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The Policy and Practice of Local Economic Development in Ghana

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Abstract
Local economic development (LED) has gained prominence as a feasible option to top–down development approaches that have generally been unsuccessful in generating significant and sustainable development at the local level. While LED has proven to be an attractive local development strategy, very little attention has been devoted to the policy and practice of LED in Ghana. This article fills this gap and contributes to the discussion and evidence of LED in sub-Saharan Africa. The article is the output of an examination of documentary sources on LED policies, practices and case studies in Ghana. We argue that while LED policy and practice in Ghana has been in existence for several years, local areas are still building their impetus for the initiative of their own economic development and find practical solutions that make sense in their milieu. It is crucial for local governments to develop LED actions plans, ensure effective participation of stakeholders, build in value chain and reduce politicisation.

Keywords Local economic development · Policy · Ghana · Practice

Introduction

Sixty years after Ghana's independence, many of her development and unemployment challenges still remain unsolved in spite of the pursuit of a variety of development interventions. Thus, deep-seated inequalities, both social and spatial, appear to exist while efforts to promote national economic growth have yielded little success in

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majority of rural areas and marginalised parts of the country. This is manifested in the increasing poverty levels and insistently low socio-economic scores (Oduro-Ofori 2011). This situation has compelled governments and development experts to re-examine what alternative approaches are available to help deal with the development backlog (Ayee 2013; Oduro-Ofori 2011, 2016; Reddy 2016). Within this context, spatial interventions, such as local coping strategies, self-reliance and 'development from within', are the effective local economic development (LED) alternatives in many countries that are gaining prominence in the local development terrain (Taylor and Mackenzie 1992).

It is argued that, perhaps, governments must shift away from top–down sectoral development strategies to a more bottom–up local development (Feld and Kirchgässner 2001). In its broader sense, LED is seen as a situation where locally based organisations or individuals utilises local resources to stimulate and build the local economy to the benefit of a large number of local people in the local community (Blakely 1994; Nel and Humphrys 1999). Even though, LED in the pre-independence up to 1987 period in Ghana has generally been described as the 'lost decades', by 2014, it reached a policy 'maturing' stage (Mensah et al. 2017). Thus, several efforts have been made in Ghana to promote LED both in terms of policy and practice (MLGRD 2010; Akudugu and Laube 2013; Mensah et al. 2013a; Mensah et al. 2013b). In fact, international development agencies (e.g. ILO, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have also played significant role in terms of the formulation, implementation and financing of LED in Ghana (Akudugu and Laube 2013; Mensah et al. 2017).

Although LED has proven to be an attractive local development strategy, very little attention has been devoted to the policy and practice of LED in Ghana in the scholarly literature. This is, however, not surprising given Ghana's limited experience in LED (Akudugu and Laube 2013; Mensah et al. 2017). Previous studies have tended to provide case studies (Agyei 2012; Akudugu and Laube 2013; Mensah et al. 2013b; Adei et al. 2015) and reviews (Mensah et al. 2013a; Oduro-Ofori 2016; Mensah et al. 2017). This article attempts to fill this major gap and contribute to the discussion and evidence of LED in sub-Saharan Africa which has been largely unrepresented in the extant literature (Rogerson and Rogerson 2010). Our central research question is: What has been the state of LED policy and practice in Ghana? In so doing, our aim is to assist LED researchers and practitioners in positioning their research and practice more explicitly in the existing Ghanaian LED literature. This study is timely and appropriate as it will help policy-makers, politicians, development agencies, local practitioners, local governments and all stakeholders involved in delivering LED to know what has been attempted and with what successes, what is left to be done and what actions to take moving forward (Mensah et al. 2017).

Methodologically, this article is the output of an analysis of documentary sources on LED policies, practices and case studies in Ghana. Structurally, the next section provides a brief overview of the theoretical debates and literature on LED. The second section presents a brief historical discussion of current LED policies and guidelines in Ghana. This is followed by a synthesis of the practice of LED in Ghana. The fourth section will provide a detailed discussion of the paper, and the final section will draw some conclusions from the study.

Theoretical Debates and Literature Review

The concept of LED has come to enjoy growing credibility as a locality-based development strategy that is critical to unlocking the potential of localities and improving the economic prospects and quality of the local people (Trousdale 2005; Akudugu and Laube 2013). This increasing credibility of LED is due to the fact that LED has the potential and capability to rejuvenate situation of a local area. LED emphasises home grown development strategies that make use of local capacities and resources to generate employment opportunities and boost locally based economic activities (Blakely 1994; Rogerson and Rogerson 2010). Generally, LED is viewed as actions that are locally based, use of local resources and locally determined interventions intended to generate employment opportunities and to promote development (Blakely 1994; Nel 2001). In other words, LED emphasises endogenous development through a participatory process that comprises several stakeholders within a spatial unit to utilise local resources including human, institutional and physical, for local development (Varol 2010; Mensah et al. 2017).

Originating from Europe in the 1950s and 1960s (Blakely 1989; Rodriguez-Pose and Tijmastra 2009), LED as a development strategy has spread rapidly to North America in the 1960s and 1970s (Dewar 1998; Clark et al. 2010), East Asia in the 1980s and 1990s and in recent years become popular in Latin America, South Asia and Africa (Clark et al. 2010; Rogerson and Rogerson 2010; Mensah et al. 2017). During this period, LED has generally gone through three broad main phases (World Bank 2004). Between the 1960s and early 1980s, it was mainly aimed at the attraction of mobile manufacturing investments (World Bank 2004; Varol 2010). During the second phase, 1980s to the middle of the 1990s, LED stressed on retaining and growing already existing local businesses and internal investment. The third wave, 1990s to date, focuses on public private partnerships, soft infrastructure investments, networking as well as highly targeted internal investments attraction (World Bank 2004).

It is worthy to note that LED in the developed world is largely characterised and driven by locality-specific crises of deindustrialisation (Nel 2001) while in the developing world, LED is at its early stage (Barberia and Biderman 2010) and takes a much more basic form (Binns and Nel 1999) and as a survivalist or self-reliance strategy aimed at achieving social rather than economic goals. In spite of these differences, LED can be classified into two types, pro-growth and pro-poor, with the former focusing on combating constraints that impede local businesses, retention of business, attracting new businesses and so forth, while the later focuses on poverty reduction and inclusion through welfare policies (Rodríguez-Pose and Tijmstra 2009).

Whereas several strategies can be used to achieve the purpose of LED, Helmsing (2001) argues that LED comprises of three approaches: community economic development (CED), locality development planning (LDP) and enterprise development (ED). CED is the process by which local residents build organisations and partnerships that interconnect profitable business (Helmsing 2001; Perry 2003) with its goal as the development and empowerment of individuals in the community (McLaughlin and Davidson 1994). The approaches that are used in CED include training of local businesses, women empowerment and enhancing human capital through training (Helmsing 2003). ED concentrates on the economic base of a locality with emphasis on exporting firms which normally cluster (Schmitz

1995; Helmsing 2001) for several benefits such as support for each other, decrease in business costs due to contiguity to each other, lobbying for superior training and education (Schmitz 1995; Helmsing 2001).

The concern of LDP is on the infrastructure, services and socio-economic capital of the locality with the aim of maximising positive externalities of LED to decrease conflict and enhance the desirability of the locality in such a way that LED goals can be realised (Helmsing 2003; Meyer-Stamer 2005). Between these, LED adopts equally supply and demand side policies. Supply side policies support businesses via tax incentives and non-tax incentives which are either optional or non-discretionary (Eberts 2005). Demand side policies on the other hand are focused on creating a supporting milieu for innovation, research and development to small and medium enterprises, development and entrepreneurial activity.

LED is increasingly seen as a form of place-based economic development (Rogerson 2014; Rodríguez-Pose and Wilkie 2017) and an integral element of national spatial development. As noted by Pike et al. (2006), place-based approach to LED is synchronous with both social and economic advantages, inclusive of a superior capacity to race in the worldwide economy; a proximate association between needs and policies, which might cause deeper broad growth; and suitable across varied situations. In spite of these advantages, a place-based approach to LED comes with challenges such as the suitable balance of application, capability limits and synchronisation among diverse echelons of government (Rodríguez-Pose and Wilkie 2017).

LED is rooted in the theory of endogenous development. Contrarily to top–down development, bottom–up support for endogenous development is gradually accepted as exceptionally effective for long-term development through actions such as human capital development, support for entrepreneurship, diffusion of innovation and building local institutions and firm networks (Canzanelli 2001). Indeed, the move towards endogenous development highlights on the distinctive factors of the spatial setting in which the activity occurs, while at the same time recognising the embeddedness in the larger structures (Wilson 1995). From the endogenous perspective, LED has three main features: first, LED circles development activity inside a territory rather than a sectorial framework; second, there is a re-orientation of economic and other development activities to maximise the retention of benefits within the local milieu by maintaining and using local resources to the greatest possible advantage; and third, development is localised by concentrating on the needs, capacities and views of the indigenous people (OECD 1996; Ray 1997).

Local Economic Development Policy in Ghana

Whereas Ghana was among the first countries in the world to have a national development plan (Vordzorgbe and Caiquo 2001), it was not until 1985 that real effort for LED began (Mensah et al. 2017). Indeed, LED was generally alien to the previous national development plans: pre-independence (1920–1930; 1930–1940; 1946–1956) and post immediate independence era (1957–1959; 1959–1964; 1963/1964–1969/1970; 1970–1971; 1975/1976–1979/1980) (Mensah et al. 2017). It is worthy of note that before official LED policy was launched in Ghana in 2014, the Government of Ghana had taken certain initiatives which are LED oriented. In 1985, the government established the National Board for Small Scale Industries (NBSSI) as the apex governmental body for the promotion and development of the Micro and Small Enterprises (MSE) sector in Ghana. The establishment of NBSSI is rooted in the central idea of development theory that MSE are engines of endogenous development (Tetteh and Frempong 2009) in both urban and rural areas as well as ensuring balanced economic growth in different parts of countries (Wangwe 1995).

Similarly, the Ghana Regional Appropriate Technology Industrial Service (GRATIS) scheme was set up in 1987 to promote rural industrialisation by transferring appropriate technologies to small-scale industrialists (Tetteh and Frempong 2009; Mensah et al. 2013a). Indeed, these institutional arrangements were clearly LED oriented as they sought to promote local economies and create employment. However, the question has to do with whether local residents had the opportunity to participate and decide on which economic activities these institutions should pursue to their benefit. In 1988, the development landscape of Ghana shifted towards local development as the country adopted and implemented a broad decentralisation programme through the enactment of the local government law of 1988 (Tandoh-Offin 2013). This shift is probably attributed to the failure of top–down development strategies to promote development and genuine local ownership of the development process (Mensah et al. 2017).

The 1992 Constitution of Ghana is one of the major policy documents that LED draws a lot of support from as a number of sections emphasise local development (Mensah et al. 2017). Specifically, Article 245(a) of the constitution empowers district assemblies (DAs) to formulate and execute plans, programmes and strategies as well as mobilise resources necessary for overall district development. Similarly, Part 1 section 10(3a to e), 4 and 5 of the local government Act of 1993 (Act 462) empowers DAs as custodians of development in their locality in collaboration with other agencies, ministries, departments, public corporations and private entities. Hence, the development planning sub-committee of the DA is supposed to identify the economic resources and potentials of the district and how to harness them to benefit the local people. LED in Ghana draws financial support from the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF). The DACF Act, 1993 (Act 455) made provision for the allocation of not less than 5% of the total revenues of Ghana to the DAs for development. Again, The NDPC Act (Act 479, 1994) and the National Development Planning (Systems) Act (Act 480, 1994) were adopted to guide Ghana's development planning. These Acts made it possible for bottom–up development planning with full participation of local communities (Mensah et al. 2017).

Even though it is not christened as LED, the presidential special initiatives (PSIs) could be seen as another milestone in the policy of LED in Ghana. In 2001, the government launched the PSI policy to promote diversity and wealth creation in the productive sector in rural areas (Tonah 2006; Asante 2012; Mensah and Botchway 2013). In congruence with the benefits of LED, the PSIs were aimed at stimulating enterprise, productivity and jobs and, therefore, were projected to create total export proceeds earnings around US$4.4 billion and generate about 100,000 jobs within 4 years (Martey 2004; Sam 2002; Tonah 2006).

In 2010, the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. (2010) formulated a new decentralisation policy with the aim of clarifying roles and repositioning DAs to promote LED. Subsequently, the government of Ghana in 2014 formulated a national LED policy and operational manual for DAs to provide the conceptual issues, the process of operationalisation and implementation tools for LED in Ghana (MLGRD 2014). The policy and manual also seek to help DAs mainstream LED into their medium term development plan (MTDP). Broadly, the policy will help build the economic capability of local areas such that the lives and economic status of all will be improved.

In spite of several impressive policies, programmes and legislations in support of LED, economic development, unfortunately, still continues to be lacking, particularly in the remote areas of Ghana. Therefore, following the run-up to the 2016 presidential and parliamentary elections, the presidential candidate of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) promised a policy popularly termed 'one district one factory' which seeks to create a conducive environment for the private sector to established a factory in every district in relation to its gifted natural resources with the objective of creating jobs for the local people and national wealth. Additionally, the one district one factory seeks to empower and equip communities to use local resources to manufacture goods that are highly sought in both international and local markets. The one district one factory initiative is expected to create business opportunities, increase industries, remove regional disparities and promote resource efficiency in the districts thereby reducing poverty, unemployment and promoting social inclusion. It is expected to generate between 7000 and 15,000 jobs in each district and around GHC 1.5 million to GHC 3.2 million jobs country-wide by 2021 (One District One Factory Brochure, 2017, http://1d1f.gov.gh/publication/).

Related to the one district one factory is the 'one village one dam' initiative targeting farmers in the three northern regions of Ghana. The one village one dam policy is intended at ensuring that there is continues agriculture throughout the year through the construction of irrigation dams in every village in the three Northern regions of Ghana. In the 2017 budget policy statement, the objective under the one village one dam was the rehabilitation of small to medium scale irrigation schemes and GHC 94, 446,132 was earmarked for its implementation. It is however imperative to note that almost all budgets in the 4th Republic of Ghana have in one way or the other intention to rehabilitate dams and irrigation systems. Perhaps, the difficulty has in most cases attributed to the execution of the intentions outlined in the budget (ISSER 2017).

Local Economic Development Practice in Ghana

This section provides a brief description of the practice of LED in Ghana. Perhaps, whereas there was no formal existence of LED policy in the pre-independence and immediate post-independent era, LED was nonetheless practiced. The main strategy adopted was the community development approach that was geared towards stimulating the local people to undertake self-help projects for their own benefit. This approach encouraged the development of local initiatives and voluntary efforts with government support sometimes (Asiedu 2002). After its formation in 1985, NBSSI has practically played a number of roles in promoting small-scale businesses. For instance, the NBSSI assisted in the establishment of 120 new businesses in the year 2003. In the same year, a total of 10, 738 people benefited from its 362 training programmes (ISSER 2004). Likewise, the NBSSI organised 266 tailor-made programmes for 6530 entrepreneurs and 4 programmes for final year students of tertiary institutions in the year 2005. The aim was to encourage entrepreneurs to be business-like and expose them to marketing opportunities, foreign negotiations, pricing techniques, customer relationship management, efficiency, quality control, elimination of waste in the production process, record keeping and loan applications. Financially, GHC 209,729,000 was loaned to 378 entrepreneurs by the NBSSI via its numerous financial systems (Arthur 2005).

With the mandate of promoting rural industrialisation, GRATIS had organised a number of technical training programmes to help artisans acquire skills in such areas as metal machining, welding and fabrication, woodworking and pattern making and foundry work (Arthur 2007; Mensah et al. 2013a; Mensah et al. 2017). GRATIS also offers visiting apprentice training on short-term basis (between 3 and 12 months) to clients and operators who want to obtain relevant skills when they obtain new machines (Arthur 2007). Indeed, in 2005, 120 people were trained in textiles manufacturing and 1100 people in metal-machining, welding and fabrication, auto mechanics and upholstery (Arthur 2007). The entrepreneurial and management development component of GRATIS provides training on basic record-keeping and accounting procedures, effective marketing strategies, management of finances and costing and pricing of manufactured goods. And this has helped improve the abilities of trainees to run their businesses and workshops effectively and efficiently (Berman 2003). With respect to its financial scheme, GRATIS has been able to secure machines and equipment to produce spare parts and customised machines for their customers and raw materials for production (Arthur 2007).

Rural Enterprises Programme (REP) seeks to enhance rural SME development through its four main components: support for promotion of rural small-scale enterprises (SPRE), rural finance services support (RFSS), rural technology (RT) and infrastructure support (IS). The SPRE is done in collaboration with NBSSI through the Business Advocacy Centres (BACs) in selected districts throughout the country with the aim of promoting rural small-scale enterprises. Therefore, the BACs provide training on business management skills and such training has yielded significant results. Evaluation in 2000 showed that the BACs had trained more than 4000 individuals which resulted in the creation of 1900 new businesses, and these businesses had employed 6000 people. Again, more than 3500 existing businesses received business skills counselling which helped them to further employ 5, 000 workers (Rural Enterprises Project 2000). The 2011 evaluation showed improvement over the previous one. Thus, the number of SMEs established reached 71% of target and 94% of the targeted number of beneficiaries were linked to larger commercial operations (Rural Enterprises Project 2011).

With reference to the RT, rural technology service centres were created, equipped and staffed to provide short and long-term training for apprentices and master craftsmen on repair services, manufacturing services and dissemination of information. This also includes technology transfer training, business improvement equipment and field demonstration (Rural Enterprises Project 2000). The RFSS seeks to help the poor and under-capitalised small-scale businesses to access formal credit. It also trains small business owners in credit management and banking culture (Anyatewon et al. 2016). Indeed, up to 70% of the 1330 loans made as at 1999 went to businesses which previously had no access to bank loans. The credit management and banking culture training increased savings rates in the formal sector by up to 30% (Rural Enterprises

Project 2000). Finally, through the IS, 74-km roads were rehabilitated leading to an average traffic volume of 230%. This has provided social and economic benefits by providing better access to services and markets. In fact, approximately 1100 people have benefited from employment as unskilled labour for road works (Rural Enterprises Project 2000).

Recognising that incidences of illegal mining can be reduced if alternative employment is made available, government had sought to use alternative livelihood (AL) programmes, otherwise known as LED to diversify the economies of rural communities that depend on illegal artisanal mining for sustenance (Hilson and Banchirigah 2009; Mensah et al. 2017). As a result, several mining companies including Newmont Gold Mining and Anglo-Gold Ashanti have responded favourably and designed programmes mostly agrarian-based to this effect (see Hilson and Banchirigah 2009; Banchirigah and Hilson 2010). The purpose was not only to discourage people from taking up employment in artisanal mining but also to reduce unemployment and improve the welfare of communities affected by mining (Banchirigah and Hilson 2010). Such initiatives include fish harvesting, grass-cutter and snail rearing, livestock and poultry farming and cassava, cocoa, oil palm, pineapple and mushroom cultivation. In addition, some mining companies have established foundations to support community development programmes such as Newmont Ahafo Development Foundation. Empirically, AL programmes in mining communities have provided mixed results and in fact appear not to have had the requisite impact on the targeted community (Carson et al. 2005; Hilson and Banchirigah 2009). This is partly due to the fact that most of the AL programmes were imposed on the people.

The PSIs (garment and textiles, agri-business [cassava and oil palm], and salt industries) aimed at promoting LED through local industrialisation. The PSIs were planned based on a farmer-ownership scheme called the Corporate Village Enterprise (COVE) model. Therefore, the COVE was owned by participants but managed by professionals with industrial experience who were engaged on performance contracts basis (Sam 2002; Tonah 2006). The cassava component of the agri-business was aimed at transforming cassava production from its subsistence nature into a commercially viable agri-business. This will help create significant proceeds internally and through exports, while at the same time tackling rural poverty by bringing rural communities into conventional economic activity (King 2004; Tonah 2006).

Therefore, the Ayensu Starch Company (ASCO) was established at Bawjiase in 2001 and commissioned in 2003 to process cassava into industrial starch. The ASCO was a public-private partnership, with substantial technical and financial assistance from the government (Tonah 2006). As part of its operations, ASCO acquired 35 ha of land to plant high-yielding variety of cassava. Underpinned by the COVE model, the ASCO formed farmer associations—Ayensu Cassava Farmers Association (ACFA)—all over the catchment area of the project and farmers in a vicinity were to be organised into a local branch of ACFA. By 2004, the total membership of ACFA was estimated at 8900 with several branches in Central, Eastern and the Greater Accra Regions of Ghana.

The PSI on cassava was one of the viable LED initiatives in Ghana; however, its impact on the local economy was limited. With initial staff of 325 as well as a number of persons as tractor operators and technicians, the number had reduced to 6 by May 2004 (King 2004; Tonah 2006). Farmers who were initially selling cassava to

ASCO had turned to the local market for higher prices. Other challenges included delays in the payment of staff, poor remuneration, absence of basic working tools and equipment, absence of rudimentary infrastructural facilities, such as transportation to the farms and drinking water, and inadequate government support (see Tonah 2006). These challenges and problems later led to the collapse of the ASCO in 2006. It later resumed operations in 2010 and ceased operations again in December 2011. Even though it has been revived in 2017, ASCO is facing a number of challenges such as frequent breakdown of the processing plant and inability to pay suppliers and workers, making it inefficient.

The PSI on Oil Palm was aimed at restructuring the Ghana Oil Palm Development Association to that of an industrial cluster. Consequently, the government assigned the Oil Palm Research Institute (OPRI) to produce 3 million oil palm seedlings annually for the PSI on Oil Palm. Also, roughly US$3 million was provided to create some 32 nurseries while 13,568 extra hectares of land were brought under cultivation by the contributing groups under the PSI. Indeed, the PSI had supported 60 milling factories to facilitate the establishment of vegetable oil refineries and biodiesel plants (Asante 2012; Sutton and Kpentey 2012). The programme provided technical, financial and material supports to farmers. In spite of the laudable nature of the PSI on Oil Palm, its implementation was limited, ad hoc and rather ineffective (Asante 2012). By 2008, only about 30,000 ha had been put under cultivation due to insufficient funding (Government of Ghana 2009). Indeed, government plans for incentives, investors, interventions, support services, etc. to facilitate the growth and development of its oil palm industry in Ghana had slowed to a halt (Asante 2012).

The PSI on textiles and garments was designed to build a new and internationally competitive garment manufacturing and export industry in Ghana. Strategies such as credit lines were therefore formulated to support micro and medium-sized companies in the textile industry. Indeed, a three-tier strategy was developed by the government to entice existing large-scale textile producers from other countries to relocate their factories to Ghana's export processing zone over a 4-year period. A subsequent selection of 25 high performing Ghanaian garment producers per year was undertaken and was provided with a comprehensive range of services to enable them to produce export-quality garment. Also, about 20 garment companies were set up to take up the production orders sourced from the USA. To achieve these visions, a multi-functional garment village and export processing zone was created to facilitate the implementation process. Also, government through investment, training, technical assistance and capacity building ensured the institution of a vibrant garment industry ready to export on large scale. By the end of 2003, the established companies had employed more than 2500 people while the garment village employed over 8000 indigenous Ghanaians.

The PSI on salt was established in 2003 to thoroughly deal with the constraints, detect and change the industry into a globally competitive one, with superior capacity for the production of salt mainly for the export market (Ghana Export Promotion Council and Commonwealth Secretariat [GEPC and CS] 2009). It was also supposed to help to facilitate the establishment or extension of 30 companies to produce 50,000–100,000 mt per annum based on the COVE model. This was expected to generate jobs for about 50,000 people. Nonetheless, the initiative was subdued by inadequate funds as well as lack of access to land and later the transformation of the industry was collapsed (Mensah and Botchway 2013). In fact, the industry has shown little advancement since 2004 (GEPC and CS 2009).

The practice of LED has not only been the preserve of the government; international development agencies have also been significantly involved. The LED approach of the ILO aims at strengthening the capacity of micro and small-scale enterprises as a means of expanding job opportunities in the informal sector (van Empel 2007). As part of implementing LED in the central and eastern regions of Ghana, ILO established the DA Sub-Committees on Productive and Gainful Employment (SPGE). In each district, the SPGE is made up of 15 members who had received training on decent work, strategic planning, resource mobilisation, advocacy, local governance and gender issues (Grooten 2005; van Empel 2007; Tijmstra 2011). The SPGE provides leadership by informing, coordinating, mobilising and linking stakeholders at the district, national and international levels (Grooten 2005; Tijmstra 2011). It also identifies local potentials and effectively harnesses them for the benefit of all in the district. Evaluation showed that it has helped hundreds of small businesses to improve, grow and expand, raising incomes and creating more and better jobs in the process as well as improve standard of living (van Empel 2007; van Gerwen 2007; Ulrich 2008; Arowolo and Asangalisah 2010; Baisie 2011).

The GIZ introduced its LED version called local and regional economic development (LRED) with the aim of helping small and medium enterprises to expand in order to improve their output and income. GIZ used regional economic round tables and the district local economic development platforms to bring key actors to deliberate, identify, diagnose, design and implement LED initiatives (Akudugu 2013; Akudugu and Laube 2013). The LRED was introduced in selected districts first in Brong Ahafo and later in Ashanti, western, central and northern regions in the form of light industrial zones. The programme provides finance for grid extension, land, advisory services, training and infrastructure for the light industrial zones. Key beneficiaries are micro and small-sized enterprises with high-energy demand such as wood processors, welders, car repairers, metalwork and agro-processing enterprises (Owusu and Newiger-Addy 2012; Akudugu and Laube 2013). To promote and encouraged participation in its light industrial zones, the GIZ uses radio stations to broadcast the purpose and significance of their intervention to local residents (see Owusu and Newiger-Addy 2012).

It is reported that 697 businesses have moved to the light industrial zones, and they have employed 2216 people. These businesses have been able to improve on their productivity leading to increased profits. This is as a result of the lower infrastructure costs, increased use of machinery, efficient use of raw materials and increased patronage (Owusu and Newiger-Addy 2012). However, the light industrial zones have encountered a number of challenges particularly sustainability and extension of the current initiative to other viable alternatives. For instance, after the withdrawal of the GIZ, LED activities have become dormant in the Brekum Municipality, while in other districts, LED initiatives have not gone beyond the establishment of light industrial zones by GIZ (Akurugu 2013; Akurugu and Laube 2013).

In Ghana, the UNDP has engaged the central government, DAs and local communities in its SME projects which seek to enhance peoples' livelihood and community development (Akudugu 2013; Akudugu and Laube 2013). At the local level, the UNDP had previously provided capacity building training and financial support for individuals to start or expand their businesses but in recent times changed such an approach in favour of LED in order for local communities to take ownership of such interventions. By this, the UNDP seeks to promote inclusive growth and address crucial development disparities in Ghana by strengthening economic viability of all districts (UNDP 2011). Indeed, the UNDP has piloted LED scheme under the supervision of the NDPC in seven districts in Ghana (Akudugu 2013; Akudugu and Laube 2013).

It has been widely accepted that the state can no longer be the single provider of goods and services, eliminating poverty and ensuring sustainable development in many developing countries. Hence, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are assuming active and complementary roles in harnessing the potentials of the people for national development (Lekorwe and Mpabanga 2007). NGOs have and continue to work in partnership with the local communities to facilitate local resource mobilisation and economic empowerment of local people (Tanga and Fonchingong 2009). In fact, the number of NGOs in Ghana keeps rising (Adam 2004; Okorley and Nkrumah 2012). Operating in various communities, NGOs in Ghana have embarked on a number of initiatives that have benefited their constituents, even though not christened as LED (Mensah et al. 2017). Clearly, NGOs in Ghana have contributed significantly to the socio-economic development (Dugle et al. 2015).

Community-based organisations (CBOs) have equally helped in the practice of LED in Ghana as they are increasingly accepted as central players in the improvement of rural people. Undoubtedly, CBOs have lesser status and involve in narrow array of activities than NGOs; they nonetheless assume a progressively principal role in a number of crucial development programmes (Opare 2007). Perhaps, they are well placed to deliver local support towards the execution of rural development projects whose achievement requires significant local and community inputs. LED initiatives require funding, and rural banks have played a crucial role in that direction. Till lately, precisely few rural people especially affluent farmers and businessmen had access to credit from commercial banks in Ghana. Therefore, rural banking was introduced in 1976 with several aims including to detect feasible industries in their corresponding areas for investment and development. This clearly typifies the importance of rural banks in LED. Evidence showed that rural banks have provided credit facilities to SMEs, farmers and financed a host of rural development activities in Ghana (Mensah et al. 2013a).

Discussion

This article analyses the policy and practice of LED in Ghana. The analysis showed that whereas Ghana is one of the first countries in the world to have a development plan (Guggisberg's 10-year development plan, 1920–1930), LED policy was alien to the pre-independence and immediate post-independence development plans (Mensah et al. 2017). On one hand, the objective of these development plans does not fit into the characteristics of LED as given by various authors (Blakely 1994; Rodriguez-Pose and Tijmastra 2009) and international organisations (World Bank 2004; ILO 2006). Thus, LED focuses on tailor-made economic and social development strategies by all stakeholders from below to empower local communities and dynamise their resources. However, these development plans were mainly decided by the central government with little or no input from local actors. Nonetheless, they still contain some important issues such as town improvements and diversification of the agricultural sector that are significant for local level development (Mensah et al. 2017).

The period 1985 to the present has seen significant LED policies in Ghana starting with the establishment of the NBSSI as a governmental body for the promotion and development of MSE in both urban and rural areas in Ghana, while the GRATIS project was set up in 1987 to promote rural industrialisation. These institutional arrangements seek to promote local economies and create employment and are considered as LED oriented (Mensah et al. 2013a; Mensah et al. 2017). Real decentralisation that allows for local participation in development planning and implementation started in 1988 through the enactment of the local government law of 1988 with the aim of ensuring genuine local ownership of the development process (Mensah et al. 2017). LED in Ghana had received attention from the 1992 constitution and the local government Act of 1993 (Act 462) and draws financial support from the DACF. Indeed, the NDPC Act (Act 479, 1994) and the National Development Planning (Systems) Act (Act 480, 1994) made it possible for bottom–up development planning with full participation of local communities (Mensah et al. 2017). The PSI policy and LED policy as well as LED operational manual for DAs are significantly important in the discussion of LED policies in Ghana.

Whereas the national LED policy appears to usher Ghana into a policy maturing stage (Mensah et al. 2017), there are a number of issues that need to be addressed for LED policy in Ghana to reach the adolescence stage. First, most DAs in Ghana do not have their LED policy and action plans (Mensah et al. 2017) as happened in well-functioning LED countries like South Africa (Xuza 2007). Similarly, DAs in Ghana have not established economic development committees as proposed by the LED policy. Second, even though DAs are expected and have made effort to integrate LED into their MTDP, LED is still largely planned in the same old structures and patterns for development planning at the district level, making it only a marginal constituent of the DMTDP. Third, there was no explicit provision or arrangement for the adoption and/or promotion of LED in the previous national development plans. Thus, whereas development planning remains one of the main means through which the development intentions of the districts are captured and implemented, all national development and medium-term development plans in Ghana have largely and explicitly neglected LED in them (Akudugu 2013; Mensah et al. 2017).

The GRATIS foundation and NBSSI have practicalised LED by organising a number of tailored training programmes for local residents (Arthur 2007) to equip them with practical skills to run their businesses and sometimes help them establish small-scale businesses (Berman 2003). This also includes financial support to help small-scale business secure machines, tools and equipment to expand their businesses. The REP also practice LED in a similar way by helping local enterprises through promotion, financing, provision of rural technology and infrastructure for rural small-scale enterprises. These approaches adopted by the NBSSI, GRATIS foundation and the REP are contextualised to fit the needs of the local people and often practicalised through training, financial support and building of appropriate technology for rural industries/businesses.

Mining companies in Ghana have also engaged in LED programmes to discourage people from taking up employment in artisanal mining and improve the welfare of communities affected by mining (Newmont Ghana Gold Ltd. 2005; Hilson and Banchirigah 2009; Banchirigah and Hilson 2010). In their assessment of AL programmes in mining communities in Ghana, Hilson and Banchirigah (2009) concluded that these programmes did not yield the intended results not only because of inadequate participation of local residents but also the choice of AL programmes and market issues. This therefore requires rethinking and redesigning of AL programmes in their entirety (Hilson and Banchirigah 2009). In fact, participation is key in programme success especially in the case of AL programmes in the mining sector where ASM benefit more from mining than AL programmes.

The PSIs brought another dynamism to the practice of LED in Ghana. The focus was more on how to harness and process agricultural products into finished products. To broaden the scope, a number of areas were not only considered (salt, cassava, oil palm, garment and textiles) but also adopted the COVE model to the implementation of PSIs (Sam 2002; Tonah 2006; Asante 2012). Whereas the PSIs were laudable and generated a lot of interest, they could not live to their intended purposes and collapsed within few years of implementation. Scholars have attributed the short life of PSIs to absence of basic infrastructural facilities, inadequate government support (Tonah 2006; Asante 2012), politicisation and intra-party political in-fighting (Asante 2012) and insufficient funding (Government of Ghana 2009; Tonah 2006; Asante 2012; Mensah and Botchway 2013). It is therefore important for government to attach the same priority and support to policy implementation in the same way as they did for the formulation. Politicisation and political imperatives should not be allowed to override such innovative programmes aimed at benefiting majority of the people or better still be managed well to avoid their unintended consequences.

International development agencies (e.g. GIZ, UNDP, ILO) and NGOs have also played a significant role in the practice of LED in Ghana. They have used innovative and participatory approaches to pursue LED in Ghana, and this has yielded some benefits to the communities where they operated (Grooten 2005; van Empel 2007; Tijmstra 2011; Akudugu and Laube 2013). What has however been a challenge is the sustainability of the various LED programmes initiated by these organisations. As noted by Akudugu and Laube (2013), after the withdrawal of GIZ, LED activities have become dormant and there have not been an extension of the light industrial zones to other viable alternatives. This is probably due to the approach adopted by these international organisations. Thus, whereas there has been some participation by the local people in the various LED initiatives, international organisations have stronger influence on the choice of local initiative adopted (Akudugu 2013; Mensah et al. 2017).

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

As LED policy and practice in Ghana progresses from infancy to adolescence, it is significant to take into consideration the following suggestions. First, there is the need to ensure that all DAs in Ghana developed LED action plans based on the national LED policy and guideline. These action plans will identify key issues that need to be addressed and aspects that holistically contribute towards a thriving local economy. Thus, LED action plans will set out a vision for economic development in the district, identify key themes that contribute towards achieving the vision and outline more specific strategic directions that together enable prosperous development of the local economy.

Secondly, there should be strong participation and partnership. The successful creation and implementation of LED strategies are dependent on the ability of local authorities to engage a wide array of stakeholders. It must be a collaborative effort of different actors—public, community, business and non-governmental—which are collectively trying to foster conditions favourable for economic and employment growth. In other words, LED is ‘everybody’s business’, including all levels of government, the local communities, NGOs and business people, as it is a cross-cutting issue. Therefore, at the district level, efforts must be made to bring on board all identified groups and association, NGOs, CBOs and community leaders to support the effort of the local government in the planning and implementation of LED. This will also ensure that there is no duplication of programmes and that all resources could be pulled together for maximum use for better results.

Third, there is the need to build sustainability in LED initiatives in Ghana. The analysis of the practice of LED in Ghana showed that they are often short-lived. It is important that efforts are made to sustain LED initiatives embarked on by either local governments or development agencies which can partially be achieved through fostering participation and community ownership of LED initiatives. Thus, this also involves the considerations of the longer term and inter-generational equity of balancing between social, economic and environmental aspects. Again, there is the need to adopt a value chain approach in the practice of LED in Ghana. This is basically a market-oriented approach that examines and links enterprises in a market chain that runs from input-suppliers to final buyers and also the relationships among them. Thus, in implementing LED projects, it is important to ensure that there is a chain and interconnectedness between the various agencies, institutions and actors. Effective cooperation and coordination of activities among actors in a chain is paramount as any case of ‘weak link’ in the chain would jeopardise the competitiveness of the entire value chain. Finally, the politicisation that has engulfed LED initiatives should be minimised. For instance, politicisation has been blamed for the collapse of most of the PSIs especially intra-party conflict.

Conclusion

LED can lead to economic solutions that ‘fit’ the local areas—that is, that build on local assets and strengths, involve local people and build capacity and have greater buy in from the community. Even though Ghana is among the first countries in world to have a development plan, it was not until the 1980s that attention was paid to LED in terms of policy. Since, the 1980s, there have been a number of policy efforts to promote LED in Ghana with the major one being the formulation of the national LED policy and manual. On the other hand, while there was no formal LED policy in Ghana in the pre-independence and immediate post-independent era, LED practice happened in the form of community development where local people were encouraged to voluntarily embark on initiatives that benefited their community. Similarly, since the 1980, a number of LED initiatives have taken place with most of them initiated and funded by central government and international development agencies through local government and NGOs. While LED in Ghana has been around for many years, it is building momentum as local areas look to drive their own economic development and find solutions that make sense where they live. There is therefore the need to help local governments develop their LED action plans to guide them, mobilise all local stakeholders for effective participation, build in value chain and reduce politicisation to ensure sustainable LED.

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