

# Examining the Competency and Independence of Councillors: A Case of Selected Local Governments of Ghana's Public Sector

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## ABSTRACT

In most local governments across the world, councillors are required to study, analyse and approve local budgets, action plans and contracts amongst other functions. But how many councillors have the expertise for such and other functions? This case study attempts to find an answer to the question by investigating and drawing a correlation between competency, independence and function of councillors. To achieve the study objectives, both elected and appointed councillors were purposively sampled across six local governments to respond to a structured questionnaire. Using the Structural Equation Model with Smart PLS 3 for data and constructs correlation analysis, the study results indicated that more than 50% of councillors were competent and independent and also suggested strong relationships between councillor competency, independence and function. The study may be relevant to researchers, professionals and policy makers. It recommends regular leadership and capacity training for councillors to enhance their expertise.

## Keywords

Local government, Performance, Councillors, Decentralisation, Governance

## INTRODUCTION

A government is set up mainly to provide services that will make life better for citizens (Agba, Akwara, & Idu, 2013; Pandeya & Oyama, 2019) through democracy. To deepen democracy, local government, known as third tier government (Agba et al., 2013; Alao, David Oladimeji Ph.D, Osakede, Kehinde O. and Owolabi, 2015; Nwaodike & Ayodele, 2016) is formed not only for effective and efficient service

delivery but to bring governance closer to the grassroots through direct participation in decision making (Akorsu, 2015; Frimpong Boamah, 2018; Gyebi, Narh, & Novieto, 2013; MU, D, & R, 2018). As a result, local governments in modern day democracies seek to find ways of achieving better performance (Uster, Beerli, & Vashdi, 2018). And this shows why improving public management efficiency has become a major priority for many developed and developing nations (Narbón-Perpiñá, Balaguer-Coll, & Tortosa-Ausina, 2019). This need for efficient management of public resources has

become so crucial an issue that it has led to a corresponding increase in research across the globe (Balaguer-coll et al., 2018; Vasstrøm & Normann, 2019). This notion has been endorsed by (Narbón-Perpiñá et al., 2019) that over the recent few years, public management efficiency improvement has been a growing concern in many developed and developing countries. Consequently, most studies have focused on policy reforms, resource mobilization, citizen participation and staff development as portrayed in the works of (Kjaer, Dittmar, & Carroll, 2019; Meloche & Kilfoil, 2017; Nelson, Gabris, & Davis, 2011; Osman, Bachok, Bakri, & Harun, 2014; Uche, 2017) and many others without giving much attention to the councillor and his qualities – a gap this study finds and intends to help fill. As main actors serving on the decision making body, councillors form a fundamental building pillar of the local government organisation (Adusei-Asante, 2012; Morgan, Baser, & Morin, 2010; Strategy, 2000). National constitutions across the globe have recognised local government councillors (hereafter referred to as Assembly members), especially, in nations that practise some form of democracy of which Ghana is no exception. Assembly members in Ghana play major roles in local governments (Assemblies). They serve as organizers, initiators, leaders and facilitators (Adusei-Asante, 2012) in their respective electoral areas, while at the various Metropolitan, Municipal or District Assemblies (MMDAs), they function as decision makers through deliberation. They also monitor, supervise activities of the Assembly and assist in the drawing of annual action plans, discussing and approving of budget and more. To perform efficiently and effectively, Assembly members require some levels of competency and independence qualities to help them contribute meaningfully to the Assembly (Local Government, 2017; Public Service Commission, 2017; Uche, 2017). Do Assembly members possess the needed qualities to analyse budgets, financial statements and action plans? What is the situation of Assembly members' qualities? The study addresses such questions in relation to Ghana's local governments. Reports of CDD/UNICEF on Ghana's District League Table as well as reports of the Auditor General on the Utilisation of Ghana's District Assembly Common Fund in recent years have partly attributed the cause of the under performance and financial irregularities in most Assemblies to the weak competency or expertise on the part of Assembly members (Ghana Audit Service, 2017; UNICEF, 2014). In confirmation, Akudugu (2013), reports that concerns have been raised about the poor

performance of District Assemblies across the country (Ghana) and in Nigeria (Uche, 2017). To address this challenge, this study seeks to examine the identifying background characteristics of a cross section of Ghana's local government councils: demographics, competency, independence and functions of Assembly members in six selected Assemblies across three regions of Ghana by drawing on competency theory, devolution theory and leadership of quality framework. Consequently, the paper is organised by first, presenting a short review of literature on local governance, outlining the key variables with hypotheses, introducing the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, presenting the methods, results and finally, presenting conclusions and recommendations.

### **The Assembly Member and Local Governance**

Local governance as a practice can be described in many ways. It is often labelled as a system or a mechanism by which power and responsibilities are shared with citizens and community groups. Geurtz and Van de Wijdeven (2010) view it as a means to augment representative democracy with more participatory mechanisms to drive community initiatives. The body or structure set up to see to the implementation of local governance is therefore referred to as local government. Local government operates on the wheels of decentralisation through political, fiscal and administrative devolution. Decentralisation is the way of transferring authority and resources from the central government to the grassroots. A local government consists of the main development actors (councillors and staff) with resources and a mandate to address development strategies (Adusei-Asante, 2012; Vasstrøm & Normann, 2019). A local government also refers to a geopolitical area within which a district or municipal corporation has been established to provide general public services for a specific population including all official and active governmental units. A local government seeks to bring government closer to the people at the grassroots through service delivery in a satisfactory, effective, adequate and timely manner (Agba et al., 2013; Mukoro, 2003). It integrates different public services according to some criteria – maybe one of the most important reasons for the creation of local governments. This is so because it has been found that without geographically dispersed local units with general-purpose of government, the central government cannot integrate and coordinate all the demands and requirements covering a country (Marume, Jubenkanda, Namusi, & Madziyire, 2016). Local governance in Ghana is classified under three

periods – pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. The first is dated back to over two hundred years ago where kings in their various States ruled their subjects through sub-chiefs. This period preceded the Indirect Rule which existed at the time of colonialism in the then Gold Coast, where few chiefs and some individuals who were at the beck and call of the colonial master were handpicked to serve as agents of undemocratic colonial rule. The third period has existed since independence, giving birth to the current dispensation established by the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, chapter 20, Article 240 -256 (Abbey, Adp, Kwaku, & Murag, 2003; Adu-Gyamfi, 2014). After independence, the number of local governments has grown from 4 to 296. Presently, Ghana can boast of 6 metropolitan, 111 municipal and 179 districts Assemblies. These administrations bring government and governance closer to the people. The Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies are seen as a laboratory of democracy and also the principal agent for advancing the cause of equal opportunity, redistribution of wealth and poverty reduction among other things (Akorsu, 2015). In order to facilitate the decentralization and the management of human and related resources, to improve the performance of government machinery and to support and promote effective development and economic management at the local level, Section 37 (1) of the Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462) established the Local Government Service (LGS) as part of Ghana's public service (Government of Ghana, 2003). For the LGS to function well, the same Act established the General Assembly (GA) as the governing body or the full council (CIPFA, 2007) with oversight responsibility. The GA is made up of elected persons from respective electoral areas and government appointees within the district, municipality or metropolis. The GA is chaired by the Presiding Member (elected or appointed). The GA has two major committees – the Public Relations and Complaints Committee and the Executive committee. The Executive Committee is chaired by the Chief Executive of the Assembly whose membership in the Assembly is by appointment. In the Metropolitan Assemblies, the executive body is known as Board, also chaired by the Chief Executive. The Board or the Executive Committees have Sub-Committees which vary in number and size. The Coordinating Director is the secretary to the Board or Executive Committee. This system is different from the United Kingdom and Australian local government models which have a separate corporate local governance system as a solution to the irregularities in local government institutions (Paulin Mbecke, 2014).

### **The Assembly Member and Leadership**

Leadership is examined in this section to provide the theoretical rationale for the development of the study. Leadership is important and a subject of historical and contemporary concern (Watt, 2011). For more than a century, there has been a plethora of research and learning devoted to the leader agency in the leadership process (Bratton, Grint, & Nelson, 2005). Even though some people argue against the importance of leadership, Northouse (2007) posits that leadership has a universal appeal considering the amount of research time and space devoted to it. Information, ideas, and theories about leadership are prevalent and such information is popular in academic research literature. People from all walks of life seek to clarify what leadership is and identify the skill sets that allow an individual to lead effectively (Woyach, 1993). Leadership is the light that shines on dark paths to make it walkable. The study agrees with Hackman and Johnson (2009) that leaders make a difference. Today's leaders need to provide the future generation with such light and difference. According to Maxwell (1993), people who influence others to follow only are leaders with certain limitations but those who influence others to lead others are leaders without limitations. Therefore, communities need leaders without limitations to build and grow citizens. Well informed citizens are a valuable asset for every community. Well informed citizen make good civic leaders. Civic leaders know that their constituents want them to be credible, have a sense of direction and the ability to take the community to their destination (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). Informed citizens make the local government's job easier. This is why citizen academies are being established throughout the US (IQ Report, 2001). Assembly members need to connect with and communicate to constituents with a range of expertise from the layperson to the technical or highly specialized individual (Barrett, 2008). Northouse (2007) contends that leaders must function in groups to effectively achieve their goals or reach their vision. To this point, it is clear that leadership has relationship and goal achieving orientations. Apart from the achievement of goals, effective leadership has other dimensions. Johnson (2005) opined the ethical dimension of leadership and argued that when one takes the role as a leader, he takes on a unique set of ethical challenges in addition to a set of expectations and tasks: consistency, loyalty, power, privileges and responsibility. The way and manner a leader handles such ethical challenges determine the quality and success of his or her leadership. In view of all these, we agree with Woyach (1993), that exercising

leadership effectively means using appropriate skills to meet the specific needs of one's group. This is clear that leadership involves skills: the theoretical underpinning for this study.

### **The Assembly Member and Competency**

Local governments throughout the world are being faced with several challenges, many of which are political, institutional, attitudinal and more. It appears the present state of research on competency management does not provide any suitable model that can be used in practice (Reinhardt & North, 2003). These challenges are common in Africa and one of such is the lack of competency (Uche, 2017). It seems that one does not need to attain a high level of education or possess some special skills or have some sort of experience to enable him qualify as councillor or Assembly member in Ghana. For example, the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana only requires a prospective Assembly member to be a citizen, attain eighteen years of age or more, have a sound mind and be resident in the area for a period not less than one year. But empirical studies in different parts of the world attest that the educational achievement of an individual positively correlates with effective citizen participation and improvement in performance (Pandeya & Oyama, 2019). Hence, most developed countries are making efforts to develop frameworks for their local governments (Local Government, 2017; Public Service Commission, 2017) and training local leaders (Watt, 2011) to enhance their competency.

All else being equal, those with a higher level of education and greater stock of knowledge and skills are likely to feel more efficacious to participate in governance at greater rates intimated (Pandeya & Oyama, 2019). In their work that focuses on culture-based development strategies of local government, they highlighted that local actors need knowledge to address existing and emerging local problems (Vasstrøm & Normann, 2019). Without proficient staff and knowledgeable elected and appointed officials, municipalities are ill equipped to complete projects. As a result, they may lack the capability to pursue relevant initiatives such as creating a capital improvement plan or updating a comprehensive plan (The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) and Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC), 2017). Considering the importance of knowledge, skills and experience required for making staff, elected and appointed officials effective and efficient in local governments, we hypothesise that Assembly members' good competency has a significant positive impact on their civic leadership functions (H1).

### **The Assembly Member and Independence**

In addition to the competency challenge is the issue of lack of independence among local government actors. For example, focusing on the case of South Africa (Cape Town and Johannesburg), Cameron (2014) examined how decentralisation policies and inter-party politics have affected urban service-delivery responsibilities and resources. In his work, he found that political attempts to undermine the authority of its officials are prevalent and lead to poor service delivery. In another instance, a study by Kabi, Kompi, & Twala (2014) revealed that community councils in the Maseru District in the Kingdom of Lesotho suffered from lack of funding, lack of human resources and the lack of decentralised political power to the districts, which affected service delivery at the local government level. The study concludes with an observation that the problems experienced at the local government sphere actually emanates from the central government. Obviously, this shows that local government actors are not independent. Similarly, in a paper that examined the lessons that could be learnt from comparative local government studies from nations like United States of America, France, India and Britain, it revealed that the challenges inhibiting efficient service delivery range from undue intervention by state governments and over politicization of administration. The study concluded that the challenges could be addressed given that there is the political will by Federal and State governments (Alao, David Oladimeji Ph.D, Osakede, Kehinde O. and Owolabi, 2015). Finally in another study, the results of key informant interview and focus group discussion revealed that absence of autonomy of local government among others is a big challenge affecting the contributions of local government (Tuke & Karunakaran, 2017). NALAG (2005) observes that Ghana's District Assemblies are ill fitted to resist any encroachment on its powers by the central government. Maybe, members are unable to resist any form of encroachment from both internal and external sources because of the lack of competency or expertise. Knowledge and skills make one feel confident to resist unscrupulous machinations. Based on the cases outlined above, we present two hypotheses that (H2) Assembly members' independence has a significant impact on their leadership functions and that (H3) Assembly members' competency has a significant impact on their independence.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

Considering the views highlighted above, the study draws on local governance and leadership theories but aligns specifically with the Competency

Approach to leadership theory (Laughton & Ottewill, 2003; Reis & Gomes, 2018; Spendlove, 2007) to focus work on capabilities of Assembly Members. The Competency Approach to Leadership Theory (CALT) emanated from the trait theory. CALT focuses on skills or behaviours, which make leaders effective. Two other similar theories exist although not as well known. They are three-skill and five-skill theories. The former approach suggests that leadership skills/behaviours are tied to the level in which the person works in the organization while the latter indicates that the factors of effective leadership are competencies; individual attributes; outcomes; career experiences; and environmental influences. Following the two specific theories, we situate the study on the latter and adopt the Local Government Capability Framework (LGCF) developed by the Local Government of New South Wales in 2017 with modifications to develop constructs for the study. The constructs will help bring to bear the competency, independence and leadership capabilities of Assembly members. The Local Government Capability Framework (Local Government, 2017; Public Service Commission, 2017) describes sixteen (16) capabilities across four core groups: Personal Attributes, Relationships, Results and Resources. These capabilities apply to all elected members and local government employees in New South Wales. Four capabilities in the Workforce Leadership group are for employees who manage people, and another four capabilities in the Civic Leadership group are for elected members. Together the capability groups outline skills; knowledge, abilities and other attributes expected of the workforce and elected members. In this work, we factor the Assembly Members and reclassify the five capability groups into three latent variables: competency, independence and leadership function as the main variables for the study. Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework for the study which tries to show the relationships between the mentioned variables.

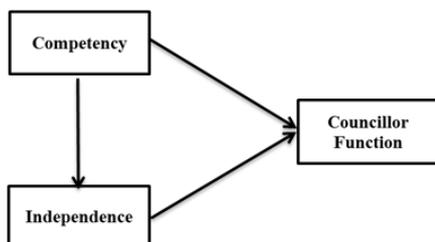


Fig.1. Conceptual Framework

## METHODS AND RESULTS

It is universally agreed that there are two types of data – primary and secondary. The latter covers information gathered through textbooks, theses,

journal articles and newspapers, statutory and non-statutory documents whilst the former comprises data collected from the field through a structured interview or questionnaire administered to respondents. In the case of this research, both primary and secondary data were used. A set of questionnaire was developed for Assembly members and pretested at the New Juaben North Municipal Assembly. Some errors were identified and modified and thereafter, the final questionnaire was administered to respondents at the selected MMDAs. The secondary data was gathered from journal articles and books obtained through the use of search engines with key words as local government, competency frameworks, municipal governments, independence of councillors and more. Out of the current 296 MMDAs, 6 were selected by convenience across three of the now 16 regions of Ghana for the case study. The Tema Metropolitan Assembly was selected from Greater Accra Region while New Juaben South and Kwahu West were selected from the Eastern Region. The remaining 3 Assemblies – Asante Akyem South, Asokwa, and Asokore Mampong were selected from Ashanti Region. These are first three regions with the highest number of MMDAs in Ghana (Ashanti, Eastern and Greater Accra respectively). Tema Metropolitan is rated one of the best MMDAs in Ghana by the CDD/UNICEF since 2015 (Ghana District League Table Facts Sheet). Kwahu West Municipal has performed fairly well but the rest are placed below the red line. Asokwa Municipal Assembly was carved out of Kumasi Metropolitan in 2018 while New Juaben Municipal was split in two (North and South) in 2018. A total of 223 Assembly members (153 elected plus 70 appointees) of the selected MMDAs were given questionnaires. Out of the total, 6 questionnaires could not be retrieved. However, 217 (97.3%) questionnaires were retrieved out of which 208 (93.2%) were correctly filled, 6 (2.6%) were found incomplete while 3 (1.3%) were poorly filled; hence, 9 (3.9%) questionnaires were rejected. Help was provided in the filling of questionnaires in most cases where respondents permitted the support of researchers. This helped a lot to minimise spoilt questionnaires. Data results were coded and analysed with SPSS to verify reliability and fitness of data through factor analysis. The data was then subjected to qualitative analysis using descriptive interpretation. Table 1 shows the distribution of Assembly members across the selected MMDAs.

Table 1: Distribution of Assembly Members

MMDA	Elected	Appointed	Total
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TMA	21	10	31
NJSMA	34	15	49
KWMA	26	12	38
AASMA	46	20	66
AMMA	10	5	15
AMA	16	8	24
	<b>153</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>223</b>

MMDA: Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assembly, TMA: Tema Metropolitan Assembly, NJSMA: New Juaben South Municipal Assembly, KWMA: Kwahu West Municipal Assembly, AASMA: Asante Akyem South Municipal Assembly, AMMA: Asokore Mampong Municipal Assembly, AMA: Asokwa Municipal Assembly

To ascertain the validity and reliability of data, a factor analysis was conducted using SPSS 3 to test the relationships between the measured and latent variables. The figures marked with asterisk in Table 2 indicate the various items that are being explained by the variance of the components. In this case, the variances (in asterisks) which are close to 1 are considered good and fit to explain the corresponding items. Components 1 – 4 explain the most variances. The test shows that the total Initial Eigenvalues for components 1 – 4 are good. The Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings appear same as the results of the Initial Eigenvalues. However, the Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings measured differently but equally good. Details of such are presented in Table 2. To top up, a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (BTS) were conducted and pegged KMO at 0.744 and BTS sig. at 0.000 which indicate that factor analysis may be useful (Schreiber, Stage, King, Nora, & Barlow, 2006). In all these, the tests indicated that the data used for the study was good and fit for analysis.

Table 2. Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings	
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance
1	5.650*	47.082	47.082	5.650	47.082	47.082	2.981	24.844
2	1.604*	13.371	60.453	1.604	13.371	60.453	2.547	21.223
3	1.331*	11.096	71.548	1.331	11.096	71.548	2.130	17.747
4	1.016*	8.468	80.016	1.016	8.468	80.016	1.944	16.202
5	.930	7.747	87.763					
6	.801	6.673	94.437					
7	.167	1.388	95.824					
8	.154	1.283	97.108					
9	.127	1.055	98.162					
10	.086	.721	98.883					
11	.079	.655	99.538					
12	.055	.462	100.000					

\* Total variance of initial eigenvalues, extraction and rotation sums of squared loadings higher than 1

### Age, Gender, Education and Employment Status of Assembly Members (AMs)

Results were obtained and presented as follows after data was coded and analysed with SPSS 22. This was done through descriptive statistics analyses, which

were performed for frequencies to ascertain the degree of agreement or disagreement. The age of Assembly members show that 72 (34.6%) of the 208 respondents fell within the age range of 18 and 40, while 101 (48.6%) and 35 (16.8%) fell within the age brackets of 41 to 60 and from 61 upwards respectively. This may mean that local government leadership is less attractive to older people. On gender, 186 (89.4%) of respondents were found to be males against 22 (10.6%) who were found to be females. It portrays a huge gap of disparity between males and female members. Report on members' level of education indicate that 32 (15.4%), 93 (44.7%), 83 (39.9%) attained basic, secondary and tertiary education respectively. Also, the total of 15% who have 'basic' level of education may find it difficult dealing with such tasks as reading and discussing financial statements, budgets and other documents. For employment and membership status, the study results report that 187 members were employed in the self – 104 (50.0%), government – 36 (17.3%) and private – 43 (20.7%) sector respectively while 25 (12.0%) were found to be unemployed. This suggests that about more than half of members may always have time for Assembly business.

### Competency of Assembly Members

Findings on competency cover responses on acceptability of certain abilities of Assembly members. The findings indicate that 7 (3.4%), 16 (7.7%), 78 (37.5%), 70 (33.7%) and 37 (17.8%) members, respectively responded 'Disagree strongly', 'Disagree', 'Neutral', 'Agree' and 'Agree strongly' on members' 'Ability to innovate'. About members' 'Ability to plan and prioritise', 10 (4.8%) respondents expressed 'Disagree strongly', 16 (7.7%) and 71 (34.1%) respondents expressed 'Disagree' and 'Neutral' respectively while 71 (34.1%) and 40 (19.2%) respondents expressed 'Agree' and 'Agree strongly' respectively. For members' 'Ability to engage constituents', 10 (4.8%), 15 (7.2%), 55 (26.4%), 92 (44.2%) and 36 (17.3%) respondents, respectively expressed 'Disagree strongly', 'Disagree', 'Neutral', 'Agree' and 'Agree strongly'. Finally, 14 (6.7%), 10 (4.8%), 53 (25.5%), 87 (41.8%) and 44 (21.2%) respondents, respectively declared 'Disagree strongly', 'Disagree', 'Neutral', 'Agree' and 'Agree strongly' in that order for 'Ability to communicate clearly'.

### Independence of Assembly Members

Members' independence spans across resilience, adaptability, independent decision making and integrity. It shows that 5 (2.4%), 20 (9.6%), 35 (16.8%), 88 (42.3%) and 60 (28.8%) respondents

respectively expressed ‘Disagree strongly’, ‘Disagree’, ‘Neutral’, ‘Agree’ and ‘Agree strongly’ to show resilience’ while 5 (2.4%), 16 (7.7%), 45 (21.6%), 80 (38.5%) and 62 (29.8%) respondents chose ‘Disagree strongly’, ‘Disagree’, ‘Neutral’, ‘Agree’ and ‘Agree strongly’ in that order to show adaptability. Responses to show independence over decision making indicate that 8 (3.8%), 15 (7.2%), 47 (22.6%), 64 (30.8%) and 74 (35.6%) respondents expressed ‘Disagree strongly’, ‘Disagree’, ‘Neutral’, ‘Agree’ and ‘Agree strongly’ respectively while to show integrity, 9 (4.3%), 11 (5.3%), 36 (17.3%), 66 (31.7%) and 86 (41.3%) respondents, respectively chose ‘Disagree strongly’, ‘Disagree’, ‘Neutral’, ‘Agree’ and ‘Agree strongly’. In all four cases, over 60 percent of the respondents expressed some form of agreement. This is a positive mark for the members and the Assembly in general.

### Function of Assembly Members

Additionally, functions of Assembly members indicate that 9 (4.3%), 15 (7.2%), 47 (22.6%), 80 (38.5%) and 57 (27.43%) respondents expressed ‘Disagree strongly’, ‘Disagree’, ‘Neutral’, ‘Agree’ and ‘Agree strongly’ respectively for ‘Represent community’. On the issue of ‘governing responsibly’, 7 (3.4%), 17 (8.2%), 53 (25.5%), 80 (38.5%) and 51 (24.5%) members responded ‘Disagree strongly’, ‘Disagree’, ‘Neutral’, ‘Agree’ and ‘Agree strongly’. Also 10 (4.8%), 17 (8.2%), 47 (22.6%), 70 (33.7%) and 64 (30.8%) respondents expressed ‘Disagree strongly’, ‘Disagree’, ‘Neutral’, ‘Agree’ and ‘Agree strongly’ respectively for ‘Inform community’ while 12 (5.8%), 14 (6.7%), 47 (22.6%), 79 (38.0%) and 56 (26.9%) respondents chose ‘Disagree strongly’, ‘Disagree’, ‘Neutral’, ‘Agree’ and ‘Agree strongly’ respectively for ‘Analyse and approve budgets/contracts’. To conclude work on study results, a Structural Equation Model (SEM) analysis was run with Smart PLS for path co-efficient values (as shown in Figure 2). This helped researchers to test the impact relationships that exist between the dependent and independent variables (study hypotheses). Finally, the study presents a bootstrapping analysis in Table 3 to show the significance of the impact relationships that exist between the main variables. Both T Statistics and P Values indicate significant impact in all cases.

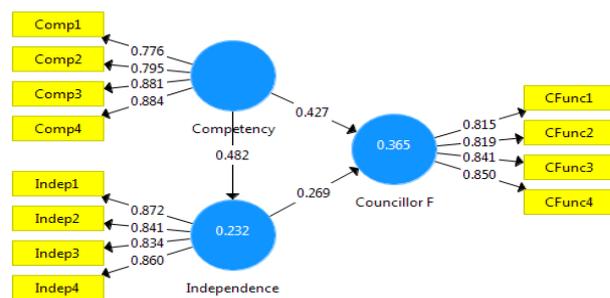


Fig. 2 Path Analysis showing impact correlation between variables: outer loadings, path co-efficient and R-squared values.

Table 3 – Significance of Impact between Variables

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ((O/STDEV))	P Values
Competency -> Councillor	0.427	0.426	0.063	6.752	0.000
Competency -> Independence	0.482	0.484	0.064	7.543	0.000
Independence -> Councillor	0.269	0.269	0.063	4.272	0.000

O: Path Co-efficient Values,

T Statistics; > 2 in all cases, P Values: < 0.01 in all cases

### Discussion

Results of study are discussed under the following sub-headings for clarity. Interpretation of results obtained through frequencies is purely subjective while that obtained from analysis of data through SPSS and Smart PLS are considered objective.

### Age, Gender, Education and Employment Status of Assembly Members

Based on the demographics of the study, results concerning the age of Assembly members show that local government leadership is less attractive to older people. It is more attractive to the young and therefore implies that the MMDAs may have active and energetic members. On gender, the results portray a huge gap of disparity between male and female members. There is the possibility that the few female representation may feel intimidated and overshadowed by the huge numbers of their male counterparts. In effect, the Assembly may lack the female inputs that it requires for decision making. The study results on gender confirm the old expressed concern over the lack of female representation in both central and local governments of Ghana, even across Africa and beyond and reason for the need of more women in leadership (Deeb, 1979; Liu, Wei, & Xie, 2014; Terjesen, Couto, & Francisco, 2016). Findings on members’ level of education suggest that members with basic level education qualification, though only a little over 15 percent may find it difficult dealing with financial and budget analysis. Their academic disadvantage

may influence certain decisions at the Assembly. Though those with secondary education form the bigger chunk, it may not guarantee ability to understand and analyse financial and budget documents for good decisions. By the standards of Ghana's secondary education, it is possible to find a secondary school graduate without the ability to understand basic financial and budget documents. The study also discovers that majority of Assembly members are self-employed while some of them are unemployed. Together, they number more than half of the respondents. This seems to be partly positive and partly negative. The self-employed and the unemployed may have time for both community and Assembly activities compared to their counterparts who are employed by government or private organizations. In the order hand, if care is not exercised, the former may abuse their services. For example, the unemployed member may be tempted to extort money or demand gifts while some of the self-employed members may divert some resources.

### **Competency of Assembly Members**

The study findings suggest that majority of Assembly members have the ability to innovate, plan, engage and communicate clearly. It indicates that in all cases, an average of over 50% which is more than half the number of respondents expressed agreement, while a number below an average of 12% expressed some sort of disagreement. The disagreement may not necessarily mean incompetency but may be based on other reasons. Similarly, agreeing to have the 'ability to do' alone may not qualify one to be competent but the 'doing' itself. This means that there should be a formal way to assess the Assembly member's competency rather than local government elections which constituents claim they use to unseat members they consider incompetent.

An assessment tool or body that targets this principal agent of local governance will help to improve local government (The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) and Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC), 2017). More so, the remaining average of about 30% covered those who expressed neutrality. It is quite alarming that about 30% of respondents expressed neutrality over their competency. This suggests a sign of looming mediocrity and lack of independence among a section of Assembly members. In this situation, competency of Assembly members is likely to compromise and have an average impact on the MMDAs (Ghana Audit Service, 2016, 2017) and on their respective areas. When this occurs, the communities are less likely to see more development projects and feel the good impact of local

government and decentralisation. Leadership without sound competency quality may lack the tendency to drive the people to their vision.

### **Independence of Assembly Members**

In this case, the results point out that about 16 – 20% of the 208 respondents appeared neutral while about 65 – 70% endorsed some sort of agreement to show independence. However, about 10% (more or less) expressed some form of disagreement. Overall, it points out that majority of members claim to possess some level of independence which is likely to have a significant impact on their functions. This may mean that decisions taken by members at both community and Assembly levels are done without influence from external sources: political parties, contractors and other individuals. In view of this, it may be perceived that the lack of independence which is often attributed to local governments has less to do with Assembly members but the Staff. When members are independent, they may debate and vote objectively to pave way for sustainable development. Though members' independence may not have a direct impact on the performance of local governments, its impact on members shapes them for better and quality decision making. Notwithstanding, the almost 20% respondents who expressed neutrality plus the almost 10% who expressed some sort of disagreement should be a cause for worry. The presence of such a faction suggests that there may be councillors who can easily be influenced. They may be appointees or those who got their membership to the Assembly through some agents, whom they have to yield their independence to.

### **Function of Assembly Members**

Finally, the study sought to find approval on some Functions of Assembly Members and discovered that more than 60% of respondents agree on functions of members while around 22% of respondents expressed neutrality. However, only about 13% expressed disagreement about function of members. Where members accept such functions and pursue them, it is likely to place significant value on their leadership. The effect is good coordination with the Assembly and community for sustainable development. This suggests that more than a half of members may be available to represents their communities at all times. They may be always there to participate on behalf of their people by presenting challenges in their respective communities, canvassing for support and joining in debates and discussions to approve action plans, budgets and contracts. Such ones also may always share information with constituents and promote feedback

to ensure responsible governance. Councillor function is significant but may not have a direct impact on Assembly performance since the function is more of organising, deliberative and legislative in nature. The impact correlation between the competency and councillor function, independence and councillor function as well as competency and independence of members indicate significance backed by R-squared values of 0.37 and 0.23. This helps the study to accept all three hypotheses.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Except for the majority of young and energetic population, the study discovers some setbacks which include a huge gap of gender disparity, more than fifty percent of members whose education level is secondary or below and whooping fifteen percent unemployed membership in the selected MMDAs. This shows a weakness in the MMDAs' human capacity. To bridge the gender gap, affirmative action policy should be put in place to increase the representation of eligible females on the Assemblies. Besides, civil society and NGOs should make frantic efforts to support and promote the need for female representation on Assemblies. The study presents a profile of Assembly members across six selected MMDAs and identifies that about more than half of Assembly members claim to exhibit qualities of competency, independence and functionality. This means that majority of members may not easily compromise decision making, monitoring and other important functions. In order to maintain or beef up their expertise, civic leadership and boost their confidence, it is recommended that regular training programmes are organised for members. For example, after elections, MMDAs should give timely and proper orientation to Assembly members by conducting briefings for them on leadership. While their roles include planning, approval of budgets, assessment of trial balances and other financial documents, the member should be equipped with the necessary tools to help him perform his duties effectively. This will help prevent financial irregularities. Finally, the study indicates significant relationships between the key constructs. This helps to conclude that competency and independence of Assembly members have significant impact on Assembly member or councillor functions. Similarly, the study observed that competency of members has a significant impact on their independence. As a result, the study accepts all three hypotheses and recommends capacity building for Assembly members of local governments of Ghana. This action will stimulate efficiency, effectiveness, commitment, awareness and a positive impact on the general work

of the Assembly as an institution and on their respective electoral areas. Overall, the study posits that competency and independence of councillors have significant impact on councillors. This position supports extant literature that argues in favour of the importance of competency of leadership. The study's relevance resides in the fact that it draws attention of researchers, policy makers, local government actors and civil society on the need to promote Assembly member competency and independence. It also throws light on the huge gender gap between male and female members, employment status and education qualification of members to project their general quality. Last, this study will serve as a foundation for future research in local government studies.

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