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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **COMMUNIQUE ON THE 2023 DISTRICT LEVEL ELECTIONS AND BEYOND ISSUES**

**ISSUED BY:**

**A CONSORTIUM OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS:**

- Local Governance Network (LOGNet)
- Chamber for Local Governance (CHALOG)
- Public Financial Management (PFM) Network

Ghana has been implementing a decentralization agenda through the Local Governance System for over three and a half decades with the objective of bringing governance to the doorsteps of the people. As the most visible form of citizen participation in the democratic process, District-Level Elections (DLE) have been held since 1988/89, with the latest in 2019 being the seventh edition. However, apart from the first elections with 59.3% voter turnout, the DLE in Ghana have been characterized by low and falling levels of participation and apathy among the citizenry.

To this end and ahead of the 2023 DLE slated for 19<sup>th</sup> December 2023, the Local Governance Network (LOGNet) in collaboration with the Chamber for Local Governance (CHALOG), the Public Financial Management (PFM) Network, and with support from GIZ, organized a series of dialogues to explore reasons for low voter turnout as well as strategies to improve voter turnouts. The dialogues were held in Tamale, Kumasi and Koforidua between July and August 2023, which brought together traditional leaders, Assembly Members, Electoral Commission (EC) and National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) Officials, civil society organizations, women and youth groups, People with Disabilities (PWDs), the media, among others as representatives from the 16 Regions of Ghana to deliberate on these issues and the way forward.

The dialogue sessions assessed the legal imperatives for the conduct of DLE, historical trends in voter turnout and women representation, the EC's role and planned activities in the upcoming election, as well its strategies to increase voter participation. The Dialogue Sessions also discussed the features of the Local Governance System including the sub-structures, identified various stakeholders and their roles in the elections, general challenges affecting participation in DLE, as well as the peculiar concerns that constrain women from and PWDs contesting elections at the local level.

**Participants identified the following as causes of low voter turnout in DLE:**

1. **Causes related to the operations of the District Assemblies:** poor delivery of public goods and services /inadequate development at the local level, perceived corruption and resource mismanagement, limited forums for engagements with the citizens/inadequate information of the operations of the MMDAs (transparency and accountability issues);
2. **Causes related to the Assembly Members:** vague and unfulfilled promises, limited engagements with constituents, over politicization of the DLEs, personal character of some of Assembly Members, lack of resources to facilitate the work of the assembly members;
3. **Causes related to the EC and government:** compressed timelines of the DLE, lack of information on the DLEs, seeming neglect of DLEs as compared to national level elections; recentralization of the decentralization process;
4. **Causes related to CSOs, NCCE and the media:** apathy and inadequate promotion of the DLEs (education, sensitization and capacity building programs for marginalised groups). Also inadequate resource allocation to NCCE;
5. **Causes related to citizens:** ignorance, apathy, disillusionment, loss of confidence in the Assembly Members and other associated challenges with decentralization and the Local Governance System in general; costly and hard to reach electoral areas; low of interest from elites and affluent citizens; and
6. **Miscellaneous:** low confidence, low capacity and very limited resources on the part of PWDs and women to contest, infiltration of partisan politics in DLEs, monetization of DLEs that price out the marginalized groups and deprived communities.

**Participants therefore proposed the following strategies** to increase awareness, citizen engagements and voter turnout for the 2023 DLE and beyond:

**For the Short-term, we call on:**

**The Electoral Commission**

1. The EC should publicize its registration and election timetable at earliest opportunity, equip all Regional and District EC Offices to begin nation-wide education on the DLE process with support from the NCCE, Information Services Department (ISD), CSOs and the media fraternity.
2. The EC must enforce the existing law that bars political parties' infiltration in DLEs to reduce the monetization and partisanship in DLEs and allow the citizens to choose those who can best represent them.
3. The EC, NCCE, ISD, CSOs and media outlets should use social media, along with traditional media channels, for DLE-related information dissemination and awareness creation to specifically target the youth, women and PWDs.
4. The EC should engage government and Parliament to amend the Constitution and create a fixed date for DLE elections as done for the National-Level Elections (Medium-Long Term)

### **The MLGDRD:**

5. The MLGDRD should collaborate with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to develop targeted mentorship and campaign support for women and PWDs.
6. MLGDRD must intensify its monitoring of District Assemblies and sanction those who fail to be transparent and accountable to their citizens per provisions for accountability in Act 936 (as amended in Act 940).
7. MLGDRD and CSOs must collaborate in seeking development partner assistance to financially and technically support DLE sensitisation and education efforts.
8. MLGDRD should engage the House of Chiefs (national and regional), religious bodies and other identifiable groups to support the nationwide education on the DLEs in their various spheres of influence.

### **The Central Government:**

8. Central government must resource the EC, NCCE and ISD to undertake these education and awareness creation activities.
9. The remuneration of Assembly Members' must be enhanced to make service at the local level more attractive; End-of-Service Benefits, for example, could be paid from the Consolidated Fund and allocated equitably across all MMDAs.

### **District Assemblies:**

10. Government must stop at-source deductions of the DACF, which should be increased from 7.5% to 20%, and remit the total sum to MMDAs to utilize as per the needs as captured in their Medium-Term Development Plans.. In tandem with this increase, portions of the DACF can be allocated as community development funds to electoral areas within the DACF distribution guidelines for targeted development in the localities. (Medium –long term)

### **CSOs:**

11. CSOs can also strengthen collaboration with the NCCE and EC, use staff and volunteers for door-to-door education, share DLE information on their media platforms, and assist in the organization of town halls or similar/forums for candidates to share their campaign messages.
12. CSOs can collaborate with development partners to enhance DLE candidates' capacity to utilize social media and digital technologies for election campaigning and messaging.
13. CSOs and development partners can support the development of focus groups and local parliaments for underrepresented groups (youth, women, PWDs).

### **Medium-Long term**

14. NCCE, with support from CSOs and development partners, should undertake continuous voter education between elections on the roles of Assembly and Unit Committee Members, and work with the Ministry of Education to include this information in educational curriculum from the basic level to create a more informed citizenry at election time.
15. The EC should engage government and Parliament to amend the Constitution and create a fixed date for DLE elections as done for national-level elections.
16. MMDAs, Assembly Members, and Traditional Authorities must strengthen their collaboration for effective development system at the local level.
17. The remuneration of Assembly Members' must be enhanced to make service at the local level more attractive; End-of-Service Benefits, for example, could be paid from the Consolidated Fund and allocated equitably across all Assemblies.

18. Assemblies' must be monitored and sanctioned by MLGDRD if they fail to be transparent and accountable to their citizens per provisions for accountability in Act 936 (as amended in Act 940).

19. CSOs should strongly advocate for the passage of the Affirmative Action Bill as well as enforcement of current disability legislation; Amendment of Act 936 and 940 to provide quotas for underrepresented groups in Assembly and Unit Committee membership.

### **Innovative Strategies**

1. EC and NCCE must develop the education campaign messages in local languages, along with pictorial communication and other PWD-accessible materials for nation-wide dissemination.
2. NCCE, ISD, and CSOs should use Community Radio, Community Information Centres (CICs), and education campaign and cinema vans to provide accurate and well-moderated content on the DLE to local communities.
3. MLGDRD should develop simple Q&A text and use social media platforms, including text messages, to start public education and awareness on the DLEs.
4. NCCE should work with CSO and development partners to produce DLE-related drama, plays, movies and cartoons to be staged/broadcast in schools, communities, and on radio and television.
5. All election education materials must be inclusive and portray a diverse range of characters including women, youth and PWDs as both candidates and voters in the DLE.
6. Use of any available public space to advocate on

Civil society believes that reversing the poor/low voter turnout trends and increasing active citizen participation in local level elections is a shared responsibility for government, state institutions, private sector and all Ghanaians.

We therefore call on all named stakeholders to actively play their roles in ensuring the successful conduct of the 2023 DLE and stand ready to leverage the trust built with traditional authorities, religious leaders, community heads and opinion leaders across the country to achieve this goal.

We thank you for your attention.

**Signed by:**

  


Christoher Dapaah National Coordinator - Local Governance Network (LOGNet) -0244547417 on behalf of CSOs consortium on District Level -campaign Ambassadors in collaboration with Chamber for Local Governance (CHALOG)-0243138633 **and** Public Financial Management (PFM) Network-0547840902

## **Distributions-**

- *The Electoral Commission*
- *The MLGDRD:*
- *NCCE/ISD*
- *The Central Government:*
- *District Assemblies- MMDAs*
- *CSOs*
- *Media Houses*
- *Parliamentary subcommittee on legal and constitutional Reforms*
- *Parliamentary subcommittee on Local Governance and Decentralization and Rural Development*
- *Development Partners etc.*