



OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP: KEY ISSUES IN SEKONDI-TAKORADI

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ABSTRAK

Sekondi-Takoradi berperan utama dalam kampanye pemerintahan terbuka di Ghana karena merupakan satu-satunya program percontohan pemerintah daerah Kemitraan Pemerintah Terbuka di negara tersebut. Tujuan dan fokus penelitian ini menganalisis isu-isu utama pemerintahan terbuka Sekondi-Takoradi. Pendekatan kualitatif dan metode analisis bibliometrik digunakan pada penelitian ini. Data penelitian diperoleh dari *website* resmi pemerintah Sekondi-Takoradi dan bersumber dari *database Google Scholar*. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pemerintahan terbuka Sekondi-Takoradi tidak populer. Isu-isu dominan pemerintahan terbuka Sekondi-Takoradi meliputi *development, governance, policy, economy, decentralization, reform, innovation*, dan SME. Sementara itu, isu-isu terkini meliputi *urban economy, leadership, SME resilience, open innovation, open governance, transportation*, dan *sustainable development*. pembangunan, tata kelola, kebijakan, ekonomi, desentralisasi, reformasi, inovasi, dan UKM. Sementara itu, isu-isu terkini meliputi ekonomi perkotaan, kepemimpinan, ketahanan UKM, inovasi terbuka, tata kelola terbuka, transportasi, dan pembangunan berkelanjutan. Isu-isu ini menunjukkan urgensi dan kontribusi potensial di masa depan bagi pemerintahan terbuka Sekondi-Takoradi. Saat ini Sekondi-Takoradi fokus pada tiga komitmen utama mereka, yakni menciptakan ketahanan iklim, *building synergies to impact water and sanitation outcomes*, dan *improve responsiveness and efficiency in municipal service delivery through E-Government*, menciptakan ketahanan iklim, membangun sinergi untuk memengaruhi hasil air dan sanitasi, dan meningkatkan daya tanggap dan efisiensi dalam pemberian layanan kota melalui *E-Government*. Komitmen-komitmen tersebut berpotensi menciptakan pemerintahan yang lebih terbuka Sekondi-Takoradi. Temuan penelitian ini menjadi rekomendasi bagi para pengambil keputusan di Sekondi-Takoradi, termasuk juga bagi seluruh pemerintah lokal di Ghana dan seluruh anggota Kemitraan Pemerintah Terbuka.

Kata kunci: Isu Utama; Kemitraan Pemerintah Terbuka; Pemerintahan Terbuka; Sekondi-Takoradi

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ABSTRACT

Sekondi-Takoradi plays a leading role in the open government campaign in Ghana as it is the only pilot local government program of the Open Government Partnership in the country. The purpose and focus of this study are to analyze the key issues of open government in Sekondi-Takoradi. Qualitative approaches and bibliometric analysis methods were used in this study. The research data were obtained from the official website of the Sekondi-Takoradi government and sourced from the Google Scholar database. The findings of this study indicate that open government in Sekondi-Takoradi is not popular. The dominant issues of open government in Sekondi-Takoradi include development, governance, policy, economy, decentralization, reform, innovation, and SMEs.

Meanwhile, current issues include urban economy, leadership, SME resilience, open innovation, open governance, transportation, and sustainable development. These issues highlight the urgency and potential future contributions to open government in Sekondi-Takoradi. Currently, Sekondi-Takoradi is focused on three key commitments: creating climate resilience, building synergies to impact water and sanitation outcomes, and improving responsiveness and efficiency in municipal service delivery through E-Government. These commitments have the potential to create a more open government in Sekondi-Takoradi. The findings of this study serve as recommendations for decision-makers in Sekondi-Takoradi, as well as for all local governments in Ghana and all members of the Open Government Partnership.

Keywords: *Key Issues, Open Government Partnership, Open Government, Sekondi-Takoradi*

1. INTRODUCTION

The term open government is not new, but various social contexts and advances in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in the government sector have contributed to how open government is conceptualized (Shao & Saxena, 2019; Wirtz, Weyerer, & Rösch, 2019). The origins of open government can be traced back to the Greek Athenian codification of law. Still, the Visigothic Code of the Kingdom of Sweden is considered the beginning of modern open government initiatives (Moon, 2020; Wang & Shepherd, 2020). Traditional open government refers to the freedom of information available to citizens so that they can make government authorities transparent and accountable even though their contributions are often constrained by the political environment. This traditional approach was reconsidered and reshaped when web technologies offered new channels through which more information could be provided simultaneously to many unknown people beyond the constraints of space and time (Aji, Antarini, & Sudemen, 2024; Gascó-Hernández, 2014; Khurshid et al., 2022).

Open government is an intriguing agenda promoted by many governments since the 2000s. Open government is seen as very important, similar to New Public Management (NPM) in the 1980s (Safarov, 2019; Sarjito, 2024; Zhao, Liang, Yao, & Han, 2022). Currently, there has been a global tendency to create a sustainable open government through the use of artificial intelligence. Open government initiatives have been widely introduced not only in Western democracies but also in Asian and African countries (Afandi, Erdayani, & Afandi, 2024; Gil-Garcia, Gasco-Hernandez, & Pardo, 2020; Prastya, Misran, & Nurmandi, 2021).

Open government has become an important strategy for administrative reform that has prompted many countries around the world to design and implement initiatives related to e-government, access to information, transparency, public participation, and collaboration (De Blasio & Selva, 2019; Piotrowski, Berliner, & Ingrams, 2022; Schnell, 2020; Zafarullah & Siddiquee, 2023). Many governments have expanded the concept of open government; for example, the Obama administration announced the Open Government Directive in 2009 and, together with South Africa, Brazil, the Philippines, Indonesia, the United Kingdom, Mexico, and Norway, took a leading role in establishing the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2011. The OGP is a multinational effort to promote open government worldwide (Raca, Velinov, & Kon-Popovska, 2022; Schmidhuber & Hilgers, 2021).

The Open Government Partnership is comprised of countries, local governments, and civil society organizations that support each other in designing and implementing projects that promote transparency in governance, public engagement, and accountability (Lnenicka & Saxena, 2021; Noushin, Farajollah, Mahdi, & Mahmoud, 2020). Transparency describes the public's ability to not only see but also understand how their government works. Public engagement refers to the public's ability to influence government by engaging in government processes and programs. Accountability reflects the public's ability to hold government to account for its policies and performance (Aboalmaali, Daneshfard, & Pourezat, 2020; Bonina & Eaton, 2020).

The Open Government Partnership is based on the idea that open government is more accessible, more responsive, and more accountable to citizens, and that improving the relationship between citizens and government has long-term and exponential benefits for all (Heywood, 2014; Lathrop & Ruma, 2010; Ruijter & Meijer, 2020). The Partnership focuses on several policy areas, including anti-corruption and integrity, beneficial ownership, open contracting, civic space, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, freedom of expression, digital governance, environment and climate, extractive industries, fiscal openness, inclusion, people with disabilities, youth, justice, land and spatial planning, open parliaments, public service delivery, education, health, water and sanitation, and the right to information (Gao, Janssen, & Zhang, 2021; Ingrams, 2020; Ruijter, D tienne, Baker, Groff, & Meijer, 2020).

Seventy-five countries and one hundred and sixty-three local governments are currently part of the Open Government Partnership. Being a local OGP member provides benefits to drive open reforms that have become part of the vision and mission of each local government to achieve levels of accountability, responsiveness, inclusiveness, and transparency (Ingrams, Piotrowski, & Berliner, 2020). Through membership in this global community, each local government can gain new information on the implementation of open government and can share views, experiences, and resources to achieve the principles of open government (Li, Yang, & Lu, 2024).

The Open Government Partnership has launched a local government pilot program because it recognizes that much open government innovation and reform is happening at the local level. Local governments can engage directly with citizens and deliver many important public services (Matheus & Janssen, 2020; Tai, 2021). Local governments involved in the program include Sekondi-Takoradi (Ghana), La Libertad (Peru), Buenos Aires (Argentina), Madrid (Spain), South Cotabato (Philippines), Paris (France), Tbilisi (Georgia), Austin (United States), Scotland (United Kingdom), Kaduna State (Nigeria), Sao Paulo (Brazil), Elgeyo Marakwet (Kenya), and Jalisco (Mexico), Basque Country (Spain), Seoul (South Korea) (Afandi, Afandi, & Erdayani, 2024).

Sekondi-Takoradi is the only local government in Ghana to be designated as a local government pilot program by OGP. In the country, seven local governments have joined OGP, including Sekondi-Takoradi, Anloga District, Ketu South, Shama, Tamale, Tarkwa Nsuaem, and Wassa Amenfi East. This makes Sekondi-Takoradi a key player in the open government campaign in Ghana. Since joining OGP, Sekondi-Takoradi has made thirteen open government commitments. Their first commitment was made in 2017 and they are currently

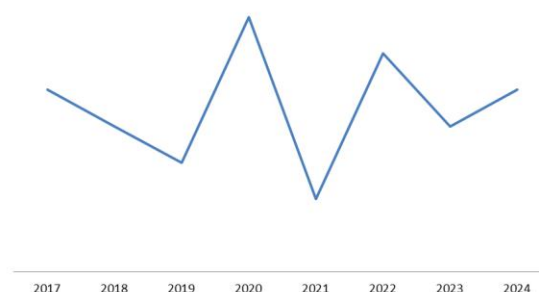
focusing on three main commitments. This study aims to analyze the main issues of open government in Sekondi-Takoradi.

2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a bibliometric analysis method. Bibliometric analysis is a method for analyzing scientific literature in a particular field of knowledge or topic (Donthu, Kumar, Mukherjee, Pandey, & Lim, 2021; Moral-Muñoz, Herrera-Viedma, Santisteban-Espejo, & Cobo, 2020). This method is used to identify and highlight critical insights generated from scientific literature (Gaviria-Marin, Merigó, & Baier-Fuentes, 2019; Kulsum et al., 2022). The research data were obtained from Sekondi-Takoradi government policy documents and sourced from the Google Scholar database taken using the Publish or Perish (PoP) application with the keywords Sekondi-Takoradi e-government, Sekondi-Takoradi information access, Sekondi-Takoradi transparency, Sekondi-Takoradi participation, and Sekondi-Takoradi collaboration, which are based on the main principles of open government. The data used is within the time limit of 2017 to 2024 by Sekondi-Takoradi involvement in the Open Government Partnership. Data were stored in RIS format, selected using Mendeley (including completing details author keywords), and analyzed using VOSviewer (type of analysis: co-occurrence; unit analysis: keywords; counting method: full counting). The bibliometric map is then juxtaposed with Sekondi-Takoradi open government policies.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

During the seven years of OGP involvement, there were thirty-six scholarly publications on the Sekondi Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly (STMA) open government and this publication fluctuated throughout the years (see Graph 1). Five publications were recorded in 2017, four publications in 2018, three publications in 2019, seven publications in 2020, two publications in 2021, six publications in 2022, four publications in 2023, and five publications in 2024. This shows that STMA open government is not popular and therefore inconsistent with its status as a local government pilot program of OGP. The partnership is campaigning for open government as an effective public administration reform strategy broadly.



Graph 1. Publication Trends

There are forty-four main issues of STMA open government. These issues are integrated and divided into several main focuses (see Figure 1). The first focuses on finance, financial literacy, financial performance, leadership, SME, and SME resilience. The second focuses on the actor's role, environment, governance, open governance, urban governance, and urbanization. The third focuses on development, development inequality, development plans, politics, and regional development. The fourth focuses on the economy, gender, transportation, transportation services, and urban economy. The fifth focuses on

decentralization, government system, local government, system, and system framework. The sixth focuses on the education system, housing crisis, intervention, and reform. The seventh focuses on collaboration, innovation, open innovation, and public innovation. The eighth focuses on economic development, local economy, and mobilization. The ninth focuses on industrial policy, policy, and sustainable development. The tenth focuses on decentralization policy, the government's role, and tourism development. Dominant issues include development, governance, policy, economy, decentralization, reform, innovation, and SME. Meanwhile, current issues include urban economy, leadership, SME resilience, open innovation, open governance, transportation, and sustainable development. These issues demonstrate the urgency and potential future contributions of STMA open governance.

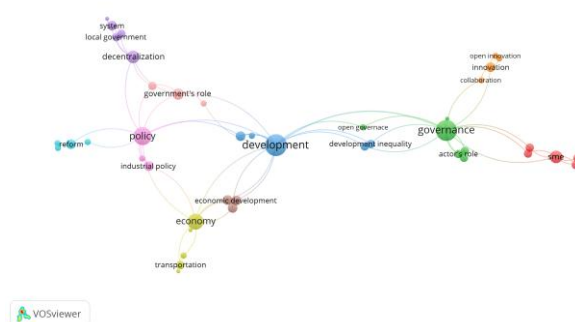


Figure 1. Network Visualization

STMA's long-term vision for OGP is to foster trust and confidence and broaden citizen participation in local governance through the creation of an enabling environment rooted in the principles of sustainable development and open government. This vision is reflected in the priority areas set out in the Medium-Term Development Plan; which places a high value on participatory and inclusive governance that is people-centered and creates prosperity and equal opportunity for all.

This vision supports Ghana's decentralization agenda that is grounded in grassroots participation as a sustainable pathway to charting people-centered development and governance in local public policy-making and implementation. Putting citizens at the heart of inclusive and sustainable urban development results in greater shared responsibility and ownership of policies, greater access to information and accountability, and increased legitimacy and trust in stakeholders.

The OGP STMA strategic vision is aimed at building responsive local governance that expands and sustains permanent opportunities for all citizens to actively participate in the formulation and implementation of local policies and creates an enabling environment for citizens to enjoy the benefits of urban life. This vision is intended to remove barriers to participation and empower citizens to play an active role in governance, improve access to and quality of city services, and address the uncertain relationship between transparency and accountability.

STMA is currently focused on three of its open government commitments: *First*, creating climate resilience. The growth of urban areas in STMA in the past two decades has declined the green belt, and green vegetation has consequently caused remarkable urban thermal environmental problems. The central government, local assembly, and CSOs have carried out projects in Disaster Risk Reduction Management such as the sea defense wall, tree planting, wetland preservation, etc. However, sustaining the positive results and scaling

them up to effect rippling positive changes in the lives of the people has been a constant challenge. Threats remain, and disasters and people's risk to disasters are still present in the metropolis. This is because the underlying causes of people's vulnerability have not yet been fully recognized and addressed. For years, DRR has focused more on efforts around disaster response and not so much on identifying the hazard-prone areas and other factors that contribute to people's exposure to disasters, incorporating risk analysis into development plans, building people's capacities towards sustainable livelihood options, and the like. The poor communities in STMA are highly exposed to the negative effects of climate change, such as floods. Limited institutional capacity and coordination for effective climate change action have contributed to this. The city does not have any climate-resilient local public policy and eco-Disaster Risk Reduction Management Plan to respond to the negative impacts of climate change and human activities leading to the loss of the city's greenery.

Projects such as sea walls, tree planting, and wetland conservation have been part of efforts to thwart the negative impacts of climate change. Ghana has been losing its rainforests at an alarming rate in recent years, but the Ghanaian government is taking steps to change all that, launching the Green Ghana Day, which saw communities come together for a massive drive to plant over 5 million trees across the country. As part of the Green Ghana Day campaign, the Ghanaian government provided free seedlings to all individuals, government and non-government organizations, traditional leaders, and educational and religious institutions willing to roll up their sleeves and help. STMA, during the campaign, planted 8,000 trees. STMA also launched the one child, one tree initiative, and about 2,000 trees were planted in schools. The city's membership in programs such as C40 and Cities4Forest, a global knowledge-sharing platform that encourages cities to invest in urban parks, green corridors, and watersheds, is part of the efforts that have been made so far. STMA has also launched a green building initiative where building permit fees are reduced by up to 30% if they are certified as green or use solar power.

This commitment involves the co-creation of climate resilience local public policy and an eco-Disaster Risk Reduction Management Plan (e-DRRP) with CSOs, government, the private sector, traditional authorities, and citizen groups. Stakeholders will co-create the local climate policy and e-DRRP that will encompass management arrangements for preparing for, managing, and recovering from disaster events and institutional mechanisms for addressing disaster risk reduction, including climate change adaptation. This commitment will serve as a guide on how sustainable development can be achieved through inclusive growth while building the adaptive capacity of communities, enhancing the resilience of vulnerable communities/sectors, and optimizing disaster mitigation opportunities with the ultimate goal of promoting people's well-being and security towards gender-responsive and rights-based sustainable development.

This commitment is linked to the long-term goal of "protecting the natural environment and ensuring a resilient Sekondi-Takoradi". Given the increasing frequency and intensity of climate-related disasters and the emergence of other adverse events such as geopolitical conflicts and pandemics around the world, resilience-building activities have been prioritized by the local government to always put the most disadvantaged—the poorest and most marginalized communities—at the heart, so that Metro's climate change resilience and adaptation efforts are deemed fulfilled only if they are met for everyone, wherever and wherever they are. This can be achieved by ensuring that the planning and implementation process of the plan takes into account the harmonization of efforts and effective participation

of all key stakeholders, such as government, CSOs, the private sector, traditional authorities, and citizens.

Second, building synergies to impact water and sanitation outcomes. As the 3rd largest city in Ghana, Sekondi-Takoradi records an average of 88,000 people annually, mostly residents of underserved communities, with sanitation-related diseases. This situation results in lost productivity, affecting household incomes and the local economy. Poor enforcement of sanitation regulations further exacerbates the situation. Available data also shows that the majority of COVID-19 infections are residents of informal settlements, where there is an over-reliance on public sanitation facilities and a high incidence of open defecation. A situation that makes adherence to the usual protocols of hand washing, physical distancing, and self-isolation an unaffordable luxury for most at the height of the pandemic. Similarly, District League data shows that 33,127 (13.5%) of the Metropolis' residents do not have access to dignified sanitation facilities. This is higher than the regional average of 2.6% reported in the Population and Housing Census General Report on Water and Sanitation. As a result, open defecation and improper disposal of liquid waste remain perennial challenges facing the city. This is evidenced by the various legal actions against violators of the STMA bylaws on sanitation and the metropolis' poor standing on the District League data, which measures sanitation sub-indicators such as the proportion of the population with access to improved sanitation services and the percentage of schools with toilet facilities, among others.

The National Environmental Sanitation Policy and the Local Governance Act (Act 936) mandate all local authorities, including STMA, to develop and enforce by-laws that require landlords/property owners to provide household toilets and impose penalties for non-compliance; sanitation outcomes in poor and informal settlements remain largely unchanged. However, enforcement of these bylaws has mainly been targeted at residents who flout regulations against open defecation, due to barriers to toilet construction by landlords and property owners. These barriers include financial constraints, lack of technical support, lack of awareness of by-laws and associated penalties, multiple absentee landlords, and low prioritization of sanitary facilities by tenants. Factors influencing the non-enforcement of bylaws by the local authority include limited funding, lack of incentives for Environmental Health Officers (EHOs), logistical constraints, and delays in the enforcement process (legal).

Although a new model of collaboration between the local authority and landlords exists on paper, it has not been fully implemented and evaluated to ascertain its suitability in impacting sanitation by-law compliance in increasing access to household toilet coverage. However, the model did not explore a strategy to achieve a voluntary compliance equilibrium through negotiation between the local authority and landlords to arrive at a consensus by-law enforcement approach. Through consultative meetings with stakeholders (local authorities, landlords/property owners/residents' associations, CSOs in WASH, and local financial institutions), the new model of collaboration would be reviewed to solicit new inputs to inform implementation. This constructive engagement would also explore agreements between parties related to by-law enforcement and compliance type, overcoming financial constraints to household toilet construction, and improving awareness of the sanitation by-laws. This commitment is in line with STMA's vision, which embraces a long-term desire to co-create and implement local policy interventions that rely on building trust with citizens and enduring partnerships with civil society and other stakeholders to create safe and equitable cities for all.

Third, improve responsiveness and efficiency in municipal service delivery through e-government. Opportunities for citizens to make inputs into decisions that directly or indirectly affect their socio-economic well-being are the key guiding principle in Ghana's local government system. The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936), and the Right to Information Act, 2019 (Act 989) exist, among others, to empower citizens to participate in decision-making, demand transparency and accountability, and gain unfettered access to legally permissible information from duty-bearers in all aspects of national life, including local governance. However, the enabling environment for citizen participation, as well as the horizontal accountability mechanisms these legislations sought to provide, have largely not engendered transparency nor accountability, creating mistrust in local government authorities. Equally, limited avenues to access information, receive feedback, and bureaucracy in accessing municipal services further entrench the feeling of neglect of the social contract between government and citizens.

Consequently, feedback from community consultation sessions indicates a disapproval rating of between 40% and 60% in terms of avenues for participation in decisions, access to financial data, and opportunities to seek accountability from duty-bearers for their stewardship. This has translated into low trust and lack of trust, weak ownership of public projects and programs, and low participation of civil society in local governance. Limited avenues for participation and access to information, including financial data, feed an unhealthy perception of opacity and lack of accountability in government. Currently, close to 98% of all transactions associated with municipal services are conducted through physical means. Also, the potentiality of an existing e-service platform, STMA360, has not been fully explored beyond permit application tracking.

Turnaround time in assessing such services is equally not encouraging due to bureaucracy and prone to corruption as a result of human intervention. Traditional avenues for participation, such as citizen engagement platforms, also limit the ability to involve a wider population to contribute to decision-making, resulting in apathy. Thus, the non-existence of a digital platform for citizens to access services and provide feedback on quality, request information, and make complaints further weakens the citizen-city authority relationship. Also, existing client service channels are poorly coordinated, resulting in less than professional output in terms of providing prompt feedback to citizen queries.

Through consultations with various local government (STMA) public-facing departments/units, focus groups, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders, a citizen-centric e-government platform would be co-created that expands the functionality of the existing e-service platform (STMA360) to enhance its existing structure, protocols, and services by redesigning and joining it up to back-office business processes and IT systems. This constructive and participatory approach is expected to deliver a platform that is not only fit for purpose but also meets the needs and aspirations of citizens and businesses within the metropolis. The electronic platform would include a multi-channel service delivery interface that improves access to municipal services by integrating service delivery across different delivery systems by integrating service systems, including internet, call center, over-the-counter service, e-mail, and ordinary mail. The platform would also include electronic services (e-services) and enhance citizens' ability to track and provide feedback on government services, revenue, expenditure, and policies. This commitment is in line with STMA's vision, which embraces a long-term desire to co-create and implement local policy

interventions that rely on building trust with citizens and lasting partnerships with civil society and other stakeholders to create safe and just cities for all.

4. CONCLUSION

STMA open government is not popular despite being a local government pilot program of OGP. The dominant issues of STMA open government include development, governance, policy, economy, decentralization, reform, innovation, and SME. Meanwhile, current issues include urban economy, leadership, SME resilience, open innovation, open governance, transportation, and sustainable development. These issues show the urgency and potential future contribution of STMA open government.

Currently, STMA focuses on three main commitments: creating climate resilience, building synergies to impact water and sanitation outcomes, and improving responsiveness and efficiency in municipal service delivery through e-government. These commitments have the potential to create an enabling environment for CSOs, government, the private sector, traditional authorities, and citizen groups to come together to create climate action to address climate vulnerability; create an expanded civic space for participation between city authorities, landlords, and other stakeholders, providing opportunities for constructive engagement that fosters shared ownership, trust, and respect for local governance; and create an enabling environment for transparency, accountability, and citizen participation by using digital e-government technologies to reduce bureaucracy in accessing city services. All of these commitments have the potential to create a more open government in STMA.

These findings serve as recommendations for stakeholders in STMA, including researchers, to use as a basis for studying STMA's open government. This will provide real contributions to the STMA government in achieving its open government commitments. The implementation of open government by STMA contributes to all local governments in Ghana, including the hundreds of local governments that are members of OGP. STMA's open government practices are very relevant to be implemented by local governments that have similar characteristics.

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