

The impact of human resource management on growth of the Office of the Upper West Regional

Coordinating Council.

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## Introduction

As one of the first African countries to gain its own political dependence (Abdulai, A. 2000), Ghana has worked extensively to develop its public sector and build public agencies that can serve the various regions and communities located within the country. One such public agency is the Office of the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council. The Office of the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council was created in 1983 and is the youngest of the 10 administrative regions in Ghana (“About UWRCC” n.d.). The mission of the agency is to “ensure total development of the region through improvement of the human and natural resources of the region through monitoring... the Municipal/District Assemblies, Ministries, Department and Agencies as well as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)” (“About UWRCC” n.d., Our Mission section, para. 1). While one of the youngest public agencies in Ghana, the Office of the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council has consistently grown and progressed within Ghana’s government sector. One of the reasons for this growth is the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council’s focus on human resource management and development.

As a whole, the government of Ghana has invested in the recruitment and development of skilled and educated individuals who could help the government sector reach new heights while still providing reliable services to Ghanaian citizens. The Office of the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council is no different, as its recruitment and investment into human leaders has led to it becoming one of the more active and impactful regional agencies in the nation. This paper will research and examine how the practice of human resource management and development has helped the Office of the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council grow into

one of the more successful public agencies in Ghana. The paper will do this by reviewing literature on the prevalence of human resource management in Ghana, the art and practice of public administration in Ghana, how Ghana has utilized human resource management and development within its public sector, and recent human resource-related events that have occurred within the Office of the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council.

### Research Problem

#### Background Information

Human resource management and development in Ghana has been administrative in nature. This is a byproduct of the British government's style of governance and administration when Ghana was still an African colony. Research shows that Ghana's government has worked tirelessly to create policies, social programs, and economic initiatives that would boost the country's human resources and help public agencies find the talent needed to bring them into the modern era (Abdul-Kahar, A. & Sulaiman, E. 2017; Debrah, Y. 2001). Unfortunately, the same research shows that Ghana has been unsuccessful in implementing the requirements included in the national government's policies inside of public or private sector workplaces. This trend is contradictory to the progress Ghana's public sector has made outside of its walls, as the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council has worked diligently to invest in the farmers who help make up its extremely important agricultural industry. According to the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council itself, the majority of workers within the region are a part of the agricultural sector and need its viability to be economically successful and safe within their personal lives ("About UWRCC" n.d.).

Thus, researching how the use of human resource management and development inside and outside of the organization can help future readers, scholars, and researchers learn how the

Upper West Regional Coordination Office has been able to avoid the negative trends around it and continue growing. While other public agencies and private workplaces have experienced difficulty implementing the human resource management and development policies enacted by the national government, the Upper West Regional Coordination Council has been able to remain proactive in its practice of human resource management and development. This productivity has led to it being the first of all the regional organizations to launch its own website and regularly publish information about its current events and council meetings (Salam, R. 2013).

#### Thesis Statement

The Office of the Upper West Regional Coordination Council has been more successful when developing its external human resources. This success has led to the government agency expanding its reach within the Upper West region and becoming one of the more advanced public agencies in all of Ghana. Thus, the thesis statement for this project will be “Has the development of external human resources and assets been the main driver of the Upper West Regional Coordination Council’s growth?”

#### Research Questions

1. Has the empowerment of citizens within the Upper West region of Ghana led to the growth of the Upper West Regional Coordination Council?
2. Does political decentralization help governments develop the public sector-related skills of their constituents?
3. Can building a relationship with citizens working and functioning outside the government lead to more successful recruitment efforts over the long-term?

The aforementioned research questions aim to discover whether or not the Upper West Regional Coordination Council’s empowerment of citizens has led to its consistent growth.

While the organization regularly publishes updates about its activities, academic literature primarily focuses on how the Upper West Regional Coordination Council and the Ghanaian government as a whole benefits and develops the citizens who do not work directly for the government. This focus on external human resources is reasonable, as the government ultimately works to create an economy and environment that allows its citizens to live safely while seeking economic success.

This personal economic success eventually results in the success of overlying government agencies, as labor-intensive industries like the agricultural sector need a multitude of individual successes before national-level progress can be realized. One of the Upper West Regional Coordination Council's most notable efforts is its focus on the Upper West region's agricultural sector and the farmers and workers that function within it. By investing in farmer education initiatives and the hiring of new workers for the Ministry of Agriculture, the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council has put time, money, and human capital into the development of farmers who are not employed or in contract with the government in any way.

This human resource management and development strategy may be confusing at the onset, but the Upper West Regional Coordination Council has worked extensively to help its residents live safer and more prosperous lives. These positive goals help the agency in the long-term, as it shows that it knows how to utilize the resources and human capital that are dedicated to it. Thus, determining all the reasons why a government agency would invest so much into developing external human resources is something that may help future researchers study how other governments seek to educate and develop those who will vote for future leaders and become future leaders themselves.

#### Approach and Methods

This project will use a qualitative approach, as it seeks to answer a question by looking at the social and economic contexts surrounding a problem. While the success of a public agency could be measured by the amount of revenue it brings in or how much its economy improves year-over-year, the viability of an agency's human resource management and development program is much less numbers based. The growth of the Upper West Regional Coordination Council is largely because of its ability to properly deploy and develop human capital whenever necessary. To maintain this, however, it has to continuously train new individuals and educate them on how the government works and what they can do to make their region more economically, socially, and politically successful. Thus, analyzing the history of human resources management and development in Ghana's government can help determine how the organization has been able to succeed and grow over time.

The information/data found within this thesis proposal will be collected via database search with Google Scholar. In addition to this tool, government-specific resources will be found by using Google's default search engine. The use of government materials will be important because they will provide a deeper level of context that many academic articles do not. After collecting said information, it will be analyzed by performing a literature review that considered credible news articles about the Office of the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council, press releases from the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council itself, and academic articles about human resource management in Ghana and the practice of human resource management in Ghana's public sector. The content found within the aforementioned materials will be synthesized according to their relevance to the thesis statement of this project, as there is little research available that examines a) how human resource management and development has

helped the Upper West Regional Coordination Council grow and b) how developing external human resources can help a public agency become more successful over time.

The analysis of the literature collected will involve discussing how the content relates to the topics of human resource management and development within the public sector and human resource management and development within the Upper West Regional Coordination Council. Reviewing articles that discuss public sector human resource management and development at the national level is important, as Ghana's national policies affect how the Upper West Regional Coordination Council does business and implements its own human resource practices and policies. When focusing on the internal aspects of the government agency, the analysis of government press releases will help provide insight into how the agency is run and focuses on the human capital it has inside and outside the organization.

No experimentation will take place throughout the course of this project. Also, there will be no interviewing that takes place to gain more information about how the Upper West Regional Coordination Council manages and develops its human resources. This is because there is very little academic information available about the organization, and any data collected by those who do not want to shed a bad light on the organization may not be fully credible. Thus, the data collection will rely mainly on academic papers that discuss Ghana's public sector human resource management strategies at a national level in order to learn what the Upper West Regional Coordination Council can and cannot legally do.

### Literature Review

#### Human Resource Management and Development in Ghana

Human resource management in Ghana has been studied by multiple authors. When defining the concept of human resource management, authors like Abdul-Kahar and Sulaiman

(2017) write that companies who practice this concept focus on staffing, performance, change management, and administration (p. 1). As they discuss how human resource management is utilized within Ghana, Abdul-Kahar and Sulaiman find that Ghana has not yet been able to make their human resource management practice more strategic. When saying this, it is meant that private and public businesses in Ghana are often more administrative and passive when managing the human capital and resources made available to them. This more administrative style of human resource management results in employees being disheartened by “[low] pay, low morale and motivation, low level of productivity, poor work attitudes, poor time management culture and under performance” (Abdul-Kahar, A. & Sulaiman, E. 2017, p. 2).

The lack of urgency in the Ghanaian human resource management sector is the result of Ghana’s past leaders failing to advance their knowledge of the field and how it can be used to improve the public and private sectors. This does not mean that past administrations did not try to improve the country’s human capital, however, as the Ghanaian government invested in an economic and social program that would make it a middle income country by 2020 (Debrah, Y. 2001, p. 190). This plan examined the need to bolster the human resources found within the Ghanaian agriculture and manufacturing industries and ensure that the economies supported by these industries could compete with those found across Africa and the rest of the world.

When delving deeper into the Ghanaian government’s past plans, Debrah (2001) mentions that the theoretical foundation of Ghana’s human resource management and development processes are based in Western methods. Specifically, the Ghanaian government leans on human resource management and development processes that were implemented during the British government’s colonial administration within the country. Britain’s colonial administration implemented Western labor management policies throughout its duration in



Ghana, but Debrah states that Ghana already had various forms of traditional human resource management and development processes within its economy before Britain's colonial administration took hold. When practicing human resource management and development in the public sector, Britain relied on an indirect system of governance that encouraged indigenous leaders to take administrative positions and deal with the complaints of their compatriots (Debrah, Y. 2001). As a result, Africans were able to hold government positions that would eventually influence the progress and Africanization of the Ghanaian economy once the country earned its independence from the British.

As Ghana's government progressed into the modern era, however, the country began to deal with an overly centralized government. This is why the national Ghanaian government and the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council have focused on decentralizing the political process within Ghana and, in turn, including more human resources and capital into the governance process. However, the participation of citizens in the political process has reached a wall in some districts. This is because there is a low level of political awareness amongst many Ghanaian citizens (Der Bebelleh, F. & Nobabumah, A. 2013, p. 12). To respond to this lack of political awareness and information, the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council created an official website that would allow Ghanaians in and outside the Upper West region to access information about the government agency's latest activities and future plans (Salam, R. 2013). According to Salam (2013), the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council was the first of its kind to create an official website that allowed outside individuals to learn about the inside happenings of the public agency. Ultimately, the investment made into the official website directly addressed a glaring need and problem within the Ghanaian political community. This direct resolution may be one of the penultimate reasons why the Upper West Regional

Coordinating Council was able to become one of the more developed government agencies in all of Ghana. While the residents of the Upper West region are not directly employed by the agency, their feedback and economic and social growth are directly fueled by the activities and leadership that takes place within the Office of the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council. This external human resource management and development compliments the internal human resource management that has occurred over time within the agency.

#### Human Resource Management and Development Within the Office of the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council

The Upper West Regional Coordinating Council's human resource management and development strategy appears to work with an outside-in methodology. While there is little academic literature on the agency in particular, there is more published dialogue about the Upper West region of Ghana's reliance on citizens to help execute government policy. Since a significant portion of Ghanaians living in the Upper West region work within the agricultural industry ("About Us" n.d., para 3; "The Upper West Regional Coordinating Council Meeting" 2018, p. 2), the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council often focuses on creating programs and solutions that can put its citizenry in a position to succeed. This is where the concept of political decentralization comes into play, as the agency's past efforts have shown a diligent focus on educating citizens and giving them as much power as possible. Much like the recruitment and development of leaders that work within the Upper West region's government, the development of residents within the region shows the long-term investment this government agency has put into the growth of human capital it uses to succeed.

While it focuses on the administration of the entire region and its needs, the Upper West Regional Coordination Council's focus on its agricultural sector, and the workers within it,

contributes to its consistent growth. Of course, this is a positive consequence of the political decentralization that has occurred within the country. Ultimately, the aforementioned economic and social initiative that the Ghanaian government implemented cannot succeed if the agricultural sector in the country does not develop as much as possible (Debrah, Y. 2001). While this economic and social plan was made at a national level, many of the human resources management-based aspects of the plan were applied by the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council.

The use of policies and government initiatives to influence human resource management and development is not new within Ghana. Abdul-Kahar and Sulaiman (2017) write that policies such as the Labor Act of 2003, the creation of the public policy commission, and the initiation of the Ghana shared growth and development agenda are three ways that the Ghanaian government has shown its interest in improving its human resource management practices. Along with these policy based human resource management and development solutions, the Ghanaian government also instituted policies that helped provide better pay for women and provide an institutional level framework of human resource management practices and procedures for the public sectors and the various local levels of the country's government (Abdul-Kahar, A. & Sulaiman, E. 2017, p. 3-5).

The aforementioned policies, on paper, appear to address the concerns that employees and citizens have about their employers and the overall economy around them. However, these policies are a comprehensive example of how Ghana's foray into human resource management and development has been largely administrative. At the end of their paper, Abdul-Kahar and Sulaiman (2017) write that Ghana's government did address many of the human resource management concerns that were present throughout the country. Unfortunately, these

administrative stop gaps have done little to help the professionals who are supposed to be benefitted by these solutions. This is what authors mean when they say Ghana's human resource management and development solutions lack true strategy, as the policies that are created by the national government are expected to result in a trickle down effect that ends with public sector businesses treating their human resources like the valuable assets they are.

Currently, the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council is using meetings and recruitment initiatives to help address the human resource management and development deficiencies within the organization. While it has worked diligently to help the human resources that are located without the organization, the current generation of managers within the agency are experiencing trouble remaining accountable with one another and finding the sheer manpower needed to address certain issues. In an article discussing a council meeting, the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council states that the area councils and unit committees that work under it have been unable to generate their own revenues. This failure to guarantee their own financial prosperity has led to an impediment on Ghana's journey to political decentralization ("The Upper West Regional Coordinating Council Meeting" 2018, p. 3). The impediment is the result of leaders at the local level being unable to properly set up educational sectors that can develop the human resources around them and train professionals that can work inside of the local government and the private sector the government ultimately hopes to oversee and benefit.

In another document published by the organization, it is reported that the Upper West Deputy Regional Minister has begun recruiting more than 3,000 agriculture extension officers ("Government to Recruit over Three Thousand Agric Extension Officers" 2019). This recruitment was started so that the agriculture industry in the Upper West region could continue to develop in a positive direction. When specifying the roles of the 3,000 recruited officers, the

Upper West Regional Coordination Council states that half of the recruited professionals will be assigned to the Ministry of Agriculture so that they can teach new and veteran farmers about modern farming practices (“Government to Recruit over Three Thousand Agric Extension Officers” 2019, p. 1).

### Implications for Further Research

Illuminating the Human Resource Management Practices of the Office of the West Upper Regional Coordinating Council

Currently, there is little to no literature available about the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council. For the most part, the organization’s official publications are the only ones available that can discuss the activities and history of the public agency in detail. Almost every other piece of academic and government literature discusses the government of Ghana at the national level. Even though Ghana’s national policies affect how its regional coordinating councils operate, they do not explain how they each adapt to the environments around them. In the Upper West Regional Coordination Council’s case, its presence as one of the youngest public agencies in Ghana has led to it becoming more innovative over time. This innovation has largely come from investing in human resources that are found outside of the agency’s main office.

Human resource management and development in the public sector is performed differently than it would be in the profit driven private sector (Knies, E. et al. 2018). For one, the public sector is often the largest employer in a country since its reach is very expansive. Knies et al. (2018) explain that the public sector is often involved in a person’s life from their birth until their death. This includes the need for consumers of the public sector to vote for those who eventually hold leadership positions within government agencies. This increased level of accountability leads to a level of tangible investment and stakeholding that “unaffiliated”

individuals cannot have with private sector employees that they do not work for or hold shares of.

In the opposite arena, this means that the future of the public sector is held in the hands of those who understand how it functions and needs to be administered going forward. Even if this understanding is minimal, the public sector and the education and training industry it oversees can work with this understanding and develop it until it becomes a notable interest in working as a leader or administrator within the government. The Upper West Regional Coordination Council is no different than any other public agency that needs an educated and trained base of employees and external stakeholders to be successful. While much of the agency's external human resource management and development is focused on the agricultural sector, there is work being done to bolster the internal performance of the organization as well.

Press releases cited within this thesis proposal show that the Upper West Regional Coordination Council is investing in its current leadership and the new officers that will be hired via various initiatives. However, the recent activities of the regional coordination council show that the senior administrators within the agency may be focused on performance improvement and management the most. This is not a negative development, as the innovation and education pushed by the Upper West Regional Coordination Council can only be maintained if the administrators within it do not become complacent.

## Exploring the Use of Political Decentralization to Develop Citizens as External Human Resources

Human resources are ultimately used to help improve the performance, health, and viability of an organization. However, the public sector is unique in that its consumers can decide who leads it at the highest levels. Due to these high stakes, public agencies have a duty to

remain accountable to their external stakeholders and, if the opportunity arises, invite them into the fold as paid employees who help advance the mission of their employer and help serve their fellow countrymen. This engagement and eventual recruitment can only be successful and sustainable if government agencies invest in their citizens and create jurisdictions that benefit from the services offered by them.

The Upper West region of Ghana is an example of a jurisdiction that has benefitted from the services and influences offered by one of its top government agencies. The Upper West Regional Coordination Council has worked to improve sanitation within the region, offer new jobs within the government, and improve the lives of farmers and agricultural workers who labor in an industry that is constantly evolving and requiring more training and resources. One reason why this success is occurring is because the Upper West Regional Coordination Council empowers its citizens to help carry out the requirements of its various initiatives. This can be seen in its desire to educate professionals and workers in various industries so that they can simultaneously provide safer working environments and improve the Upper West region's economic performance.

Political decentralization in Ghana has been studied extensively. When explaining what political decentralization is, Antwi-Boasiako (2010) writes that the concept involves central governments spreading out their power amongst their lower-level, local counterparts. This distribution of power usually leaves local level governments at the mercy of their constituents instead of the superior government agencies that previously oversaw their actions and activities. In Ghana's case, the use of regional coordinating councils is an example of how the administrative power and responsibility within the country has been divided. This decentralization may have been for the best, as Ghana's 10 regions each have their own unique

quirks and needs. This unique nature requires people who have lived in the regions for a long time to help improve the long-term condition of their home areas.

This may be why the Upper West Regional Coordination Council excessively employs the use of human resource management and development strategies on its constituents just as much, if not more, than the people who actually work inside the organization. While the development of employees and managers should be the goal of all human resources departments, the tactics used by the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council may be helping it develop its future leaders and employees. By decentralizing the political process even further, the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council has positioned itself to develop and grow even more in the short- and long-term future, as it will simultaneously be able to grow its reach as a government organization while also educating a training a new wave of public administrators who can continue to lead the organization in an upward direction.

Defining the Importance of Developing the Next Generation of Public Administrators

While mentioned in the other parts of this section, the development of new employees and leaders in the public sector is another topic of discussion that should be illuminated by this research. While the development of new senior officials can happen within the organization, the recruitment of new employees and managers can be one of the more difficult parts of human resource management and development in the public sector. While developing citizens who will never work inside of the government is important, there is also a need to cultivate the interests of those who dream and desire to work for a public agency when they finish their college education and/or workforce training. Political decentralization should act as a tool that can be used to tear the veil between everyday government operations and the Ghanaian public. In the Upper West



Regional Coordination Council's case, the veil between the public agency and the public was broken when it decided to officially launch its own website.

The launch of the agency's official website showed a concerted effort to educate the Ghanaian public and build a relationship with those who want to become closer with their regional government. The use of relationship building with potential recruits is an important tactic for the Upper West Regional Coordination Council, as government agencies often pay less than private employers and require much more accountability to the public in terms of communication, spending, and overall effectiveness. Being able to overcome these shortcomings while also allowing new hires to develop within their new roles once they are hired will be another important aspect of the agency's continued growth, as the rigidity of public policy does not allow for much macro level innovation, if any. This could be another reason why residents in the Upper West region are so empowered, and further research should be able to confirm whether or not citizens are so empowered because the private sector is better suited for fast-paced innovation and advancement.

### Conclusion

This thesis proposal outlined how the study of the Upper West Regional Coordination Council's growth will occur. The government agency has steadily grown over time, and one of the more consistent variables seen throughout its history is its ability and desire to empower the local residents that reside within its jurisdiction. Academic research points to the empowerment of citizens being a face of political decentralization; and Ghana has been working to decentralize its government for quite some time. While there are other reasons that should be credited for its growth, it appears that the Upper West Regional Coordination Council's focus on developing human capital inside and outside of the agency is the reason why its increase in reach and

performance has been so sustainable. This project would ultimately explore how accurate this projection is and what other reasons, if any, could be behind the agency's growth and influence despite being the youngest of all 10 administrative regions in Ghana. It would be done with a qualitative methodology, as finding the reason behind the Upper West Regional Coordination Council's stunning growth is one of the rare business administration problems that does not require any numbers to solve.



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