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An Assessment of the Effectiveness of Public Accountability Mechanisms in Primary Education Service Delivery in Lower Local Governments: A Case of Bukedea Town Council, Bukedea District.

The study set out to assess the extent to which public accountability mechanisms in education service delivery are effective in Bukedea Town Council of Bukedea district. The major concern was that while there are many known public accountability mechanisms such as public meetings, display of public information, the media and demand driven mechanisms such as protests and petitions, they seem largely ineffective in local governments. Meetings are irregular and are not well facilitated even when they take place, public information is not regularly displayed and when displayed it is not accurate and up-to-date and the media has not been utilised to provide information to the public. The objectives of the study, therefore, were to: establish whether those in authority in Bukedea Town Council provide sufficient and timely information about resources, plans and service delivery in education to citizens; assess whether the Town Council (TC) authorities provide citizens opportunities to participate in decision making through consultation and debate on education issues on a systematic and inclusive basis and; examine whether there has been any improvement in education service delivery in the TC since being carved out. The study that was both quantitative and qualitative was conducted at the TC and school levels. Views and information were obtained from elected councillors, TC residents, staff of the TC, head teachers and SMC chairpersons of schools in the TC and opinion leaders. Methods used were questionnaires, focus group discussions, unstructured key informant interviews, desk reviews and observations. Qualitative techniques were used to analyse data as it was being collected while quantitative data were analysed after completing data collection.

The general finding of the study is that public accountability mechanisms in this TC are not very effective at both TC and school levels. While there are attempts to display public information, it is not accessible to the general public, complete and up to date. Public meetings such as budget conferences at the TC level are attended on invitation – not open to the general public. At school level, there are good attempts to regularly hold meetings of SMCs and PTA executive committees and parents' Annual General Meetings (AGMs), but these meetings, especially AGMs are very poorly attended and SMC and PTA executive meetings are supply driven – agenda and discussions driven by conveners – those in authority. The media has not been utilised to account to the public. There are no mechanisms to receive complaints, feedback or even compliments from the public such as suggestion boxes. Service delivery improvements that have taken place are not known by the members of the public. There is no deliberate attempt to inform members of the public about plans, budgets, programmes, projects etc – other than those invited to attend budget conferences. There are serious man power gaps in the district, TC and in schools that impact on public accountability. The study concludes that the traditional model of local governance, in which representatives are elected to take decisions on behalf of citizens with little input from citizens between elections, is still the one that prevails in this TC as well. Those elected are assumed to be able to assess the detailed needs and priorities on behalf of those they represent. Although some consultations are held with residents, it is usually through representation – LCs, Parish Development Committee members and through meetings especially at school levels. Such

consultations are haphazard, biased and supply driven. The study recommends that in order to improve public accountability, the TC should provide more information and in more creative ways to community members; government should officially allow parents to contribute towards their children's education despite the existence of the UPE policy; communities need to be empowered with the necessary skills, tools and information to enable them engage with those in positions of responsibility; SMCs should be empowered to be effectively involved in the management of primary schools and manpower gaps that exist at the district, TC and school levels should be plugged.

KEY WORDS: Public Accountability Mechanisms, Primary Education, Service Delivery ,Lower Local Governments, Bukedea District.