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Original Article

Factors Affecting Youth Involvement in Community Development in the Ho West District of the Volta Region, Ghana

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Abstract

The study examined the factors that affect youth involvement in community development at Kpedze, in the Ho-West District of the Volta Region of Ghana. A mixed method approach was used in conducting the study. Concurrent Nested Strategy design was adopted for the study. Simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used to sample 100 respondents for the study. The study was guided by the Social Systems Theory, which explains youth participation as a product of interactions among family, peer, institutional and socio-economic systems. A three-point Likert scale questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data and analysed using descriptive statistics in which frequencies and percentages were used. Qualitative data was gathered through the use of a semi-structured interview guide and subjected to content analysis using themes developed from the data collected. The findings revealed that family, peer groups, religious institutions and community leadership structures collectively influenced the extent of youth participation in community development activities. It was concluded that the youth are an essential resource for sustainable community development whose level of participation is shaped by interconnected social systems, which thus emphasises the need for inclusive structures that promote their active participation in decision-making and local development processes. The study recommends that the National Youth Authority and advocacy groups reinforce their sensitization programmes in communities on the need for stakeholders to promote full and independent involvement of the youth in community development.

KEYWORDS: youth participation, community development, civic engagement, social systems, local governance, Ghana

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Community development is increasingly understood as a participatory process that depends on the collective efforts of local actors to identify needs, mobilize resources and implement solutions that improve social and economic well-being. Youth are very important to national development since various programmes directed at them by the government at various times give credence to them (Agumagu et al., 2006). Globally, young people constitute a large proportion of the population, making them a critical resource for sustainable development. Beyond their demographic significance, contemporary development literature emphasises that youth participation should extend beyond symbolic inclusion to meaningful engagement in decision-making and leadership processes (OECD, 2020; UNDP, 2022). Studies suggest that active youth engagement is associated with improved innovation, stronger social cohesion and enhanced accountability in community development processes (UNDP, 2022; UNICEF, 2022).

Across global and African contexts, youth participation has gained renewed attention because young people represent a significant demographic group with the energy, creativity and leadership potential required for sustainable community transformation (UNDP, 2022; UNICEF, 2022). In many communities, youths contribute meaningfully through communal labour, sanitation campaigns, health education, advocacy, volunteering and local governance initiatives, making their involvement critical to development outcomes (Olatunji & Duruji, 2021). Afrobarometer surveys conducted across Ghana and other African countries reveal that a substantial proportion of young people express interest in participating in local decision-making but face barriers that limit their actual involvement (Sanny, 2020). These barriers include unemployment, financial constraints, limited access to decision-making spaces, lack of recognition and perceptions that youth contributions are undervalued by community leaders (UNICEF, 2022). Recent studies further highlights that socio-economic pressures like job insecurity and poverty significantly affect youth engagement in voluntary and community-based activities, as young people prioritise livelihood survival over unpaid communal work (ILO, 2022; UNDP, 2021).

In Ghana, youth participation in development has been prioritised within national policy frameworks, particularly through the National Youth Policy (2022–2032), which seeks to promote youth empowerment, civic engagement, employability and inclusive governance (National Youth Authority, 2022). The policy recognises youth as key stakeholders whose participation is essential for achieving local and national development goals. Despite these policy commitments and government intervention to empower youth in civic engagement in Ghana, it appears youth participation in community development remains uneven.

Although several studies including (Adu-Gyamfi, 2013; Agdal et al., 2019; Ile & Boadu, 2018) have examined youth participation in governance and development in Ghana, limited empirical evidence exists on the specific factors influencing youth involvement in community development activities within Kpedze in the Ho West District. Understanding the factors that influence youth involvement in community development is therefore essential for designing inclusive interventions that strengthen participation and maximise development outcomes. This study addresses this gap by examining the socio-economic, cultural and institutional factors that shape youth participation in community development initiatives.

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1.1 Justification of the study

Sustainable community development depends heavily on the active involvement of local people, especially young people, whose energy and social networks can support mobilisation, volunteering, innovation and leadership in community initiatives (OECD, 2020; UNICEF, 2022). In Ghana, this policy expectation is reinforced in the National Youth Policy (2022–2032), which frames youth participation as essential for inclusive governance and local development outcomes (National Youth Authority, 2022). Despite these policy intentions, national evidence suggests that youth participation in civic and community spaces is uneven, partly because socio-economic pressures such as unemployment and limited opportunities can reduce young people's availability for community activities (Torsu, 2023; UNICEF, 2022). Recent Ghana-based research also shows that where local governance structures do not create practical and accessible avenues for youth participation, young people's involvement in decision-making and local development planning becomes limited (Titigah et al., 2023).

This study is justified because the determinants of youth involvement differ across contexts, and district-level realities often shape participation more than national policies. Empirical work in Ghana indicates that youth groups can contribute substantially to community development when they are organised and supported, but their participation is still affected by education, resources, leadership relations and local opportunity structures (Issaka et al., 2022). In the Ho-West District, recent community engagement initiatives in Kpedze demonstrate the importance of participation platforms while raising questions about the extent and quality of youth involvement. Despite these planning efforts, little empirical evidence exists regarding how such contextual factors specifically shape youth participation at the community level. However, there is limited empirical documentation that specifically explains the factors shaping youth involvement in community development in Kpedze, creating a clear local evidence gap. This study therefore seeks to examine the factors affecting youth involvement in community development activities at Kpedze in the Ho-West District, providing context-specific evidence that can inform the District Assembly, youth groups and relevant youth-focused institutions in strengthening participation strategies.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Social Systems Theory

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is social systems theory. Social systems theory explains youth involvement in community development as an outcome shaped through interconnected social structures, where family, peers, schools, religious bodies, local leadership and district-level governance interact to enable or constrain participation (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022; Gal, 2017). The social systems theory emphasizes that young people are part of various systems that are dynamically connected to the environment of which they are part (Anfara & Mertz, 2006). Thus, the youth impact these systems and they are also impacted by them. According to Garfat, (2003); Shaffer and Kipp (2009), there are various types of systems: (1) Intrapersonal system according to these scholars, involves factors within a person that have an influence on them, e.g., attitude, perception, emotion, cognitive, competencies and skills. The development of these factors which are imbedded in humans are triggered by actions of the environment as a result

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of education or socialization. The youth can actively contribute to support the system for acquisition of skills; as well require skills as individuals to regulate the relations in order for development to occur. (2) Interpersonal or micro or socio-cultural systems; This refers to the institutional systems that individuals interact with. These institutions are family, peer group, work group and church. It normally involves patterns of activities, roles, interpersonal relations which an individual has with these systems. Through consistent exposure to these systems, through informal interactions, they impact the lives of individuals. It therefore shapes their way of thinking or conducting themselves. There is therefore the need to always strengthen the relationship between the individuals (youth especially) and these systems. (3) Socio-economic or macro systems; These are systems that impact the well-being of the youth. They entail economic conditions, social conditions, political changes, national issues and environmental concerns that have impact on the growth of the young people. Normally, these are external factors in the environment that the youth may have no control over. Largely, these systems interconnect to positively or adversely affect the activeness of the youth in their various communities.

Social Systems Theory is relevant to the present study as it views the youth as members of interconnected social systems, including the family, peer groups, educational institutions, religious organisations, community structures and the broader socio-cultural environment. It argues that youth participation is not determined solely by individual characteristics but is influenced by the interactions and relationships within these systems. The theory is therefore useful for understanding the complex and multidimensional factors that affect youth involvement in community development.

1.2.2 Youth Engagement

Youth engagement is therefore influenced through repeated exchanges between young people and their environments, including social norms, opportunity structures and power relations that determine whether youth are invited, trusted and listened to in community decision-making spaces (Gal, 2017; Ramey, 2017). Previous studies have shown that youth civic engagement is influenced by the availability of social support and family-based civic socialization. Dolan (2022) argues that supportive relationships within families, schools and communities provide the social resources necessary for civic participation. Similarly, Belay and Tefera (2023) found that adolescents who experience higher levels of parental civic socialization are more actively engaged in civic activities. Furthermore, Fliaguine et al. (2024) demonstrated that parental civic participation promotes youths' future civic engagement, whereas negative parental beliefs about civic involvement may constrain such participation.

Odijie and Imoro (2021) posit that competitive clientelism in Ghana influences patterns of community participation by linking access to resources and development opportunities to political networks. As a result, individuals and groups may be motivated to participate in community activities based on anticipated political or material gains rather than purely civic considerations. Evidence on youth-adult partnership further shows that youth participation becomes more meaningful when adults share power, provide mentorship and create safe spaces for youth voice, rather than limiting youth roles to attendance or labour (Richards-Schuster & Timmermans, 2017; Zeldin et al., 2014). This framing fits the Kpedze context because youth involvement is likely

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shaped through linked systems, including household expectations, peer dynamics, educational experiences, livelihood pressures and the openness of community leadership and local governance processes to youth voice and leadership (Titigah et al., 2023).

1.2.3 Community Development

Community development literature describes "community" as more than shared location, highlighting relational ties, shared identity, repeated interaction and collective responsibility for local well-being (Carlon, 2021; Serbeh et al., 2023). Community development is widely defined as a participatory process that strengthens local capacity, builds collective agency and supports people to identify needs, mobilise resources and implement solutions through inclusive structures (Carlon, 2021). Similarly, participation is emphasized as a core mechanism through which communities sustain improvements, since inclusive involvement improves legitimacy, coordination and shared ownership of outcomes (Serbeh et al., 2023). Research also indicates that youth contributions are robust when participation includes leadership roles and shared decision-making, rather than limiting youth involvement to mobilisation or implementation after decisions are already made (Augsberger et al., 2024; Ramey, 2017). Ghana-based studies on participation similarly suggest that local governance and community structures can support development when residents perceive channels as accessible and responsive, but participation weakens when communication is poor, roles are unclear, or citizens experience exclusion (Serbeh et al., 2023; Titigah et al. 2023). However, youth participation is also affected by adult gatekeeping and institutional culture, where youth may be perceived as learners rather than capable co-leaders, which can marginalise youth voice even in settings that claim inclusiveness (Richards-Schuster & Timmermans, 2017; Sala-Torrent & Planas-Lladó, 2024).

Existing studies suggest that youth participation is influenced by four broad categories of factors: institutional factors, socio-cultural factors, educational factors and socio-economic factors. The following review discusses each category in relation to community development participation. Empirical work on youth councils and local governance shows that youth engagement improves when structures include clear mandates, resources, feedback loops and opportunities for youth influence on priorities and budgets (Augsberger et al., 2024). In Ghana and comparable contexts, youth participation in local governance is often shaped through socio-cultural expectations and political dynamics that affect who speaks, who leads and who is considered legitimate in decision-making spaces (Titigah et al., 2023). Related evidence also shows that civic participation is increasingly shaped through digital engagement and youth-led organising, which can broaden participation opportunities but can still face barriers linked to access, legitimacy and institutional responsiveness (Ghadiri Khanaposhtani et al., 2022).

Moreover, education and skills influence participation because community development increasingly demands communication ability, confidence, leadership competence and technical skills for planning, monitoring and collaboration (Ghadiri Khanaposhtani et al., 2022). Studies linking youth participation and positive youth development outcomes suggest that participation builds competence, confidence and contribution when youth roles involve real responsibility and supportive adult partnership (Jekamo et al., 2025 ; Ramey, 2017). Research also shows that skill-building pathways such as mentorship, civic learning and youth-adult partnership training

strengthen youth capacity for meaningful participation, especially when youth are included early in planning rather than added later for implementation (Richards-Schuster & Timmermans, 2017; Zeldin et al., 2014). Evidence from community participation programmes similarly indicates that youth participation becomes more sustained when institutions support youth voice with practical tools and supportive relationships, rather than relying on motivation alone (Grace et al., 2024; Sala-Torrent & Planas-Lladó, 2024). However, Kuperus and Asante (2021) argue that institutional commitments and organizational responsibilities can limit individuals' participation in community development activities. These influences can shape the extent to which youth prioritize participation in community development activities relative to other competing commitments.

Financial constraints and the opportunity costs of volunteering remain significant barriers because participation often requires transport, time away from income-generating activities and contributions such as dues or materials, which can discourage consistent involvement (Njenga et al., 2024). Njenga et al. (2024) further stated that access to finance and information shapes engagement, especially where youth face insecure livelihoods and limited institutional support. Aside access to finance, youth unemployment and underemployment can further reduce participation by increasing economic pressure and encouraging migration or informal work patterns that make sustained community engagement difficult (ILO, 2022; UN DESA, 2020). Smith et al. (2022) and Dadzie et al. (2020) highlight the influence of economic factors on civic participation, arguing that financial pressures and livelihood demands can limit sustained engagement in community development activities. Their studies suggest that young people are more likely to prioritize income-generating opportunities over voluntary community involvement, especially in contexts characterized by economic hardship. Conversely, Gyan and Mfoafo-M'Carthy (2022) claim that persistent patriarchal norms, traditional gender roles and institutional barriers restrict women's active participation in community development and local governance in rural Ghana. Similarly, Patnaik (2021) found that women's participation is shaped by local gender dynamics, social recognition, and household power relations, leading to varying levels of engagement across communities.

Evidence from Ghana-focused participation studies argues that youth engagement also depends on whether community and local governance structures provide credible pathways for youth voice, leadership growth and tangible returns such as skills development and recognition (Serbeh et al., 2023; Titigah et al., 2023). Schooling and structured learning environments can strengthen civic skills, efficacy and participation pathways among young people (Wray Lake et al., 2020; Martini et al., 2023). In effect, the literature supports the view that youth involvement in community development is produced through interacting systems of recognition, institutional design, skills and education and socio-economic conditions, which provides a solid basis for examining the specific factors affecting youth participation in Kpedze (Gal, 2017; Serbeh et al., 2023).

The reviewed literature suggests that youth participation is influenced by multiple interacting factors including education, socio-economic status, gender relations, peer networks, family influence, institutional support and cultural norms. However, the relative influence of these factors varies across contexts. Consequently, there remains a need for context-specific studies to understand how these factors operate within local communities such as Kpedze.

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2.0 METHODS

2.1 Research Approach

A mixed methods approach was adopted because it supports a fuller understanding of complex social issues through the integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence, while also strengthening interpretation through triangulation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). This approach facilitates a richer and more nuanced understanding of factors affecting youth involvement at Kpedze by combining numerical evidence with detailed contextual explanations.

2.2 Research Design

The study used a concurrent nested strategy design, where one dataset plays a supportive role in explaining or enriching the other and integration occurs at the analysis stage through comparison and interpretation of results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

2.3 Study Area

The study was conducted at Kpedze, a town in the Ho-West District of the Volta Region of Ghana. It lies within the Volta highlands and known for its predominantly agricultural activities and strong communal traditions. The town is accessible by road and serves as an important local centre for surrounding communities. The community is characterised by strong social and cultural institutions, including traditional leadership, religious organisations, youth groups and community-based associations.

2.4 Population

The target population comprised youth and opinion leaders in the Ho-West District, while the accessible population consisted of youth drawn from youth groups and opinion leaders within Kpedze community who were available and willing to participate in the study (Etikan et al., 2016; Pole & Lampard, 2002). The participants were selected from the four main suburbs of Kpedze community, namely Awlime, Salama, Todze and Anoe to ensure broad representation across the study area.

2.5 Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

A combination of simple random sampling and purposive sampling was used. The youth were selected from youth group meetings at the four major suburbs in Kpedze community. Simple random technique was used to sample the youth because it utilises equal probability selection method. Simple random sampling was applied to select 75 youth respondents to reduce selection bias and improve representativeness of youth views within the community (Taherdoost, 2016). Purposive sampling was used to select 25 opinion leaders, comprising 4 chiefs, 1 District Chief

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Executive, 4 church leaders, 10 parents, 2 assembly members and 4 youth leaders (Patrons). A purposive selection of these opinion leaders and stakeholders was vital due to the fact that several key respondents and groups such as local authorities and youth's parents, church leaders, chiefs had a high level of understanding about youth involvement in their community. The total sample consisted of 100 participants, comprising 75 youth respondents who completed questionnaires and 25 opinion leaders who participated in interviews.

2.6 Data Collection Instruments

Qualitative data were gathered through the use of a semi-structured interview guide whereas quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire. A three-point Likert scale questionnaire was constructed and designed for the youth in Kpedze community to solicit information based on the research question. The questionnaire and interview guide were reviewed by experts in the field to ensure validity. To strengthen trustworthiness, the interview guide was aligned with the research objective, reviewed by experts, consistently applied and maintained an audit trail throughout the study.

The reliability of the questionnaire was established through pilot testing in the Agotime-Ziope district which shares similar socio-demographic characteristics as the Ho-West district. The pilot testing involved twenty respondents (consisting of 15 youths and 5 opinion leaders). A Cronbach Alpha reliability value of 0.78 was attained which clearly shows the instrument was adequate to be used for undertaking the substantive study (Surucu & Maslakci, 2020).

2.7 Data Analysis Procedures

The qualitative data was analysed using content analysis, where responses were coded and grouped into themes aligned with the research question and interpreted alongside the quantitative findings (Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021). The quantitative data analysis employed descriptive statistical methods, specifically, frequencies and percentages. Although the field data were collected in 2019, recent literature was incorporated to situate the findings within current scholarly and policy debates on youth participation and community development.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Prior to conducting the study, an introductory letter was obtained from the Social Studies Department in the University of Education, Winneba. Verbal consent was sought from the respondents before conducting the interviews while written informed consent was obtained before respondents completed the questionnaires. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were used to replace participants real names. Information provided by respondents was kept confidential and utilized exclusively for the purpose of the study. Voluntary participation was encouraged and respondents were free to opt out from the study at any point in time.

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3.0 RESULTS

Table1 presents demographic characteristics of respondents. For the purposes of this study, demographic characteristics consist of age, gender, educational level, occupation and marital level.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (Youth) (n = 75)

Characteristics	Number	Percentage(%)
Age		
Below 20 years	10	13
Between 20-25 years	30	40
Between 26-30 years	20	27
Between 31-35 years	15	20
Gender		
Male	30	40
Female	45	60
Educational Level		
No Education	5	7
Basic Education	12	16
Senior High Education	28	37
Diploma	20	27
Bachelor's degree	10	13
Occupation		
Unemployed	20	27
Student	14	19
Farming	15	20
Trading	15	20
Others	11	14
Marital Status		
Married	28	37
Single	42	56
Divorced	3	4
Separated	2	3

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The data in Table 1 shows that 30(40%) of the respondents were between 20-25 years, 20(27%) were between 26-30 years, 15(20%) were between the ages of 31-35 and 10(13%) were below 20 years. Also, 60% of the respondents were females while males constituted 40% of the sample. The data suggests that the study is largely represented by youths aged 20-30 years. Therefore, findings from the study may particularly reflect the experiences and perspectives of this age group.

From the Table, it can further be seen that 28(37%) of the respondents had Senior High Education (SSCE/WASSCE), 20(27%) had Diploma, 12(16%) had Basic Education, 10(13%) had acquired bachelor's degrees while 5(7%) did not attain any education. It is clear that the majority of the youth had, at least, acquired some level of education which is enough for them to be able to function effectively in community development.

Additionally, the data indicate that 15(20%) of the respondents are engaged in trading, 15(20%) in farming, 20(27%) were unemployed, 14(19%) were students with 11(14%) engaged in other occupations such as teaching and nursing. This implies that most of the sampled youth have varied occupational variables which are enough determinants of their engagements in community activities. On marital status, it can be seen from the data that 42(56%) of the respondents were single, 28(37%) were married, 3(4%) divorced while 2(3%) were separated.

Factors affecting youth involvement in community development activities

A list of statements perceived to be factors were given to respondents to rate using a three-point Likert scale, 3=agree, 2 =disagree, 1= not sure. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Factors influencing youth involvement in community development activities

	Responses (%)		
Factor statements	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
Education encourages me to associate with others	87	9	4
Educated youth participate in community development.	95	5	0
Less educated youth are discriminated against in community development	93	6	1
Educated youth appreciate community work more than less educated	87	10	3
High level of educational qualification is required for community work	88	10	2
Age of the youth influence their participation in community work	75	20	5
Marital status influence youth involvement in community work	70	20	10

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Male youth better participate in community development	80	20	0
Motivation affects youth participation in community development.	87	10	3
My role in the church will not allow participation in community development activities	87	9	4
My parents and friends influence participation in community work	93	7	0
Lack of Job/Money affects youth participation in community work	93	5	2
Women are not allowed in major decision-making processes	27	70	3
Political influence on youth participation in community development	87	9	4

From the data in Table 2, it can be seen that 87% of youth agreed that education encourages them to associate with others which eventually motivates them to interact with them in order to participate in community-based projects for development. On the other hand, 9% disagreed and 4% were not sure. Additionally, 95% of youth agreed that well-educated youth played an active role in community development activities, whereas 5% disagreed. The data also shows that 93% agree that the less educated experience exclusion from community activities. With only 6% disagreeing while 1% were not sure. 87% of respondents agreed that educated youth were inclined to appreciate community work while 13% disagreed.

On higher level of education required for community work, relatively, higher number of respondents 88% agreed to the whereas 12% disagreed. Also, with regards to age, the established that majority 75% of the respondents agreed that age was an indicating factor in participating in community activities whiles 25% disagreed. In relation to marital status as a factor with the propensity of influencing the youth participation in community-based activity, majority 70% agreed, while 20% disagreed and 10% were not sure.

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Gender and motivational factors that influence participation in community development activities

Table 3: Gender and Motivational factors that influence Participation in Community Development Activities

Statement	Agree		Disagree	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Male youth better participate in community development.	60	80	15	20
Motivation affects youth participation in community development.	65	86.7	10	13.3
Total	**75**	**100**		

On gender and motivational factors as indicators responsible for youth participation in community development activities, the data in Table 3 show that 60(80%) respondents agreed that male youth participate better in community development, while 15(20%) respondents disagreed. Relatedly, 65(86.7%) respondents agreed that motivation affects youth participation in community development, while 10(13.3%) respondents disagreed.

Table 4: Women are not allowed in Major Decision-Making Processes

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	20	26.7
Disagree	55	73.3
Total	**75**	**100**

Table 4 shows that 55(73.3%) disagreed that women are not allowed in major decision-making, while 20(26.7) agreed, suggesting perceived inclusion among most respondents.

Table 5: My Parents and Friends influence Participation in Community Work

Statement	Agree		Disagree	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Parents influence	70	93.3	5	6.7
Friends influence	55	73.3	20	26.7

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Table 5 shows that 70(93.3%) of the respondents agreed that parents influence their participation, while 5(6.7%) disagreed. Friends also appeared influential, with 55(73.3%) agreeing and 20(26.7%) disagreeing.

Lack of job/money affects youth participation in community work

Some other socio-economic factors the researchers sought to explore were effect of jobs and money on youth participation in community work. The results are presented in the table below.

Table6: Lack of Job/Money affects Youth Participation in Community Work

Statement	Agree		Disagree	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Lack of job	70	93.3	5	6.7
Lack of money	58	77.3	17	22.7

On lack of job and money, Table 6 shows that 70(93.3%) agreed lack of job affects participation and 58(77.3%) agreed that lack of money affects participation.

Table 7: Political influence on youth Participation in Community Development

Responses	Frequency	Percentage %
Agree	65	86.7
Disagree	7	9.3
Not sure	3	4
Total	75	100

Regarding politics, 65(86.7%) agreed that politics influence youth involvement while 7(9.3%) of the respondents disagreed to the assertion that politicians influence them to involve in community development activities. The qualitative findings largely corroborated the quantitative results and provided deeper insights into how the identified factors influence youth participation in community development activities.

Influence of Level of Education on youth Involvement in Community Development

For more and in-depth analysis, the researchers, sought from the opinion leaders, the influence the level of education of youth has on their involvement in community development programmes. Ten (10) opinion leaders constituting the majority indicated that education is needed in most cases in their engagements. According to them,

> *"one's level of education determines the programme you are engaged in".* They further stated that, *some platforms required competence in both written and*

> *spoken English language which therefore implies that those engaged in it need some appreciable level of education.*
>
> Opinion Leader 20 said that, *"for the avoidance of embarrassment, most youth avoid such platforms".*

These responses confirmed the quantitative data that majority (87%) of educated youth were inclined to appreciating community activities. Again, it is corroborated in another response from the youth which stated in a significant number, (88%) that high educational qualification played a pivotal role in community development.

When requested to state in clear term what in his view affect youth participation in community development, Opinion Leader 5 stated;

> *"Most of the engagements from the Assembly to the community required some form of educational qualifications. It is increasingly evident that without basic literacy and numeracy skills- thus at least Senior High School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), it will be difficult to engage in any formal community activities."*

Other factors which influence the choice of the youth

The main reason that led to the responses was to explore in-depth view from the respondents what they think influence the youth most to participate in community development activities. From the responses gathered from the respondents, three categories of influence emerged: Peer influence, parental influence and religious leader influence.

Influence by peers

Majority of the respondents indicated that most of the youth were invited by friends to join youth groups which aims were to carry out development activities such as sanitation, erecting canopies, digging of graves etc. The respondents indicated from the interview that these peers were their friends from junior or senior high schools as well as playmates.

> Respondents indicated that most of the youth were invited into the group by their peers who were either already members of the group or knew more about its activities.
>
> Opinion Leader 22 reported that
>
> *Some of them explained that they joined in order to be in constant contact with their peers and that should their friends leave the group one day that may affect their membership as well.*

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In youth leaders' responses to whether or not youth in the community enjoy working with peers than the elderly. The responses are that most of the youth indicated that working with peers is more comfortable. To them (youth), environment with elderly people is always tensed.

> *You have to be careful about what you say; that is why it is difficult to associate with the elderly. You are sure of getting a strong reprimand when you slip slightly.* (Opinion Leader 24)

From the youth leaders, most of the membership results they get over the years, were basically referrals.

Opinion Leader 23 stated that;

> *"There is a portion on membership card that seeks from the members to indicate how they heard of the group's activities. Majority of members indicated "referral by friends".*

Opinion Leader 23further stated that;

> *Most of them enjoy working in peers than assigning them to elderly. What they need is relaxed environment to work. Their contribution is effective when you allow them to do it with peers.*

Opinion Leader 25 expressed that;

> *"…one thing that was obvious throughout is that a new member is always introduced by a friend…."*.

The interview data consistently showed that peers serve as the primary recruitment channel into youth groups. Youth leaders reported that most new members joined through referrals from friends, classmates, or existing members, suggesting that peer networks play a central role in shaping participation. This finding validates the quantitative data of (73.3%) of the youth agreeing that their peers influence them in participating in community activities.

Influence by Parents

The view of parents about their wards' participation in community development became very significant in determining the influence they have on their wards. Most of the parents in response to whether or not they see the need for their wards to engage in community activities responded in affirmative. According to them, the development of the community is a concerted effort which their wards cannot be exempted from. This finding is consistent with the quantitative results, which indicate that parental influence plays a significant role in shaping youth participation in community development activities.

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Opinion Leader 12 stated that:

"As for this community, it can only develop, if we all play our parts including our children. Therefore, I would always ensure that my children engage in some activities that will help bring development".

Opinion Leader 16 reported that:

"Development of this community is the work of both young and adults including my wards. I always encourage them to participate effectively but not in political activities. They (political activities) have tendencies of destroying family ties if care is not taken".

Like the above responses, majority of the respondents agreed that there is a need to allow their wards to participate in community work.

Areas of community work parents sanctioned or otherwise

Opinion Leader 14 expressed that:

"I would want my wards to do everything except politics. These days, politics become avenue for insults, backbiting and even destroying family ties. I always encourage my wards to stay away from politics in order to maintain their reputation and that of the family".

Opinion Leader 10 narrated that:

"Chieftaincy issues, political issues are the areas I do not encourage my wards to venture into. Rather, communal labour, town hall meetings which focus on education, I encourage them to go. These days, there are social groups in the town, that I influence them to be part".

The responses point to the fact that parents play significant role in their ward's participation in community development activities. Majority of the parents stated activities such as communal labour, educational campaign as areas they discussed with their wards to engage. Interestingly, parents sanctioned the youth from involving in politics however, the quantitative data shows that politics highly influence youth participation in their community, with (87%) of the youth agreeing to this assertion.

Opinion Leader 1 stated that:

"I feel that the youth are more energetic to carry out some activities in the community than the elderly. With fresh blood in them, they are able to mobilize

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themselves for clean-up exercises, erecting/mounting canopies and digging graves".

The finding reveals that strenuous activities are reserved for the youth. According to them, the youth have energy to get such activities done with ease. Another striking revelation was that; youth exuberance sometimes makes the youth to go extreme. Eight (8) parents indicated that the youth ought to seek the counsel of their parents whenever they have to take decisions that affect the lives of the entire society. In this case, according to them (parents), it will be difficult to leave some major decisions in the hands of the youth.

Influence by Religious Leaders

Opinion Leader 6 stated:

"I believe, activities in the church make our committed youth already engaged. Church activities do not happen only on Sundays. Sometimes, our youth work throughout the week especially when we have special programmes".

Opinion Leader 7expressed that:

"Well, we do not exclude them from any community activities. The church and the community work together".

Similarly, Opinion Leader 8 said:

"Naturally, our committed youth who had already learnt such doctrines will hesitantly approach certain activities in the community. Again, hmmm, when our programmes conflict with certain activities in the community, they may show loyalty to the church than the community. But let me tell you the church does a lot of community development- from clean up exercises, social interventions- look at a lot of mission schools in the community".

While church involvement may reduce participation in some community activities because of competing commitments, religious institutions themselves often contribute substantially to community development.

4.0 DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the various factors that influence youth involvement in community development and how these factors shape patterns of participation among young people. These results are discussed in relation to existing empirical literature. The qualitative findings largely corroborated the quantitative results and provided deeper insights into how the identified factors influence youth participation in community development activities.

4.1 Education, age and marital status influence youth participation

The findings indicate that education facilitates social interaction, which may create opportunities for participation in community activities. This finding concurs with evidence that schooling and structured learning environments can strengthen civic skills, efficacy and participation pathways among young people (Wray Lake et al., 2020; Martini et al., 2023). The finding that higher educational qualifications facilitate participation in community development activities aligns with research showing that educational attainment often predicts civic participation because it improves access to information, networks and leadership opportunities (Wray Lake et al., 2020). The data also shows that less educated youth experience exclusion from some community activities concurs with findings from Ghanaian local governance settings where educational level can act as informal gatekeeping mechanisms that reduce inclusion of less educated youth in community decision spaces (Titigah et al., 2023). The finding is in harmony with social system theory that it encompasses combine effort of attitude, perceptions, skills and competencies that influence the youth to behave in a certain manner- inactiveness/activeness in community development (Garfat, 2003; Shaffer & Kipp, 2009).

The findings reveal that age and marital status influence participation, suggesting that changing responsibilities and social roles shape willingness and availability for community work, is consistent with literature on how youth transitions and adult role demands can reduce or redirect civic involvement (Wray Lake et al., 2020). High agreement that motivation, parents and friends and lack of job or money affect participation also concur with studies linking civic engagement to social support, family civic socialization and practical resource constraints (Dolan, 2022; Belay & Tefera, 2023). These findings demonstrate that social support is a critical enabler for youth civic engagement.

4.2 Gender and motivational factors that influence participation in community development activities

On gender and motivational factors as indicators responsible for youth participation in community development activities, the findings reveal that male youth participate better in community development. This claim is adequately supported by recent evidence that socio-cultural norms and gendered expectations can shape participation in community and public activities, often placing additional constraints on female youth through household responsibilities and limited inclusion in leadership spaces (Serbeh et al., 2023). However, the finding indicates that women are not excluded from major decision-making processes. Their responses suggest that women are generally perceived to be included and given opportunities to participate in important community decisions. This reflects a positive perception of women's involvement in leadership and governance activities, highlighting a growing recognition of gender inclusivity in decision-making

structures. Although qualitative evidence from rural Ghana highlights persistent patriarchal norms and structural barriers that can restrict women's participation in community development processes (Gyan & Mfoafo-M'Carthy, 2022), indicating a possible difference in local norms or respondent perceptions in this study context. The finding therefore suggests that while male youth may be perceived as more active or prominent in certain forms of community development participation, women may still have access to and participate in formal decision-making processes. These findings capture different dimensions of gender participation in community development.

In addition, the result demonstrates that motivation affects youth participation in community development. This finding supports current research showing that youth engagement is strongly influenced by motivation linked to recognition, perceived relevance and opportunities for meaningful contribution (Jekamo et al., 2025).

4.3 Parents and friends' influence

The findings of the study demonstrate that parents influence youth participation in community development. This is supported by Fliaguine et al. (2024) that parental civic engagement can shape youth civic attitudes and behaviours, since parents often model community involvement and transmit beliefs that either encourage or discourage participation. Furthermore, friends appeared influential, aligns with the argument that social support and social capital provide pathways into youth civic action, because supportive relationships can strengthen confidence, belonging and willingness to engage in community affairs (Dolan, 2022). Findings on parents and friends align with the social systems theory (Gal, 2017), that influence of family, peer group (friends/mates), among others are interconnected systems that cumulatively influence the youth to participate in community development.

4.4 Influence of lack of jobs/money affects youth participation in community work

The results of this study reveal that socio-economic or macro systems largely affect youth involvement in community development. This finding affirms social systems theory that macrosystems have tendency of changing the attitude of humans to behave in a certain way (Shaffer & Kipp, 2009). This finding is consistent with studies indicating that unemployment and financial hardship can reduce young people's capacity to participate in community activities (Torsu et al., 2023). The findings also concur with literature on volunteering and livelihoods which shows that economic constraints and expectations of remuneration can limit sustained engagement, especially where young people must prioritise income-generating activities (Smith et al., 2022; Dadzie et al., 2020).

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4.5 Political influence on youth Participation in Community Development

The study reveals that political factors play a significant role in shaping the level of youth involvement in community development activities. This finding affirms the systems theory whereby political influence has impact on the well-being of the youth when it comes to community development. The findings suggest that political affiliations, interests and dynamics can influence young people's participation in development initiatives. This indicates that politics is an important determinant of youth contribution to developmental progress of their communities. This mirrors the analysis of competitive clientelism in Ghana, where the distribution of resources and opportunities through political networks shape community participation incentives and local development priorities (Odijie & Imoro, 2021).

4.6 Influence by Religious Leaders

The finding highlights that religious leaders play a significant role in promoting community development through their active contributions. However, religious activities were among the factors that interfere with youth involvement in community development and the leaders' confirmations reinforce the view that institutional obligations can compete with community engagements (Kuperus & Asante, 2021). Thus, religion may simultaneously facilitate and constrain youth participation depending on the context. This is consistent with the study's finding that churches shape youth social networks, obligations and messages about civic life and engagement, which can influence how youth allocate time and decide what activities to prioritise. The findings further suggest that religious commitments influence the extent to which some youth participate in community activities. This finding highlights Serbeh et al. (2023) observation that religious institutions can either facilitate participation or reduce involvement when church programmes compete with community engagements. The findings support Social Systems Theory by demonstrating that youth participation is shaped by multiple interconnected systems. Family influence, peer networks, educational attainment, religious commitments and socio-economic conditions collectively affected the willingness and ability of youth to engage in community development activities.

4.7 Practical Implications

The findings suggest that educational attainment enhances confidence, communication skills and opportunities for participation. Stakeholders should therefore promote educational access and civic education initiatives.

Community mobilisation programmes should actively engage parents because parental support appears to influence youth willingness to participate. This finding suggests that interventions aimed at increasing youth involvement should not focus solely on the youth but also incorporate strategies that strengthen parental awareness and support. Programme implementers, community

leaders and policymakers can organise parent-focused sensitisation campaigns, community forums and educational workshops to highlight the benefits of youth participation in community initiatives.

Youth development programmes should utilise peer networks and youth-led groups as recruitment and mobilisation mechanisms. Additionally, peer-led outreach activities, mentorship programmes and youth advocacy campaigns can increase awareness, reduce barriers to participation and encourage broader youth engagement.

Community leaders should collaborate with religious institutions to minimise scheduling conflicts and promote complementary youth engagement activities. Jointly organised activities and coordinated programmes can help create a supportive environment that enables the youth to balance their religious commitments with active involvement in community development, ultimately enhancing participation and strengthening community outcomes.

Youth participation programmes should consider livelihood support initiatives, as unemployment and financial hardship may reduce participation opportunities.

4.8 Conclusions

The study concludes that the youth constitute an essential resource for community development, whose level of participation is influenced by interconnected social systems, which thus highlights the need for deliberate efforts to create inclusive structures that support meaningful youth engagement in local development processes.

4.9 Limitations

The study employed a concurrent nested strategy design and was conducted in four major suburbs of Kpedze in the Volta Region of Ghana. Although this approach facilitated an in-depth and context-specific examination of the phenomenon under study, the findings cannot be generalized to all youth in Ghana. Future research should therefore extend the geographical coverage and utilize larger sample sizes to improve the transferability of the findings. Another limitation of the study is that the field data were collected in 2019, as circumstances and policy may have changed since then, recent studies were used to relate the findings to current scholarly and policy discussions.

4.10 Recommendations

From the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made;

1. The National Youth Authority and advocacy groups should reinforce their sensitization programmes in the rural areas on the need to allow full and independent involvement of the youth in community development activities and decision making. This would help address the finding that suggests that youth were not seen as experienced and mature enough to take some decisions entirely.

2. Opinion leaders, district authorities and development partners should establish educational support schemes and skills-development programmes to enhance the capacity of young people to participate effectively in community development activities.
3. District Assemblies, community leaders and youth-focused organisations should strengthen existing youth groups and create structured opportunities for youth participation in local development planning and implementation.
4. Community development stakeholders should use peer-led mobilisation strategies because peer networks significantly influence youth participation.
5. Community sensitisation programmes should involve parents to encourage positive attitudes toward youth participation.
6. Community leaders should collaborate with religious institutions to coordinate activities and increase opportunities for youth participation.
7. Employment and livelihood support programmes should be integrated into youth development initiatives to address financial barriers to participation.

DECLARATION

Data Availability: The datasets generated and analysed during the current study are not publicly available. However, de-identified and anonymized data may be made available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author. Requests will be assessed based on ethical, legal and academic integrity standards.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest related to the conception, execution, analysis, or publication of this study. No external commercial, institutional or personal influences affected the research process.

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