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Challenges Encountered in Community Development in Urban Slums: A Study of Ashaiman, Ghana

Jamal Appiah-Kubi*

Social Policy Institute, Ankara Yildirim Beyazit University Güvenciler Mahallesi, Cinnah Caddesi. No: 16

Çankaya, Ankara, Postcode: 06010, Turkey

Email: jaksisi9@gmail.com, jakubi18@yahoo.com

Abstract

Considering the success achieved in community development efforts undertaken in rural Ghana, the practice has been adopted to engender economic and social development in urban Ghana. Over time, informal settlements known as slums have emerged in and around the urban communities in Ghana, where the slum dwellers face many challenges such as poverty and poor housing. Although some community development efforts have been undertaken in these slums, the slum dwellers continue to live in impoverished conditions, due to unsuccessful and unsustainable community development efforts. This study was therefore adopted with the qualitative research design to find out the challenges that are encountered in community development efforts in Ashaiman slums. Thirty participants consisting of chiefs, assemblymen, community inhabitants and community developers were interviewed. The study found that community development in Ashaiman slums faced challenges such as lack of funds, ethnic and tribal differences, negative attitude of the inhabitants towards projects, lack of land ownership by inhabitants and poor monitoring and supervision of projects. It is therefore recommended that slum dwellers in urban Ghana are granted access to land so that they will be motivated to develop them as their own properties, and also be supportive of community development efforts.

Keywords: Community Development; Community Participation; Ethnic Diversity; Insecure Land Tenure; Project's Sustainability; Resource Constraint; Slums.

* Corresponding author.

1. Introduction

Although precolonial Ghanaians had self-help arrangement for meeting their needs, a more coordinated and technique-based community development practice was introduced in Ghana by the British administration in the 1920s [1]. The introduction of the practice was necessitated by problems such as illiteracy, poor infrastructure, poverty which had to be tackled [2]. According to Thaddeus and Owusu-Sekyere [2], community development was accepted by the rural inhabitants as it was based on a philosophy which was not different from the traditional values of reciprocity, interdependence and mutual aid which were shared by the inhabitants of the communities. A typical example of collective efforts undertaken by communities for a common goal was the 'nnoboa' practice among the Akans. This practice was based on self-help and mutual assistance among farmers who took turns to work on each other's farm during planting and harvesting of crops [3].

Considering the massive contributions made by community development in ways such alleviating poverty and providing infrastructure in many rural Ghanaian communities [4,5], the process has been adopted to tackle the problems encountered in the urban communities. As a result of the high rate of urbanization and incommensurate infrastructural development within the Ghanaian urban space, many slums have emerged [6] [7]. The myriad of problems such poverty, poor sanitation and poor housing faced in Ghanaian slums have necessitated the execution of community development projects to resolve them and improve the conditions in such settlements [8,9].

Although projects and campaigns have been undertaken in Ghanaian slums, these efforts have not effectively achieved their targets of resolving the problems in such communities, due to some challenges encountered in the community development practice. This deficiency however, has not translated into much research being conducted to understand the challenges encountered in slum development efforts, which would lead to efforts to resolve such challenges. The limited information on the subject has led to a number of questions being asked by both academics and community developers. Examples of such questions are: What specific factors challenge community development in Ghanaian slums? Are there any dynamics in the urban slums that pose challenges to community development efforts in such communities? This study was therefore conducted to investigate the challenges encountered in community development in urban slums and how such challenges have influenced community development. The information provided by this study will help academics in the community development discipline and community development practitioners especially those working in slums, to understand potential challenges to be encountered so that reactive measures can be planned.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1 Literature review

Regardless of the numerous contributions made by community development in many communities, the practice has faced many challenges across the globe. This can be seen in Amoako and Cobbinah's [10] and Gulyani & Basset's [11] position that the challenges encountered in community development have impeded the successful completion of some projects while others have rendered community development unsustainable. Negative

attitudes such as laziness and alcoholism on the part of the inhabitants have ruined projects in Kenyan slums, as such attitudes have impeded their ability to keep their jobs and cater for themselves [12]. Due to these failures, many have lost control over their lives and also constricted them from participating in projects. Negative attitudes of inhabitants have not only impeded projects in developing countries but in developed countries as well. This is evidenced in Dukeshire and Thurlow's [13] report that negative attitudes of rural inhabitants in Canada impeded many projects through their resistance to such efforts due to a perceived incompatibility between their values and the projects.

The lack of community involvement in designing projects have also challenged the execution of such projects. In their study in rural Canada, the lack of involvement of the rural folks in designing projects led to the non-participation of such inhabitants as they did not understand the projects and their essence in the beneficiary communities [13]. They added that the inhabitants resisted the projects because they felt such efforts were being imposed on them. Insecure land tenure is a common factor that has constricted many projects in many slums across the globe [14]. Many projects in developing countries have been unsuccessful due to inhabitants' lack of land ownership. The lack of land ownership discourages many inhabitants from supporting and participating in community development because of their perception that the properties are not theirs' and hence they could be evicted from the land by the owners [15].

Some societal issues have also impeded many projects in some areas. According to Aryeetey [16] the cultural values of some communities in northern Ghana made the local people overly dependent on their chiefs in community development, leading to the failure of such projects, as many of the chiefs lacked the requisite expertise for the projects. Beside the overdependence on the chiefs, ethnic disputes in northern Ghana have also prevented people from feuding ethnic groups from collaborating on projects [16]. This challenge is especially dire in communities with high ethnic diversity.

With regard to resources for community development, studies such as Berg and Mugisha [17] and Sengupta [18] found that many projects are ruined by the lack of requisite resources. While the designs of some projects are altered in order to execute them with limited budget, others are ruined entirely or suspended due to the lack of requisite resources [19]. Resource constraint affects all kinds of projects regardless of the approach adopted, as it can be experienced by the various stakeholders of projects such as community developers, inhabitants or government agencies. This is evidenced in a finding that some projects planned by Ghana's Local Government Ministry and Department of Community Development have been ruined by the lack of resources such as funds and logistics [5].

Some community development efforts have also encountered poor coordination of the activities and process involved. Campfens [20] opines that many projects in Ghana and Bangladesh were impeded by the poor coordination of processes involved which caused clashes between the agencies involved and thereby compromising smooth execution. In Bangladesh, poor coordination by the government coupled with the shortage of resources discouraged cooperation from many rural communities, causing failure in projects. The reduction or lack of government support in community development can be seen in the Kenyan government's failure to grant slum dwellers land ownership as an incentive for them to develop such areas as their own

properties [21,22].

2.2 Theoretical framework

Sherry Arnstein’s theory of community participation underpinned the study as much emphasis is being placed on understanding how community participation influences projects undertaken in Ashaiman slums. Its usefulness to the study can be seen in its adoption in a similar study by Hoddinott, Adato, Besley and Haddad [23] which focused on poverty reduction in South Africa. Community participation refers to the engagement of community inhabitants in projects undertaken in their community [24]. According to Arnstein [25], community participation in projects is in the form of a ladder, ranging from the bottom where there is low participation to the top where there is high participation as depicted in *figure 1* below. Low community participation leads to unsuccessful community development as inhabitants are unable to acquire skills required to maintain and also replicate projects as a result of their non-participation [25]. This means that projects in Ashaiman could be rendered unsuccessful by the non-participation of the slum dwellers due to the challenges faced.

Conversely, high community participation leads to successful community development, as inhabitants through their involvement, understand the processes, have increased control and ownership over projects, and also acquire expertise required to maintain and also replicate the projects [25] [26]. Relating this theory to the study, factors that impede community participation in projects undertaken in Ashaiman have the potency of ruining the projects, as they would result in projects not being maintained as well as inhabitants not having the requisite attributes to engender community development efforts on their own. It is therefore important that such factors are resolved in order to engender successful community development.

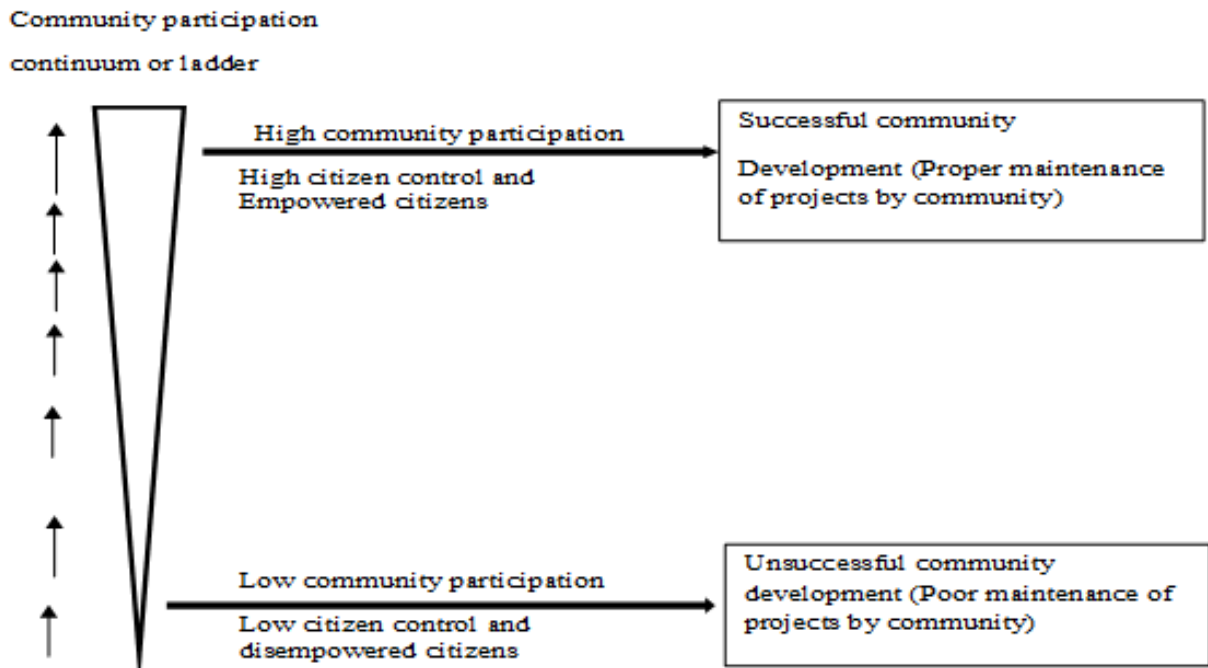


Figure 1: theory of community participation

3. Methods and materials

3.1 Methods

The qualitative method of inquiry was adopted for this study, as the researcher was interested in understanding in detail the views of stakeholders about community development in the slums [27]. The study was conducted in Ashaiman, a municipality in the Greater Accra region of Ghana which has a population of about 190,972 [28], and located about five kilometres from Tema and about thirty kilometres from Accra central. Within the municipality, three specific slums were selected for the study are Tulaku, Taboo Line and Valco Flat. These slums were selected because although many projects and campaigns have been undertaken there, the living conditions are still poor. They were therefore deemed suitable as the study sought to understand the reasons for the failure of projects.

Thirty participants who had been actively involved in community development efforts in the slums were purposively sampled, and these participants consisted of chiefs, assembly members, community inhabitants and community developers who worked in the communities. Out of the 30 participants, there were three chiefs, three assembly members, 12 community developers and 12 inhabitants, all of whom were evenly sampled from the three selected slums. Primary data used for this study were obtained through interviews which were conducted in English and Twi with the participants, and aided by the use of a set of guiding questions.

Data was collected through note-taking and voice recording with participants' permission, and then analysed using Braun and Clarke's [29] framework of data analysis.

With this analytical framework, obtained data were familiarized with through transcription and thoroughly reading through the transcripts. Through this, initial codes were generated according to the similarities among the data.

Themes were then searched for by clustering similar information, after which the derived themes were reviewed, defined and named to communicate specific findings. Finally, the derived findings were reported. Ethical issues that were observed are informed consent and voluntary participation of participants, confidentiality of data derived and the avoidance of plagiarism.

3.2 Socio-demographic characteristics of participants

The ages of the participants ranged from between 25 and 54 years, with 7 of them being between 25 and 34 years, 14 of them being between 35 and 44 years, and the remaining 9 being between 45 and 54 years.

Out of the 30 participants, 22 were males while 8 were females. With regard to the experience of community developers in the slums, 7 of them have been involved in projects for less than five years while the remaining 5 have been in community development for five years or more. All the 12 inhabitants, 3 chiefs and 3 assembly members have been involved in the implementation of projects in their respective communities for at least three years.

4. Findings and discussions

4.1 Findings

In spite of the numerous projects attempted and undertaken in Ashaiman slums, many community development efforts have been largely unsuccessful while others were satisfactorily executed, due to some challenges that have been encountered. Two broad challenges encountered in community development in Ashaiman slums are community issues and institutional and operational challenges.

Community issues that impede community development are negative attitudes of some slum dwellers towards projects, crime, land issues and ethnic differences and resultant disputes among the people. Some negative attitudes of inhabitants include low community participation in some projects, sabotage of projects and their expectation of reward for their participation in projects. It was revealed that some slum dwellers rarely show commitment to some projects due to their non-involvement in the design of projects and low sensitization on such projects. Others do not only show poor commitment but also sabotage some projects especially when they perceive that projects are used as ploys to evacuate them from land which they are illegally occupying. Some slum dwellers also expect to be rewarded for their support and participation in the execution of projects, dissuading people from the main goal of community development, and leading to increased cost of the projects.

Crime is another community issue that has impeded the execution of projects in Ashaiman slums. A common form of crime that has impeded community development in Ashaiman is theft. As a result of the theft of materials such as bags of cement and wheel burrows, there has been shortage of materials acquired for projects, and this has delayed the completion of projects. Although theft, vandalism of facilities and other forms of crime have not entirely impeded the execution of projects, they continue to ruin the smooth completion of the affected projects with the budgeted resources and within the stipulated timelines, as well as the sustainability of improved conditions in the slums.

Many projects in Ashaiman have also been impeded by insecure land tenure which means many slum dwellers in the selected slums lack of ownership of land on which they reside. The execution of some projects and campaigns have been inhibited by the inability to secure land for such projects as a result of slums dwellers' lack of land ownership. This challenge has manifested into difficulties in securing lands for projects, causing delays in the execution and completion of such projects. Slum dwellers' lack of land ownership is as a result of the government's and tribal chiefs' failure to grant the inhabitants ownership of land, since the land in such informal settlements are owned by the government and some tribes. In line with land issue, it was also uncovered that due to poor demarcation of land in the slums, it has become difficult for appropriate space to be identified for specific projects.

Ethnic differences also impedes community development efforts in Ashaiman slums. Ashaiman is co-habited by people from different ethnic groups who have their respective traditional leaders. The high ethnic diversity means people have different values, and this has created ethnic dispute among some of the tribes which have inhibited the slum dwellers to collaborate towards common goals in some instances and also delays or sabotage

in the execution of some projects. Suffice to say that the problems associated with ethnic differences and disputes become dire in situations where people from particular ethnic groups perceive they have been alienated from projects through community developers' affiliation with other ethnic groups. In such instances, some aggrieved inhabitants do not only recuse themselves from the projects but rather sabotage them. Furthermore, the differences in values and interests of the inhabitants due to ethnic differences have constricted decision making on particular projects to be undertaken.

Beside community issues impeding community development in Ashaiman slums, some institutional and operational factors have also constricted the execution of projects. The challenges discussed hereafter are related to the processes and methods adopted for community development as well as the resources required for the processes. The lack or inadequacy of resources has been a key challenge in community development in Ashaiman slums. The execution of some projects have stalled or cannot be executed according to their design due to the shortage of resources required for such efforts. Community developers and other stakeholders therefore have had to alter the design of projects in order to implement projects with the limited resources. In situations where some changes such as increase in the costs of resources occurred between the planning phase and project implementation phase, it becomes difficult for additional resources to be acquired. This is exacerbated by sponsors' delays in providing funds for projects. Additionally, this challenge gets worse when the slum dwellers require some reward for their participation in community development efforts. An example of projects that are being stifled by the lack of funds and resources is the income generating projects. Due to the lack of requisite funds to acquire materials such as dye and beads, these projects which have assisted many inhabitants are being compromised.

Poor monitoring and supervision of projects during their implementations is another operational factor which continues to stifle community development in Ashaiman slums. Due to the poor manner in which certain projects are being supervised, such projects are being carried out haphazardly, and in essence rendered unsuccessful. The quality of projects that are not properly monitored and supervised are being compromised. This is because in such projects, some workers misappropriate raw materials and also use inferior materials in order to cut the cost of production. In the end, this has rendered some projects unsustainable.

Poor management and maintenance of projects is another challenge of community development. This is manifested in ways such as littering refuse after clean-up campaigns have been undertaken and dustbins have been provided, and riding motor bikes on footbridges which are meant for humans to walk on them. As a result of such malpractices, some facilities such as footbridges have suffered breakages and damages. Such unfortunate incidents have made it difficult for sustainable community development to be engendered.

Project model is another key challenge faced in community development efforts in Ashaiman slums. In projects which are designed from community developers' worldview, inhabitants' understanding of the processes involved have sometimes been challenged especially when they are not properly educated and sensitized on such projects. This discourages community support and participation in such projects, since they do not know the essence of such projects in their lives, and hence perceive such projects could be used in a hidden agenda to evict them from the communities. This challenge and its effect is aggravated when the community developers

are not open and transparent about the projects.

4.2 Discussion of findings

As depicted by the findings, challenges encountered in community development in Ashaiman slums have led to low community participation in many projects and thereby compromised their successful execution. Although some projects have survived the challenges, their end products have usually been of low quality, making community development in such instances unsustainable. For example, although the income generating projects in Ashaiman continue to be undertaken, slum dwellers' lack of resources has impeded them from establishing trades with the acquired skills as a result of their inability to acquire requisite materials such as solder and beads. Although such people have gained the vocational skills, many cannot exploit the expertise to make a living, and this defeats the goal of the project. It is worthy of note however, that projects undertaken in both rural Ghana and organized parts of urban Ghana also face this challenge as reported by Campfens [20] and Laird [5]. This supports findings by Amoako and Cobbinah [10] and Gulyani and Basset [11] that challenges faced in the execution of projects and campaigns have rendered community development unsustainable in many areas.

Negative attitudes such as sabotage of projects and inhabitants' expectation of rewards for their participation in projects continue to impede successful execution of projects in the Ashaiman slums. This has had dire influence on projects already facing funding constraint, as there are no spare funds to be given to the inhabitants as reward for their participation. This has sometimes translated into low community participation especially in projects in which massive sensitization is not done to educate the people on the essence of such projects in their communities. This is not an isolated finding as it has been reported by Izugbara and his colleagues [12] that the negative attitudes of some inhabitants in Kenyan communities have impeded community development.

Ethnic differences is another challenge that has ruined some community development efforts in Ashaiman slums. Ashaiman is being co-habited by people from different tribes such as Gas, Ewes, Akans and Hausas, and this corroborates Nunoo's [30] report about the high ethnic diversity in the municipality. Due to the ethnic differences and the resultant differences in values and interests which breed low collaboration for common goals, some projects have been compromised. In other instances, some inhabitants from specific ethnic groups become aggrieved by their perception of being sidelined from projects. In such instances, they tend dissociate themselves from efforts being made or even sabotage the processes, leading to low community participation and unsuccessful community development. The findings supports Aryeetey's [16] assertion that ethnic and tribal differences impeded community development in northern Ghana.

Non-representation of the slum dwellers in the design of projects has also impeded the implementation of such projects. As revealed earlier, some projects are designed exclusively by the community developers without inputs from the inhabitants. This has led to low community participation due to the lack of understanding about such projects especially when they are technical in nature. The low community participation in many instances has translated into poor maintenance of such projects, leading to unsuccessful community development as depicted at the bottom of the ladder in the theory of community participation. This corroborates Dukeshire and

Thurlow's [13] position that poor representation and involvement of inhabitants in designing projects discourages their participation and hence ruins successful community development.

Another challenge that has gravely constricted community development in the Ashaiman slums is slum dwellers' lack of land ownership. Most of the lands in the communities are owned by either the Ashaiman Municipal Assembly (ASHMA) or some traditional leaders. The lack of land ownership coupled with the poor demarcation of the land in the slums have delayed projects as a result of long period it takes for some land to be leased for projects. This challenge and the threats of eviction have also demotivated some slum dwellers from using their scarce resources to develop the land knowing they could be evicted any time. This finding supports Sherbiniin and his colleagues [14] report that community development efforts are impeded by inhabitants' lack of ownership and control over the land on which they live.

As revealed in the study, many challenges encountered in projects have led to low community participation in some projects. As a result, many inhabitants do not have the expertise required to maintain the projects executed in the communities, leading to unsustainable community development. This finding confirms the theory of community development which stipulates that at the bottom of the ladder where there is low community participation, community development is unsuccessful because the inhabitants are unable to maintain projects undertaken due to their lack of skills required to maintain those projects [25].

5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Community development can be a crucial tool in slum communities continue to face a myriad of problems such as poverty, poor housing and poor sanitation. Although many projects have been undertaken in Ashaiman slums, the slum dwellers continue to live in impoverished and deplorable conditions. This is because many projects undertaken have not been successful and sustainable as a result of the challenges such as ethnic differences, insecure land tenure, and lack of resources, which have been encountered in such projects. While some of the challenges encountered are related to the manner in which projects have been carried and the others related to dynamics in the communities, they have all compromised community support and participation in the projects. The theory of community participation was adopted for the study to test how the low community participation, and just as it predicts, projects have been satisfactory or even unsuccessful because community participation in Ashaiman is low. Their sabotage, non-participation and low participation has led to their inability to acquire requisite skills needed to maintain projects undertaken and also replicate others on their own. Considering that the global slum population and their problems keeps increasing, it is important that the dynamics in such informal settlements as well as operational issues in projects are thoroughly interrogated so that the corrective measures can be instituted to overcome the challenges encountered in community development efforts.

5.2 Recommendations

Considering the positive role that community development has played in some communities, it is important that the practice is engendered in Ashaiman by overcoming the challenges encountered. In order to overcome the

challenges related to theft of resources, the government through ASHMA should put measures in place to combat crime in the communities. This can be done through the institution of watchdog programmes and also police patrol. ASHMA should also make the effort to conscientise people to be vigilant and also report criminal incidents to the police, so that crime can be curbed in Ashaiman.

The Government of Ghana through the legislature should implement slum development policies. The government has not been as active in community development in slums as it did when the practice was introduced in rural Ghana, and this is aggravated by the low self-help efforts undertaken by the slum dwellers due to their high poverty levels. The government should therefore implement policies that will promote community development in the slums, and also spearhead practice. The government should also grant the inhabitants ownership of the lands so that the slum dwellers' apathetic attitude towards projects due to their lack of ownership of land can be addressed.

Additionally, community developers should put measures in place to encourage community participation in projects. This can be achieved by designing projects based on community needs, educating and sensitizing communities about projects, and also being open and transparent about the projects. This will enable the slum dwellers understand the true goal of projects so that their perception about the likelihood of they being evicted through such projects can be resolved. It will also help them understand the various processes involved in the projects and how the implementation of such projects would benefit them as communities. Through these measures, the inhabitants of communities will be motivated to support and participate in the execution of projects.

Furthermore, community developers should build their own capacities as community developers and that of the inhabitants and their chiefs. If this is done, the inhabitants can acquire some expertise on specific projects and hence participate in such projects. The acquired skills will also help inhabitants better manage and maintain the facilities, and also be able to replicate such projects on their own. They should also devise means through which they can obtain the needed funds for projects. Such measures include writing proposals to solicit support from corporate entities and also partnering with other agencies in order to amass adequate funds and resources for community development.

There is also the need for community developers to develop techniques that will aid them to work with the various ethnic groups and factions in the slums. Some projects in Ashaiman were found to have been impeded by challenges related to ethnic and tribal differences among the inhabitants. If community developers and other key stakeholders in community development practice in the slums such as the traditional chiefs can bring the people together regardless of their ethnicity, it would help create strong bonds and in essence get community-wide support and participation in projects.

The chiefs who are important stakeholders in the slums should constantly dialogue with other chiefs in the slums as well as the inhabitants so that healthy bonds can be created and common interests can be established. This would help resolve the challenges related to ethnic differences among the slum dwellers. With healthy relationships and a common direction, the slum dwellers can collaborate towards the achievement of collectively

agreed upon goals. Additionally, the traditional leaders who are custodians of land should lease them to the inhabitants so that such beneficiaries will be motivated to develop the lands as their own properties and also participate in the execution of projects.

6. Limitation of the study

The qualitative research design was adopted for the study. While this approach of enquiry suited the study, it did not afford the researcher the opportunity to delve into the frequency at which community development projects are being undertaken in Ashaiman slums. Although the enumeration of projects undertaken in Ashaiman slums was not an objective in this paper, such information would be a valuable addition to the literature on community development in Ghana. It is therefore recommended that subsequent studies on community development in Ashaiman slums adopt quantitative or mixed research approaches so that some numbers can be introduced to show the frequency of projects undertaken in specific communities. Additionally, this study focused on Ashaiman slums although there are slums in other urban and peri-urban areas in Ghana. Attention must therefore be also paid to such areas so that a holistic picture can be created about the slum population in Ghana and their development efforts.

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