessed 8 democratic elections in a 4 year Presidential and Parliamentary term.

The structure of Ghana's Local Government system is set out in Chapter Twenty (20) of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana. The local government structure has a three tier Municipal and District and a four tier Metropolitan Assembly System. The Article 35 (d) of the 1992 Constitution enjoins the state to "make democracy a reality by decentralizing the administrative and financial machinery of government to the regions and districts and by affording all possible opportunities to the people to participate in decision-making at every level in national life and in government". At the district levels, the Article 241(3) mandates the district assembly to be the highest political authority with executive, legislative and deliberative powers.

Even though traits of local governance had existed in the colonial period even before Ghana attained Independence in 1957, scholars argue that it was in November 1988 that the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) government promulgated a law on Local Government (PNDC Law 207) to establish district assemblies as the basic unit for local governance as well as identified the functions they have to perform (Asibuo, 1991). When Ghana returned into civilian rule in 1992, the Local Government Act 462 replaced the PDNC Law 207 in 1993. Abbey, Azeem and Kuupiel (2010) assert that the Act created 110 assemblies at the metropolitan, municipal and district levels. Ghana's local government is currently guided by the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936). The Act 936 of 2016 sought to harmonize some five legislations that were already in existence covering different aspects of local governance in Ghana. These legislations included the Local Government Act (Act 462) of 1993 and Local Government Service Act (Act 656) of 2003.

Additionally, the in line with Article 241(3), the Act empowered Assemblies to be the highest planning authority in each district as well as mobilize adequate resources for the development of the districts (Abbey et al., 2010). Between 1993 and now, the number of MMDAs have moved from the initial 110 through to 138 and currently stands at 261 district assemblies in Ghana. The District Assemblies are headed by a Chief Executive that is appointed by the President without a stipulated tenure of office. These Chief Executives at the various districts as appointed can also be fired by the executive at any point.

Financing of Local Government in Ghana

According to Bird (2010), one of the essential pre-conditions for every successful decentralization is a sound revenue system. Ayee (2006) also asserts that financial resource is the "lifeblood" of decentralization despite being one of the major problems Ghana's decentralization faces. Ghana's decentralization involves transferring responsibilities as well as resources from the central government to the various MMDAs (Abbey et al., 2010). Local governments are supposed to be dependent on two sources of financing; central government transfers and internally generated revenues. However, Appiah-Agyekum et al. (2013) indicate

that the central government continue to control the financial activities of local governments as most of the districts are have capacity challenges to be able to generate adequate internal funds. This has made local authorities dependent on the central government to the extent that the central government approves all financial estimates, approves all loans raised and even power to control the award of contracts at the local level (Appiah-Agyekum et al., 2013).

The Article 240(2)(c) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana stipulates that “there shall be established for each local government unit a sound financial base with adequate and reliable sources of revenue”. The constitution further requires that a share of the total revenue of Ghana should be transferred to the local governments every year following a formula approved by Parliament. Over the years some of the resources from the central government to the local governments have included the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GETFund), created for education expenditures; the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Account, for administration of HIPC debt savings; the District Assemblies Common Fund, a statutory fund for the transfer of central government resources to local authorities. Apart from GETFund, HIPC and DACF, Adu-Gyamfi (2014) opines that the Central government is also responsible for releasing the salaries and wages for the local government staff at the various district assemblies.

Mansour and Esseku (2017) also identified that some districts within which mining entities operate get additional transfers based on a fixed percentage of mineral royalties collected by the central government through the Mineral Development Fund. From 2006, the Government of Ghana and its Development Partners have a pooled funding called the District Development Facility that serve as additional revenue for the MMDAs (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014). The difference with this fund is that this is through a performance-based assessment that seek to enhance financial management in the MMDAs. At the end an assessment conducted based on the Functional and Organizational Assessment Tool, district assemblies who meet the criteria receive additional funds. Again, unlike the other transfers, this fund cannot be used to impact recurrent expenditure but can be used for developmental and capacity building purposes.

The District Assemblies Common Fund

The District Assemblies Common Fund first implemented in 1994 is a creation of the 1992 constitution of Ghana. Article 252(1) of Ghana’s constitution states “there shall be a fund to be known as the District Assemblies Common Fund. Adu-Gyamfi (2014) has indicated that this Fund serves as the biggest and largest transfer from the central government as it contributes about 75% of revenues in the district assemblies. The 1992 Constitution further stipulates where the Fund should be sourced from and the process for disbursement of this revenue.


Article 252 (2) of the 1992 constitution provides that the District Assemblies Common Fund should be provided from the national revenues of the country. It states that “*subject to the provisions of this Constitution, Parliament shall annually make provision for the allocation of not less than five percent of the total revenues of Ghana to the District Assemblies for development; and the amount shall be paid into the District Assemblies Common Fund in quarterly installments*”. The Article 252 (3) further provide that moneys should be “distributed among all the District Assemblies on the basis of a formula approved by Parliament”. The Administrator of the District Assemblies Common Fund is supposed to propose to Parliament within three months at the end of each fiscal year the sharing formula.

The ceiling of the Common Fund is based on revenue projections every year and the allocations are announced after it has received approval from Parliament (Abbey et al., 2010; Mansour & Esseku, 2017). Different stakeholders including the Ministry of Local Government and Rural

Development and Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning determine some aspects of the district budgets that can be financed from the fund (Abbey et al., 2010). Others such as the Controller and Accountant General's Department and the Common Fund Secretariat are also involved in the disbursement of the District Assemblies Common Fund.

Figure 1: Allocation Statement for 2020 DACF.

2020 FORMULA FOR SHARING THE DISTRICT ASSEMBLIES COMMON FUND
ALLOCATION STATEMENT 2020



	PROP. %	GHC	GHC	PROP.	GHC	GHC
		2020			2019	
INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFERS	14.42		333,537,849	13.42		279,100,590
NATIONAL YOUTH AUTHORITY (ACT.939)	4.00	92,508,262		4.00	83,177,065	
YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AGENCY (ACT.887)	9.00	208,143,590		8.00	166,354,129	
NATIONAL DISASTER MGT. ORG.(ACT.927)3%	1.42	32,885,997		1.42	29,569,397	
NATIONAL PROJECTS	19.32		446,789,948	16.11		334,982,799.
NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICIES	1.77	41,000,000		2.00	41,588,533	
LOCAL GOVERNMENT SPECIAL PROJECT	4.32	100,000,000				
GHANA SCHOOL FEEDING				4.81		100,000.00
WASTE MGT. (LIQUID/SOLID/ SEWERAGE TREATMENT PLANT	6.30	145,798,948		4.00	83,094,266	
CONSTRUCTION OF MMDAS BUILDING	3.46	80,000,000		4.81	100,000,000	
CONSTRUCTION OF COURTS/RES. BUILDINGS	3.46	80,000,000		0.50	10,300,000	
RESERVE	13.86		320,531,305	13.77		286,234,448
CONSTITUENCY LABOUR PROJECTS(MPS)	5.00	115,635,328		5.00	103,971,331	
CONSTITUENCY LABOUR MONITORING AND EVALUATION (MPS)	3.00	69,381,197		3.00	62,382,798	
RESERVE FUND	2.00	46,254,131		2.00	41,588,532	
RCC	1.50	34,690,598		1.50	31,191,399	
DACF OPERATIONS	0.63	14,570,051		0.63	13,100,388	
DACF OFFICE BUILDING/ADM. RESIDENCE				0.10	2,000,000	
INSTITUTIONS UNDER MLGRD.	1.73	40,000,000		0.96	20,000,000	
MLGRD OFFICE BUILDING	-	-		0.58	12,000,000	
MMDAS - INDIRECT	2.00		46,257,345	6.30		131,079,427
YEA-SANITATION MODULE (ARREARS)	1.47	34,000,000		5.77	120,000,000	
TRAINING	0.43	9,944,638		0.43	9,000,000	
CURED LEPERS	0.10	2,312,707		0.10	2,079,427	
MMDAS - DIRECT	50.40		1,165,581,105	50.40		1,048,029,349
PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (PWD)	3.00	69,381,197		3.00	62,382,798	
NET MMDAS	47.40	1,096,199,908		47.40	985,646,551	
TOTAL FUND	100.00		2,312,706,550	100		2,079,426,613

Source: DACF 2020

The District Assemblies Common Fund has been faced with a number of issues and the processes have received criticisms from practitioners and scholars (Abbey et al., 2010; Appiah-Agyekum et al., 2013; Mansour & Esseku, 2017). Whiles Mansour and Esseku (2017) have identified the unpredictability of the disbursement as one of the issues with the fund, Appiah-Agyekum et al. (2013) have also bemoaned the over 49% of deductions by the central government which represent a huge loss for the Assemblies to execute their planned projects (Mansour & Esseku, 2017). Figure 1 shows that in 2020, MMDAs directly received only 50.40% for their use within the MMDAs with the other institutional transfers taking the

remaining. Even with the direct disbursement, 3% was specifically used to support persons with disability (PWD) and therefore in 2020, the net percentage received by the MMDAs was 47.40% (Figure 1). Abbey et al. (2010) have also highlighted the various mismanagements and misuse of funds, questionable payments for uncompleted projects, overdue loan repayments, among other issues that have been reported by the media and the various audit reports. All these defeats the reason why the fund was set up and this hinder the development of the district assemblies.

Allocations from the DACF to MPs

Members of Parliament have succeeded in bargaining for a percentage of the allocation from the District Assembly Common Fund to support developmental activities in their constituencies (Appiah-Agyekum, 2013).

In the Part III of Guidelines for the Utilization of the District Assemblies Common Fund for 2017 Fiscal Year, outlined how the MPs share of the Common Fund came about. It is stated that *“in approving the formula for sharing the District Assemblies Common Fund, Parliament by consensus decision in 1997, resolved that a percentage of DACF allocation to the Reserve Fund shall be shared on Parliamentary Constituency basis and that the utilization of this amount should be for projects selected and approved by the Member of Parliament”*. Ahwoi who was the Minister of Local Government then also outlined how this fund was birthed states that: *“the leaders of both the majority and minority in parliament came to us and told us bluntly that considering the way the Chief Executives of Local Assemblies were bluffing with the DACF, if we don’t give MPs their share, they won’t approve the formula (for the sharing of the fund) when it comes before parliament”* (Ahwoi, 2012).

Some other characteristics of the fund include that:

- i. The fund be shared equally to the 275 Parliamentary constituencies
- ii. The fund be released quarterly to the Assemblies and the Member of Parliament shall be notified
- iii. A separate account shall be kept for every constituency.
- iv. No money shall be withdrawn from this account without a memorandum from the sitting Member of Parliament.
- v. Payment from the account shall be made by the Finance Officers of the Assembly and as such accounting for the fund shall form part of the accounts of the Assembly.

Source: Guidelines for the Utilization of the District Assemblies Common Fund for 2017 Fiscal Year

Over the years, there has been a growing debate on the MPs share of the Common Fund as various scholars have criticized MPs for using illegal means to secure these funds. Some scholars have maintained that the allocation to MPs from the Common Fund is illegitimate and lacks any form of legislation but rather based on an agreement between parliamentarians. Findings by Appiah-Agyekum et al (2013) point to the absence of a legislative instrument on the management of the MPs Common Fund.

Table 1: DACF Disbursement to MPs for Constituency Labour Projects

Fiscal year	5% of total tax revenue/ Total DACF	5% of DACF for MPs
2019	2,079,426,613.00	103,971,331.00
2020	2,312,705,550.00	115,635,328.00
2021	2,402,331,910.00	120,116,596.00

Source: Authors construct (2022) based on data from Parliament of Ghana

NB: Amounts are quoted in GHc

That notwithstanding, the allocations have been happening every year since its introduction as part of the formula submitted to Parliament by the DACF Secretariat. Table 1 shows the amounts that have been allocated to MPs as against the total DACF with a three-year trend from 2019 to 2021. The 5% for each year is then divided among the 275 MPs in Ghana to carry out development projects in their constituencies.

Methodology

The study employed the qualitative approach as its research approach. Qualitative research has been identified by Sakyi (2010) as key to understanding the experiences of Ghanaian legislators. Asante (2018) also adds that to understand the issues surrounding the utilization of MPs Common Fund, the qualitative research can provide a better understanding. The study mainly relied on primary data through the use of interviews and focus group discussions. In both cases, semi-structured interview guides were used to solicit the needed information. The semi-structured interviews allowed for follow up on the responses given by the participants to enhance the reliability of the data (Robson, 1993). In the end, the study interviewed five (5) MPs and conducted eight (8) focus group discussions. Each focus group discussions had a about 4 to 8 people participating in the study. The focus group discussions were used to mainly collect the data on the perception of citizens and some scholars have reiterated that it is very appropriate when people are brought together with similar background and interest. The data was subjected to a thematic analysis (Miles et al., 2014) where the researchers identified commonly recurring themes and used ‘a combination of analyst narrative and illustrative data extracts’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 24).

Findings and Discussions

Source of Funds for Members of Parliament

The study first sought to understand the sources of funds for members of Parliament through the lens of citizens as “perception” and juxtapose that with the reality as “practice” from the MPs. Through the focus group discussion, the participants indicated they were aware of some sources of funds MPs use for the development in their various constituencies. From their perception, MPs used their allocations from the Common Fund, their own salaries and allowances and returning also “Ex-gratia” was mentioned.

- ***Common Fund***

The citizens were aware that MPs were receiving some monies from central government named as the common fund. To them, they believe that some money has been given to the Assemblies and the MPs also get something. The study rather found that the citizens did not know much about the fund; its objective, and how much. A respondent mentioned that

“we know MPs get some monies from the government. We don’t really know much about this money, the purpose, what it should be used for or other information on it, so we are unable to even give you any further information on it and even how much money they get”.

The MPs on the other hand explained that indeed there were allocations from the central government which included the allocations from the DACF which most people know as the “Common fund”. It is rather the objectives of the fund and the processes associated with the fund that most citizens were not in the known. Additionally, the study revealed from the interaction with the MPs that in practice, there were some other allocations from the central government aside the Common Fund. These other allocations were from the National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA) and the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GetFund) for MPs to be used to address Health and Educational needs of their constituents.

The underlying issue here is about the opaqueness of the allocations from the central government to the MPs through the DACF, GetFund, and NHIA. It was revealing for the citizens to know that the MPs were receiving some additional funds apart from the DACF that has mostly been in the public domain. Like we are assessing the MPs Common Fund, it will be interesting for future studies to unravel issues surrounding the other allocations to MPs like the GetFund and NHIA. As the legality of the share of the DACF to MPs has been questioned, same can be done for these allocations. Like this study, others can also assess how MPs use the other allocations for its purpose.

- ***Salaries and Allowances of MPs***

Another source of funds that the citizens were aware MPs receive funds was the Salaries of MPs. When citizens were asked how they expected MPs to meet the various demands and where they think MPs get money for them, they bemoaned that MPs were receiving huge salaries and allowances bigger than what the average person get. As a result, their expectation is that the MPs can use a part of their salaries to address the challenges of their constituents.

Unfortunately for the MPs, their constituents do not care whether the funds they are requesting for are from the central government allocations or their personal funds. A MP narrated that “for them and I mean the citizen or voter, so far there is the need on their side and they come to you, you have to go to any extent to help them fix their problems. Others also corroborated that they are forced to use their personal salaries and allowances for their work in their constituencies.

Due to political reasons, MPs are unable to explain to the citizens their source of funds available to them at any time. So, in a case where the central government allocations have been exhausted or even delayed, they are still forced to cater for the needs of their people through their personal salaries and allowances. This is because whiles citizens perceive MPs as developmental agents or their point of call when in need, MPs on the other hand also see their constituents as voters. MPs gain sympathy from constituents they are able to help and likewise suffer electoral disadvantages if they are unable to. For this reason, they are forced to use their own salaries for any issue that comes up from the constituency.

- ***Donations***

Donation from well-wishers of the MPs was another important source of funds used by MPs for the developmental projects in their constituencies. Aside the allocations from the central government which MPs depend on, and the use of the personal funds of MPs, MPs depend on donations from well-wishers and sympathizers. Even though this did not come out clearly from the focus group discussion as the citizens were aware that MPs received donations, but they did not have evidence to that effect. On the side of the MPs, even though they agreed they received some donations from people, they were not willing to go further into this discussing what goes into it. Our understanding is that the MPs were not willing to discuss this topic of donation not from a developmental perspective however, they were skeptical of the electoral implications their responses may have. Ghana's electoral laws bars electoral candidates from accepting certain gifts or donations from certain categories of people to support their electoral fortunes. The monitoring regime and structures to track such political financing have been non-existent and so donations from individual as well as companies remains one source of funds for politicians like MPs in Ghana.

Processes of the MPs share of the DACF

Despite the various sources of funds identified in the previous section, the focus of the paper is on the use of the MPs share of the DACF. This section assesses the process of the MPs share of the DACF from the citizens perspective and the reality of the MPs. Participants were asked if they were aware of the processes the MPs Share of the DACF goes through before reaching them as beneficiaries

As previously indicated, the study showed a very limited knowledge of the citizens on the MPs use of the DACF. It was evident that the citizens did not have adequate knowledge even the process that this share goes through before getting to them as beneficiaries. When enquired if participants from the focus group were aware of processes from the allocation to the disbursement, the responses were not satisfactory. The general understanding from the discussion was that the citizens think the allocations are made to the personal bank accounts of the MPs and they withdraw to carry out all the development projects in the constituency. A participant responded that "for me, I know MPs are given the funds in their accounts and they use it for all the development they carry out". Another respondent corroborated and stated that "the MPs go for the money from the government and they come into the constituency to build the schools and hospitals with these monies".

These responses were however totally different from the narration of the MPs. MPs totally debunked the assertion that the DACF is paid to them for redistribution. One MP took time to narrate the processes that was corroborated by the others. To them,

- i. there is a separate bank account kept at the District Assembly to which the fund is released into.
- ii. Anytime there is a release, the DACF secretariat writes to them stating the amount that has been released and for which quarter the amount is for.
- iii. As MPs, they have no direct access to the funds unable to withdraw from the account as they are not signatories to it. MPs identify a problem in their constituency and only write a letter/memorandum addressed to the Head of the District Assembly to release funds to address this problem.
- iv. The District Assemblies are therefore to use their internal processes to purchase the equipment needed to address the issue.
- v. Depending on the relationship between the MP and Head of the District Assembly, MPs are sometimes notified or invited to make presentation for these items.

These practical narrations by the MPs triangulated with the processes as outlined in the Guidelines for the Utilization of the District Assemblies Common Fund for 2017 Fiscal Year shows a lot of similarities. Apart from the issues of the funds not being released on quarterly in practice as stipulated in the Guidelines, almost everything else has been going according to the laid down process. Even with that, to still work around it, it is still why the DACF secretariat writes to the MPs with the amount and which quarter it is for (Process ii above).

Use of MPs Share of the DACF

The study revealed that because most of the citizens think the Common Fund is the only allocation from the central government to the MPs, they as well assume that for all the development projects in the constituency, the MPs mostly fall on only this allocation. Participants from the focus group discussion indicated that DACF share to MPs is “Used for everything MPs do in the constituency” and so to them, whether the MP is paying for educational, health, or social expenses, the main fall back is the MPs share of the DACF.

When asked if respondents knew how MPs use their share of the DACF, one respondent narrated that

“In my constituency, it is used to support needy students, registration of poor on NHIS, support to health directorates/facilities, sometimes contribution of fuel to MMDA to undertake monitoring are some areas”.

Responses from MPs do not entirely corroborate the perception by the citizens on the use of their share for almost everything, but they narrated instances where part of their allocations has been utilized to supplement support to areas such as education, health, among others. A MP narrated that, “

unlike the allocation from GetFund that is solely educational support, or NHIA that is solely for health-related issues, the DACF doesn't have a limited criterion. So, in case I have exhausted funds from GetFund and there are still some educational or health support I have to take care of, I use the DACF in that area as well”.

The caveat in this is that MPs can use this fund for anything in the constituency subject to the approval of the decentralized head/MMDCE. Our findings are corroborated by Asante (2018) whose study found that the MPs share have normally been used for payment of school fees, supply for farm implements, agro-chemicals, fertilizers, supply of water to communities, payment of medical bills, among others.

It is at this utilization that the friction described by various scholars usually manifest (Azeem, 2003; Ahwoi 2010; Antwi-Boasiako, 2010). In many instances where the head of the decentralized unit needs to approve for the use of fund despite the fund being in the name of MPs usually creates confusion. Whiles Ahwoi (2010) believes that that the tensions mostly arise when the heads of the district assemblies and MPs are from different parties, Arthur (2012) disagrees and indicate that conflict still manifest even when the heads and MPs are from the same political party. Some scholars attributed these constant conflicts to the individual selfish interest of the head of the district and the MP and nothing to do with them seeking to pursue the needs of the local people. Boachie-Danquah (2004) and other scholars also assert

that the use or spending of the DACF in Ghana has been one of the greatest challenges to accountability and transparency.

Challenges on the MPs Common Fund

Despite the purpose for the establishment of this fund, objectives of the fund as well all the various ways through which the fund has been put to good use, there are however still some challenges with the usage of the funds. These challenges are identified from both the citizens perspective as well as from the MPs point of practice.

- **Selection of Beneficiaries**

The first challenge with the management of the MPs DACF has been on the selection of the beneficiaries. The respondents have argued that communities that benefit from the benevolence of the MPs as well the individuals that are supported by the MPs are usually those that are not selected based on needs or by merit. They think MPs do not have any criteria to select beneficiaries and that their selections always have personal and to a large extent political undertone.

A respondent explained:

We are not aware of any laid down process to access this MPs Common Fund and so only persistently try to access the MP until he/she listens to us. So, if I need school fees or any other support, I believe I have to look for him through any means possible. That is why you mostly find us at their homes and offices.

As a result, they are of the belief that since there is no criteria, citizens have resorted in the using other approaches to get their grievances to the MPs to get solutions from the DACF. Approaches have been included getting the house of the MPs very early in the mornings to the extent that there are always queues in their houses and offices. Also, this has resulted in the creation of gatekeepers like people who have access to the MPs. Some people narrated how they go through third parties in the constituency to access their MPs.

A respondent bemoaned that:

You know our MP is in Accra and so he comes here once a while. With the limited time, you may still find it difficult accessing them, so we identify some people close to the MP and narrate our problems to with the hope that when they get through to the MP, they will inform him/her.

Some respondents who have not had their requests granted believe that they will need to find better approaches to getting to the MPs to hear their stories and they are very sure of getting their requests supported from portions of DACF when this happens.

In practice, the MPs acknowledged that this problem exist even for them with the selection of the beneficiaries. As one MP aptly put, when it comes to our share of the DACF, the “Demand exceed Supply” and so we have not figured how best to go about sharing it”. MPs have resorted to the use of discretion to select beneficiaries for the DACF. Even when it comes to the community projects, they have still resorted to discretion. They agreed that communities and individual that are persistent in their demands are the ones that get support anytime there is a release.

An MP narrated that: *as an MP, I get a lot of request from my constituency in different shapes and form. Unfortunately, with the amount that we get from the DACF and the kind of requests that comes in, we are unable to do much. I personally note down these demands until there is a release from the central government then I start addressing the pressing ones.*

- **Abuse of Funds**

Following how the selection of beneficiaries, the respondents believe that is unfair and an abuse of funds. To them, since these are state funds given to the MPs to carry out the needed developments as well as support their constituents, the processes should be open and fair to accommodate anyone who will require any form of support from the MPs. As such, if they must go to the extent even use third parties to access such state funds, to them, it is rather unfair and an abuse. Luckily, some of the respondents had benefitted from one way or another from the allocations of the MPs and shared their experience on how tedious the process was for them. Again, how long it took them before getting the answers to their request.

Conclusion and Recommendation

When it comes to the MPs share of the DACF, the two biggest debates continue to linger; the legality or otherwise of Fund and the question of MPs as developmental agents. As this paper has tried to contribute to the debate that despite the question of the legality, the fund is being used by MPs to do a lot in their respective constituencies ranging from education, through health, water and sanitation, electricity support among others. This is attested to by citizens who have accessed this fund for various reasons. For such people, the question of legality matters very less to them if the MPs can address their needs with such a fund available to them. It is for this reason that many former and current MPs have even called for an increase in the allocation to be able to meet the demands of their constituents. For instance, the MP for Suame Constituency who is currently Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs and the Leader of the Majority Group has asked for an increase as the current allocation is only able to fund small projects and assistance as opposed to the huge demands by citizens like road construction. The onus rather lies with the MPs as law makers to ensure that they rectify this long-standing illegality to at least give a framework for its access and use as many scholars have already recommended (Appiah-Agyekum et al., 2013, Asante, 2018).

In terms of recommendation, we join the many scholars and practitioners (Arthur, 2012, Appiah-Agyekum et al., 2013, Debrah, 2009) who have been advocating for the election of the MMDCEs. This election has been argued by scholars as a means to take the burden off the MPs as the developmental agents. It is argued that because MPs are the ones who present themselves to the constituents to be voted for, the citizens demand accountability through voting from the MPs. When the MMDCEs position are voted on, as the head of the district assemblies which control over the larger share of the DACF, citizens will then demand for development from them. This will in the long run help address the perception in the minds of many citizens on the role of MPs as developmental agents in Ghana's democracy.

Short Biography of Authors:

1. Alhassan Sayibu Suhuyini

Hon. Alhassan Sayibu Suhuyini has been a Member of Ghana's Parliament for Tamale North Constituency since 2017. He is also a Member of the Appointment Committee as well as the Land and Forestry Committee of Parliament. He has a track record of being an advocate against corruption and poor leadership. He had over a decade media practice in different regions across Ghana, with a focus on politics and governance and won several awards. He is currently pursuing a PhD in Public Administration and Management in the University of Ghana. He is an Alumni of US State Department IVLP and South Korea Next Generation Leadership Program. He has served as a Board Member of Ghana Civil Aviation Authority and the Spokesperson for Hajj Board between 2013 to 2017.

2. Joseph Antwi-Boasiako

Joseph Antwi-Boasiako is currently an Accountability and Resource Governance Advisor with GIZ Governance for Inclusive Development (GovID) in Ghana leading on topics of Civil Society Organizations and Marginalized Groups. He holds a Master of Philosophy in Public Administration from the University of Ghana and a Bachelor of Arts Political Studies from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana. He has worked as a Research, Teaching and Graduate Assistant at the University of Ghana Business School. His interests are accountability institutions, corruption, civil society organizations and participatory governance.

3. Abdul-Rashid Iddrisu

Abdul-Rashid Iddrisu is a Lecturer, trainer and business coach, entrepreneur, and a media practitioner. He is a staff of the University for Development Studies with the Marketing Department, Nyakpala Campus and the department innovation and community engagement Coordinator. Mr. Iddrisu holds a Master of Business Administration certificate in Strategic Management and Consulting from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, He is also a graduate of the University of Cape Coast with a Bachelor of Commerce Certificate and holds a Higher National Diploma Certificate in Accountancy from the Tamale polytechnic.