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Fostering Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement for Sustainable Decent Work Policies in Africa: Lessons From Ghana

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ABSTRACT

To meet the 169 targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it has been argued that governments alone are unable to deal with its associated challenges. Consequently, studies have shown how expanding governance to public, private, and civil society organizations (CSO) across scales could help make significant contributions to achieving the SDGs. Despite this admission, little is known about stakeholder engagement and collaborative approaches that could foster effective partnerships between and among stakeholders in pursuance of decent work policies. Using the Decent Work Pilot Project (DWPP) in Ghana as a case study, we draw insights from key informants through in-depth interviews to identify relevant stakeholders, their roles, interests, forms of engagement, benefits and challenges associated with promoting decent work policies and practices among informal workers in two local districts in the country. Employing a qualitative thematic analysis technique rooted in data triangulation approach, we propose a framework that guides stakeholder collaborations for delivering decent work policies. The framework particularly mirrors the important role of local governments as ‘partnership brokers’ that create a safe space for multi-stakeholder engagement. The paper concludes with pertinent lessons that can serve as catalysts for formulating and implementing effective and successful future decent work policies and practices in Ghana and Africa at large.

1 | Introduction

Since the establishment of labor standards in 1999, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has been working to “... promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equality, security, and human dignity” (International Labour Organisation 1999). In pursuit of this goal, past and present development

frameworks continue to recognize the important role of Decent Work (DW) in poverty reduction and economic growth. For instance, halfway through implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2008, DW targets and indicators were carved into MDG 1 because of the recognition of the strong nexus that exists between DW and poverty reduction (Soma-*vía* 2007). More recently, Goal 8 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been dedicated to the creation of decent jobs,

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a move that magnifies the relevance of DW principles in spurting economic growth.

The growing interest in issues of decent work is relevant because workers in both formal and informal settings have found themselves in a "...world of uncertainty and insecurity" with regard to decent work and employment opportunities throughout time (Abebrese 2014, p. 1). These conditions have rendered many 'working poor', as they find themselves in employment relations that are characterized by long working hours, non-clearly defined tasks, minimum wage payments, lack of health insurance or maternity benefits, inadequate accommodation, arbitrary changes in work contracts, lack of respect for labor, obstacles to labor unionization and discrimination against gender, ethnic and class (D'Souza 2010; International Labour Organization 2002). Although the level of resources committed to DW policies and projects until now is commendable, much work remains to be done, recognizing that about 60% of the global workforce continue to find themselves in an informal sector characterized by precarious working conditions (International Labour Organisation 2019; Tucker and Anantharaman 2020). Consequently, earlier studies on Decent Work Programmes (DWP) sought to ask questions related to 'what' the impact of these programmes have been in various countries (Azunu and Mensah 2019; Baisie 2008; Deshingkar et al. 2012; Lerche 2012) while others examined 'how' the programmes are being implemented (Azunu and Mensah 2019; Tijmstra 2011). More recently, attention has been drawn to understanding how these programmes are designed and implemented to offer lessons to other countries seeking to localize the SDG 8 with the aim of offering blueprints on how local governments could take center stage in the DW policy process (Okbandrias and Nordjo 2024). Amid the increasing interest in issues of DW, little is known about governance mechanisms or structures put in place to bring together stakeholders of varied power, authority, and interests in pursuance of common decent work goals.

Ghana is one of many African countries to have successfully implemented the DWP using local governments as the main vehicle for delivering the programme's goals (Grooten 2005; Okbandrias and Nordjo 2024). More importantly, the implementation of the DWP in Ghana prioritized local ownership and ensured that stakeholders from public, private, and civil society organizations (CSO) at national and local scales effectively collaborate to improve the welfare of informal workers in local communities (Baisie 2008; Tijmstra 2011). While evidence of the programmes's impact on beneficiaries and local economy abounds (Azunu and Mensah 2019), some studies have attributed the programme's successes to the scope of collaboration fostered among local, national and international stakeholders (Baisie 2008; Tijmstra 2011; Okbandrias and Nordjo 2024). However, what remains unclear is how such collaboration was fostered among these stakeholders. Understanding this ambiguity is hugely important because attempts to forge alliances and collaboration among stakeholders in some countries have woefully failed and remarkably diminished the impact of the programmes (Lerche 2012). Clearly, the level of impact of DWP on beneficiaries, to a large extent, rests on how well stakeholders' efforts are coordinated (Ahdiyana et al. 2021). Hence, within the context of increased significance for stakeholder

collaboration, and the lack of understanding on how such collaboration should be fostered among stakeholders at various scales, the current study investigates the roles, interests, benefits and challenges faced by stakeholders in promoting decent work. Using the Decent Work Pilot Project (DWPP) in Ghana as a case study, the study specifically seeks to:

- explore the roles and interests of government, civil society, and public and private stakeholders in promoting decent work.
- examine the engagement mechanisms used to foster collaboration among multi-leveled and sectoral stakeholders in the implementation of decent work standards.
- assess the benefits of mainstreaming decent work principles among rural informal entrepreneurs.
- understand the challenges faced by authorities in implementing decent work projects.
- develop a framework that shapes collaboration among stakeholders implementing sustainable decent work projects and to serve as a template for students, future researchers and governance practitioners.

2 | Conceptualizing Collaborative and Local Stakeholder Engagements

Collaborative governance (CG) is an institutional arrangement, an ongoing structural relation, and a development process that fosters multi-sectoral, institutional, and cross-boundary collaboration among stakeholders to achieving a common public good. The concept is regarded as the ideal approach to creating a win-win situation for local, national, corporate, and international stakeholders (Agbodzakey and Taylor 2019; Florini and Markus 2018; Wetterberg 2011). An increasing body of literature has suggested that collaborative governance (CG) plays a crucial role in spreading development, particularly in aiding the transition from the MDGs to SDGs (Muslim et al. 2022), and mirroring the role of CG in achieving the SDGs (Dai and Azhar 2024; Gonzaga and Pratama 2025; Knox and Orazgaliyev 2024; Mariani et al. 2022; Wibawa and Nur'aini 2020). According to Emerson and Nabatchi (2015), the potential benefits of CG and its successful collaboration require the recognition of five main issues: the systems context, policy drivers, collaboration dynamics, policy actions/outputs and outcomes.

As Figure 1 illustrates, events within a CG system are a continuous and dynamic phenomenon, with certain drivers (on the left) inspiring and instigating the evolution of a Collaborative Governance Regime (CGR) that is also dynamic in its engagements to bring about change in the current system or regime itself (Ansell and Gash 2008). While the system context (in gray) is visualized as oval-shaped in contrast with other box-shaped systems (Ansell and Gash 2008), CG is argued to be more effective in situations where stakeholders are motivated to come together due to certain circumstances that drive them. These drivers could include situations where; (1) conditions are uncertain and multiple challenges persist within the system (uncertainty), (2) challenges and uncertainties cannot be resolved by one agency or stakeholder- the so-called wicked

problems (interdependency) (Mariani et al. 2022), (3) it is ascertained that doing nothing about the challenge or problem would only lead to a much more detrimental effect on welfare (consequential incentives), and therefore, finally, (4) an agency or stakeholder has stepped up to convince other stakeholders to find a solution to the problem (initiating leadership) (Kuhn 2016; Muslim et al. 2022).

These drivers instigate the forging of a cross-institutional, sectoral, or boundary collaboration that is dynamic to the extent that agents could interact and reinforce one another. However, for a successful outcome and particularly an ongoing system, their engagements need to be guided by some principles - share common motivations and have the willingness to jointly find solutions. Specifically, principled engagement highlights the behavioral elements of the collaboration. This includes the way and manner in which stakeholders collaborate in discovering the problem, and collective decision making (Emerson and Nabatchi 2015). For instance, as seen in Table 1 below, Conti et al. (2019) examined the means of engagement in collaborative interventions carried out by stakeholders in the cities of Copenhagen, Amsterdam, London, Hamburg, and Barcelona and found several ways through which engagements were fostered based on contextual realities.

Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) further asserted that behavioral elements of principled engagement are driven and motivated by interpersonal connections that reflect how committed stakeholders are to the change process. This includes the degree of trust and understanding for each other, and finally, a collective

feeling of efficacy in their engagement through legitimization of some of the principles and actions. These interpersonal elements are important to ensure that the right actors are brought together in collaboration to make significant contributions towards the collective goals.

Functional elements are also needed to build capacity for joint action (Vivier and Sanchez-Betancourt 2023). These may include the pooling of resources together, putting in place some procedural (ground rules, memorandum of understanding, etc.) and institutional mechanisms, technical advice, knowledge-sharing as well as leadership. While it is assumed that during such collaboration, all stakeholders should be participating at the same level, there is the need for a leadership group that will steer affairs, manage overlapping roles, and foster engagement among the broader stakeholder groups. As Muslim et al. (2022, p. 172) put it, "Leadership is an important factor in building collaborative governance, [and] even leadership capacity would also affect the effectiveness of ongoing collaborations". It is also important to unpack those stakeholders who have common interests in a broad problem to attract equally interested investors for the collaborative process and build a framework that enhances effective dialog between and among them.

Mariani et al. (2022) found that in some cases, the presence of financial rewards may be crucial in attracting key stakeholders whose contribution would be relevant to the achievement of the public goal. The authors further add that the role of a supportive public sector institution, be it financial, technical, or legal is an important driver of a successful collaboration (Mariani et al. 2022). Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) argued the need for a backbone organization that has staff to run the change activities and most importantly, a fiscal and or legal agent. The need for what they called partnership brokers or platforms is also crucial in collaboration for creating "... a safe space for public, private, and civil society actors [stakeholders] to engage with each other..." (Florini and Markus 2018, p. 10). Such platforms would also ensure that stakeholders collaborate in sharing vision, knowledge, and can be effective for sustainability purposes as they could "...provide continuity in the face of personnel changes or unwavering commitment among the leadership of participating organizations" (Florini and Markus 2018, *ibid*).

Since the adoption of the 'Local Agenda 21' of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio, decentralized institutions, mostly local governments (LGs), have been instrumental in dealing with the challenges of sustainable development. This has been

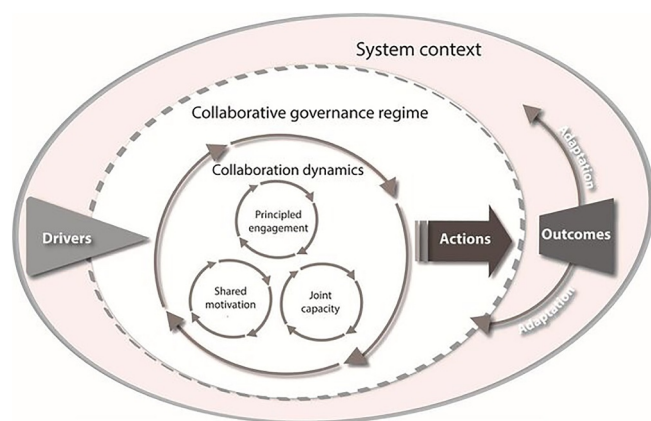


FIGURE 1 | Framework for collaborative governance. Source: Emerson and Nabatchi (2015, p. 27). [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

TABLE 1 | Means of engagement in collaborative Interventions.

Cities	Engagement mechanisms
Copenhagen	Surveys, regular meetings, opinion consultation.
Amsterdam	Regular meetings, thematic forums, public hearings.
London	Regular meetings, opinion consultation, online surveys, digital platforms, working groups, discussion boards, public hearings.
Hamburg	Online surveys, networks, discussion groups.
Barcelona	Networks, discussion groups, online surveys, regular meetings.

Source: Conti et al. (2019, p. 10).

demonstrated in areas such as rural tourism development, urban green space, building social capital, local economic development, climate change adaptation and mitigation, HIV prevention, waste management, disaster management, peace-building, and many others (Asropi 2020; Bush 2020; Gibb et al. 2020; Guha and Chakrabarti 2019; Jain et al. 2021; Liou-bimtseva and Da Cunha 2020; Vogel et al. 2020). In many poor interventions in developing countries, LGs have been identified as the best fit for leading the definition, planning, and implementation of these interventions (Nordjo et al. 2023).

As most of these interventions require the emergence of several stakeholders, LGs have also become the platform where stakeholders converge, serving as the “partnership platform” for most of these collaborative interventions. A case in particular is the study of Joo Chang (2009) where due to the increase in demand for welfare systems, the government of South Korea amended the Social Welfare Act in 2003 to allow the formation of a cross-sectoral collaborative governance structure known as the Community Welfare Council in every local government within the country to “...provide local welfare planning, discuss welfare service provision, link welfare and public health services, and recommend alternatives through monitoring the programme in practice, in collaboration with various participants at the local level” (ibid, p. 80). The council however, consisted of individuals from public, non-profit and for-profit organizations.

Until recently, the promotion of decent work principles such as employment creation, rights at work, social dialog, and social protection, especially among informal sector workers is an area that the role of LG in serving as a platform for collaborative engagement has not been explored. Such exploration is however, imperative to understanding which stakeholders are required in dealing with the problems of indecent employment. Also important are the various roles and interests of these stakeholders.

3 | The Decent Work Agenda: Evolution, Challenges, and Global Impact

The idea of “decent work” (DW) represents a fight to the era of neoliberal regimes which changed the balance of power between labor and capital from the 1970s onwards (Lerche 2012). More specifically, ‘labor-friendly’ regimes of the Global North were replaced by ‘labor unfriendly’ regimes, while ‘development-friendly’ regimes of the Global South were brought to an end (Silver and Arrighi 2001). This shift weakened the position of labor organizations while strengthening the bargaining powers of employers and governments. Neoliberalism therefore stalled the efforts of ILO in getting national governments to sign up to labor conventions which aim to compel governments to implement labor conventions under surveillance of the ILO (Lerche 2012).

Although this hard nut was eventually cracked, it was not through ILO’s imposition of conventions on governments. Rather, a revised non-binding labor framework which centered on fairness and decency with no precise descriptors was the remedy. The revised framework set levels of pay and conditions

required to realize the expected level of ‘decent work’ that were not fixed by ILO. The failure of ILO to enforce labor standards internationally during this period also brought about a shift in its focus away from organized formal sector labor to unorganized informal sector workers, a move which did not sit well with the labor constituent of ILO represented by formal labor unions.

Consequently, the Decent Work Agenda was introduced in 1999 with a strong emphasis on closing the gap between formal and informal sector workers through recognition that work is not only a source of income but more importantly, a source of personal dignity, family stability, peace in community, government accountability and economic growth that expands opportunities for productive jobs and enterprise development (Kissi and Herzig 2021; Standing 2008). The agenda seeks to harness these goals by mainstreaming four (4) key principles into all forms of work, including employment creation, rights at work, extending social protection, and promoting social dialog, with gender being a cross-cutting phenomenon (International Labour Organisation 2013). In globalizing these principles, the decent work agenda (DWA) formed part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) programmes and aimed at promoting strong and active participation of civil society organizations in multilaterally funded projects (Hughes and Haworth 2011). It is further argued that the wider importance of the DWA became evident much more in 2004 when the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Development suggested that the agenda be made a global priority, pursued at local, national, and international levels. It is therefore not surprising to note that in 2008, despite the MDGs nearing completion, a new decent work target and indicators were added to MDG 1, reaffirming the globalization of the agenda and its importance for poverty reduction. Recognizing the relevance of decent work to sustainable development today, SDG 8 has been dedicated to promoting its principles in all countries. Thus, decent work occupies a much greater presence in the SDGs than in the MDGs.

4 | Implementing the Decent Work Agenda for Sustainable Development

The Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs) are ILO’s main local economic development structure of efforts to implement the DWA (Løken et al. 2008). In an attempt to get context-specific information for scaling up at country levels, the programme was first rolled out in 2000 as pilot in eight countries including Bangladesh, Denmark, Ghana, Kazakhstan, Morocco, Panama, and the Philippines. Since 2005, the ILO has been implementing and extending its programme to many member countries with at least five main goals-

“...to support national initiatives aimed at reducing decent work deficits; to strengthen national capacity to integrate decent work into national policy; to demonstrate the utility of an integrated approach in different socio-economic contexts; to develop methods for effective country programmes and policies; and to share lessons from national experience” (Hughes and Haworth 2011, p. 45).

Contrary to the above, results of decent work projects and programmes globally have been mixed, with some countries experiencing significant improvements in labor conditions than others. For instance, Azunu and Mensah (2019) found that ILO's decent work project in Ghana has led to the creation of jobs, enabled participants to improve their businesses, their economic situation, and enhanced their ability to meet their health needs, thereby pulling large informal entrepreneurs out of the poverty threshold. However, Lerche (2012) found that the DWA in India did not enhance the mainstreaming of decent work principles among informal workers because the Indian political landscape did not further the creation of a strong alliance among stakeholders. Thus, the extent of collaboration among relevant stakeholders is crucial for a successful and impactful decent work programme. Although there have been recent studies aiming to offer lessons to scale up decent work implementation as part of achieving SDG 8 (Okbandrias and Nordjo 2024), little is known on how countries with success stories succeeded in coordinating various stakeholders in pursuance of the decent work goals. Hence, a need for empirical investigation into such successful case studies.

5 | Methodology

The current study adopts a qualitative approach. This approach was deemed appropriate because it enhanced direct engagement with study participants on their experiences with collaborative interventions (Creswell 2014). Patton (2002) opines that studies that follow qualitative approaches facilitate the acquisition of valuable information in situations where explanations and descriptions of events and processes are required from actors of different roles. Given that this study seeks to obtain information on the roles, interests, means of engagement, and challenges faced by stakeholders within a collaborative intervention, the qualitative approach was deemed appropriate. The data used in this analysis was collected in March 2021 and complemented with other documentary information and follow-up interviews with beneficiaries in August 2024.

5.1 | Case Study

This study employed a single case study approach, prioritizing internal and constructive validity over external validity (generalizability). This strategy of inquiry was deemed appropriate for the study because it allows for in-depth investigation of complex phenomena in their real-life context and reveal the experiences, perspectives and beliefs of marginalized groups whose voices might be overlooked in population studies (Lee and Saunders 2017). By so doing, such design aids in generating rich, deep, and contextualized data and thereby helps to obtain a holistic understand a phenomenon within a given boundary. More specifically, the Decent Work Pilot Project (DWPP) in Ghana was chosen as the ideal case within which questions of stakeholders, roles, interests, governance mechanisms, and challenges would be examined and analyzed. The DWPP was chosen because available evidence suggests that it involved public, private, and CSOs within and outside the borders of Ghana (Tijmstra 2011). As a project that aimed at reducing the

level of poverty incidence among workers in the informal sector, the collaborative intervention adopted a local approach by using LGs of the pilot districts as lead agents in conveying the definition, planning, and implementation of the project (Grooten 2005; Tijmstra 2011). Consequently, the project "...led to the creation of jobs, enabled participants to improve their businesses, improve their economic situation, and meet their health needs and also adopt strategies to pull themselves out of poverty" (Azunu and Mensah 2019, p. 405). More importantly, "Women entrepreneurs represent more than 50% of the SBAs and SBEs who benefited from the training and business assistance of the GDWPP" (Grooten 2005, p. 31), emphasizing the gender-sensitive nature of the project. As implementation of decent work in some cases have proven to be less impactful, the choice of choosing the DWPP in Ghana as a specific case of inquiry offers a deep-dive into such a rare or unique case, helping to uncover some success factors that are peculiar or contextual but are relevant enough to provide useful information on how to govern future collaborative labor policies, programmes, and projects in similar contexts (Wetterberg 2011).

5.1.1 | Case Study Districts

The study was conducted in two local government districts, namely the Effutu and Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam districts (EAEED) in the Central Region of Ghana. The EAEED are two (2) of 261 LG assemblies in Ghana. In the Central Region, they constitute two (2) of the 20 LG assemblies. Effutu Municipality has many small-scale enterprises involved in arts, pottery, tiles ceramics making, among others. Due to its proximity to the Gulf of Guinea, fishing and fish processing are other dominant economic activities in the municipality (Effutu Municipal Assembly). Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam district, however, is predominantly a rural agrarian economy and largely informal (Ghana Statistical Service 2014). About 71% of total district households are engaged in crop farming. Agro-processing, which subsumes oil palm processing as well as 'gari' processing is the next dominant economic activity in the Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam district. Oil palm processing has however been its major export (Baisie 2008). Other small-scale activities dominant in the district includes hairdressing, barbering, woodcarving, auto-mechanic, and carpentry. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (2014), it is estimated that about 92.8% of the total employed population in the district is engaged in informal economic activities. These two districts have been selected as case studies because they were the only districts chosen for the DWPP implementation (Grooten 2005).

5.2 | Data Collection and Sampling

The study relied on secondary and primary data sources. The secondary data sources for the study include reviews of relevant scholarly articles and books on collaborative governance, decent work policy, sustainable development, the informal sector, decentralization, and unpublished documents from the Assemblies' archives. Primary data were sourced through key informant (KII) and in-depth interviews (IDI) with relevant stakeholders recruited through purposive and convenient

sampling techniques. As seen in Table 2, purposive sampling technique was applied in sampling national/local government stakeholders as well as international/national CSOs because these stakeholders possess deep understanding and experience on the subject being investigated. Hence, the decision to purposively sample them to benefit from their rich understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Conversely, convenient sampling technique was applied in sampling beneficiaries of the project. This technique was applied because the researchers engaged only beneficiaries who were readily available at the time of the study. A total of fifteen (15) participants were interviewed. In ensuring anonymity of these participants, pseudo-variables were used to represent them. The table below summarizes the specific sampling technique, data collection method, description, and roles of the various stakeholders sampled in this study.

5.3 | Data Analysis Approach

As has already been indicated, the study used a qualitative thematic analysis method which required recording and transcribing field interviews to capture participants' true experiences. This analytical approach involved the identification, categorization and interpretation of patterns in response to a given research question. The study applied Berg's (2001) approach to qualitative data analysis, involving the following steps; (1) reading and re-reading transcripts to identify emergent themes, (2) establishing linkages between quotes, (3) verifying themes, and (4) making analytical connections to ensure a coherent and analytical write-up, utilizing an iterative process with close reader-text interaction. More specifically, the analysis of interviews involved combining field research notes and transcription of audio interviews, developing data codes, transforming them into comprehensive labels, organizing themes, sorting them into categories, interpreting the fragmented categories into meaningful transcripts, and connecting the segmented patterns to previous studies for generalization as delineated by Berg (2001, p. 240). This paper used a triangulation method to ensure data accuracy and robust interpretation of participants' views, utilizing pseudo-variables to maintain participants confidentiality

(Campbell et al. 2020; Zhang and Wildemuth 2017). Participants were given consent forms, and assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and the option to discontinue the study if needed. This allowed for open and honest narrating. The field data were later transcribed, and the transcripts were named using the participant's roles.

6 | Findings

6.1 | Stakeholders, Their Roles and Interests in the Project

The DWPP project implementation involved several local, national, and international stakeholders engaged in various activities aimed at achieving the decent work goal of enhancing entrepreneurs' participation at the local level (Kissi and Herzig 2021). The implementation of these activities was done at the local level and by local government institutions in partnership with national and international stakeholders. The implementation of the project was embedded in the local assemblies' Medium Term Development Plans (MTDP) such that by pursuing the goal of the project, the assemblies' development plans are simultaneously being pursued. Between the project activities and outcomes lie some level of collaboration between and among national and local government units: community, state, and international civil society organizations (CSOs), and informal and other private sector stakeholders.

6.1.1 | National and Local Government Stakeholders

It was identified that during the implementation phase, while the national ministries and other departments were putting measures in place to consolidate their authority at the local level, the local assemblies positioned themselves to also influence policies in those rural areas in a bid to ensure a smooth implementation process. It is important to admit that the entire project was in the hands of the two local assemblies although other supports, including funding, were sourced from other stakeholders. Notwithstanding, the two assemblies demonstrated a strong commitment to improving their local economy.

TABLE 2 | Data collection and sampling.

Stakeholder groups	Pseudo-variables	Sampling technique	Data collection method	Role in DWPP	Focal level	Number
National/Local government stakeholders	NMT1	Purposive	KII	NDPC ¹	National	5
	DOU2	Purposive	KII	LG official	Effutu	
	BAI3	Purposive	KII	LG official	Ajumako	
	MWA4	Purposive	KII	LG official	Effutu	
	AFA5	Purposive	KII	LG official	Ajumako	
International/National/Local CSOs	ASI6	Purposive	KII	Consultant	Effutu & Ajumako	1
Informal/Private stakeholders	B1...B9	Convenient	IDI	Beneficiaries	Effutu (5) & Ajumako (4)	9
TOTAL 15						

Source: Authors' construct.

The assemblies were credited for co-funding the project, forming a sub-committee within the assembly structure to oversee the project, and working with all relevant stakeholders. As elaborated by one of the local committee members at Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam;

...The whole thing [project implementation] was on the assembly. Because, I have told you, the assembly has to set up the LED [Local Economic Development] platform... So, the assembly was responsible for the implementation of the project but they worked with other actors, that's the private sector, then the NGOs, and the traditional authority, all the stakeholders within the communities that were identified to be partners, they worked with them. [But] in terms of facilitation, [and] logistics, it was the assembly... (BAI3)

It was found that the setting up of a LED platform began with the creation of the Sub-Committee on Productive and Gainful Employment (SPGE)—a tripartite committee within the pilot assembly structure responsible for the local planning and implementation of the project. Some state institutions at the district levels were also active in some stages of the project implementation processes. Key among them were the local government hospital, the National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA), and the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG). The district-level ECG also contributed to the project by training local private electricians on some of the best innovative ways of doing business with less risk to consumers. These agencies were contacted by the SPGE [who now represented the assembly] to render such services to the SBAs and SMEs.

6.1.2 | International, National and Local CSOs

Several Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) comprising international NGOs, local NGOs, knowledge institutions, and community/social unions played significant roles in the pilot planning and/or implementation. The international NGOs included the International Labour Organization (ILO), Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA), and the African Development Bank (AfDB). Generally, these actors provided technical and/or financial assistance. ILO was viewed as the initiator of the pilot project as it trained stakeholders at the national and local levels on LED and further funded the local economic plans of the pilot districts. This was emphasized by one interviewee thus:

...without the ILO, that project cannot be implemented and even without the ILO, the framework [Local Economic Development approach to Decent Work] would have been different. (ASI6)

Moreover, the role of the consultants was key to the project implementation as they conveyed what decent work entails in practical terms to the enterprises. One of the project consultants put it this way:

...you see, ...without the consultant, there is a gap: The enterprises are at one point, they want to move to the second level. There is no way to do that. So, we facilitated...We were [like] facilitators of development, yeah. (ASI6)

In addition, the ILGS and the University of Cape Coast were among some of the prominent knowledge institutions that played key roles in the project.

6.1.3 | Informal and Other Private Sector Stakeholders

The private sector stakeholders were mainly members of the informal sector (SMEs and SBAs) and local rural banks, including the Assinman Rural Bank and Enyan Denkyira Rural Bank. These banks, through the African Development Bank's State Investment Fund (SIF), promoted access to funds on credit to the SBAs and SMEs within the district. This was part of enhancing the implementation of the social security component of decent work. The informal sector workers in the participating districts could be said to be the project beneficiaries. As local economic unionized groups, all planning meetings and implementation activities were communicated to entrepreneurs through their association leaders who were directly in contact with the SPGE. In all, the project assembled a great number of stakeholders who had different roles, interests, and levels of influence on the project's success. The Table 3 provides a comprehensive summary of the discussions.

6.2 | Forms of Stakeholder Engagements

Stakeholders were involved in several forms of engagement during the planning and implementation of the DWPP through workshops, training, consultation, and lobbying among others at the local level. These stakeholders [including CRED, EMPRECH Ghana, FIT Ghana, and the local ECG] were approached somewhere in the project cycle to provide some sort of guidance in areas such as research, capacity building, financial support, etc. Amid the various roles played by the different stakeholders of the project, workshops served as one of the most important avenues where enterprises, consultants, SPGE and sometimes ILO engaged fellow stakeholders. This was mostly the case when capacity-building interventions were organized either for the enterprises or SPGEs. As one of the SPGEs in Ajumako confirmed:

...there was a lot of training... workshops were held... a lot of workshops were held, some locally [at the pilot districts] and for others, we went to Accra ... (BAI3)

Although workshops served as means for capacity building, at the policy level, workshops organized by ILO for SPGE members were primarily on how to engage and implement the Local Economic Development (LED) approach whereas that of the enterprises was more of Business Development Services.

The engagement strategies focussed on ensuring that the appropriate activities were carried out to realize the overall goal

TABLE 3 | Stakeholder groups, roles and their interests.

Stakeholders	Institutions/ Groups	The role of stakeholder in project	The interest of stakeholders in project
National and local government stakeholders	State Ministries	Influence policies at the national level.	Enhance coherence in policy at the central and local levels.
	Regional Co-ordinating institutions	Served as an interface between central and local activities of the project.	Coordinate actions and activities of central and local authorities.
	Effutu/Ajumako District Assemblies	Influencing policy at the local level and responsible for local planning and implementation of the project.	Improve the local economy by way of boosting the quantity and quality of jobs available.
	District-level Public Agencies	Assisted with implementation by creating awareness, training, etc.	Deliver services to the entrepreneurs through the district assembly.
International, national and local CSOs	International NGOs	Provided technical and/or financial assistance.	Improving the local economy through reduction in decent work deficits.
	Local NGOs	Provided fit-for-purpose business development services to the SMEs and SBAs.	Improve the competitiveness of the enterprises at a fee.
	University of Cape Coast	Assisted assembly with a baseline survey on SMEs development (opportunities and challenges).	To make ready the available relevant data for successful implementation at a fee.
	Institute of Local Government Studies	Local lead consultant of the project.	Strengthening local capacity for implementation of the project.
	Labor Unions	Served as key members of ILO tripartite agency influencing policies at the national level.	Seek the best interests of the labor unions
Informal and other private sector stakeholders	Informal Sector (SMEs and SBAs)	Participated in local planning and implementation of the project.	Produce and deliver quality products/ services to improve income levels.
	Rural Banks	Provided entrepreneurs with credit facilities.	Enhance patronage of the SIF allocated for the SMEs/SBAs.

Source: Authors' construct.

of the project. The most dominant engagement strategies between the public and private sectors were meetings, consultations, and partnering. At the local level, the district assemblies and district-level public agencies were of key interest, especially when dealing with individuals from the informal and other private sector partners or stakeholders. These engagements helped to foster key activities such as unionizing the enterprises into SBAs, building entrepreneurs' capacity, and creating awareness of best business practices at the district level. Their partnership with local banks and health facilities helped to create some level of financial security for the SBAs.

6.3 | Benefits of the DWPP

Recognizing the diversity among stakeholders in terms of their interests, roles and levels of influence, a wide range of strategies including meetings, consultations, and partnership were used in engaging the stakeholders. As seen in Figure 2 below, these engagements helped in coming up with concrete activities such as capacity building, organizing entrepreneurs into co-operatives, and introducing financial and medical supports to entrepreneurs in the two pilot districts. Consequently, evidence from the field

suggests that these interventions carried out in the study areas improved employment standards by stimulating local employment, enhancing the involvement of entrepreneurs in local decision-making, implementing local social security instruments within the informal workers, and ensuring best business practices were followed. Taken together, these interventions helped to improve the economy of the two local assemblies.

6.3.1 | DWPP and Local Job Creation

A key benefit of DWPP the creation of jobs for the local people in the case study districts. Learners were involved in new apprenticeship jobs that became a source of employment for these beneficiaries. This was confirmed by some of the beneficiaries in the interview extracts below:

The oil palm machinery made me productive and I was gainfully employed: I was engaged throughout the week and my sales improved significantly. More importantly, I had better prices for my products at the time (B8).

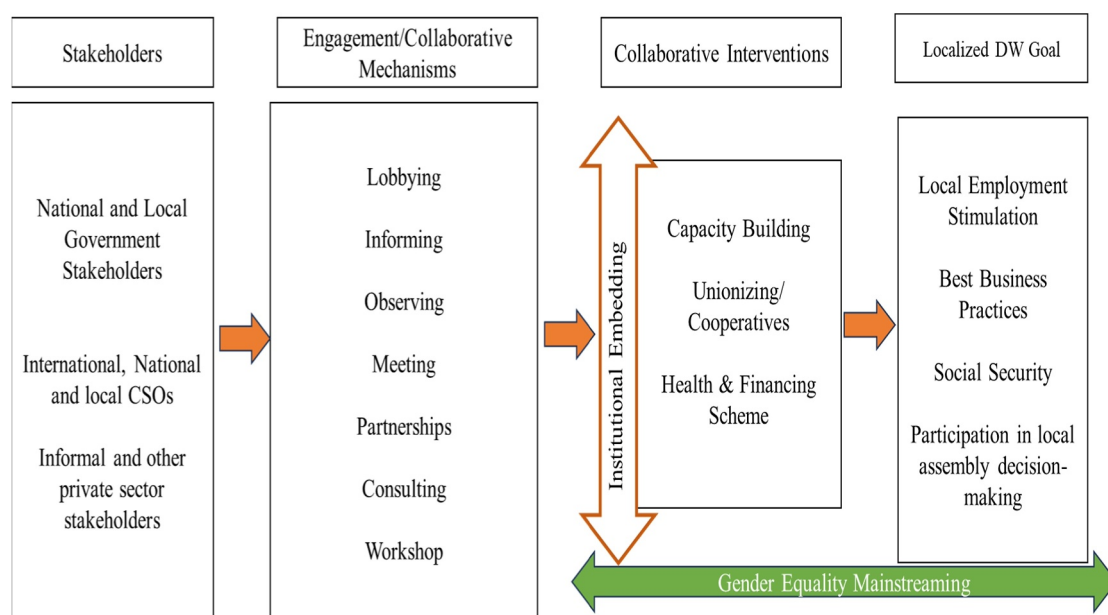


FIGURE 2 | Linking stakeholder groups, their engagement mechanisms and decent work outcomes. *Source:* Authors' construct. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pad.2106)]

Another beneficiary affirmed this during the field interviews and expressed that:

I also mentored and trained some younger ones who aspired to be big-time hairdressers in this community (B9).

6.3.2 | Involvement of Entrepreneurs in Local Decision-Making

Another important benefit of the DWPP was the conscious efforts made to involve the entrepreneurs in decision-making regarding the economic and social development of the two assemblies. This was enhanced through the creation of the SPGE as a tripartite agency within the assembly structure. The SPGE was a 15-member committee made up of local government officials, key informal entrepreneurs and local employers of the district. The essence was to use the platform as a means to engage the informal sector in general and the private sector in particular, to agitate for their rights and seek further social and economic privileges they deem necessary for the betterment of their welfare. More importantly, the project ensured that gender representation on the committee is balanced so that local decisions and interventions would serve men and women equally.

6.3.3 | Social Security Mechanisms

The DWPP led to the introduction of innovative measures through which the health and financial needs of the informal entrepreneurs would be protected by the project. This was done in two ways: First, the project encouraged and registered entrepreneurs on the Governments' health insurance policy at the time. The project also partnered other local banks to offer credits to entrepreneurs.

6.3.4 | Best Business Practices

Beneficiaries of the DWPP benefitted a shift from old ways of doing business to smarter eco-friendly way of doing business through exposure to management trainings and workshops being organized during the project. This goal of the project was against the background that informal entrepreneurs had less regard for cleanliness of working environments, lacked proper bookkeeping and documentation of transactions, etc.

6.3.5 | Improvement in the Economic Situation

Beneficiaries interviewed during the field data collection expressed confirmed that their socio-economic circumstances have improved greatly due to the implementation of the DWPP project in their respective districts. This was elaborated by some of the beneficiaries in the interview extracts from the field interviews.

Aside from being able to perform my domestic responsibilities as a man, the increased revenue helped me to expand my business by acquiring new equipment for other new shops I opened during the time (B7).

This was further confirmed by another beneficiary who is a small holder farmer:

Since the project commenced, I never faced the problem of having to keep my fruits for a longer time which most times, got spoilt after some days. The project enabled me to access readily available markets for the fruits and this lifted the level of my income (B3).

6.4 | Shaping Collaborations in Decent Work Projects

Clearly, DW as designed and implemented in the EAEED was essentially to address key employment challenges confronted by informal workers in the two case study districts. Hence, beyond the active involvement of national and international stakeholders, the role of some Ghanaian-based CSOs (such as Centre for Rural Enterprise Development (CRED), EMPRECH Ghana, and FIT Ghana, etc.) was crucial not only for increasing local content but more importantly, offering local and context-specific insights that helped to maximize entrepreneurs' welfare. More importantly, these organizations were consulted by ILO and the local government assemblies (through the SPGEs) to provide fit-for-purpose Business Development Services (BDS) to rural entrepreneurs.

However, recognizing that stakeholders of the project were of varying scales and sectors, it was important to find the appropriate means of bring them together to work towards the common goal of improving labor standards in the two local areas. Nonetheless, the degree of engagement varied greatly due to the methods utilized by some of the stakeholders. For instance, as seen in Figure 3, lobbying was found to be peculiar among stakeholders at the national or policy level. Several stakeholders were also engaged in the project by sharing and passing on information to the target beneficiaries and these stakeholders included traditional leaders (Chiefs or Queen Mothes) and other stakeholders from the Institute of Local Government Service (ILGS). Although some stakeholders were not directly engaged in action [CEDECOM and the RCC/RPCU], they were present in local-level meetings to observe proceedings as part of monitoring activities of the pilot assemblies.

Notwithstanding, a significant number of stakeholders were engaged in the DWPP through partnership with the SPGE. For instance, in order to achieve the goal of introducing localized

social security instruments, the SPGE went into partnership with the local insurance, health service authority and the rural banks in the two pilot districts. Moreover, engagements between the CSOs and government stakeholders mostly revolved around four objectives, namely policy influencing, capacity building, knowledge sharing, and regulation/supervision. It is important to note in Figure 3 the significance of the need for a tripartite platform that had representations from all stakeholder groups as part of the assemblies' organizational structure [SPGE]. It was observed that the SPGE served as the main platform to embed specific collaborative interventions² required to achieve the project goals/outcomes³ into the development plans of the two assemblies (see Figure 2). As seen in Figures 2 and 3, these engagement mechanisms were not ends in themselves but means to get the best out of these stakeholders in realizing the goals of the project in the two pilot districts.

However, to contextualize what decent work means for the local people and help institutionalize the project, the creation of the SPGE was the primary intervention through which all other interventions were conceived and defined. Locating the SPGE within the assembly structure helped come up with other interventions such as capacity building, cooperative formation, and health and financing schemes. For instance, in the quest to introduce social security instruments among the informal entrepreneurs, the LG, through the SPGEs partnered with the various stakeholders (See Figure 3) with expertise in community development, healthcare provision, banking, electricals, and research institutions, among others.

In connection with the general framework for collaborative governance as proposed by Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) (Figure 1), Figure 2 provides a more specific framework for decentralizing decent work or labor-related projects through a collaborative governance approach. More specifically, it disaggregates the various elements which contribute to successful collaborative actions by explicitly outlining; (1) why the need to

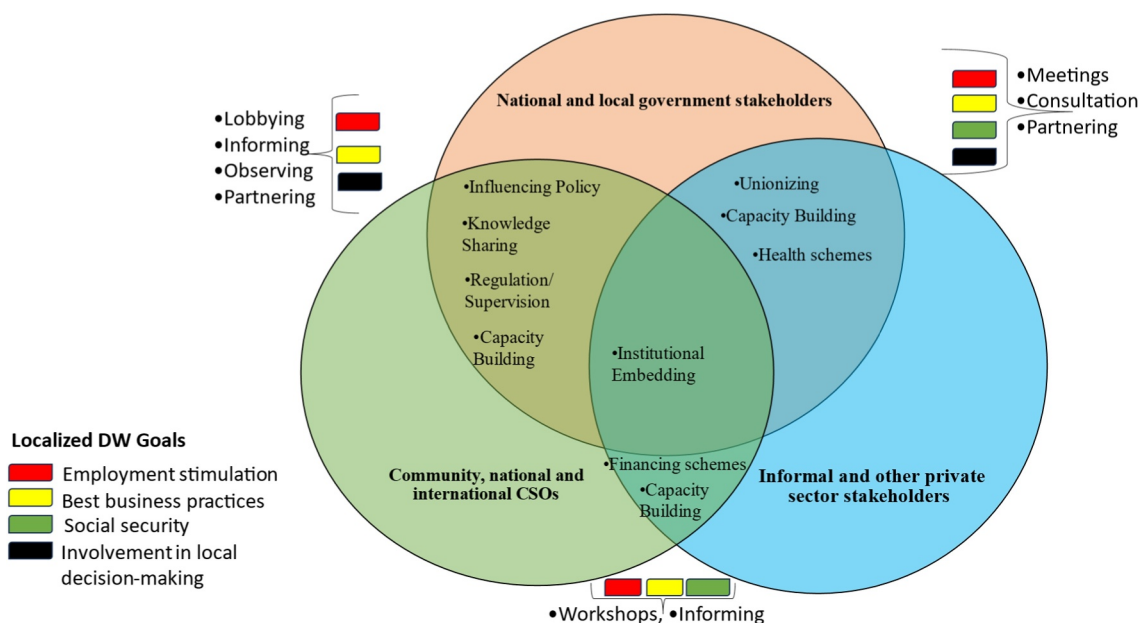


FIGURE 3 | A collaborative governance approach to decentralizing decent work policies. *Source:* Authors' construct. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

collaborate (drive/expected outcome), (2) who should collaborate with who (stakeholders/joint capacity), (3) when should this collaboration happen (formulation, implementation or monitoring stage), and (4) how should actors collaborate (means of engagement).

6.5 | Challenges

Despite DWPP's benefits, our analysis identified several challenges associated with its implementation in the two case study areas. Like many social policies and projects, the DWPP faced challenges right from the start of its implementation. The findings of the study reveal that some challenges were peculiar to one pilot district while others were general. Some of these key challenges include.

6.5.1 | Acceptance of the Project

Initial acceptance of the project by local stakeholders proved to be difficult for the SPGE. This difficulty was found to originate from harmonizing the interests of the various stakeholders. This was also faced at the enterprise levels where the SBAs and SMEs felt no need to be trained in activities they have been doing for years. For example, one of the interviewees in Effutu confirmed thus:

There was a woman at *Bawdjiase* who was into Gari processing, and exports it to our nearby [countries like] Togo... We invited this woman to come for the training. She said she won't come; she doesn't have time. ... [But]...when I assessed her production, I realized that no, this woman needs some guidance (DOU2).

In other words, it is perceived that leaving one's work for training is deemed as a waste of time, and the hours spent on training would have accrued some income if the entrepreneur had been at work. It was also found that some of these entrepreneurs initially had to be compensated financially for attending the training programmes.

6.5.2 | Management and Sustainability of the Credit Unions

As a significant initiative within the DWPP was the establishment of a Credit Union in Effutu district. It was managed and controlled by some selected local private entrepreneurs with the view of improving local content but the Union faced with serious problems of mismanagement and dishonesty, especially regarding the repayment of money it credited to borrowers. Although effective measures were put in place to ensure borrowers pay their debts, evidence from the field suggests that many felt the union was obliged to dish out money to them to improve their business without demanding payback. This was the situation of the Edwumapa Credit Union in Effutu as one of the implementers observed:

...we set up "Edwumapa Credit Union", in a way it was a success. However, wherever we have such revolving fund and that kind of banking skills is not injected in them but looking at it as a kind of Father Christmas or a thank you institution for members, then it won't work ... [and also] if at the end of the day, people are not honest and the association guarantees for ten persons and they all default, then eventually, the association becomes bankrupt. And once they're declared bankrupt the financial institution loses. Hence, rendering it also bankrupt (BAI3).

The findings of the study also reveal that beyond the support of the *Assinman* and *Enyan Denkyira* Rural Banks, the local people also maintained a credit union in Ajumako but this also ran into bankruptcy and eventually liquidated because of management issues.

6.5.3 | Changes in National and Local Political Leadership

The results of the field data analysis further indicate that following the 2008 national elections which saw the National Democratic Congress (NDC) take over political power from the then New Patriotic Party (NPP) government, the transition negatively affected smooth running of the project in at least two different ways. Some the study participants confirmed this challenge affected the project because the change subsequently brought about changes in some key personnel influencing policies in favor of the project in the various government ministries, departments, and agencies. At the local levels, available evidence suggests that some key members driving the project within the assembly, such as the Chief Executives as well as some members of the SPGE, were replaced by new appointees of the then newly elected NDC government. Other participants revealed that the level of commitment was never the same and the replacement of key personnel of the SPGE mid-way through the project implementation created some knowledge gaps. One of the interviewees put it this way:

... The whole concept was politicized when the government was changed. So, the people who were driving the initiative were taken out and those who came, they didn't have much information... [Because] there was no capacity [building] for them (BAI3).

However, there were opposing views as to whether the new government was committed or not. For some interviewees, the project suffered from a lack of political will whereas study participants from Effutu were of the view that the buy-in at the assembly level was low.

I'm not sure [it's] political will ... if you're running a programme or project and it's singled out as a special project without looking at it to mainstream it into the existing structure and then you single it out as a special project, the system will not accept it as such.

Particularly when you're receiving funding from an external source to run the programmes and then others are not benefiting. Of course, eventually when the funds from the external sources [is cut] everybody will be standing and looking at it then that is the beginning of the failure of the programme (MWA4).

6.5.4 | Lack of Funds

Following the end of the pilot period, continuous running of the project and associated interventions proved difficult as international donors terminated continuous funding of the project. It was hoped that the impacts would continue to be felt as the assemblies took over. The withdrawal of funds in the pilot districts affected many implementation activities, especially training services that needed to be organized for the SBAs. This affected the expansion, profitability, and competitiveness of some businesses. Explaining the reason for such implications, one of the consultants explained that:

...enterprises, as feeble as they are, require continuous support to some extent to be able to sustain some of the things that they would have learned. Or you know, concepts, ideas, practices changes. So, we should have continuously been supporting [by] providing continuous training, capacity building, linkages and all that. So that is also missing, and you would have required an agency like say CRED or the NBSSI to do that. But you see they are also commercially oriented so the enterprises should be able to fund our services and many times the enterprises are reluctant to provide or to fund these interventions (ASI6).

7 | Discussions

The Decent Work Pilot Programme (DWPP) in Ghana aimed to trickle-down poverty among rural informal entrepreneurs by eliminating all forms of vulnerabilities associated with informal employment including long working hours, minimum wage payments, lack of health insurance or maternity benefits, inadequate accommodation, lack of respect for labor, obstacles to labor unionization and discrimination against gender, ethnic and class (Abebrese 2014; Azunu and Mensah 2019; Okbandrias and Nordjo 2024; Somavía 2007). In realizing this policy objective in the Effutu and Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam districts (EAEED) in the Central Region of Ghana, the project actively engaged several stakeholders from public, private, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) operating at the local, national and international spheres. This approach was well aligned with that of previous studies that emphasized the need for stakeholder collaboration in dealing with complex societal problems such as unemployment and poverty reduction (Ahdiyana et al. 2021; Baisie 2008; Lerche 2012; Okbandrias and Nordjo 2024). As seen in Figure 2, the quest to improve employment situations, encourage best business practices,

create safety nets for entrepreneurs and enhance employees' participation in local decision-making instigated the need for stakeholders that are well-versed in providing such services to collaborate. The logic here is that a single institution or stakeholder could not provide all such relevant supports (Dai and Azhar 2024; Gonzaga and Pratama 2025; Knox and Orazgaliyev 2024). For instance, to achieve the decent work goal of enhancing entrepreneurs' participation in local assembly decisions, the local government assemblies were deemed best fit to enhance achievement of this objective because of their close proximity to entrepreneurs and ability to identify those that are poor and encourage their unionization into cooperatives of similar economic activities where they could now get the opportunity to negotiate or agitate for their socio-economic interests and propose training needs they deem effective for empowering and improving their welfare (Okbandrias and Nordjo 2024). However, other relevant services including the provision of these trainings as well as other technical/financial services were best delivered by other stakeholders, including the ILO, local and national consultants, and CSOs among others. Notwithstanding that stakeholders vary in power, interest and authority, it is important to recognize that a number of factors influence the extent of dynamics in collaboration (Emerson and Nabatchi 2015).

First, the goal of reducing poverty was a shared vision among stakeholders across all levels, ensuring that national interest thrives amid the potential of stakeholders to have individual interests. For instance, at the global level, international stakeholders were inspired by the quest to contribute to reducing poverty as envisaged in the Millenium Development Goal 1. At the national level, stakeholders at the policy and implementing fronts were guided by the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy I & II, a national development plan that aimed at reducing the national poverty incidence and consequently, contribute to the achievement and enhancement of MDG 1.

Notwithstanding, private stakeholders, such as consultants, despite their interest in contributing to the global and national goals of decent work would ordinarily be interested in offering services at a fee, hence, the need to meet their interests as well. Thus, financial incentives could be used as a tool to drive or shape interests of some stakeholder for the collective good. This finding is consistent with the study of Mariani et al. (2022) which found that in some cases, the presence of financial rewards may be crucial in attracting key stakeholders whose contribution would be relevant to the achievement of the public goal. Moreover, the capacity of stakeholders to coordinate efforts effectively was influenced by the availability of the required financial and human resources, leadership, and institutional arrangements. As the initiating institution, the provision of a seed money by ILO to kick start the pilot, as well as the financial contribution by local governments helped to give impetus to the implementation of the project. This allowed to meet financial commitments needed for hiring the services of other stakeholders and obtaining the necessary logistics to support the project implementation process.

The role of ILO in the Decent Work Agenda corroborates the findings of previous works which argue that the quest to deal with the wicked problems of sustainable development require

the need for an agency or stakeholder who would act as an initiating leader, stepping up to convene other stakeholders to find a solution to these problems (Agranoff and McGuire 2003; Ansell and Torfing 2014; Emerson et al. 2012; Kuhn 2016; Mariani et al. 2022; Muslim et al. 2022). Moreover, the role of the two local government institutions as lead implementing institution agents at the local level helped lead the diverse stakeholders towards a common goal (Jain et al. 2021). The idea of using LGs as lead implementing agents at the local level is further supported by Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) who argued the need for a backbone organization that has staff to run any sustainable collaborative intervention. More specifically, institutional arrangements within the LG setup such as the creation of the tripartite sub-committee known as the SPGE helped to create a collaborative environment that is safe, inclusive and trusting enough to encourage open communication, appreciate diverse perspectives, manage power dynamics, promote transparency in decision-making and build collective intelligence at the local level (Vivier and Sanchez-Betancourt 2023). More importantly, recognizing that the Sub-committee comprised of stakeholders of varied interests (representatives of labor unions, private employers and government), it enabled stakeholders to learn from each other and resolve conflicts constructively, thereby helping to maintain positive collaboration among these stakeholders. Such institutional arrangement helped to create within the assembly structure, "... [a] safe space for public, private, and civil society actors to engage with each other..." (Florini and Markus 2018, p. 10) in local socio-economic decision-making. This enhanced the position of the SPGE as a partnership broker that nurtures the planning and implementation of the other three collaborative interventions (represented as institutional embedding in Figures 2 and 3).

In furtherance of the need to maintain positive collaboration among stakeholders at the local level, the findings of the study indicate a number of ethical and moral principles that guide collaborative interactions among stakeholders during project planning and implementation, and ensuring that all parties are committed to shared goals and values. For instance, recognizing that poverty in rural areas affects women and children more, amid their exclusion in decision-making, mainstreaming of gender issues were a top priority of local assemblies, thereby guiding them on the need to ensure gender representation is backed not only in terms of number of women on the SPGE committee but is also translated to association leadership and beneficiaries of the project. This effort helped to spread positive welfare to some female entrepreneurs, affirming the need for gender mainstreaming to be a crosscutting issue in all decent work principles (D'Souza 2010; Grooten 2005; International Labour Organisation 2013). Moreover, as a local economic development approach, all scheduled planning meetings and implementation activities were communicated to local entrepreneurs through their association leaders who are directly in contact with the SPGE. Moreover, during implementation of project activities, a peculiar finding from the study was that workshops serve as the dominant means for engaging national and local stakeholders for capacity building interventions. This finding corroborates the study of Conti et al. (2019) which found that various approaches can be adopted in engaging stakeholders in a collaborative intervention. Further findings reveal that some means of engagement are peculiarly relevant to

certain contexts, requiring distinct approaches that reflect local realities in addressing those wicked problems.

Taken together, it is clear that the Decent Work Agenda in Ghana was rolled out under a political climate that was favorable and receptive to the call of reducing poverty (Knox and Orazgaliyev 2024). This was profoundly evident following a change in government in 2008 when the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) government lost political power to the National Democratic Congress (NDC). This transition in power affected the Decent Work Agenda in at least two ways: first, the change in government subsequently resulted in replacement of key personnels driving and influencing the policy within the various Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) at the national level. At the local level, members driving the project from the Assembly structure were similarly replaced, putting into doubt the commitment of new members serving on the SPGE. Consequently, this led to a loss of institutional memory and a gradual decline in the successes of the project since 2008.

8 | Conclusions

Using the Decent Work Pilot Project (DWPP) in the Effutu and Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam districts of Ghana as the specific case of inquiry, the current study aimed to fill gaps in decent work research by following a qualitative approach to examine the roles, interests, engagement strategies, benefits and challenges in promoting decent work. Considering these objectives, the findings reveal that achieving decent work outcomes such as improved employment conditions, enhanced business practices, entrepreneurial safety nets and employee participation in local governance and decision-making necessitated collaboration among diverse stakeholders spanning from public, private, and civil society organizations at local, national, and international levels.

However, recognizing the potential variation in interests among such diverse stakeholders, a number of factors were found to be peculiarly responsible for the successful implementation of the DWPP in the Effutu and Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam districts in Ghana. These factors included a shared vision among stakeholders, effective coordination and engagement strategies, strategic leadership from the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the local governments as well as the establishment of inclusive institutional arrangements like the SPGE sub-committee. Ethical principles such as gender mainstreaming and open communication among stakeholders further fostered trust and commitment among stakeholders. Notwithstanding, political transitions and personnel changes within governmental bodies disrupted institutional memory and shifted priority away from decent work objectives and thus threatened the sustainability of the project. To address these challenges, this study proposed a modified collaborative governance framework that emphasizes multi-stakeholder collaboration for addressing unemployment and poverty reduction and enhancing the role of local governments as 'partnership brokers' that create a safe space for these stakeholders to collaborate in achieving decent work outcomes. More specifically, the framework outlines

expected outcomes for decent work projects, identifies relevant stakeholders for achieving those outcomes, maps stakeholders to specific outcomes, and provides guidance on effective stakeholder engagement timing and mechanisms.

The findings underscore the importance of the following: (1) robust institutional frameworks to safeguard collaborative interventions from political instability, (2) integrating interventions into existing local structures, (3) assembling relevant stakeholders, (4) securing committed support from local government, and (5) involving project beneficiaries throughout all phases. While these insights are context-specific, they offer valuable guidance for policy-makers and researchers seeking to translate the decent work principles into practical development outcomes in other countries that share similar contextual realities. Hence, to advance research on decent work while guiding policy-makers towards sustainable interventions that improve employment conditions and reduce poverty, future researchers should consider expanding contextual studies to assess how local contexts influence stakeholder collaboration in promoting decent work.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Practice Impact Statement

We propose a framework for decentralizing decent work (DW) projects, offering practical guide to practitioners and policymakers. Particularly, the framework outlines how collaboration and engagement among stakeholders could be fostered by highlighting four critical dimensions: (1) the importance of stakeholder collaboration for DW projects (expected outcomes), (2) the relevant stakeholders for such projects (joint capacity), (3) the timing of collaboration among stakeholders (formulation or implementation stage), and (4) the effective methods of engagement (ways in which actors could collaborate).

Endnotes

¹ National Development Planning Commission

² Such as capacity building, unionizing entrepreneurs and the provision of health/financing benefits/packages.

³ Namely, local employment stimulation, best business practices among entrepreneurs, social security packages and enhance entrepreneurs' participation in local assembly decision-making.

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