

# Issues Confronting Governance and Implementation: Sustainable Development Goals in Ghana

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Received: Aug. 4, 2020    Accepted: Sept. 4, 2020    Online published: Sept. 26, 2020

doi:10.5296/jpag.v10i3.17482

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/jpag.v10i3.17482>

## Abstract

Based on qualitative data from Ghana, this article explores the issues of governance and the extent to which its potential affects the implementation of sustainable development goals (SDGs). The article argues that, although it is largely understood that governance is about the practice of good government, its potential impact on the implementation of SDGs is limited in Ghana. This study advances that, while the implementation of SDGs in Ghana has paved the way for the application of good governance practice, in some cases, it is still trapped in the institutional and network framework that is touted to hamper quality public service delivery development and progress. However, it is suggested in this context that effective implementation of SDGs can be met if the systems and structures of governance are appropriately aligned using proper checks and balances. Additionally, the level of commitment, rule of law, and accountability must be improved to ensure equal participation for all. Finally, corruption must be fought to restore public confidence in the institutions of government and public sector networks while maintaining public trust and performance management with citizen participation to achieve effective public service delivery.

**Keywords:** governance, implementation, sustainable development goals, public administration, corruption, public trust

## 1. Introduction

In 2000, governments from about 189 countries met at the United Nations General Assembly in New York to decide on the policies to address the challenges of the world, including poverty, social segregation, and economic and environmental problems. This meeting birthed the millennium development goals (MDGs). The MDGs expired at the end of 2015, and sustainable development goals (SDGs) was launched in the same year. The evaluation of the MDGs showed several shortcomings to its governance potency, efficiency, and effectiveness. This lack of governance and its impact on the economy, society, and the environment has

resulted in the evolution of SDGs from MDGs. However, unlike MDGs, SDGs apply to all countries (United Nations [UN], 2016). As a result, this article explores the challenges of confronting governance in the implementation of SDGs in Ghana.

The UN's MDGs became a paradigm shift in governance theory and practice and has revolutionized the way we think about the public toward efficient service delivery. However, this paradigm shift is inconsistent and less accountable and utterly out of touch with the realities of modern public service delivery. The MDGs overcame corruption and the inefficiencies of social, economic, and political systems and the nonperformance of public institutions (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN DESA], 2019). The "issues" with the practices of MDGs led to the adoption of SDGs in developed and developing countries and its promise to curb corruption, improve access, and promote efficiency in public service delivery. Nevertheless, many governance systems and institutions, particularly in developing countries, remain weak, less innovative, and inefficient (Bertucci & Alberti, 2005).

The implementation of SDGs proclaimed the dawn of a new period where governance systems were expected to enable full participation, increase efficiency, reduce the perception of corruption, and enhance the effectiveness of public administration (UN DESA, 2019). UN institutions, such as the UN DESA through its Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG) on sustainable development, encouraged countries to adopt collaborative and network strategies to propel governance (UN DESA, 2020). Consequently, SDGs arrived as each country developed its governance systems, using SDGs as a policy instrument to enhance public sector institutions and community networks (UN DESA, 2019). The adoption of SDGs in the implementation of public service delivery has been termed a collective effort. This includes better use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), including the integration of public, private, and community sector networks to increase information distribution, improve service delivery, and accelerate citizen participation (UN DESA, 2020).

The implementation of SDGs is expected to enhance the quality of governance, reduce corruption and infrastructure deficits, increase public access, strengthen administrative capacity, and improve operational efficiency and public service delivery in Ghana. However, the theoretical and practical evidence on the state of SDGs suggests that poor capacity remains an everyday experience of people accessing various government services. Notwithstanding, it is an expectation that the evolution of SDGs would enhance network performance, such as operational efficiency, and improving service delivery and effectiveness in public sector governance would trigger a movement toward a more open, accountable, and transparent administration with the public's interest, trust, and confidence at the centre of public service delivery. Focusing on the public sector institutions and management challenges in Africa and Ghana, studies, such as UN DESA (2019), Osifo (2014), Diop et al., (2010), and Alence (2004), examined the challenges confronting governance and the public institutions in Africa and Ghana.

Of particular significance to this topic, within the larger research interest on SDGs in Ghana,

is how governance can play a role in changing public service delivery. An exploratory analysis of the challenges of governance on quality public service delivery and the implementation of SDGs deserves more attention given that the narratives of SDGs have not been featured significantly in the literature of governance and public administration, leading to a lack of scientific and empirical knowledge. This study is necessary to contribute to the current body of literature of public administration on governance and SDGs towards improving the quality of service delivery in Ghana. This study is qualitative, and it uses exploratory techniques to understand the issues of governance on the implementation of SDGs concerning public service delivery in Ghana—with a focus on service accessibility, efficiency, institutional networks, and coordination among the state and non-state actors.

The previous section elaborates on the ideas, theories, and concepts of governance to advance and address the discussion of SDGs as a strategy for the global vision 2030. The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section two interprets ideas and concepts connecting governance with institutional and network theory. This is followed by the methodology in section three, and the case of Ghana is presented. In section four, the findings are presented from Ghana, and the results are discussed. Additionally, section four looks at the obstacles to the implementation of SDGs in Ghana. Section five explores and presents the way forward. A conclusion is drawn in section six in the context of Ghana as a developing nation on the continent of Africa.

## **2. Governance in Theory and Practice**

The term “governance” as a concept means different things to different people. For some scholars, governance implies the rule of law, collective decision-making, capacity building, information sharing, and accountability among many other things. Sørensen and Torfing (2019) linked governance with innovation—a means by which citizens and political actors coproduce value or cocreate different possibilities in dealing with complex societal problems. Additionally, some interpret governance as a shift in thinking and ways of working with diverse actors and people, including the promotion of change, good relationships, and best practices. According to Rhodes (1996), governance is not just about “government,” it includes the political, legal, economic, technical, environmental, spatial, and cultural ideals of communal and household roles and cooperatives, which also need to be blended with policy reformation and administrative orientation, including social interaction, learning, information sharing, and accountability.

Other scholars assign different meanings to governance. According to Kooiman (1993), governance is a way of thinking and working based on mutual values, such as trust, honesty, integrity, and accountability. Thus, governance can be interpreted as productive human interaction between different people or individuals. Just like trust, governance is also compared to the acquisition of knowledge and skills through a commitment to change and learning (Harisalo & Miettinen, 2000). This is because governance, like trust, is a multifaceted issue with complex problems. Additionally, there is no single universal model for trust; an individual can feel the effects, but trust as a value is difficult to prove. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) human development index report has

shown that “people around the world seem to have lost confidence in the effectiveness of their governments—and often seem to be losing faith in democracy” (UNPD, 2002).

Public administration in many countries tends to address social and coordination problems, such as trust, which includes the process for managing the relationships involving people and organizations. Several other network governance studies and institutional analysis focus on the improvement of public trust between citizens and governments. Hence, governance, like trust, can be interpreted by stating that trust refers to the level of confidence people have in governance. Thus, as a part of the discussion, governance may be interpreted as a totality of interaction (Kooiman, 1993) based on the process of coordination, cooperation, and collaboration concerning institutions and networks (Rhodes, 1996).

However, in this discussion of SDGs’ implementation, two theories serve as a foundation for integrating different governance issues, challenges, and concerns. An institutional theory emerged from the study of societies, industries, and organizations (Selznick, 1949; March & Olson, 1989). According to North (1990), institutions are the rule of the game because they shape laws, rules, and norms and regulate human activities. Conversely, in the context of this study, governance draws attention to the discussion of good practices and the implementation of the SDG agenda. In this study, institution is linked to an understanding of the relationship and behavior that affects governance for the achievement of a given purpose (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). According to Scott (2014), institutional theory is linked to three pillars, which include cultural-cognitive, normative, and regulative structures. Hence, in thinking about improving governance, the relationships between individual actors, institutions, and networks are relevant to understanding its nature and complexity.

According to Scott (2014), institutions can affect the capacity of government to interact and coevolve in different ways. Hence the cultural-cognitive structure is presented to learn how to improve governance and address gaps across sector boundaries. It broadly refers to the cultural norms, values, patterns, behaviors, and practices. Additionally, the normative theory is linked to collective action and the network. It emphasizes the need to work collectively across boundaries and issues, and this can be connected to institutional roles and responsibilities. In other words, the normative structure describes the ‘logic of appropriateness’ and the ‘logic of consequence’ (March & Olson, 1989) while the regulative pays attention to the rules.

For a better understanding and interpretation, the Scott (2014) theory of institution is reinforced with the Olson (1965) “logic of collective action,” which focuses on the integration of the principles, ethics, and perspectives of governance (p. ). Hence, connecting the Olson (1965) theory of collective action principles lies in the phenomena of network governance. The study of network governance has emerged from the field of social science and the technology field of the 1980s (Heeks, 2013), and it emerged as a way of thinking in terms of sustainability. Network analysis in regard to governance can be interpreted to make sense of the relationships between people, institutions, and their environment. Cleveland (1972, as cited in Frederickson, 2009) advanced this further by advocating for less government for more governance. Similarly, according to Rhodes (1996), governing can exist

without the state but with trust, solidarity, and mutual accountability. Rhodes (1996) presented a way forward for understanding governing without government as a new form of governance practice. However, Frederickson (1999) suggested the need to rethink public administration. He presented an institutional, public-sector network with governance theories as relevant to the future of public administration (Bingham et al., 2005).

Guba and Lincoln (1994) defined a network as the actions required to affect change. It also represents a different way of thinking about governance and ways to keep the government accountable and transparent (Bevir, 2011). According to Ingraham and Getha-Taylor (2008) network is a mode of governance by which social coordination is achieved. However, in terms of network activity, the emphasis is more on formal and informal ways of working with people and institutions and the environment (Keast, 2003). Thus, in the context of this discussion and the study of public sector institutions, the theories and practice of network governance are based on the cognitive, normative, and regulative level of institutional analysis and governance context. Additionally, this includes the challenges of governance, such as democratic principles, values, ethics, and rule of law, and the implementation of SDGs becomes an essential point of consideration in the quest for good governance and efficient public administration in Ghana. Hence, the conceptual framework of this study is informed by the complexities of governance based on the institutional and network perspective of public administration theory and practice. This also combines substantive principles like transparency, integrity, and accountability in exploring the cognitive, normative, and regulative framework of governance in regard to the implementation of SDGs in Ghana.

### **3. Research Method**

This study employed qualitative research methods based on an exploratory case study to achieve the goal of the study. It aims to answer the research question: what are the key issues facing governance in the implementation of SDGs and its relation to the quality of public service delivery? The employment of an exploratory case study approach is justified on three grounds. First, given the nature of the research question and, second, the exploratory case study approach was suitable because it is relevant for qualitative studies (Guba & Lincoln 1994; Yin, 1994). Third, given the lack of a suitable model to test and measure the implementation of SDGs as a whole in this regard, the exploratory case study approach was employed to describe the challenges and to provide pertinent knowledge for further development. The study used secondary and fieldwork sources in collecting data for the analysis (Osei, 2020).

Two main data sources (secondary and primary data) were used in this study. These include relevant publications, books, journals, and official reports, and fieldwork study and consultations were used to gain insight into and to highlight the challenges confronting governance in the implementation of SDGs in Ghana. A purposive sampling technique based on fieldwork experience guided the research questions, and an attempt has been made in this article to answer the aforementioned questions.

Based on the aforementioned issues confronting the governance systems in Ghana, the

following question has been raised in this study: how can governance be improved to achieve SDGs in regard to quality public service delivery in Ghana? In other words, how can governance function or work better for all people concerning the SDGs shown below?

Table 1. SDGs and their related indicators

SDGs	Indicators
SDG-1	No poverty
SDG-2	Zero hunger
SDG-3	Good health and well-being
SDG-4	Inclusive and quality education
SDG-5	Gender equality
SDG-6	Ensuring clean water, sanitation, and hygiene
SDG-7	Affordable and clean energy
SDG-8	Decent work and economic growth
SDG-9	Industry innovation and infrastructure
SDG-10	Reduced inequalities within and among countries
SDG-11	Sustainable cities and communities
SDG-12	Responsible consumption and production
SDG-13	Climate action
SDG-14	Conserve and sustainable use of Earth's water
SDG-15	Protect life on land
SDG-16	Promote peace, justice, and strong institutions
SDG-17	Partnerships for the goals

Note. The sustainable development goals report (UN, 2016).

The shift of governance from MDGs to SDGs aims to achieve better and quality public service delivery for all. However, the accessibility of these services poses many challenges for governance and public service delivery in developing countries. At the same time, implementation of SDGs, in some cases, has worsened because of institutional and network differences. Ghana, as an exploratory phase, is used as a standpoint to construct this discourse and to answer the research question for the following reasons.

- Ghana is the first on the continent to reach the MDG target one of having extreme poverty by 2015 (UNDP, 2015).
- Ghana is among the few countries on the continent to achieve the MDG target on access to improved water supply before 2015 (Monney & Antwi-Agyei, 2018).
- Ghana has shown a high level of commitment to implementing SDGs (Government of Ghana, 2019).

#### **4. Hurdles to the Implementation of SDGs in Ghana**

Ghana has achieved its MDG target for access to safe drinking water but failed to achieve the goal on basic sanitation service delivery. A large section of the Ghanaian population has



lacked access to proper water and sanitation service delivery (Osei, 2020). Improved basic sanitation service delivery is needed because of increased network and institutional complexities and corruption as well as poor governance coupled with population growth while climate change and coronavirus diseases continue to hamper the national development plan and the vision for SDGs. Several attempts have been made to address the issues still the integrated of the solution are yet to be fully realized (UN DESA, 2020).

Sanitation governance challenges, including poor infrastructural facilities, water pollution, illegal mining, urbanization, climate change, electronic waste, and deforestation, among many other issues in Ghana, remained as a barrier and a solution to the achievement of SDGs (see Osei, 2020; Republic of Ghana, 2017). Additionally, this is because sanitation is in sync with the difficulties of governance, which include democratic principles and practices, such as the rule of law, human rights, accountability, and citizen participation. This can create imbalance and an unequal governance structure between the rich and the poor. Lessons from the implementation of MDGs have fueled this debate on the significance of good governance and sustainable development in Ghana.

Whether or not such problems originate from poor governance systems, corruption, political division, or institutional and network failures remains a matter of public debate. Notwithstanding, there is a need to address the issues of governance for the benefit of the disadvantaged people who have called for this debate. Additionally, it is within this same objective that the implementation of SDGs is expected to be achieved.

Politically, Ghana as a country is known for its peace, security, and cooperation with external partners. It is also known as one of the best democratic countries in the sub-Saharan Africa region that places an emphasis on governance for social, economic, and environmental sustainability. Ghana is ranked among the most peaceful in West Africa (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2020). Despite these good attributes, several challenges remain that affect governance systems and implementation of SDGs in Ghana (Osei, 2020). A critical look at Ghana's governance systems suggests weak institutions with a feeble state capacity, inadequate partnership, and a low level of citizen participation with limited transparency and accountability. Similar reports and studies found dysfunctional management systems with shortages of legal and social support systems, fragile checks and balances, and corruption are some of the underlying causes of poor governance affecting the implementation of SDGs in Ghana (Osei, 2020; Sarfo-Kantankah, 2016; Alence, 2004; Ainuson, 2004).

Concomitantly, poor coordination among stakeholders is blamed for the dysfunctional governance system in Ghana (Osei, 2020). The issues in regard to weak coordination in Ghana's public sector institutions have also been discussed. The Ainuson (2010) study found coordination is a big issue in the Ghanaian governance structure. The renaissance effects of coordination include a poor citizen perception of governance and mistrust. Indeed, there are many studies and reports about the issues of institutional and network coordination. Within these studies, weak democratic governance, accountability, and limited participation by citizens in political decision-making are some of the issues in regard to the coordination and implementation of anti-corruption programs and initiatives in public-sector institutions and

service delivery (Osei, 2020; Osifo, 2014; Diop et al., 2010; UNDP, 2002). Additionally, this results from poor governance capacity. Furthermore, weak governance support can create low levels of trust in public service and make it difficult to discuss effective partnership and cooperation in the implementation of SDGs.

Another problem with the Ghanaian public service delivery implementation is the corruption and widespread indiscipline, which makes it more challenging to address sanitation. Corruption in Ghana has been cited as a major factor in poor sanitation service delivery (Osei, 2020). From the study conducted by Transparency International (2019), Ghana was ranked 78 out of 180 countries surveyed in 2018. It occupies ten positions between 38 countries surveyed using the Afro barometer in 2018. Ghana is lower compared to peers, such as the Seychelles, Cabo Verde, Botswana, Rwanda, Namibia, Mauritius, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, and South Africa. The report on Ghana suggested an increase in corruption since 2002, which raised doubts in regard to its governance capacity and seriousness in the implementation of SDGs. SDGs as a global vision is expected to be achieved in 2030. Transparency International (2002) ranked Ghana at 50 out of 102 countries surveyed.

Implementation of good governance in Ghana, particularly clean water, sanitation, and hygiene (SDG-6) is a complex phenomenon that brings different views, theories, and practices into perspective. This perception has been reinforced by the fact that Ghana's homegrown efforts of implementing a monthly national sanitation exercise failed to garner political and community (citizen) support. By contrast, the government of Rwanda has been influential in implementing the water, sanitation, and hygiene services (WASH). Rwanda's sense of commitment in implementing WASH services was reinforced by the fact that its anti-corruption programs and policies are drafted domestically and largely accepted by citizens. The Transparency International Report (2019) shows that the government of Ghana is doing little to fight corruption.

The results by Mensah (2020) showed a high level of awareness but a low level of community participation in Ghana's effort, culminating in Ghana's ineffectiveness to make any significant impact on improved sanitation in the country. Mensah (2020) cited politics, attitude, lack of interest and inadequate logistics as some of the key factors contributing to ineffectiveness and poor governance in Ghana. This article argues that if corruption is widespread it can affect politics and sustainable development. Likewise, corruption plays a key role in the quality of public sector institutions and service delivery as well as in the life of the disadvantaged poor in many countries, and Ghana is not an isolated case.

Hence, this study establishes that the issues of corruption and poor governance are intrinsically linked and can invariably affect the implementation of agenda 2030 and SDGs. Additionally, it can affect social cohesion and policy coordination, which, presumably, could compromise long-term efforts. In short, there is a need to rethink and reposition governance to realize the implementation of the UN's agenda 2030 and SDGs. This paper makes a general appeal to apply broader democratic principles, such as citizen participation, political accountability, and rule of law with good ethical behaviors and standards. More so, the need for increased citizen participation through digitalized technology can be leveraged to enhance



coordination, collaboration, and mutual benefits in shared public service delivery.

## 5. Way Forward

In past decades, the government of Ghana has promoted the “decentralization agenda” as part of an implementation strategy in cities, towns, and villages across the country in the hope of reducing social and gender inequality and by empowering local and community participation. Evidently, such efforts appeared to have improved water supply networks in the urban and local communities of Ghana (UNPD, 2015). Hence, the need for the state to actively engage citizens in all aspects of public service delivery implementation is becoming increasingly urgent. For instance, the UN’s agenda 2030 calls for stronger institutional and partnership coordination and collaboration involving state and non-state actors as some of the requirement for the achievement of SDGs in participating countries.

Thus, Ghana can and must be willing to act collaboratively and do things differently. For instance, Ghana heavily relies upon donor support and assistance in the form of grants, remittance, and concessional loans from various multilateral, bilateral, and diaspora contributions in the form of remittance from its citizens abroad (Osei, 2020). These donations and the support focus on infrastructure development, economic growth and poverty reduction, environment and climate change, social, political, and economic development including WASH services (UNPD, 2005). Additionally, what policy and regulatory measures are taken to ensure that these donations and the support are used appropriately and do not end up in corrupt hands? In answering this pertinent question is the integration of institutional and network theories.

Ghana has shown that, historically, coordination takes place within the framework of the consultative group meetings arranged by the special non-state actors, such as the World Bank (WB) and their recipient governments (Osei, 2020). According to UNPD (2005), the coordination among state and non-state is minimal. The same report on Ghana concluded that there are inherently weaker links between sustainable development issues and good governance practices, pointing to the need for broader shared capacity building and institutional network. Several reasons account for these failures, including a lack of participation. Full and active participation and coordination among the state, non-state, and communities have the potential to change the relationship from poor coordination to better institutional and network performance.

Thus, good coordination must be backed by the need to place the community and citizen participation at the centre of planning, regulation, and financing of service delivery in Ghana. One important area is the need to reflect upon the legislation, laws, and cultures of public administration systems in Ghana while taking into account an integrated public service (Keast, 2004). The importance of promoting integrated principles for good governance practices and sustainable development goals (SDGs) framework has been stressed by several international and local governance institutions. Additionally, a huge number of studies have shown that a significant contribution to the integrated management approach in policymaking is a solution to improve citizen participation and coordination in urban and disadvantaged communities. Such an approach is needed for public managers and administrators to engage local

stakeholders and communities as equal partners in the promotion of good governance and sustainable public service delivery.

This means governance development is at the core of public administration and service delivery, including the implementation of SDGs. For instance, the use of ICT and digital learning is recommended to inform decision-making and the interaction between public officials and citizens. There are equally good reasons to support the introduction of e-governance in Ghana to fight corruption and for the utilization of shared knowledge and information for development. Additionally, there are several calls for citizen and community involvement in the fight against corruption. For instance, in the context of Ghana, “communal labour” has been identified as cognitive and regulative mechanisms to improve public attitudes and behaviour toward the achievement of SDG-6, which is clean water and sanitation. Equally, this article sees the need for attitudinal change, including encouraging a collective social responsibility for accountable governance in the Ghanaian governance setting. Such interventions or initiatives should focus on building trust-based relational contracts for the effective participation and implementation of SDGs. Additionally, increased citizen participation, including an assessment of the governance attitude and behaviour between the state and non-state, as well as monitoring and evaluation are useful. Thus, by addressing the gaps, these issues will be addressed, and it will foster trust and good governance practices.

Last, an improvement of Ghanaian public administration systems and a good governance model needs to be studied closely and comparatively. This includes improving transparency, accountability, and integrity as well as full participation by citizens in oversights, checks, and balances, which are fundamental to keeping institutions accountable and strong and reduce corruption and social inequalities while upholding the Ghanaian constitutional provision, their human rights, and their involvement. The 1992 constitution of Ghana guarantees the right to participation, which must be actively enforced. March and Olson’s (1989) “logic of consequence” may be one of the most important governance tools for analyzing the issues of the constitutional provision and the implementation of SDGs in Ghana. However, the issues of governance are collective problems and require shared solutions and strengthening public sector ties and promoting collaboration will help overcome the barriers. This reflects the reality—governance is a complex social phenomenon and the interaction of institutions and networks as well as communities are key determinants in the quest for good governance practice and implementation of SDGs.

## **6. Conclusion**

This article concludes that the implementation of SDGs, at least based on the case explored in this study, is of fundamental importance in Ghana largely because of the challenges of governance. There has been a significant improvement in the institutions involved in the service delivery of water and sanitation for urban and local communities. Even so, there are challenges, such as corruption, weak accountability systems, low coordination, and frequent policy changes that destabilize the potential of governance and the implementation of SDGs in Ghana. These issues need to be solved to realize the full benefits of good governance. This

article claims that effective implementation of SDGs can only be achieved if the systems of governance are integrated with best practices. This implies that governance structures, networks, institutions, actors, and stakeholders should be made fully accountable and transparent. This, nevertheless, requires credible commitments from state and local institutions as well as active engagement of communities and non-state sectors to ensure success. Additionally, the integration of digital technology and community interaction may be effective mechanisms for strengthening institutional and network ties. The development of digitalized network governance is suggested, and accountability and trust are enforced. Finally, war corruption must be fought to restore public confidence and trust while aiming for efficient public service delivery. It is in this arena that the implementation of SDGs in Ghana, and elsewhere, can be achieved.

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