

# Nature of Non-Governmental Organisations Involved in Local Development in the Upper West Region of Ghana

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## **Abstract**

*Globally, non-governmental organisations have established themselves as pace setters, advocates, auditors and above all partners in various facets of development. While there is evidence of the categorisation of NGOs at the international or global level, little is known of the character of NGOs' operations at the local level of development. Using an exploratory survey design and a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches, the paper presents a comprehensive profile of the operations of NGOs in the Upper West Region. The study was conducted as a background survey to guide later investigation on State – NGO partnership in local development in the Region. It emerged that most NGOs were not duly registered with the Social Welfare Department and the Registrar General's Department as required by law. NGOs also adopted a multi-sectoral approach to development mainly in order to open themselves to diverse sources of funding. The integrated approach to development was also adopted by the NGOs. Most NGOs were also involved directly in project implementation and had a rural focus. In the light of increasing urbanisation and the persistent call for government agencies to be more responsible in service delivery, there is the need for NGOs to reposition themselves strategically in the areas of advocacy and watchdog roles as well as refocusing on urban areas in order to remain relevant*

to the current development discourse. Further research is needed to establish whether non registration and renewal of registration by NGOs can be blamed on non-compliance by NGOs or poor governance by the regulatory agencies.

**Keywords:** Non-Governmental Organisation, Upper West Region, Profile of NGOs, Local Development, Operational Areas of NGOs

## **INTRODUCTION**

Generally, the approaches to development have evolved over the years, largely towards visions about more suitable approaches to development. While this evolution reflects an imperative search for solutions to development problems, it has been even more critical in causing a shift from state dominance to a rather all hands on deck management of development. For instance, central to the emergence of “alternative” development was the concept of local participation in development design and implementation (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). As Thomas (2000) indicates, development has now come to be seen far more in terms of “practice and intervention within the context of liberal capitalism.”

One key non-state actor that has contributed to the “alternative” development agenda through local participation is the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). In Cameroon for instance, NGOs have worked in partnership with the local communities to facilitate local resource mobilization, gender mainstreaming and economic empowerment of women (Tanga & Fonchingong, 2009). Similarly, in Ghana, NGOs contribute significantly to the socio-economic development of especially the deprived rural communities. They have endeared themselves to many rural folks because, according to Bob-Milliar (2005), these NGOs have provided them with clean drinking water, the clinic in the village centre, the afforestation project, credit facilities, school building, extension services and many more.

Lewis and Kanji (2009) have strongly argued that NGOs have been central to development practice and are likely to remain important actors in development in the years ahead. NGOs’ roles have been summarized in terms of three main sets of activities that they undertake: implementers, catalysts (initiators) and partners (Lewis, 2007). This does not however suggest that all NGOs confine themselves to only one of these roles as some NGOs’ activities may cover all three roles. Similarly, Clark (1991) presents NGOs roles in local development in the context of their collaboration with the state to include complementing, reforming, and/or opposing the state. In complementing the state, NGOs act as service providers and implementers of development activities, thus filling the gaps left by public services (Lillehammer, 2003; Thomas, 1992). The reforming role of NGOs is related to NGOs as agents of advocacy and contributors to policy dialogue, through “mediation” (Tandon, 1996). In opposing the state, NGOs can act as watchdogs and hold governments accountable, done directly through lobbying, or indirectly by supporting groups that are adversely affected by government policy (Thomas, 1992).

Hadenius and Uggla (1996) stated that NGOs have two functions: the pluralist and the educational. By the pluralist function, NGOs ensure the best possible coherence between individual preferences and collective choices (Riker, 1995 cited in Lillehammer, 2003). Their educational function is based on the idea that the support for democracy's fundamental principles can only be created through the experience gained from repetitive participation in democratic structures (Hadenius & Uggla, 1996). According to Lewis and Kanji (2009), for Western donors who had become frustrated with the traditionally bureaucratic and ineffective government-to-government project-based aid, NGOs provided an alternative and more flexible funding channel, which potentially offered a higher chance of grassroots participation. This relates to Cernea's (1988) argument that NGOs embodied 'a philosophy that recognises the centrality of people in development policies', and that this, along with some other factors, gave them certain 'comparative advantages' over government and public sector. Through undertaking community organising and policy advocacy, NGOs could operate as a counterweight to balance public interests, especially "against the excesses of the state and the market" (Howell & Pearce, 2001).

Essentially, the role of NGOs in development in general and local development in particular has been well established in literature. Generally, they are pace-setters, advocates, auditors and above all partners in all facets of development. However, in order to appreciate the issues raised on the increasing diversity and complexity of NGOs' role in development, the paper posits that it is necessary to establish an informed background perspective of NGOs' involvement in local development, based on local evidence. Currently, data on such background perspective is virtually invisible in the Upper West Region. Thus, a study on the topic will help provide an invaluable and up-to-date data development managers, academics and students working in the field of development and its related disciplines.

This paper focuses on presenting a comprehensive background of the operations of NGOs in the Upper West Region of Ghana. In this context, the need to analyse what kinds of NGOs there are in the Region, what their roles are and the components of their local development interventions is evident.

## **CONCEPTS OF NGOS AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT**

There are many debates about what is and what not an NGO is. One reason for the debates on the concept of NGOs is that the concept is complex, often unclear and difficult to grasp. In spite of the lack of consensus on a universal definition of NGO, however, attempts have been made by various authors to define the term. For instance, the World Bank argues that NGOs are private organisations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, and/or undertake community development (Gibbs, Kuby & Fumo 1999). Similarly, Ghana's NGO Policy Guidelines of 2007 define an NGO as an independent, non-profit making, non-

political and charitable organisation, with the primary objective of enhancing the social, cultural and economic wellbeing of communities, and the operation of that organisation does not have a religious, political or ethnic bias.

Holloway (2001), referred to NGOs as a group of organisations distinct from government institutions and business organisations, the distinct feature being that they are formed to complement, supplement and offer alternatives to government development efforts. Similarly, Edwards and Fowler (2002) defined NGOs as a subset of civic organisation, defined by the fact that they are formally registered with government, receive a significant proportion of their income from voluntary contributions (usually alongside grants from government), and are governed by a board of trustees rather than the elected representatives of a constituency.

Thus, a clear definition of NGO still remains contested. The conception of NGO for the purpose of this study is the World Bank's (1996) definition. In this context, an NGO is a non-profit, non-state organisation whose activities are geared towards relieving suffering, promoting the interest of the poor, protecting the environment, providing basic social services, and/or undertaking community development. This definition may seem subjective, thus leaving out some organisations that others will consider as NGOs. However, there has been a proliferation in the contextual application of the term NGOs that no single definition can satisfy all contexts. Thus, this definition only suffices the purpose of this study. In other contexts, it may appear too narrow or wide.

Like the concept of development itself, defining local development has been contentious, with some scholars characterizing it in the social context while others conceive as an economic concept. Generally, however, much of the literature rightly conceives local development in the context of active local participation in community development agenda.

Local development is comprehensively defined as a process that leverages the comparative and competitive advantages of localities, mobilises their specific physical, economic, social and political resources and institutions (UNCDF, 2006, cited in Romeo, 2010) and is embedded in national development processes and frameworks, including existing national and sectoral development strategies, the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework and decentralisation and civil service reforms (UNDP, 2007). Coffey and Polese (1984) also conceived local development as a form of regional development in which endogenous factors occupy the central position. In that context, Coffey and Polese (ibid) then suggested that local development goes through four stages: the emergence of local entrepreneurship; the take-off of local enterprises; the expansion of these enterprises beyond the local region; and the achievement of a regional economic structure that is based upon local initiatives and locally created comparative advantages.

All definitions of local development point to a development approach in which the move towards solutions to local problems is facilitated by the active participation of local actors such as local communities, civil society organisations, private sector companies, local

governments and local resources. The aim of local development therefore is to enhance the local's capacities to better formulate and implement policies that support local needs, induce greater productive efficiencies for improved local development.

## **Types of NGOs**

A critical look at the workings of NGOs suggests that they vary considerably in structure. Lewis and Kanji (2009) posited that NGOs are generally difficult to categorise into straight forward groups because they exist between states and markets, and take many diverse organisational forms. Willetts (2002) has suggested that the most effective way to distinguish between NGOs is to obtain precise data on a range of different variables: the number of full-time employees, the number of members and the funding of the annual budget give measures of the size of any NGO; opinion poll data on recognition of and support for an NGO or its goals, along with the frequency of positive mentions in the news media give measures of its political strength; and rather subjective variables, such as the professional skill, knowledge and experience of the personnel matter for both operational and campaigning purposes.

Mostashari (2005) put NGOs under two groups: Operational and advocacy NGOs. He interpreted the difference between them as the choice between small-scale change achieved directly through projects and large-scale change promoted indirectly through influence on the political system. Willetts (2002) identified that operational NGOs seek to "achieve small-scale change directly through projects", while advocacy NGOs seek to "achieve large-scale change promoted indirectly through influence of the political system."

The defining activity of operational NGOs as Willetts (2002) notes is implementing projects while advocacy NGOs are concerned with holding demonstrations or campaigns to defend or promote a specific cause. Thus, operational NGOs need to possess an efficient headquarters bureaucracy, in addition to the operational staff in the field while advocacy NGOs is not really characterized by such administrative burdens. Operational NGOs focus on delivery of services and welfare. Advocacy NGOs focus on knowledge, awareness and acceptance creation through lobbying and activism, hence, can also be termed as campaigning NGOs.

Cousins (1991) grouped NGOs into two broad categories: according to their orientation; and level of operation. NGO orientation refers to the type of activities they undertake (for instance, human rights, environmental, or development work). An NGO's level of operation on the other hand indicates the scale at which it works, such as local, regional, national or international (Vakil, 1997).

Based on orientation, Cousins (1991) found four types of NGOs: charitable, service, participatory and empowering NGOs. Charitable NGOs' activities are directed towards meeting the needs of the poor such as distribution of food, clothing or medicine; provision of housing, transport, and schools. Service orientation NGOs engage in activities such as the provision of health, family planning or education services in

which the programme is designed by the NGO and people are expected to participate in its implementation and in receiving the service. Cousins (1991) further notes that participatory NGOs are characterised by self-help projects where local people are involved particularly in the implementation of a project by contributing cash, tools, land, materials and labour. Empowering NGOs on the other hand aim at helping poor people develop a clearer understanding of the social, political and economic factors affecting their lives, and to strengthen their awareness of their own potential power to control their lives. In terms of differentiating NGOs according to level of operation, Cousins (1991) identified community based, city-wide, national and international NGOs. These categories are clearer in identifying the coverage of the NGOs' operations.

Cornman, Cunt and Sujata (2005) have also grouped NGOs into local and international categories. Local NGOs (LNGOs) are owned and run by nationals; formed on local initiative rather than donors and driven by the desire to identify certain felt needs or experiences and find local solutions to the development problems (Turary, 2002; Cornman et al., 2005). Northern NGOs, international NGOs (INGOs) are those NGOs that receive funding from bilateral, multilateral, or foreign private-sector donors and whose policies and systems are from their headquarters based outside the country (Cornman et al., 2005; Malunga, 2007).

Others have categorised NGOs based on their degree of autonomy, location, and scope of activities (Farrington & Lewis, 1993; Paul, 2000). Another way to classify them is according to the focus of their primary objectives and functions: welfare NGOs, development NGOs, service NGOs, environmental NGOs, advocacy NGOs, human rights NGOs, women's NGOs, and religious NGOs (Gallin, 1999; Tvedt, 1998). NGOs have also been distinguished based on legal status. While this classification can be diverse and depends upon each country's laws and practices, Stillman (2007) grouped NGOs based on legal status into four main family groups: Unincorporated and Voluntary Association; Trusts, Charities and Foundations; Companies not just for profit; and Entities formed or registered under special NGO or non-profit laws.

Generally, there are numerous classifications of NGOs and some classifications may naturally overlap. Due to these diversities, NGOs can sometimes oppose each other on one issue but as well collaborate on another. However, regardless of the diversity in grouping NGOs, the focus should be to categorise them in a way that defines their scope in terms of territorial possessiveness, operational coverage and development (change) orientation. Lekorwe (2007) suggests that the term NGO is ambiguous and covers a range of organisations within civil society, from political action groups to sports clubs. Thus, categorisations of NGOs are essential in establishing the frameworks within which NGOs operate. As Lekorwe (2007) further argues, although all NGOs can be regarded as civil society organisations not all civil society organisations are NGOs. This emphasis calls for the need for researchers to define the categories of NGOs that their studies cover.



## **Operational Areas of NGOs**

NGOs work in many different fields; some are multi-purpose in terms of their diverse development activities, while others are single-purpose, involved basically in one major function (Hague, 2002). In the context of this study, the researchers are interested in establishing those aspects of their operations that can generally be associated with social transformation and improvement in quality of life, especially of the local people.

According to David Rieff, “the whole point of humanitarian intervention was precisely that NGOs and civil society had both a right and an obligation to respond with acts of aid and solidarity to people in need or being subjected to repression or want by the forces that controlled them, whatever the governments concerned might think about the matter” (Rieff, 2010). Similarly, Frandsen (2009) identified that the scale and variety of activities in which NGOs participate has grown rapidly since the 1980s, witnessing even greater expansion in the 1990s. This has subsequently made them too dependent on a limited number of donors (Edwards and Hulme, 1996), and has the potential of altering the focus, including the operational coverage of many NGOs. According to Ha et al. (2007), the operational definition of NGOs can be identified under 12 “functional” categories: Health, Education, Environment, Community/Social Welfare Services, Development, Disaster and Emergency Relief, Human Rights, Culture, International, Philanthropy/Voluntarism and Grant making, Network Organisations, and Other (perhaps, the undiscovered down-to-ground peculiar approach).

Similarly, Hague (2002) submits that NGOs are involved in activities related to nationwide socio-economic rural development—such as poverty alleviation, income generation, skill development, primary health care, rural credit, and agricultural inputs. NGOs also engage in leadership and entrepreneurship development, skills in irrigation and water management, promotion of poultry and livestock rearing, fisheries, forestry, and handicrafts (Newnham, 2000; Khandker and Khalily, 1996). In Cameroon, international NGOs are better organised, more focused, technically proficient, and financially viable and have deeper penetration into communities than local NGOs that are plagued by lack of expertise, poor management and funding difficulties (Tanga and Fonchingong, 2009). In Latin American feminist NGOs, Alvarez (1998) noted that the 1990s witnessed a concentration of NGOs in such activities as gender policy assessment, project execution and social services delivery, a diversion from earlier movement-oriented activities.

In terms of geographical spread, the former centralisation of NGOs in the North has changed, perhaps due to growth in technology to ease communication and mobility. Now, the historical origin of an NGO being formed in a particular country does not mean it is currently a national or regional rather than a global organisation. While it might be a practical necessity for an international NGO to have a headquarters office in a particular building, but the location of the office does not convert a global NGO into a national or regional organisation (Willetts, 2002). Thus, at the national, regional, district or community levels, the location of an NGO’s headquarters does not necessarily

indicate a concentration of its operations in that location. NGOs in one region, district or community can have operations (projects or programmes) in other regions, districts or communities. As long as their strengths can reach, NGOs should have wide operational coverage (both in terms of geography and activities).

## **THE STUDY AREA**

The Upper West Region once formed part of the then Upper Region of Ghana. It was carved out in 1983 in furtherance of Ghana's decentralisation programme. Currently, the Region is made up of 11 districts, namely: Wa Municipal, Wa West, Wa East, Nadowli, Jirapa, Lawra, Sissala West, Sissala East, Lambussie/Karni, Daffiama/Bussie/Issa and Nandom. The major economic activity of the Region is agriculture. People of the Region are engaged in subsistence agriculture with staples such as guinea-corn, millet, rice, yams, beans, groundnuts, and bambara beans. Sheep, goats, chickens, pigs and guinea fowls are raised for domestic and commercial purposes.

Generally, the Region lacks behind in many aspects of development. For instance, the 2006 Ghana Living Standard Survey revealed that 69.19% of adults in the Region have never been to school. Access to education in the Region is still poor. About 67.1% of school-going-age children have access to primary education while only 17.2% had access to secondary school (GSS, 2005; UNDP, 2007). According to Ghana Statistical Service (2012), the Region's illiteracy rate for people aged 15 years and above stood at 34.7%. Similarly, the Ghana Statistical Service Living Survey 6 (2014) identified that only 51.7% of adults (15 years and above) in the Region had ever attended school. There is very high incidence of poverty (GSS, 2009). As Blench (2005) remarked, by many indicators, Upper West Region is the most disadvantaged Region of Ghana. In terms of child mortality, disease incidence, access to health, schooling, roads and communications, it remains at the bottom of the table. It has seen remarkably little donor investment and has been largely neglected by government.

In the early years of the Region, there was very little NGO activity. A few NGOs that started operations in the Region soon phased out (Blench, 2005). In the recent past however, many NGOs (e.g. Plan Ghana, Actionaid, Suntaa-Nuntaa, and Rural Aid Action Programme (RAAP) have undertaken some operations either solely or in partnership with government in the Region. Church-based NGOs have also emerged and all the major denominations have some type of operation (Alebikeya, 1988).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The focus of this study was on gaining insights and familiarity with the operations of NGOs for later investigation on State-NGO partnership in local development in the Region. Thus, the study adopted an exploratory survey design and a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches.



The survey started with a preliminary interview with the Regional Director of the Social Welfare Department (SWD). The SWD is the mandated institution for the registration and regulation of NGO activities in Ghana. This preliminary survey helped to design the rest of the study. At the time of the study, information from the Regional Social Welfare Department revealed that the Wa Municipality was the hub of NGOs in the Upper West Region. Out of the 33 NGOs in the SWD's list, 25 of them had offices in Wa. This made the area a representative site for the study. Although the study targeted the entire region, the Wa Municipality was selected for survey.

All NGOs with offices in the Municipality were invited to participate in the study. Although SWD put the number of NGOs in the study area at 33, a tour by researchers to establish the locations of the organisations revealed nine additional NGOs in the Wa Municipality alone which were not in the SWD's list. Others had also closed operations in the Region but were still in SWD's list. In all, 30 NGOs with offices in the Wa Municipality were in operation at the time of the study. Though all 30 operational NGOs in the Municipality were included in the study, only 18 responded to the questionnaire. The rest declined to participate in the study, citing no interest in the study and busy schedules that did not allow them to respond to questionnaires.

The major method used for data collection was self-administered questionnaires distributed to the Directors / Managers of the participating NGOs. This was followed by telephone interviews to clarify and/or complete responses of some participants whose responses were unclear or incomplete.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents and discusses the study's results on the nature and character of NGO operations in the Upper West Region.

### **Legal or Registration Status of NGOs**

Until the drafting of the Trusts Act in 2006 and the National Policy on NGOs in 2007, the establishment and registration of NGOs were regulated under the Companies Code, 1963 (Act 179). Under the Act, NGOs were required to register as companies limited by guarantee. This first step was for the organisation to register with the Registrar General's Department for a certificate to commence business and incorporation. The next step was for the organisation to register as an NGO at the Department of Social Welfare. At the local (district, municipal and metropolitan) level, assemblies may be authorized to give accreditation to NGOs.

Currently, there are two main steps for registration as an NGO in Ghana: (1) Get a certificate to commence business and incorporation at the Registrar General's Department under the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General; and (2) Register as a local or international NGO at the Department of Social Welfare under the Ministry of Employment

and Social Welfare (Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), 2011). Also, under the NGO policy regulation of Ghana (2007), an organisation is expected to renew its registration every year. Failure to renew amounts to termination of operations and will lead to the deletion of the name of the organisation from the register. Other regulating public agencies of NGO operations in the country are the Regional Co-ordinating Councils (RCC) and the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs).

NGOs are required by various regulations (for example, Company's Code and NGO Policy Regulation of Ghana) to comply with certain registration procedures. The study established that although all the NGOs that participated in the study had done one form of registration or the other, there were some deficiencies. For instance, while 16.6% of the NGOs registered with the Social Welfare Department (SWD) only, 50% of them had registered with the Registrar General's Department (RGD) only (See Table 1).

**Table 1: Registration of NGOs with regulatory agencies**

Regulatory Organisation (s)	Frequency	Per cent
Social Welfare Department (SWD) only	3	16.6
Registrar General's Department (RGD) Only	9	50.0
Regional Co-ordination Council (RCC), Metropolitan, Municipal / District Assembly (MMDA), SWD and RGD	1	5.6
MMDA, SWD and RGD	4	22.2
MMDA and RGD	1	5.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey, July 2014

The initial registration deficiencies are further confirmed by the non-renewal of 41.7% of local NGOs (a defiance of the required annual renewal of registration). The study, however, established that all international NGOs had renewed their registration accordingly. A search by the research team established that there were at least nine NGOs in the Wa Municipality alone (some of which took part in the study) that were not in the SWD's list of registered NGOs. These registration deficiencies reveal weak regulatory governance, and thus suggest that the regulatory organisations have an incomplete picture of the range of NGOs in the Upper West Region.

### **Types and Range of NGOs**

Of the 18 NGOs that participated in the study, 66.7% were local NGOs, with the remaining 33.3% being international in their scope. In terms of who started these organisations, it was established that 17 (representing 94.4%) were set up by individuals or groups of

persons while one (5.6%) was started by a church. This confirms the assertion by Korten (1987: 155) that the origin and growth of most NGOs, can be traced to ‘... the high moral purpose, goodwill, hard work, and common sense...’of one or more individuals. Table 2 presents the establishment dates of both local and international NGOs in the Region.

**Table 2: Types of NGOs in relation to established date of operation in the Region**

	Before the year 2000		Between 2000 and 2005		Between 2006 and 2010		After 2010 (% of Total)	
	(% of Total)		(% of Total)		(% of Total)			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Local NGO	7	38.9	2	11.1	2	11.1	1	5.6
International NGO	4	22.2	2	11.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
TOTAL	11	61.1	4	22.2	2	11.1	1	5.6

Source: Field Survey, July 2014

The study also established that the emergence of local NGOs brought about a decline in the initial influx of foreign NGOs into the Region. As shown in table 2, of the six international NGOs that participated in the study, all started operations in the Region before 2006. Three local NGOs were established after 2005. For both local and international NGOs, there has been a decline in the number established since 2000. Perhaps, the emergence of local NGOs also discouraged the siting of international NGOs in the Region.

A review of the visions and missions of NGOs that participated in the study revealed that they envisage a sustainably developed Upper West Region, where sustainable development culminates into self-reliant people (the primary agent of development) and a long preserved environment (the primary victim of physical development). This is reflected in the ‘people’ and ‘environment’ centred approaches adopted in their development interventions. From the gender perspective, NGOs in the Region view women as critical agents in the pursuit of the local development agenda. While women are not the sole beneficiaries of NGO interventions in the Region, it can be inferred from the visions and missions that women empowerment (through gender mainstreaming and increased participation) is central to NGO local development interventions.

### **Scope of Operation of NGOs in Local Development**

Globally, non-governmental organisations are now recognised as key actors on the broader landscape of development through their active roles in humanitarian action, environmental activism, human rights work, and many other areas of development intervention. Although NGOs widely intervene in international development, this study confines itself to their operational coverage in the local development context. Thus, much

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of its arguments do not apply to their operations outside the study area. The study sought to establish the specific nature of work the NGOs undertake in their interventions. The results are presented in Table 3. Based on literature on the scope of NGO operations in local development, the authors developed ten broad classes of interventions which can propel local development (see Ha et al., 2007; Hague, 2002; Newnham, 2000; Khandker & Khalily, 1996).

**Table 3: Nature of NGOs work in local development in the Upper West Region**

Nature of Work	Never (%)	A small part of our work (%)	About 1/3 of our work (%)	About ½ of our work (%)	About 2/3 of our work (%)	Most of our work (%)	All of our work (%)
We provide services directly to local people and communities (food, healthcare, education and training)	6.7	6.7	20.0	20.0	6.7	26.7	13.2
We partner other organisations (public and private) that provide services directly to local people and communities	0.0	26.7	20.0	13.2	6.7	26.7	6.7
We support economic and productive enterprises that benefit poor people	6.7	26.7	26.7	13.3	6.7	6.7	13.2
We influence how government and other powerful organisations work (that is, 'advocacy')	13.3	20.1	13.3	13.3	20.0	13.3	6.7
We conduct and publish research	33.3	40.0	6.7	13.3	0.0	6.7	0.0
We support and strengthen civil society organisations	13.3	40.0	20.0	6.7	6.7	13.3	0.0
We help people claim their human rights	20.0	13.3	6.7	20.0	20.0	20.0	0.0
We support collective action by our targets	20.0	20.0	6.7	26.6	20.0	6.7	0.0
We fund individuals	46.6	33.3	6.7	6.7	6.7	0.0	0.0
We help build peace and reconciliation	0.0	26.7	33.2	6.7	20.0	6.7	6.7

Source: Field Survey, July 2014

From Table 3, all NGOs in the Region have some amount of intervention in partnering other organisations (public and private) that provide services directly to local people, as well as in helping build peace and reconciliation. While 46.6% of NGOs do not fund individuals, 33.3% do not conduct and publish research. Twenty percent of the Organisations neither help people claim their human rights, nor support collective action by their targets. As shown in the table, a significant proportion of NGOs stated that between one-third and about half of their work related to all ten broad classes of interventions. The data in Table 3 confirm the assertions that NGOs work relates to overall development in line with integral development principles, including poverty alleviation, income generation, skill development, primary health care, rural credit, leadership and entrepreneurship development (Hague, 2002; Newnham, 2000; Khandker & Khalily, 1996).

### **Primary Sectoral Focus of NGOs**

All NGOs had primary focus in two or more sectors (See Table 4). This explains why the sum of the frequency is greater than 18 (that is 80). They also had limited operations in other sectors of development across the Region. Thus, NGOs in the Region exhibit multiple identities in their local development interventions. While the multi-sectoral focus can help spread NGO interventions across many sectors, it can also distort specialisation. Thus, this can lead to unaccomplished aims by the time intervention projects are being phased out.

Table 4 shows that the primary sectors in which NGOs focus on are education, health, human rights, community development, social issues and the environment. Specific areas of high concentration included advocacy, water and sanitation, provision of water resources, economic empowerment, youth action through outreach, food security, climate change, hygiene governance, entrepreneurship and microfinance.

**Table 4: Primary sectoral focus of NGOs**

<b>Sector of focus</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Education	14	17.5
Health	13	16.25
Environment	9	11.25
Culture	3	3.75
Human Rights	13	16.25
Development	12	15.0
Social issues	12	15.0
Other	4	5.0
Total	80	100

Source: Field Survey, July 2014

The findings as presented in Table 4 reflect Ulleberg's (2009) assertion that in sectors like health and education, NGOs have been occupying the role of main service providers over the past few years. Similarly, Jackson (2001) noted in the Ghanaian case that government's expenditure in health and education had witnessed pronounced reductions.

Interestingly, however, the study identified that even though most NGOs' primary focus were in sectors such as education and health, in majority of them, these sectors formed less than 30% of their overall development operations (see Table 5). For instance, 62.5% of all NGOs who had primary and limited focus in education said the sector formed below 30% of their total operations. In all three sectors of health, human rights and community development, the study identified that in 66.6% of NGOs with operations in these sectors, less than 30% of their interventions were devoted to each of them. The situation is even more pronounced in the environment and social issues categories where 88.9% and 75% of NGOs stated they had below 30% commitment in them respectively.

**Table 5: Percentage of sectoral focus of NGOs**

Sector of Focus	Count	Percentage of Operational Focus				Total
		Below 30%	30-59%	60-80%	Above 80%	
Education	No.	10	3	1	2	16
	%	62.5%	18.75%	6.25%	12.5%	100
Health	No.	10	3	1	1	15
	%	66.6%	20.0%	6.7%	6.7%	100
Environment	No.	8	0	1	0	9
	%	88.9%	0.0%	11.1%	0.0%	100
Culture	No.	4	0	0	0	4
	%	100%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100
Human Rights	No.	10	1	1	3	15
	%	66.6%	6.7%	6.7%	20.0%	100%
Development	No.	10	1	0	4	15
	%	66.6%	6.7%	0.0%	26.7%	100
Social Issues	No.	9	2	1	0	12
	%	75.0%	16.7%	8.3%	0.0%	100%
Other	No.	3	0	0	0	3
	%	100%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100

Source: Field Survey, July 2014



These findings (in Table 5) buttress the earlier indication that the multi-sectoral engagements can blur specialization. These findings also suggest that in practice NGOs in the Region concentrate more in sectors different from their primary focus. Thus, areas that in theory represent the primary focus of NGOs might become very secondary in practice. In this context, the authors conclude that NGOs in the Upper West Region are faced with a crisis of concentration. This is, however, not peculiar to only NGOs in the Region as Fonjong (2007) identified that in Cameroon, the dependency of local NGOs on external funding presented challenges for local NGOs in the pursuit of their own agenda. Liang (2003, cited in Andreas, 2005) also noted that strong dependency from external funding can be a serious problem for the long-term development of local NGOs. Since donors operate according to their own goals and project management styles which NGOs have to conform to in order to receive financial support, the practical implementation of their intended development interventions could be constrained by funding governments and international foundations.

### **Geographical Concentration of NGOs**

The study established that all NGOs in the Region had some rural development projects and / or programmes. However, 94.4% of NGOs in the Region had their concentration in rural areas. This reflects a rural domination of all NGOs' activities in the Region. For instance, the study identified that only one of the NGOs studied had less than 30% of its total operations in rural areas, three NGOs (representing 16.7%) had 60-80% of their total activities in rural areas, while the majority (14 NGOs, representing 77.8) had over 80% of their operations in rural areas. This may mainly reflect the rural nature of the Region.

This confirms the assertion that the bulk of NGO development projects go to the rural areas (Rahmato, Bantirgu & Endeshaw, 2008; Hague, 2002). In many countries, NGO rural concentration has marked a paradigm shift in the rural development approach. This shift in approach to rural development aims to generate processes of profound structural change in rural territories (Delgado, 2004). The result has been rural transformation, including development of transport infrastructure, delivery of essential services, and valorisation of rural amenities and promotion of rural enterprises (OECD, 2006). Rural tourism has also received special attention, given its potential to regenerate rural areas (Morán, 2002, cited in Ambrosio-Albalá & Bastiaensen, 2010). However, the increasing rate of urbanisation witnessed globally and in Ghana where it is expected that by 2015 more than half of the world's population will live in urban areas, means that NGOs have to begin to strategise and retool themselves to be in a better position to meet the many challenges associated with this increasing phenomena of urbanisation.

The study further established that in terms of the nature of geographical extent of NGO work in the Region in the past ten years, none of the organisations operated in a single district. For instance, while 6 of the 18 NGOs operated in multiple districts, 5 had a regional coverage and 6 had international geographical coverage (See Table 6).

**Table 6: Nature of geographical extent of NGO work in the past ten years**

Geographical Extent	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Multiple Districts	6	33.3
Regional Level	5	27.8
Multiple Regions	1	5.6
International Level	6	33.3
Total	18	100.0

Source: Field Survey, July 2014

Hague (2002) submitted that NGOs are involved in activities related to nationwide socio-economic rural development. Thus, the establishment of headquarters office in a particular location does not convert a global NGO into a national or regional organisation (Willets, 2002). The study identified that although the Wa Municipality is the hub of NGOs in the Upper West Region of Ghana, these NGOs essentially have operations spread across the entire Region.

### **Nature of NGO interventions in the past ten years**

Since the 1980s, NGOs have attracted the attention of different sections of the development community for various reasons which are largely linked to their development interventions. The study further assessed the nature of NGO interventions in the past ten years. Generally, NGOs work in many different fields whether they are multi-purpose or single-purpose in terms of their diverse development activities. This study identified that all NGO interventions in the past ten years can generally be associated with social transformation and improvements in quality of life, especially of the rural people.

As shown in Figure 1, the study conceptualised NGO development interventions under four broad headings: direct grassroots interventions, advocacy based work, community mobilisation or advocacy based work and funding.

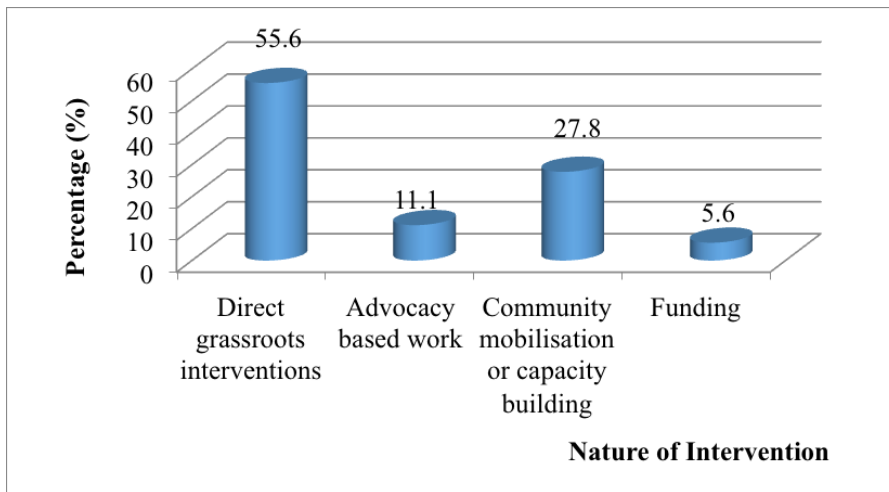


Figure 1: Nature of NGO local development interventions in the past ten years

Source: Field Survey, July 2014

A significant 55.6% of NGOs in the Region noted that their interventions have been direct grassroots interventions. Perhaps, this explains why funding (direct financial aid to beneficiaries in figure 1) represented a small percentage (5.6%). The high percentage of direct grassroots interventions suggest that NGOs in the Region are ‘first generation NGOs’ whose priority is to address immediate needs, mainly through undertaking relief and welfare work (Korten, 1990). It also revealed that much of the intervention has been donor administered. However, such forms of interventions do not propel self-reliant local development initiatives, neither are they good for sustainable community development. What is required for self-reliant and sustainable interventions is renewed interest in advocacy and capacity building to enhance lasting structural changes in beneficiary communities. What makes local development distinctive is the idea that interventions are the results of local ideas, endeavour and labour, rather than external administration. Such a conception of local development propels local and indigenous structures in the development frame against a predominantly borrowed orientation in development.

## CONCLUSION

The Upper West Region of Ghana remains largely underdeveloped in many aspects, including access to health, schooling, roads and communication facilities among others. In view of their wide operational and geographical coverage, the study concludes that the emergence of Non-Governmental Organisations in the Region has contributed significantly to filling major local development gaps that the state actors have been constrained in dealing with. NGOs in the Region have facilitated development in the

fields of education, health, human rights, community development, social issues and the environment. Specific areas of high concentration have been advocacy, water and sanitation, provision of water resources, economic empowerment, and youth action through outreach, food security, climate change, hygiene governance, entrepreneurship and microfinance.

Despite the wide range and scope (in content and geography) of NGO involvement in local development, they remain inappropriately integrated with the public sector regulators in the Region. There are registration gaps, revealing an incomplete picture regulatory governance of NGO operations in the Region. Further research is needed to establish issues of regulatory governance of NGOs in the Region.

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