Democratization and participation:
National education policy-making in Africa

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This is Ghanaian case study that focuses on widening participation in national education policy-making via a social justice panel. It analyses the narratives of two former members of the Ghana Education Reform Committee and focus-groups interviews of ordinary Ghanaians. While the narratives of commission members are in favour of maintaining the status-quo, those of the focus groups express a strong interest in having opportunities to relate issues about the schooling system in Ghana. The paper suggests the social justice model as the most appropriate model to address the exclusion of ordinary Ghanaians from the education policy-making table. The conclusion makes democratic, moral and implementation arguments for the participation of that segment of the population in national education policy-making.

Keywords: Citizenry engagement; democracy; education policy-making; participation; social justice

INTRODUCTION: NATURE, CHARACTERISTICS AND SCOPE OF NATIONAL EDUCATION COMMISSIONS

National education policy-making in all former British colonies in Africa (i.e. Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia) follows a British colonial model that favours the participation of and consultation with a tiny segment of the population who possess English language facility. In this model, the national education policy-making process involves the appointment of a national education commission or committee to review national goals, outcomes, philosophy and policies of education, and to make appropriate recommendations to the government. The National Education Review Commission is normally made up of representatives of various parts of the education system; representatives are drawn from different sectors of society. Normally, the government of the country is not officially represented on a commission but the ministry of education provides all the necessary technical support and other resources required for commissions to carry out its work successfully. As well, the government appoints the commission's chair, determines the terms of reference for commission, and the deadline by which it needs to submit its final report. The chair establishes the commission's agenda based on its terms of reference, monitors its activities and periodically informs the government and media about the progress of its work. The review commission carries out a national consultative process using a variety of methods, such as: submission of papers containing ideas, suggestions and insights; petitions and town hall meetings; press conferences; travelling around the country to solicit citizen views; and focus group discussions.

After gathering all the information it needs in accordance with its terms of reference and the established deadline, the commission writes its final report. In the report, it formulates a comprehensive set of recommendations on future education goals, issues, challenges and policy solutions for submission to the government. Upon receiving the commission's report, the government evaluates the recommendations and then issues a White Paper. The White Paper explains the government's position in relation to the recommendations and indicates which of the recommendations it will develop into policies, regulations, programs or plans and implement them. Finally, the government releases the White Paper for t public reaction (Evans, Sack, & Shaw, 1996).

Five characteristics distinguish educational commissions in Ghana and, for that matter, all former British colonies in Africa. First, the language of communication (LOC) that commissions use is English, which has been adopted as the official language and language of instruction in educational institutions in all former British colonies in Africa. Accordingly, participation in commission work, either as members or members of the public, requires a facility in English language. Second, members of a commission are not responsible for formulating strategies, methods or finding resources for implementing its policy recommendations (Itaaga, 1998). That responsibility lies with the government that appointed the commission. Third, education commissions play only advisory roles, in that their authority is limited by their terms of reference, which are determined by the governments that appoint them; commissions are neither part of the bureaucracy nor a branch of the government.

A government that appoints a commission is not obliged legally or morally to implement any policies or regulations based on the recommendations of the commission. Nevertheless, commissions exercise immense subtle influence on the initial development of education policy through the distillation of ideas, issues, problems and directions governments should take (Muricho & Chang'ach, 2013; Vidovich, 2001). In other words, commissions exercise considerable influence in framing educational issues and challenges in the country where they are appointed. Allied to this is that members of commissions are part of the educated elite – who are a distinctive group with technical, managerial and professional credentials (Bariledum & Serebe, 2013). Owing to the influence they wield, education commissions have historically shaped the form and nature of the education systems in all former British colonies in Africa.

Fourth, contrary to prevailing misconception, the scope of the work of Commissions goes far beyond reviewing existing education policies, programs, regulations or legislation. Commissions also examine implementation obstacles of existing education policies, identify current and future education development issues and propose solutions (Muricho & Chang'ach, 2013; Nudzor, 2014). Lastly, national education commissions are transitory and of limited life expectancy. They are quickly dissolved as soon as they submit their final report to the government. The standard norm is that commissions are invariably appointed in response to public or international pressures to solve specific education problems or crises in national education systems (Amutabi, 2003; Nudzor, 2014).

The purpose of this paper is to argue for the participation of ordinary Ghanaians (including women) in national education commissions' policy development activities through a social justice panel. The paper argues that the current participatory and consultative model of national education committees is undemocratic, elitist and top-

down. This paper discusses the questions: Whose voices are heard and whose are unheard in the current model of national education policy-making in Ghana? Whose problems or needs are addressed or unaddressed? Whose interests and aspirations garner news headlines and are ultimately served? To provide a context for the discussion of these questions, the following section of this paper provides a brief history of national education commissions in Ghana and then a critique of the traditional mode of operation of education commissions to illustrate how they exclude the voices of ordinary Ghanaians. The fourth and fifth sections of the paper describe the research method used for responding to the above research questions and the theoretical perspective of the research. These sections are followed by a discussion of results and of the social justice panel as a model for allowing marginalized women and ordinary Ghanaians to participate in education policy-making activities of education commissions. The paper concludes that education policy-making requires participation of and consultation with wide segments of the population to ensure acceptance, cooperation and implementation at the grass-roots and national levels. The conclusion also advances strong moral imperative arguments of democracy and anchors those arguments with reference to other Ghanaian studies that have found the current traditional policy participatory strategies inadequate.

GHANA'S NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY COMMISSIONS/COMMITTEES

Ghana is a small West African country that shares a common border with the Ivory Coast to the west, Burkina Faso to the north, Togoland to the east, and the Gulf of Guinea and Atlantic Ocean to the south. It has a land mass of about 238,535 km^2 and an estimated population of 27 million. Ghana is one of the world's largest producers of gold, diamonds and cocoa. In 2005, Ghana had 12,200 primary schools, 5450 junior secondary schools, 510 senior secondary schools, 8 publicly-funded universities and a fast growing number of private universities. The Ghana Ministry of Education (MOE) is the main national education policy and regulation body, and the Ghana Education Services (GES) is the policy, legislative and regulation implementation arm. The GES is also the designer and evaluator of publicly-funded education programs in the country.

Since attaining political independence from Great Britain on 6 March 1956, the national education policy development process in Ghana has consistently followed the British colonial model described above: starting with the Educationists Committee in 1920; and subsequently Mills-Odoi Commission in 1966; Kwapong Review Committee in 1970; the Dzobo Commission in 1974; the Education Commission on Basic and secondary Education in 1987; the University Rationalization Committee in 1988; and the Education Reform Review Committee in 2002. The Educationists Committee or 1920 recommended the expansion of basic education in Ghana, which then had only Castle Schools and a few mission schools. It also recommended moral education consisting of character building, thrift, and temperance as part of the official school curriculum (Antwi, 1992). All the committees or commissions were formed to assist in reforming Ghana's education system by way of ideas, strategies and suggestions.

One of the Mills-Odoi Commission (1966) recommendations was that management of secondary schools should be centralized and private schools be subject to regular inspection in the same manner as public schools. Furthermore, the Dzobo Commission (1974) recommended six years of primary schooling, three years of junior secondary schooling, and three years of senior secondary schooling. These recommendations were

partially implemented on an experimental basis during Busia's regime in 1969-1972. The 1987 Educational Commission was concerned with examining the possibilities of implementing the junior and secondary school concepts recommended in the Dzobo Commission's report (Fobi, Koomson, & Godwyl. 1995).

This brief history indicates the level of influence the various commissions have exercised in shaping the present education system in Ghana. In fact, it is almost impossible to write a realistic education history of any of these former British colonies without making references to education commissions and the roles they have played in framing issues and in shaping the education systems in those countries. The Committee on Review of Education Reforms in Ghana, the latest commission to be appointed, was inaugurated on 17 January 2002 under the leadership of Professor Jophus Anamuah-Mensah (Government of Ghana, n.d). The terms of reference for this 30-member commission required the examination of the goals and philosophy of the then education system with a view to: ensuring the system's relevance to the development of human resources for the country; determining strategies for the introduction of information technology in all schools and colleges; re-examining the basic school system; determining how best to mainstream pre-school education into the formal education system; and considering strategies for the professional development of all educators (Ghana Ministry of Education, 2002).

As part of its strategy for data collection, the Committee conducted press briefings, reviewed existing education documents, received memoranda, visited selected education institutions, undertook regional visits and formed special task forces. The Committee completed its work in October 2002 and, in December2003, the government issued a White Paper on the report of the Committee. The White Paper adopted the Committee's recommendations with, among other things, universal free, compulsory education consisting of two years of kindergarten, six years of primary education, three years of junior high schooling and four years of senior secondary schooling. The government also accepted the Committee's recommendation to set up a national apprenticeship program for youth interested in the trades and those unable to obtain admission into senior secondary school.

CRITIQUE OF EDUCATION COMMISSION METHODS OF OPERATION

Traditionally, education commissions in Ghana use methods of operation that form a barrier to the participation of women and ordinary Ghanaians. As an illustration, the Ghana government's White Paper on the report of the Education Reform Review Committee (n.d) states:

> The committee received a large number of memoranda from the public, and invited many people to make presentations at its sittings. The readiness of the public to offer information and ideas to enhance the work of the committee indicates a high level of participation and interest of the public in the national task assigned to it (para. 4).

There are conceptual problems with certain words and phrases in the above quote. First, the term public is not a homogenous entity or mass without differentiation to ethnicity, gender, occupation, or social-economic class. Those who submitted "the large number of memoranda" to the Committee, and those who made "presentations" to the Committee in English (the official language of communication of Ghana) were members of the minority

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educated elite; and not the majority of the population consisting of market women, farmers, miners, farm workers, factory workers, construction workers, bus drivers, cleaners, and office clerks (Holland & Blackburn, 1998). These segments of the population have limited or no English proficiency skills and are unlikely to submit any memoranda, information or make presentations to the Committee.

Similarly, the Committee did not invite any persons from those population groups to make presentations in their indigenous languages. In fact, the use of English as the exclusive means of communication for the Committee's work suggests that a vast majority of the Ghanaian population were excluded from the process of participation in the Committee's work. Mantilla (1999) notes that participation has two distinct meanings: one conjures the notion of participation as a joint endeavour, and the other the notion of participation for a specific purpose. Participation, as stated in the White paper, implies participation for the express purpose of supplying information. This is what ordinary Ghanaians would be capable of doing if the language of communication were the indigenous language, the forum not intimidating and the participants treated with respect and dignity. The White Paper also states:

> The Committee adopted a variety of strategies towards the conduct of its work. These included press briefings, review of existing documents, receipt of memoranda, visits to selected institutions and organizations, regional visits and the formation of special task force (para. 4).

Who are the authors of the documents the Committee reviewed? Which institutions and organizations were visited and where are they located? The Committee visited the ten regions and, undoubtedly, these were regional capitals, not the rural districts in the regions. Why? The Committee's press briefings were published in the national dailies and broadcast on the national television in English. These participatory strategies, such as press briefings, and the special task forces that were established and certain people invited to make presentations to, did not create any opportunities for ordinary folks to participate. Only the members of the minority educated elite had access to those English newspapers and television programs.

Lamenting this sad situation of exclusion, Bodomo (1996) identifies two critical issues with regards to the use of foreign rather than indigenous language in Africa. First, it prevents the possibility of generating local initiatives since only a tiny fraction of the population can participate productively in local conversations on development issues. Second, mass participation in development discourses at the national level is plainly impossible to attain. Socio-linguistically, people are more comfortable and capable of expressing their thoughts and sentiments in a language they use in their everyday social interactions. The use of the English language as the only official language in Ghana has condemned an enormous portion of the population to, so to speak, "social ostracism", disqualifying them from participating in education public policy-making in Ghana.

RESEARCH METHOD, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The research was designed as a qualitative study with an interest in meanings, perspectives and understandings gained from human narratives. Two major sources were used to collect data. The first source was semi-structured interviews of two former members of the latest 30-member education commission that was inaugurated on 17

January 2002 and completed its work in October 2002. A professional colleague of mine in Ghana contacted two members of the Committee on 18 July 2006 who agreed to share their perspectives on the issue with me in a telephone interview on 2 August 2005. Each of the individuals signed a written consent form to indicate their willingness to participate. The form noted their rights to withdraw from participation at any time during the interview and to refuse to disclose information deemed confidential. The form also assured them of their personal anonymity in future discussion of results. Each telephone interview lasted an average of one hour and was audio-taped. The recordings were later transcribed then analysed to determine themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The interviews were based on the following major question: What benefits or costs would accrue with the participation of and consultation with ordinary Ghanaians (including women) in policy-making activities of national education commissions?

The second source of data for the study were interviews with focus groups. The primary purpose of these interviews was to determine if ordinary Ghanaians have issues with the current schooling system and to assess their willingness to participate in national education policy-making activities of commissions. Two focus groups were recruited through a Pentecostal church with branches in Kumasi and Accra. Announcements were made at each of the branches asking ordinary Ghanaians who were interested in participating in a group discussion about schooling issues in Ghana to join a focus group. Each member of the group signed a consent form that assured them of anonymity and confidentiality of their names and other social demographic details in published works.

Ordinary Ghanaians were defined as follows:

- Any Ghanaian without a post-secondary education;
- At least 18 years old;
- Engaged in one of the following occupation categories: retailing, wholesaling, hawking/peddling, farming, dress-making/tailoring, painting, carpentry, brick-laying, barbering, bus/taxi driving, driver-assisting, hair-dressing, cleaning, baking, cooked-food sellers/restaurateurs, mechanics, and trade apprentices.

A total of 63 people in the two branches of the church expressed an interest in participating in the focus-group meetings. However, the final focus-group members were intentionally limited to allow the researcher to moderate effectively. The focus-group session in the Kumasi branch of the church took place on 14 February 2016 and lasted approximately 45 minutes. The group comprised 17 people, ten of whom were women. The session was audio-taped with permission of the group. The Accra focus-group session occurred on 24 February 2016 and comprised 14 people, none of whom were women. The session took 60 minutes and was also audio-taped. Both groups discussed two major questions in the Akan indigenous language: What issues bother you most about schooling in Ghana? How willing are you to participate in a government organized forum to discuss education issues in Ghana?

A focus-group is an organized and controlled discussion with a chosen group of individuals for the purpose of obtaining information about their perspectives on issues specified by the researcher (Hughes & Du Mont, 1993). Focus-groups were used in that they assisted the researcher to elicit multiple views on the issues of schooling in Ghana and provided a greater amount of data in a short period compared to individual interviews. The recruitment of the focus-group members through a Pentecostal church is justified on

the grounds that Pentecostal churches are now a magnet that attracts Ghanaians from all walks of life, especially the youth and women. The phenomenal growth of Pentecostal churches in Ghana and other African countries may be attributed to their exceptional pastoral care; preaching of material prosperity and wealth creation strategies; providing a high probability of meeting suitors for marriage; and offering comprehensive spiritual healing (Diara & Onah, 2014).

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The theoretical perspective underpinning this research is that proposed by Joshee and Goldberg's (2005) theory of social justice in policy-making. The theory advocates the participation of traditionally excluded groups in public policy development processes. In sum, Joshee and Goldberg's (2005) theory proposes empowerment of marginalized segments of society through participation in public policy-making. Though the theory was originally proposed to create spaces for the participation of underrepresented groups in policy-making processes in Canada, it has universal application in the policy development field with regards to participation in education policy formulation in Ghana and the rest of the African continent.

Four fundamental concepts underlying Joshee and Goldberg's (2005) theoretical perspective are pertinent to this research. The theory conceptualizes democracy as the process of communication in which citizens, regardless of socio-economic background, ethnicity, race, gender, physical ability or educational attainment, participate collectively in making decisions affecting their lives. Thus, it is against the principle of fairness and equity that people should be made to deal with the effects of policies on their lives without having any say in the development of those policies. This principle suggests that democracy is more than representation, a situation in which some people are elected or appointed to represent others. The participatory principle focuses on total inclusion and gives greater attention to the participation of those who, historically, have been excluded from the process of policy development and implementation. The second concept of Joshee and Goldberg's theory is that allowing people from all walks of life to participate in policy-making does not diminish social differences. Joshee and Goldberg emphasize that social differences must be acknowledged and efforts made to understand others' perspectives with respect and humility. The third concept of Joshee and Goldberg's theory concerns removing oppressive structures and barriers that prevent the participation of marginalized people in the policy development and implementation process. In the Ghanaian case, the use of the English language in the activities of the education commission has made it impossible to generate mass interest and participation in education discourses.

The final component of Joshee and Goldberg's theory is the development of a social justice panel model that can be used to change the structure of exclusionism in policy participation. This is how Joshee and Goldberg describe the social justice panel:

> The social panel would be selective drawing from groups that are traditionally underrepresented in decision-making . . . It would include activists, scholars, and government officials and would be established for an extended period of time. It would be national in scope and would allow for communication through writing, electronic mail, and face-to-face encounters. Participants would be invited into the panel on the basis of their knowledge, commitment, and engagement . . . The panel

would be moderated by an individual who would act as a facilitator for the dialogue. The moderator would also initially be responsible for providing participants with background information on the policy process and the issue (pp. 7-8).

Two approaches dominate the policy reform field in Africa: reform for efficiency and reform for empowerment (Swartzendruber & Njovens, 1993). The core of Joshee and Goldberg's (2005) policy participation theory supports the empowerment of the excluded segments of the population rather than policy reform for efficiency. It is also a bottom-up approach as opposed to a top-down approach to policy-making, which focuses on national elites, professionals, experts and government bureaucrats (Mantilla, 1999). This theoretical model is pro-lower class, in that it advocates recognition, inclusion and fair treatment of ordinary citizens from the perspective of social justice. It is additionally proactive by courting the interest of ordinary segments of population rather than waiting for these segments to demand participation through violent or non-violent social activism. Policy reform for efficiency, on the other hand, relates to the adoption of the tenets of instrumental rationality which uses lifeless mathematical instruments such as cost-benefit analysis, linear programming, risk management and econometric models to improve policy analysis, development and implementation in Africa.

DISCUSSION OF INTERVIEW AND FOCUS-GROUPS' NARRATIVES

Over the decades, several justifications have been put forward to explain why the wider public might be excluded from participating in policy-making. As applied to national education policy-making in Ghana, one respondent stated that "all over the world education policies and regulations are made by experts, not ordinary folks". He wondered how ordinary people could make any useful contributions to education policy development for the country when they do not possess expertise or have not achieved higher education credentials. Another respondent similarly stated: "apparently the issues involved in making education policies would be overwhelming and over the intellectual capacity of those ordinary folks. It is unthinkable that market women who could hardly read a small portion of English text with comprehension or write their names could participate in education commission's activities either as presenters or submitters of information." These assertions justify the need for presenters or submitters of information or petitions to national education commissions to be made up of people with varying degrees of post-secondary education attainments, arguing that such people would make more useful contributions compared to ordinary folks. It also implies that, in terms of cost-benefit analysis, preference should be given to the participation of the elite class as opposed to the marginalized, non-educated class. The assertions are at odds with my belief that, while the non-educated class is incapable of writing a long English prose about the education system, they certainly have a story to tell in their indigenous languages about the education system either as parents/guardians, elders or community members.

Green (1994) contends that a policy question or issue does not belong to the domain of theoretical or technical expertise. On the contrary, it is a moral and practical question. Green's thesis is that experts or professionals do not necessarily make better policy decisions than their non-expert counterparts. As an illustration, one of the terms of reference of the Education Reform Review Committee was to re-examine the philosophy of education of the Ghanaian school system. This is a value-laden issue which ordinary Ghanaian folks could help to develop. Perhaps their oral presentations to the Education Reform Review Committee would take the form of statements, stories, metaphors,

proverbs or wise sayings. Whatever the forms, they are still valuable for developing a philosophy of education.

The interview respondents also contended that mass participation of ordinary folks in public education policy-making will not lead to effective or quality policy decisions. This perspective implies that public decision-making is a technical issue exclusively for the technocrats, not a practical democratic issue whose solution requires moral choice making. The respondents strongly shared this perspective because they believed that some level of technical knowledge about education is needed for effective participation in commission work. Nonetheless, commissions normally make recommendations based on discussions and reflections of what they have heard or what has been submitted to them. This is philosophical in nature rather than technical, calling into question the view that Ghanaian professionals and elites, who dominate the policy-making landscape, are better able to make effective recommendations than non-elites.

Further, the interview respondents drew a demarcation line between rational policy decision-making and democratic decision-making. The respondents claim that, while democracy involves mass participation in making broad organic future choices for a society, rational public education policy-making belongs to those who have been specifically elected or appointed to formulate and execute it. The respondents held a narrow view of democracy believing that it is merely a representational system rather than a communication process in which citizens participate to discuss issues affecting their lives, those of their families, their communities and future generations. The respondents' conception of democracy conforms to the traditional, pre-colonial mode of democracy in which sub-chiefs represented the people in *Ahenfie* forums without direct participation of the people in those forums. Although, it should be noted, that sometimes even *Ahenfie* forums were open to participation by ordinary people. As well, an entrenched belief of the respondents was that greater citizen engagement in the public education policy-making process would imply redefining the roles of education commission members. One might, then, ask this question: What would be the roles and functions of the individual members of education commissions if ordinary Ghanaians were also engaged? As one of the respondents honestly admitted, "It would not change the roles and functions of the members in any practical way, except that it would generate extensive amount of data which the members may not have the capacity or training to deal with."

Walters, Aydelotte, and Miller (2000) state that the purpose of public involvement and the stage of the policy development that requires public involvement should be clearly spelt out. For example, if the stage of the policy development is generating alternatives, public participation may involve helping policy developers to search for alternatives and educating the public about the issue. Therefore, allowing ordinary Ghanaians to participate in education policy-making does not mean that commission members would become redundant or their roles would be usurped by those folks. Indeed, the participation of ordinary Ghanaians in commission policy activities would not change the social status of these people, nor does it mean social differences would be eliminated. Furthermore, to what extent are the commission members' values and norms congruent with those of the majority public? The respondents believed that commission members are selected so that they represent all views, concerns and aspirations concerning education in Ghana. This narrative suggests that commission members are so altruistic that their recommendations to government are similar or approximate the views of the majority of the population.

However, as part of the elite group, commission members have their own values and ethos cultivated through their long association with the Westernized education they received in post-secondary institutions, particularly university. For this reason, it is fair to say that they will formulate arguments and recommendations that essentially promote their own values and interests rather than those of the majority ordinary Ghanaians. The history of education commissions in Ghana provides significant evidence that education-specific issues concerning Ghanaian women (including girls), rural communities, under-resourcing of public schools and demoralization of teachers, corporal punishment and irrelevant curriculum and pedagogy are yet to receive any national attention at the policy-making table. These problems were highlighted in the discussions in the focus-groups.

Additionally, the interview respondents argued that allowing ordinary Ghanaians to participate in education commission activities would be time-consuming, financially expensive and complicated. The respondents admitted that commission members may lack training in effective public engagement, especially if the presentations of participating segments of the public are non-traditional, such as narrating personal stories or experiences, using proverbs and metaphors to convey meanings, and otherwise sayings. They agreed that, "this is where excessive time of the commission would be consumed." They noted that such participation would cost too much in terms of time and logistics to complete the commission's work. As one of the respondents said, "The amount of logistics required such as translation into English, or the services of interpreters, you name it, would be too much for the commission's limited budget to accommodate. I mean the financial costs would be out of the roof!"

Consequently, the issue is how national education committees construct the target audiences of national education policies (Schneider & Ingram, 1997). If ordinary Ghanaian folks, such as market women, housewives, construction workers, miners, subsistence farmers, fishers, and farm and factory workers are construed as "illiterates" or without intellectual capacity to reason, for example, they would be excluded. That implies they are intellectually immature to engage in any stages of the education policy development process without incurring astronomical financial and time costs to the government; hence, their exclusion from the education policy-making process may be justified.

The financial cost of allowing ordinary Ghanaians to participate in national education policy formulation is minimal compared to the ultimate costs the government would have to bear in an event of policy failure. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2001) indicates that, "Strengthening relations with citizens is a sound investment in better policy-making and a core element of good governance. It allows governments to tap into new sources of policy-relevant ideas, information and resources when making decisions" (p. 1). While I am not universalizing the benefits of direct public engagement in education policy-making, the participation of ordinary Ghanaians in the education policy process would minimize, if not eliminate, the social distance that characterizes the relationship between policy-makers and ordinary Ghanaians. This impaired relationship invariably results in the formulation of wrong policies in relation to policy problems confronting the majority of the population (Amukowa, 1997).

How does one find out if ordinary Ghanaians are willing to participate in the national education policy process? Both interview respondents agreed that surveys, opinion polls

and policy research would help to unravel whether ordinary Ghanaians want to participate in public education policy development and the forms they want that participation to take. But the respondents believed that a vast majority of the people would pass it over to the educated folks because the latter possess fluent English oral and written communication skills. This view, however, does not support the case of the overwhelming number of ordinary Ghanaians who expressed a strong interest and enthusiasm to participate in the focus-group discussions about educational issues in Ghana. The focus-group members were unanimous in their willingness to participate in discussions if they are scheduled after 7:00 pm Monday to Saturday, and 3:00 pm on Sunday. They also stated that they have a strong preference for their Akan language as a medium of discussion in such forums. Below is a summary of the educational issues that arose during the focus-groups' discussions:

- Sexual harassment of girl students by male teachers and head-teachers;
- Teaching students skills and knowledge they could apply in their lives, families and communities, such as morals and values (respect for the elderly, hard-work, honesty, truthfulness, humility, responsibility, etc,);
- Proper maintenance of school buildings and facilities; provision of adequate desks/tables and chairs;
- Reasonable supply of resources for teaching and learning, including textbooks;
- Non-caring attitudes of teachers toward students; teachers' refusal to teach and report on time at school;
- Trade or vocational apprenticeship training for students who fail to qualify for senior secondary school(SSS) admission;
- Provision of incentives to attract teachers to teach in rural communities such as remote allowance and rent subsidy;
- Regular payment of teachers' salaries and allowances on time;
- Private elementary and junior secondary schools charge exorbitant tuition fees;
- Less use of corporal punishment in school and search for alternative forms of punishment with greater deterrence;
- A bilingual schooling system that allows students to attain literacy proficiency in both English language and indigenous Ghanaian languages; and
- Get the communities to participate in decision-making, implementation of decisions, and identifying alternative sources of funds for school projects.

The above issues are fundamental to the school system in Ghana and members of the focus-groups articulated them with passion, though most of the articulations were in the form of personal, family and community stories, For instance, the groups recognized that sexual harassment of girl students by teachers and, in some cases, head teachers, negatively impacts on their academic success. They also observed that the Ghanaian public school system is chronically under-resourced and the morale of the teachers is at a low ebb, preventing them from teaching effectively and demonstrating caring attitude towards students. The unfortunate result is that the public-funded primary and junior secondary school system has practically collapsed in major Ghanaian cities and, in its place, private schools have emerged. These private schools have fancy names like "international school", "preparatory school" and "experimental school." In these schools, English is the exclusive language of both teaching and learning and corporal punishment is hardly meted out to t students. Poor families who want quality education for their children are compelled to enrol their children at private schools which have a tuition fees

structure hardly within the financial means of those families. Hence, the focus-groups demanded regulation of private school tuition fees.

The focus group members also highlighted that the physical conditions of most public-funded primary and junior secondary school buildings are in shambles, with most of classrooms lacking basic furniture. These schools normally require parents/guardians to purchase tables and chairs for their children to bring to school. The children whose parents/guardians are unable to make such purchases sit on the bare floors in their classrooms. Children sitting on the bare floors cannot comfortably learn let alone produce any positively significant learning outcomes. In close-knit communities, the focus group members suggested, community members could pool their resources to purchase furniture for the schools located in their communities. While the lack of basic resources is an important issue hindering the smooth functioning of the school system, corruption at the central office and weak administrative infrastructures are equally important factors producing a dysfunctional public-funded school system. As the groups highlighted, the government should urgently address this issue. The focus-group members also pointed to the issue of relevant education for character development and economic survival. During the focus-group sessions, the members unanimously placed greater emphasis on better character development than economic survival skills. This does not imply that the groups consider economic survival skills unimportant. On the contrary, the groups regarded school as an extension of parenting of which character development features prominently. They defined character development as instilling in the youth and modelling values such as peace, respect for parents and elders, patience, honesty, law-abiding, hard work, and community bonding.

A bilingual school system is also one of the issues the groups discussed Language of teaching and learning has been a contentious national issues since the dawn of political independence from the Great Britain. A majority of the Ghanaian educated elite are strongly in favour of exclusive English schooling in that English is regarded a language of power in terms of its international economic, political and educational dominance Avast number of international negotiations and marketing schemes are conducted in English. As well, a large proportion of academic publications is written in English (needle, 2012). Besides, more than 80% of international organisations conduct their business transactions in English (Crystal, 2003). Despite the veracity of these empirical assertions, they do not diminish the primacy of the local. While the Ghanaian educated elite focus on the international, they appear to have lost sense of the local or domestic where many of the vital activities related to societal development take place. It is in the local or domestic sphere that development or underdevelopment occur, signifying that development is fundamentally a local affair. In fact domestically, Ghanaians need a common indigenous language that they could use comfortably to communicate with one another in literary and oral forms in the economic, political and educational spheres.

Additionally, the trend in the news media is towards bilingualism; this is especially the case for many FM radio stations that have sprung up in the country in the last twenty years. These FM stations offer news services, movies and other programming in both English and major Ghanaian languages, with the latter dominating the space. This is different from the printed news dailies and weeklies which are still predominantly written in English. Further, in the churches, people use both English and Akan Bibles. Consequently, the focus-group members believed that this is how the school curriculum should be structured to allow students to develop literacy skills in their own languages as

well as in English as an international language. Nonetheless, the groups' overwhelming support for bilingual medium of teaching and learning is a direct challenge to monolingual English schooling that has dominated the Ghanaian education landscape for decades.

Next, the groups suggested a minimal corporal punishment in school and the need to search for alternative forms of discipline with effective deterrence. Historically, European missionary educators introduced corporal punishment in elementary schools they established in the colonial era. At that time corporal punishment involved hitting or stroking with soft canes were used sparingly and invariably in conjunction with counselling. Its purpose was to reinforce positive behaviour from students and to deter them from flouting school rules and regulations. After political independence, caning has been used not only for implementing school rules and regulations but also for improving student academic performance. The prevailing belief among some Ghanaian teachers is that if a student is performing badly academically a few strokes of a cane will motivate the student to invest more efforts in learning and improve their performance. With this belief student poor academic performance is correlated with lack of effort. Without any empirical justification, student poor academic achievement is attributed solely to the student's lack of effort rather than effective teaching approaches, different learning styles, uncaring attitudes of teachers, unsupported home environment or lack of proper meals for physical and mental nourishment. It is not surprising that the focus-groups did not advocate a total ban on corporal punishment in schools and suggest humane forms of discipline. Instead, they were against its excessive use particularly as an instrument for motivating students to learn and improve their academic performance.

Culturally in most Ghanaian homes caning is accepted as a basic instrument for discipline. Therefore, caning per se in schools was not considered problematic or physical abuse on the part of teachers who administer it. It is only when a student is severely hurt as a result of caning that caning as a penal punishment becomes a community issue. Owing to its systemic use for discipline, caning should be included as part of national issues for education policy conversation. The groups' mention of rural education also deserves some comments. According to the 2010 census, the population of Ghana is estimated at approximately 26,640,000 of which 50.9% is urban and 49.1% is rural (Ghana Statistical Services, 2010).This suggests that the population of Ghana is almost evenly split between rural and urban. Yet the quality of rural schooling conditions are more poor compared to urban schooling. This is partly due to substandard housing, inaccessible road network during rainy seasons and lack of basic social amenities in rural communities. Consequently, it is an immense challenge to attract and retain certified teachers in rural schools. Most newly certified teachers will not accept relocation to rural communities, leaving rural schools to rely heavily on uncertified teachers. It is in the context of this problem that the focus-group members advocated financial incentives like rent subsidy and remote allowance to attract and retain certified teachers in rural schools. Thus, overall, the education-related issues raised by the focus-groups challenge the conventional assumption that only experts or highly educated Ghanaians and the professional bureaucrats are knowledgeable of issues affecting the development and delivery of public education services in Ghana.

POLICY PARTICIPATORY MODELS FOR ORDINARY GHANAIANS

Bourdieu (1997) and Parker (2003) contend that certain segments of the population are systematically excluded from policy-making because they do not possess the "cultural capital" needed to find a seat at the metaphorical policy-making table. To develop the democratic capacity of ordinary citizens and bring transparency to governance in Ghana, artificially created "cultural capital", particularly English language written and oral facility, should not be allowed to disenfranchise segments of the population from participating in national education policy making. Such disenfranchisement is what Joshee and Goldberg (2005) refer to as an oppressive structure or barrier that prevents participation of ordinary people in education policy-making in Ghana. The undeniable fact is that masses of the ordinary population of Ghana use their indigenous languages for daily communicative and interactive activities (Morris, 1998).

Many models can be used to ensure participatory policy-making (Averill, 2001 Curtain, 2003b; Goldman &Torres, 2002; Johnson & Mutchler, 1999; Joshee & Goldberg, 2005). Four of these models: citizen panels, citizen jury, citizen forum, and deliberative polling, will now be discussed briefly. This will be followed by an outline of the social justice model, which is considered the most suitable for the purpose of the paper. Citizen panels are generally used at the local level. Such panels are put together by government officials and consist of a statistically representative sample of citizens whose views are sought over a period of time (Joshee & Goldberg, 2005; Curtain, 2003b). Joshee and Goldberg (2005) note that their primary function is to offer advice to government officials who are, nevertheless, not obliged to act on the advice offered by the panel. Joshee and Goldberg (2005) note that the traditional power structure that privileges certain voices remains intact in citizen panels. Therefore, the citizen panel model is not suitable for adoption when intending to enable Ghanaian women and ordinary folks to participate in national education policy-making.

The citizen jury uses a representative sample, which could be regional or national. The government puts together citizen juries to deliberate contested issues or problems and to advice public officials accordingly (Joshee & Goldberg, 2005). However, unlike citizen panels, the membership of citizen juries is small and less permanent and they receive presentations from experts and cross-question the experts (Curtain, 2004). However, citizen juries suffer from the same defects as the citizen panels. Citizen forums have been used extensively in Britain to resolve many social problems (Curtain, 2004). The forum is structured and involves local dialogues on critical national policy issues (Goldman & Torres, 2002). Forum members, according to Curtain (2003a), work in groups of ten, each with a trained facilitator, and the results are shared with national and local leaders. Again, the national leaders are not obliged to accept the decisions of the forum members. Thus, the model suffers from the same defects as the two models already discussed, and is unsuitable for the purpose of gaining better representation by women and ordinary Ghanaians in education policy.

Deliberative polling is often used in the US and Canada. In deliberative polling, a representative sample is polled on specific issues and those polled are invited to discuss those issues together. Materials with balanced views on the issues are sent out to participants before the meeting. With the help of a trained facilitator, the participants prepare a set of questions during focus group meeting and the questions are used in dialogue with experts on the issue and political leaders. After two days, the participants

are asked the initial baseline questions again in a survey. The changes in opinion are taken as indicative of the opinion of the public if they were involved in the deliberations. This model is not suitable for the purpose of this paper because it demands a high-level of literacy which most Ghanaian women and ordinary folk do not possess.

The social justice model proposed by Joshee and Goldberg (2005) seems to me to be the most suitable for allowing ordinary Ghanaians to participate in national education policy development in Ghana. The model draws heavily on the strengths of the other models – discussed above – and features of deliberative dialogue proposed by Johnson and Mutchler (1999). Participation would occur at a local rather than national level, and discussions would be a face-to-face among between 20-30 participants; the discussion would be moderated by a trained facilitator. The facilitator would be fluent in the language spoken in the region where the dialogue takes place. Presentations by the participants would be oral rather than written. A representative sample of interested, committed and affected ordinary Ghanaians would be selected from the 201 districts in Ghana to participate in the policy development activities of education commissions. Sufficient time would be allocated to the panel to deliberate the issues, and members' opinions, perspectives, and suggestions must be treated with acceptance, respect and dignity. As ordinary Ghanaians have low-incomes, it is very important that considerations are given to their work and family priorities in scheduling the panel meetings.

The issues involved and the basic rules of engagement in the social justice panel would be explained to and agreed to by the participants. The government should sponsor the social justice panels and it should craft a series of radio advertisements in the four major Ghanaian languages to cultivate the interest of ordinary Ghanaians in education policy development. The National Commission on Democracy in Ghana, along with other community and national activists, scholars and policy-makers should be consulted in developing other basic rules for the operation of the social justice panel. But I stress that the social justice panel should only be one of the strategies for participation and inclusion of marginalized groups and communities in national education policy making. The use of strategies such as press briefings, special task forces, visitations to educational institutions, town hall meetings, soliciting submissions (through electronic postings) and presentations should be continued as well.

CONCLUSION

The development of national education policies in Ghana without the active participation of ordinary Ghanaians has been a consistent pattern throughout the history of education commissions in Ghana. Yet the two past commissioners interviewed for this study held that this is not a major problem of the policy development process in Ghana. As a matter of fact, they did not acknowledge that education policy failures in the past had anything to do with a lack of understanding of the human conditions of the vast majority of ordinary folks; the absence of their voices in policies affecting their lives; and poor identification of their needs and aspirations. Education policy impacts individuals, groups and communities across Ghana and this is why it is the collective business of the entire nation rather than the sole responsibility of elected or appointed representatives of the people. Thus, it is a highly contentious issue (Curtain, 2003a) that requires the participation of ordinary folk, many of whom are unilingual speakers of a Ghanaian language.

The participation of women and ordinary Ghanaians in the national education policy-making process is needed more urgently than at any other juncture in the history of the country. This is a period in which Ghanaians have enjoyed a relatively stable change of governments through the ballot box and there are unprecedented growing roots of democratization. Widening participation in the education policy development process to include ordinary Ghanaians is a viable means of strengthening and deepening those democratization roots. That is, it would fertilise democratization across the country. That way, ordinary and marginalized Ghanaians are more likely to identify with and own the policies than when the policies are imposed on them from without (Bromell, 2012; Caddy 2001; Curtain 2003a; Nyagga, 2014).

In writing about education policy formation in Africa, Evans (1994) asks the following critical questions: "How the process could be improved to better enhance its openness and access; to ensure that diverse groups' needs are effectively heard; to generate credibility and legitimacy; and to build support and consensus for proposed education policies?"(p. 6). The formation of a social justice panel might provide the means to respond to those questions and allow ordinary Ghanaians to participate in policy decision-making instead of having policies imposed upon them. As Amartya (1999) rightly points out, development requires the democratic participation of people in deciding matters that affect their lives and in which they are interested. By this means, Amartya (1999) continues, citizens can harness the resulting freedoms to make positive transformation of their lives, families and communities.

Apart from the moral imperative arguments of democracy, education policy implementation at the local/district level would be enhanced if ordinary folk become co-producers of those policies. Co-production and co-ownership of education policies are twin prongs to fertilize democratization and reduce citizen cynicism toward government (Agostino, Schwester, & Holzer, 2006; Callahan, 2002; Somach, 2002). Implementation of policies that would be further developed based on the recommendations of the national education commissions is critically important. Educational policy-making, contrary to the beliefs of the interview respondents, is a social and political process and not a technical issue belonging exclusively to elected or appointed officials. This does not in any way suggest trivialization of the application of sound technical expertise or technology in national education policy-making as a public issue.

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