

# Assessing the Functionality of Sub-District Structures in Ghana's Local Governance System

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## Abstract

Ghana's decentralization aims to bring decisions and services closer to citizens through a layered local government system. Below the District, Municipal and Metropolitan areas, at the base are sub-district units—Urban, Zonal, Town, and Area Councils, plus Unit Committees—intended to be the everyday face of local democracy. Despite their legal status, questions remain about whether they work in practice. This study assesses how far these sub-district bodies are truly functioning: whether they are active, resourced, and connected to district planning and accountability system. Using a qualitative multiple case study, we gathered data in metropolitan, municipal, and rural settings. The researcher conducted interviews, focus groups, document reviews, and field observations with sub-structure members, Assembly officials, traditional leaders, and residents. Findings were analysed thematically and interpreted using institutional theory, empowerment theory, and governance legitimacy theory. Across cases, many sub-district structures are legally constituted but practically dormant. Most have no budgets, little or no training, and low public visibility. Members are unsure of their roles, links to Assembly decision-making are weak, and citizen awareness is minimal. A pattern of “local centralization” is evident: District Assemblies hold on to power and resources, starving sub-structures of authority.

Institutional neglect, capacity gaps, legal ambiguity, and weak downward accountability undermine the functionality of sub-district structures. Revitalization demands legal clarification, dedicated funding, mandatory training, and genuine integration into district systems. Without this, Ghana's decentralization risks staying on paper rather than taking root in communities.

**Keywords:** Sub-district structures; decentralization; local governance; Ghana; accountability.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Ghana's 1992 Constitution and the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) envision a system where power and services move closer to citizens through strong local institutions. That vision does not stop at the Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs). It depends on the sub-district structures—Urban, Zonal, Town, and Area Councils, and Unit Committees—doing real work at the grassroots. These

bodies should make participation routine. They are expected to mobilize communities, support local planning, implement and monitor projects, and connect residents to the Assemblies. They can also help raise revenue (e.g., market tolls, property rates) and resolve everyday disputes.

In reality, many sub-structures are invisible or inactive. Unit Committees often exist only “on paper,” without offices, tools, or funds. Councils rarely meet, and when they do, their voice in decisions is weak. Citizens either don’t know these bodies or don’t see them as useful. The gap between the promise of decentralization and daily experience is hard to miss. This study takes that gap seriously. It examines how sub-structures currently function, what holds them back, and what it would take to make them matter again in local governance.

### **1.2 Problem Statement**

Despite Ghana’s decades-long commitment to decentralization, the country’s sub-district structures—Urban, Zonal, Town, and Area Councils, along with Unit Committees—remain among the weakest parts of its local governance system. These bodies were created to be the front line of grassroots governance: the point where local communities meet their District Assemblies. On paper, their responsibilities are ambitious. They are supposed to encourage citizen participation, help shape local development plans, mobilize revenue, and ensure accountability in service delivery.

In reality, however, many of these structures are little more than names in official documents. Unit Committees, in particular, often have no offices, no equipment, and no funds to carry out their work. Meetings are infrequent, and even when they happen, their impact on decision-making is minimal. For many citizens, these bodies are invisible; some have never heard of them, while others see them as politically irrelevant. This gap between the legal framework and what happens on the ground raises serious questions about the depth of Ghana’s decentralization. When grassroots structures are unable to function, it weakens citizen participation, undermines local democracy, and disrupts service delivery and development planning. It also reduces accountability, as decisions become concentrated at the district level—far removed from the daily realities of ordinary people.

Although decentralization in Ghana has been widely studied, very few assessments have focused squarely on the current state of sub-district structures: how they function, the constraints they face, and their potential to contribute to participatory governance. Without this understanding, reform efforts risk ignoring the foundational weaknesses that could derail the entire decentralization project. The study addresses that gap. It examines the functionality, relevance, and challenges of sub-district structures in selected districts, asking how they operate, why they struggle, and what changes are needed to make them active and effective players in Ghana’s local governance system.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

This study aims to examine how functional and relevant Ghana’s sub-district structures really are within the broader local governance system.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

- ☐ Clarify the roles and responsibilities that Ghana's decentralization framework assigns to sub-district structures.
- ☐ Evaluate how well these bodies—across different District Assemblies—are actually working in practice.
- ☐ Identify the key institutional, financial, and operational barriers that limit their performance.
- ☐ Investigate how local communities perceive these structures and the extent to which they engage with them.
- ☐ Suggest practical strategies to boost their capacity, influence, and overall contribution to local governance.

## 1.4 Research Questions

To guide the inquiry, the study addressed the following questions:

1. What roles are sub-district structures meant to play under Ghana's decentralization policy?
2. How operational and effective are Urban, Zonal, Town, Area Councils, and Unit Committees in the selected District Assemblies?
3. What institutional, financial, and logistical challenges are holding back their effectiveness?
4. How do community members view these structures, and how actively do they engage with them?
5. What concrete measures could make these bodies more relevant, effective, and sustainable?

## 1.5 Significance of the Study

This study speaks to both academic discussions and policy debates on decentralization and grassroots governance in Ghana. By zeroing in on sub-district structures—arguably the most neglected tier of local government—it brings attention to a vital but often overlooked piece of the decentralization puzzle.

From an empirical standpoint, the research offers grounded, context-specific insights into how these structures actually operate—or, in many cases, fail to operate. It uncovers the day-to-day and systemic obstacles that weaken their performance. Such evidence is valuable for local government officials, policymakers, and development partners who are serious about deepening decentralization and fostering more inclusive governance.

On a practical level, the study points to concrete, actionable steps for breathing life back into these structures so they can play a meaningful role in local planning, service delivery, and citizen participation. It also offers direction for civic education and advocacy efforts, equipping citizens to engage more actively and hold their local institutions accountable.

In the end, strengthening sub-district structures is not just about fixing an administrative gap—it is about making Ghana’s decentralization agenda work for ordinary people, ensuring that governance at the grassroots is responsive, participatory, and accountable.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Conceptual Overview: Decentralization and Local Governance**

Decentralization is not a single act but a complex process that involves shifting power, authority, and resources away from central government and placing them in the hands of lower levels of government or, in some cases, non-state actors (Rondinelli, 1981; Ribot, 2002). It typically plays out across three interconnected dimensions:

- **Political decentralization** – giving locally elected bodies real decision-making authority.
- **Administrative decentralization** – assigning planning and implementation responsibilities to subnational institutions.
- **Fiscal decentralization** – granting lower levels of government control over finances, including the power to raise and spend their own revenue.

Ghana’s decentralization strategy combines all three of these dimensions within a legal and constitutional framework. While comprehensive in design, its implementation has been uneven. The ultimate aim has been to promote participatory democracy, ensure fair and balanced development, and give communities greater ownership of how they are governed (Ayee, 1994; Ahwoi, 2010).

In this context, *local governance* refers to the systems and processes through which local institutions work with citizens, allocate resources, and deliver services—ideally in ways that are responsive to community needs and priorities.

### **2.2 Sub-District Structures in Ghana: Rationale and Policy Design**

Ghana’s Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) sets out a tiered local government system. At the top are the Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs). Beneath them sit the sub-district structures—Urban, Zonal, Town, and Area Councils, along with Unit Committees.

These grassroots units are intended to:

- Serve as the bridge between citizens and local government.
- Drive bottom-up planning and improve service delivery.
- Help raise revenue locally.
- Strengthen accountability and transparency in decision-making.
- Empower communities to actively shape their own governance.

In theory, they form the bedrock of participatory local governance, ensuring that decentralization is not just about moving administrative functions but also about deepening democracy (Crawford, 2009). Their real value lies in their closeness to the people, their understanding of local realities, and their potential to make governance responsive.

### 2.3 Historical Evolution and Functionality in Practice

Sub-district structures were first introduced under PNDC Law 207 (1988) as part of Ghana's push for grassroots empowerment. While their creation marked an important step, their development has been patchy. Over the years, many have slipped into inactivity—particularly Unit Committees and Area Councils.

Research by Ayee (1994), Kyei (2008), and Asante & Ayee (2021) shows that, although these structures are legally recognized, they are often missing from real governance processes. Many District Assemblies operate without engaging their sub-district units, blaming resource shortages or capacity gaps.

For example:

- **Unit Committees**, tasked with mobilizing communities, overseeing small projects, and supporting civic education, often exist only on paper—without offices, budgets, or equipment.
- **Town and Area Councils** rarely meet, and even when they do, they struggle to carry out basic functions such as approving permits or collecting market fees.

### 2.4 Institutional and Operational Challenges

Several persistent challenges have weakened sub-district structures in Ghana:

- a) Financial Constraints** – They receive no direct budgets and rely on District Assemblies for funds, leaving them sidelined in financial planning and unable to carry out even routine duties (CDD-Ghana, 2018; World Bank, 2020).
- b) Human Resource Gaps** – Most members work voluntarily, often without training or incentives, which leads to low commitment. Many sub-structures also lack dedicated administrative staff.
- c) Weak Legal Enforcement** – Although the law requires these structures to be active, there are no penalties for Assemblies that fail to establish or support them, creating a gap between policy and practice.
- d) Political Marginalization** – They are often left out of planning and budgeting, with discussions dominated by Assembly Members.
- e) Low Public Awareness** – Many citizens either do not know these bodies exist or have no idea what they do, limiting civic engagement (Gyimah-Boadi, 2006; Crawford, 2009).

**f) Overlap with Traditional Authorities** – In rural areas especially, chiefs and traditional councils hold significant influence over land, dispute resolution, and development, sometimes sidelining formal sub-district bodies.

## **2.5 Comparative and International Perspectives**

Around the world, strong grassroots governance depends on active, well-supported lower-tier structures. For example:

- In **Uganda**, Local Council I plays a central role in planning, taxation, and conflict mediation.
- In **India**, Panchayat Raj institutions have constitutional backing and direct funding, enabling vibrant village-level governance.

Successful models share common features:

- Clear legal mandates and enforcement.
- Guaranteed funding streams.
- Strong capacity-building programs.
- Integration into wider planning and budgeting systems.

In Ghana, many of these enabling conditions are absent, leaving sub-district structures to operate in an institutional void.

## **2.6 The Role of Sub-Structures in Local Development and Accountability**

When they work, sub-district structures can:

- Provide platforms for citizen feedback.
- Enable participatory budgeting and project monitoring.
- Reduce elite capture of decision-making.
- Improve transparency in public spending.

Studies from elsewhere (Faguet, 2014; Smoke, 2015) confirm that development outcomes improve when communities are directly involved in decision-making. In Ghana, however, this potential remains largely unrealized due to the weak and often inactive state of these bodies.

## **2.7 Gaps in the Literature and Justification for the Study**

Most research on Ghana's decentralization focuses on the MMDAs or the relationship between central and local government. Far less attention has been paid to the sub-district level—particularly on:

- How they function across different district types (urban vs. rural).
- Why some remain dormant while others are active.
- The lived experiences of those who serve on them.

- Their contribution to fiscal accountability and service delivery.

This study sought to fill that gap through field-based research in selected District Assemblies, assessing their current state, relevance, and prospects for reform

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

The functioning of sub-district structures in Ghana's local governance system can be critically analyzed through the lens of three interrelated theoretical perspectives:

1. Institutional Theory
2. Empowerment Theory
3. Governance Legitimacy Theory

These frameworks provide a deeper understanding of how formal structures are shaped by contextual realities, how power is distributed and exercised at the grassroots, and how citizens perceive and engage with local institutions.

#### **3.1 Institutional Theory**

Institutional theory explores how formal and informal rules, norms, and routines shape organizational behavior and performance (March & Olsen, 1984; Scott, 2001). It posits that institutions do not function in a vacuum—they are embedded within broader social, political, and cultural environments that influence their design, acceptance, and implementation.

Sub-district structures in Ghana—such as Unit Committees and Area Councils—are formally mandated by legal and policy instruments. However, institutional theory explains the gap between formal design and actual practice. According to this perspective:

- Organizations often adopt structures for legitimacy, not functionality (isomorphism).
- Institutional arrangements may persist even when they are ineffective due to path dependency.
- Weak enforcement, lack of incentives, and conflicting informal institutions (e.g., traditional authorities) can undermine sub-structures.

This theory helps us understand why sub-district structures may exist legally but remain dysfunctional or dormant, especially when they are not aligned with local interests, incentives, or political priorities.

#### **3.2 Empowerment Theory**

Empowerment theory, as articulated by Zimmerman (1995) and Perkins & Zimmerman (1995), emphasizes the processes through which individuals and communities gain control over decisions and



resources that affect their lives. It focuses on enhancing the capacity of marginalized or underrepresented groups to participate meaningfully in governance.

Applied to local governance, empowerment theory suggests that:

- Structures matter only if people are enabled to use them;
- Functionality is determined by the extent to which citizens feel they can influence decisions, demand accountability, and access resources;
- Genuine decentralization must be matched with efforts to build local capacity, raise civic awareness, and encourage agency.

In this study, empowerment theory frames the assessment of sub-structures not only as technical units, but as platforms for fostering grassroots agency and democratic engagement. It explains why citizens often disengage from inactive sub-structures—and why revitalization must include efforts to equip and activate communities.

### 3.3 Governance Legitimacy Theory

Legitimacy theory (Suchman, 1995; Beetham, 1991) focuses on the perceived rightfulness of authority and governance structures. In the local governance context, legitimacy derives not only from legal mandates but also from performance, participation, and responsiveness.

Sub-district structures are intended to increase the legitimacy of local governance by:

- Bringing decision-making closer to the people;
- Creating local ownership of development initiatives;
- Enhancing transparency and accountability.

However, when these structures are inactive or disconnected from communities, they lose legitimacy, resulting in low citizen trust, reduced participation, and increased reliance on informal institutions. This theory explains why citizens may bypass formal structures and engage instead with chiefs, political actors, or NGOs.

Governance legitimacy theory thus enables this study to explore citizen perceptions of sub-district structures, and how legitimacy is built—or eroded—through visibility, performance, and community relations.

### 3.4 Synthesis of Theoretical Insights

Theory	What It Explains in This Study
Institutional Theory	Why sub-structures exist legally but remain non-functional in practice (institutional gaps, misalignment, or symbolic compliance)
Empowerment Theory	How functionality is influenced by citizen capacity, awareness, and engagement with local governance processes



Governance Legitimacy Theory	Why community perceptions and trust are critical to the effectiveness and sustainability of sub-district structures
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This integrative theoretical approach allows the study to move beyond a purely structural analysis and engage with social, behavioral, and institutional dimensions of sub-district governance in Ghana.

#### 4. Methodology

This study is grounded in the **Constructivist–Interpretive Paradigm**, which views social reality not as a fixed, objective truth, but as something shaped through human interaction and perception. In other words, there is no single “reality” to uncover—different people experience and understand governance in different ways.

From this perspective, the research adopts a **relativist ontology** (accepting multiple realities) and a **subjectivist epistemology** (recognizing that knowledge is co-created by the researcher and participants). This makes a **qualitative approach** the most appropriate choice, as it allows the study to explore the nuanced, lived experiences of those involved in Ghana’s sub-district governance system.

The interpretivist stance values **depth over breadth**, focusing on uncovering how local actors perceive, participate in, or disengage from sub-district structures. It also allows the research to capture **context-specific insights**—especially important when examining informal norms, power dynamics, and accountability practices that don’t always appear in official documents.

##### 4.1 Research Design

A **Multiple Case Study Design** was chosen to compare sub-district functionality across different governance settings. As Yin (2003) and Stake (1995) suggest, this approach allows for an in-depth, multi-layered examination of a phenomenon within its real-world context, using a variety of data sources.

Three local government areas were selected:

1. **Tema Metropolitan Assembly** – representing an urban/metropolitan setting.
2. **Yilo Krobo Municipal Assembly** – representing a peri-urban or semi-rural context.
3. **Gomoa West District Assembly** – representing a predominantly rural district.

These cases reflect Ghana’s three-tier local government classification and offer a strategic spread in administrative type, performance, and geography. Selection was also informed by the 2015 UNICEF–CDD assessment of local government performance.

##### 4.2 Units of Analysis

The study examined multiple layers within each district:

- The **central administration** of the Assemblies (e.g., Chief Executives, Coordinating Directors, Finance Officers and Planning Officers).
- **Sub-district structures** such as Urban, Zonal, Town, and Area Councils, and Unit Committees.
- **Decentralized departments** (Education, Health, Works, Budget).
- **Assembly Members**, sub-committee chairpersons, and other local stakeholders.

This multi-level focus ensured both institutional and community perspectives were captured, with data drawn from different actors to allow triangulation and strengthen the validity of findings.

### 4.3 Sampling and Selection of Participants

A **purposive sampling** strategy was used to select respondents with significant experience in local governance. Participants included:

- Presiding Members and Assembly Members.
- Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Chief Executives.
- Planning, Finance, Audit, Works, and HR Officers.
- Leaders of sub-district structures.
- Civil society actors and traditional leaders.

This mix of official and community-based voices ensured the study covered both formal governance structures and the informal dynamics that often influence them.

### 4.4 Data Collection Methods

To capture rich, reliable, and cross-verified data, the study used multiple qualitative methods:

- **Semi-structured interviews** with officials, assembly members, and sub-structure leaders, guided by flexible interview protocols.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)** with Unit Committee and Town/Area Council members to explore community engagement and perceptions.
- **Participant observation** of Assembly and sub-structure meetings, noting participation, procedures, and interactions.
- **Document review** of Assembly minutes, composite budgets, development plans, and audit reports.

This combination allowed the study to blend **real-time observation** with **historical evidence** and **personal accounts**.

### 4.5 Ethical Considerations

The study received ethical clearance from the **Ethical Committee for the Humanities (ECH)** at the University of Ghana. Key practices included:

- **Informed consent** – both verbal and written, from all participants.

- **Confidentiality** – anonymizing identities to protect privacy.
- **Voluntary participation** – allowing respondents to withdraw at any time without penalty.
- **Political sensitivity** – avoiding recording devices in favor of field notes to encourage open, honest responses, given past political tensions.

## 4.6 Data Analysis

Data was analyzed inductively in three stages, following Strauss & Corbin (1998):

1. **Open coding** – breaking data into initial categories linked to roles, challenges, and engagement.
2. **Axial coding** – connecting related codes to identify patterns and relationships.
3. **Selective coding** – pulling together the main “storylines” and core themes across cases.

Findings were interpreted through the study’s theoretical lenses—Institutional Theory, Empowerment Theory, and Governance Legitimacy Theory—and informed by both field evidence and literature.

## 4.7 Ensuring Trustworthiness

The study applied Lincoln & Guba’s (1985) quality criteria:

- **Credibility** – using triangulation, member checks, and extended time in the field.
- **Dependability** – pretesting interview tools and maintaining consistent procedures.
- **Transferability** – providing thick descriptions so others can judge applicability to their contexts.
- **Confirmability** – keeping audit trails, seeking supervisor feedback, and maintaining reflexive journals.

Research assistants received extensive orientation in interviewing skills, ethical conduct, and note-taking, and interview guides were pretested and refined

## 4.8 Summary of Data Collection Sites

District	Sub-structures Studied	Context
Tema Metropolitan <b>Greater Accra Region</b>	Sub-Metropolitan District Councils, Zonal Councils, Unit Committees	Urban/Industrial
Yilo Krobo Municipal <b>Eastern Region</b>	Zonal Councils, Unit Committees	Semi-urban/Rural
Gomoa West District <b>Central Region</b>	Area Councils, Town Councils, Unit Committees	Rural

## 5. Results and Discussion

This section brings together the field findings from **Tema Metropolitan, Yilo Krobo Municipal, and Gomoa West District**, examining how sub-district structures operate—or fail to operate—within Ghana’s local governance system. The analysis draws on **Institutional Theory, Empowerment Theory, and Governance Legitimacy Theory**, placing the data in a wider scholarly and policy context.

### 5.1 Institutional Dormancy and Symbolic Compliance

While Urban, Town, Area Councils, and Unit Committees are formally established under the **Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936)**, in practice many exist only on paper. In all three districts, several councils had not met for months—sometimes years—had no records, or were entirely inactive. One council member in Yilo Krobo summed it up:

*“They say we are the eyes and ears of the Assembly, but we neither see nor hear—we are blind and deaf without support.”*

This mirrors **Scott’s (2001)** idea of *institutional decoupling*, where organizations maintain formal structures for legitimacy but fail to make them work in reality. Similar patterns have been noted elsewhere in Africa—**Smoke (2003)** found that in Uganda and Kenya, lower-tier units often serve more as legal formalities than functioning governance bodies.

### 5.2 Financial Marginalization and ‘Local Centralization’

Although the law requires District Assemblies to allocate **50% of Internally Generated Funds (IGF)** to sub-structures, none of the study districts honored this. Councils were operating without offices, meeting spaces, or even basic supplies.

As one Tema council official put it:

*“The law says we should get funding, but we haven’t received a cedi. We are expected to operate without fuel, paper, or even a room to meet in.”*

This reflects **Akotey’s (2017)** idea of *local centralization*, where Assemblies—though constrained by central government also replicate similar top-down control over their own sub-units by concentrating almost all local government resources and operations at the District, Municipal and Metropolitan level. The **World Bank (2020)** notes that in many countries, fiscal devolution stops at the highest subnational level, leaving grassroots bodies powerless.

### 5.3 Capacity Gaps and Role Ambiguity

Many sub-structure members reported never receiving any training or formal orientation. Several had no clear understanding of their duties and had never seen an official job description.

One Unit Committee member admitted:

*“Nobody explained anything. We were sworn in and left to figure it out ourselves.”*

From an **Empowerment Theory** perspective (**Zimmerman, 1995**), this represents a governance failure: creating representatives without equipping them to act. In India, research by **Blair (2000)** shows that structured training dramatically improves the effectiveness of village councils—an experience Ghana could learn from.

#### **5.4 Community Detachment and a Crisis of Legitimacy**

Citizen awareness of sub-district structures was extremely low. Most participants in focus groups could not name their Unit Committee members and had never attended a meeting. One community member remarked:

*“To us, governance ends at the district level. We don't know anyone beneath that.”*

This is a **legitimacy gap**—as **Gaventa (2006)** and **CDD-Ghana (2018)** argue, institutions gain trust when they are visible, accessible, and deliver results. Without these qualities, people disengage, undermining the democratic promise of decentralization.

#### **5.5 Legal Ambiguity and Institutional Overlaps**

Tema's Sub-Metropolitan District Councils illustrate the problem. They perform Town Council functions but lack formal recognition under Act 936, making it difficult to access funds or enforce decisions. A Sub-Metro coordinator lamented:

*“We do the work of a Town Council, but they tell us we're not in the law. So we get nothing.”*

**Crook & Manor (1998)** warn that such *legal orphaning* leaves institutions vulnerable to neglect or elite capture.

#### **5.6 District Assemblies as Gatekeepers of Decentralization**

A striking paradox emerged: while Assemblies complain of central government dominance, they themselves often block power from flowing downward. As one district officer admitted:

*“We complain about Accra holding power, but we do the same thing to our councils.”*

This confirms **Ayee's (2003)** view that Ghana's decentralization remains hierarchical, not genuinely participatory—undermining downward accountability (**Faguet, 2014**).

## 5.7 Theoretical and Empirical Synthesis

Theme	Empirical Insight	Theoretical/Scholarly Interpretation
Institutional Dormancy	Sub-structures exist legally but lack operational life	Institutional decoupling (Scott, 2001); symbolic compliance (Smoke, 2003)
Financial Exclusion	No direct funding; IGF provisions ignored	Local centralization (Akotey, 2017)
Capacity Deficits	Members lack training and clarity	Disempowerment (Zimmerman, 1995); Appiah-Agyekum et al. (2014)
Public Detachment	Citizens unaware of structures or processes	Legitimacy erosion (Gaventa, 2006; CDD-Ghana, 2018)
Legal Ambiguity	Sub-Metros function outside formal legislation	Legal orphaning (Crook & Manor, 1998)
Assembly Control	Assemblies block power flow to sub-units	Vertical accountability breakdown (Faguet, 2014)

## 5.8 Contribution to the Field

This study advances decentralization research by:

1. Providing detailed, comparative evidence on sub-district functionality in varied Ghanaian contexts.
2. Integrating institutional, empowerment, and legitimacy perspectives to explain grassroots governance realities.
3. Strengthening the case for bottom-up reform that empowers communities—not just Assemblies.

## 6. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

### 6.1 Conclusion

This study set out to explore whether Ghana's sub-district structures live up to their legal promise of grassroots participation and accountability. The answer, across all three case study districts, is largely *no*. While these structures are mandated by law, they are under-resourced, poorly integrated into district operations, and almost invisible to the public. Many operate only in name, undermined by **financial neglect, capacity gaps, legal grey areas, and low citizen engagement**.

Rather than deepening democracy, Ghana's decentralization has produced **local centralization**—power pooling at the district level while the grassroots remain sidelined. Without rethinking this model, sub-district structures risk remaining **symbolic shells** rather than engines of participatory governance.

## 6.2 Policy Recommendations

### 1. Legislative Review and Clarification

- Amend Act 936 to clarify mandates and formally recognize overlooked bodies like Sub-Metros.

### 2. Dedicated and Predictable Funding

- Enforce IGF allocation rules and establish a ring-fenced *Sub-Structure Development Fund*.

### 3. Mandatory Induction and Ongoing Training

- Institutionalize standardized training through the Institute of Local Government Studies and Regional Coordinating Councils.

### 4. Formal Integration into Assembly Workflows

- Involve sub-structure reps in planning, budgeting, and monitoring committees.

### 5. Citizen Awareness Campaigns

- Partner with civil society to run local governance education drives.

### 6. Performance Benchmarks

- Track and publish sub-structure performance indicators annually.

### 7. Strengthen Downward Accountability

- Implement citizen scorecards, public budget hearings, and community audits at the sub-structure level.

## 6.3 Final Reflection

Revitalizing Ghana's sub-district structures is not optional—it is central to the success of democratic decentralization. Without functional governance at the grassroots, decentralization risks remaining a top-down exercise dressed in local language. Reform must move beyond rhetoric to ensure resources, capacity, and authority flow to the very level where citizens live and experience governance.

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