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# Sustaining decentralized collaborative governance arrangements in Africa: a case study of land management committees in the Upper West Region, Ghana

Abdul-Salam Ibrahim  · Bernard Afiiik Akanpabadai Akanbang · Wolfram Laube

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**Abstract** Sustaining collaboration in decentralized land governance has become the center of attention in land discourse due to the evolving realities and diverse interest involved in hybrid land governance systems in Africa. Drawing theoretical insights from collaborative governance, this study examined the formation and sustainability of Land Management Committees under Ghana's Land Administration Project. Using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the study found that facilitative traditional leadership, inclusiveness, context driven approaches and transparency and accountability sustains decentralized collaborative arrangements for land governance. Whilst the collaborative governance literature acknowledges that in some instances, strong trust may serve as a disincentive to collaboration, this study

has shown that strong trust through social capital could actually serve as the foundation for sustaining collaborative systems. Also, this study has shown that it is possible to sustain collaboration when collaborative policies are situated within the cultural context of stakeholders and empower groups to abide by the principles of transparency and accountability through effective traditional leadership. We recommend that there should be regulated flexibility in the operationalization of collaborative arrangements in order to ensure that they are context dependent for their sustainability to be assured.

**Keywords** Land governance · Land management committee · Collaborative governance · Sustainability · Decentralization · Ghana

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## Introduction

Collaboration in decentralized land governance involves the pooling of resources and knowledge from state and non-state actors locally in order to deal with the increasing complexities of customary land governance (Akaateba 2018; Ayitio 2019; Biitir and Nara 2016). Bugri (2008) espoused that land governance process in Africa particularly in Ghana requires the collaborative efforts of both customary and statutory stakeholders due to the evolving realities and weaknesses of the traditional and statutory land governance

establishments. Community-based collaborative structures commonly constituted is thus the novel route. This study draws theoretical insights from collaborative governance to examine the formation and factors affecting the sustainability of collaborative system—an emerging but less highlighted phenomenon in decentralized land governance in Sub-Saharan Africa. Land governance refers to “the rules, processes and structures through which decisions are made about access to land and its use, the manner in which decisions are implemented and the way that competing interests in land are managed” (Bugri 2012, p 2).

Proponents of collaboration in decentralized land governance argue that intermediate systems need to be created to serve as conduit for the synchronization of customary and statutory tenure systems (Amanor 2012; Sarah 2017). The relevance of this argument is based on the fact that in most countries in Africa including Ghana, there is the preponderance of customary land ownership making it logical to give a significant stake to those who own greater share of the land in its management. Such a system will require the transfer of management functions to the local level and an acknowledgement of the right of the customary owners to manage their own land within the context of an open and transparent legal system that guarantee fairness and permit external monitoring by the state (Ayitio 2019; Byamugisha 2013; Chauveau 2006). This is the case of the Ghana's Land Administration Project (LAP). The LAP established Land Management Committees (LMCs) as integrated and collaborative structures to superintend the operations of the Customary Land Secretariats (CLSs) as decentralized land governance systems across the country. In the Upper West Region (UWR) of Ghana, seven of these decentralized collaborative institutions were established to streamline customary land governance.

The peculiarity of the Region emanates from the fact that customarily, land is a common property resource entrusted with family heads. The family heads are fiduciaries who are to manage land in a transparent and accountable way for the benefit their families (Kansanga et al. 2019; Biitir and Kuusaana 2019). The trust of the argument of the paper is that understanding how collaboration is attained and sustained among the different families is critical to the creation of a decentralized land governance system that is responsive to its context. This is because if the

diverse actors and interests are unable to overcome obstacles to collaboration, flexibly adapt to changing circumstances, resolve issues of trust, or address power asymmetries, sustaining such collaborative arrangement could be thwarted. This becomes even more challenging within the context of rapid urbanization, increasing land commodification and speculation and the resultant rise in land disputes occurring in the study area (Mwingyine 2019; Kansanga et al. 2018). Such a context heightens the interest of fiduciaries and the greater diversity of stakeholders in collaborative arrangements (see Kansanga et al. 2019) and thus provide a fertile ground for examining the formation and factors affecting the sustainability of collaborative structures as a viable alternative for decentralized land governance.

While there have been significant studies on institutional designs that are conducive for effective collaboration (Doberstein 2016; Musavengane et al. 2019; Westerink et al. 2017), there has been little research on the sustainability of such collaborative initiatives (Ananda and Proctor 2013; Vodden 2015). Also, studies on collaboration within the context land governance is limited as studies often turn to focus on sector-specific governance issues like watershed councils, community health partnerships, community policing, collaborative planning and natural resource (irrigation, coastal fisheries, pastures, forests and ground water) co-management (Cheadle et al. 2005; Ishimaru 2014; Liederbach et al. 2008; Scott 2016; Sullivan et al. 2019; Wyatt et al. 2019). In Ghana, studies on collaborative arrangements for decentralized land governance often focus on collaborative land delivery practices within the context of institutional hybridity (Akaateba 2018; Ayitio 2019; Biitir et al. 2017; Obeng 2018) as well as the adaptation and role of customary institutions in promoting good local land governance (Biitir and Nara 2014, 2016; Arko-Adjei 2011). These studies turn to give little attention to the contextual conditions in the formation and sustainability of the customary institutions which serve as the foundation for decentralized land governance in Ghana. The argument is that without understanding the specific and broader socio-economic context in which actors are ‘embedded’ it is unlikely that we can know the circumstances that affect individual decision-making over resource use particularly land (Cotula et al. 2019).

The aim of this study is to examine how the LMCs as decentralized land governance structures were initiated and constituted in the communities as well as how they have been sustained with limited government support in the UWR of Ghana. This is underscored by the fact that if present institutions are the manifestations of past social and political orientations, consideration of existing social and political relations within communities can yield an enhanced appreciation of how present institutions are contested and what future institutions may look like. The ensuing section focuses on the theoretical basis of the study. “[Study context and methods](#)” section highlight the study context and methods. The findings of the study focusing on understanding the formation and sustainability of the LMCs is presented in “[Findings](#)” section and discussed in “[Discussion](#)” section.

## Theoretical framework

### Common property resource theory

Common Property Resources (CPR) refers to “a category of natural resources that are owned, controlled and managed by a group of people” (Vij and Narain 2016 p. 60). Generally, common property resources encompass all resources which are accessible to the whole community and to which no individual has exclusive property rights (see Acheson 2018). Common property right is the bases of common property resource management (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2004). Group of actors are said to share common property right when they are able to manage a resource system through a self-organized institutional structure that exercises collective choice right of management and exclusion over the resource and the benefits accruing from the resource (Ostrom 2003). When communal groups have full ownership over the resource system, they possess the additional right to sell their access, use, and exclusion and management rights to others, usually subject to approval by other members of the group (Acheson et al. 2015; Ostrom 2003). The rights and practices determining access to these resources are generally conventional (Marikkani 2012). Largely, CPRs may be identified by access, common use and communal purpose. Thus, a resource system becomes common property only when the group of people who have the right to its collective use

is well defined, and the rules that govern their use of it are set out clearly and followed universally thereby allowing the capture of future benefit streams (Marikkani 2012). Common Property thus implies existence of an institutional arrangement over the resources.

The institutional arrangement for commons governance are often self-organized with little state involvement (Casari and Plott 2003). Though instances of state initiated commons institutions exist, they are often limited to contexts where social groups are unable to leverage on social capital for collective action (Saunders 2014; Roe and Nelson 2009). Social capital which includes the characteristics of the social group comprising social networks, norms and trust is particularly thought to allow groups and communities to resolve collective problems by encouraging compliance to collectively desirable behavior (Gillinson 2004; Zuka 2013). Social capital thus provides a suitable context for the emergence of commons institutions (Saunders 2014). However, the sustainability of the commons on the bases of social capital depends on the extent to which the interests of social actors pursuing institutional change agrees with those of the larger collective (Agrawal 2003). Though a number of commons theorists have postulated different conditions that affect the sustainability of common property institutions, similarities can be discerned. Generally, the sustainability of any given institutional arrangement depends on a myriad of contextual conditions including the nature of the resource to be governed; the level of self-organization of local resource users to craft, monitor, and enforce resource use and management rules; and the extent to which actors who are subject to these local institutional structures cooperate and collaborate with other actors who are external to the community (Andersson and Ostrom 2008; Agrawal 2001, 2003).

### Collaborative governance theory

This study draws largely from the collaborative governance theory. The collaborative governance theory is a hybrid of theories; model of collective action, the model of collaborative problem resolution and the extensive common property resource theory (see Emerson et al. 2012). The common property resource literature has particularly contributed significantly to our understanding of the collaborative



governance theory by outlining the basic scope and authorities for joint effort, decision making rules, and operating procedures (Bingham et al. 2014). Collaborative governance system engages non-state actors in a collective decision making process that is consensus oriented and aims to accomplish a task that cannot be achieved by any of the actors individually (Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson et al. 2012). Collaborative governance theory is grounded in the postulation that every stakeholder has something of worth to contribute to final outcomes (Innes and Booher 2010) and hence emphasize the role of non-state stakeholders. Though in some instances public agencies may wield ultimate authority, the non-state actors must directly participate in the decision-making process (Freeman 1997). This is to ensure that the local indigenous knowledge and networks is brought to bear in decision making processes. This further builds social capital by strengthening social relationships and trust to contribute to genuine communication and joint problem solving (Stratoudakis et al. 2019).

The increasing role of local actors in the management of commons stems from the failures of central government efforts to improve resource governance and thus provide the bases for collaboration between these two structures through the sharing of responsibilities and resources in a decentralized resource governance arrangement (Sullivan et al. 2019; Wyatt et al. 2019). Thus, states have sought to involve local actors in the governance of local resources by instituting new local institutional structures (Davis et al. 2020). These novel commons represent policy shifts in many developing countries, whereby governments have turned to local-level actors and common property institutions for decentralized resource governance (Musavengane et al. 2019; Musavengane and Simatele 2016). These policy shifts are but a belated appreciation that sustainable resource governance is not exclusive of the sustainability of human institutions that shape resource governance, and that local actors are often those with the greatest stakes in sustainability of resources and institutions (Agrawal and Benson 2011; Davis et al. 2020).

The sustainability of a collaborative system implies the creation of public value (Thomson et al. 2008) which is linked to commitment. This is vital to the continuity of the collaborative process and to keep it going beyond the initiation stage (Stratoudakis et al. 2019). Ansell and Gash (2008) identified starting

conditions, institutional design, facilitative leadership and the collaborative process as conditions whose interplay determines the sustainability or otherwise of a collaborative system. Whilst the starting conditions establishes the underlying level of trust, conflict, and social capital that serve as resources or liabilities during collaboration, institutional design establishes the ground rules that guide the collaborative process and facilitative leadership offers essential mediation and facilitation for the collaborative process (see Ansell and Gash 2008, 2012). Finally, the collaborative process entails the actions of participants and may occur in an iterative or nonlinear manner (Nikolakis and Hotte 2020).

#### Contextualizing collaborative land governance in Africa

There is the mushrooming of collaborative systems for decentralized land governance in Africa (Benjaminsen et al. 2009; Byamugisha 2014; Knight 2010). This is necessitated by incessant urban growth and its offshoots which present overarching burden on statutory authorities in land governance in the continent (Akaateba 2018; Obeng 2018). The inherent weaknesses in existing customary land ownership and administration amplifies the bases for collaboration between state and non-state actors in dealing with those challenges. According to Huxham et al. (2000, p 340) collaborative systems are chiefly “initiated with an instrumental purpose in mind”. That is, to accomplish a task that could not have been achieved by any of the actors independently (see Bingham et al. 2014; Edge and Meyer 2019). States consequently initiate collaborative processes to tap into the potential of the non-state actors. The collaborative governance literature acknowledges that government or public agencies typically initiate collaborative process (Emerson et al. 2012; Koontz et al. 2010; Roth and de Loë 2017). In Uganda for instance, Obaikol (2014) noted that governments have historically initiated and created spaces for stakeholder collaboration in land governance particularly in land policy formulation. However, at the local level in Ghana, Akaateba (2018) in a study of collaboration between local government authorities and traditional rulers in the preparation of planning schemes for vacant lands found that, the collaborative processes were initiated by the traditional authorities in their attempt to benefit from

increasing land values and to ensure the orderly development of their communities.

Collaboration demands an effective institutional design in order to thrive (Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson et al. 2012). The choice of institutional structure for land governance has significant repercussions for power balance within society, and many countries in Africa have experienced age-old tensions between public and customary structures regarding control over land (UNECA 2017). Collaboration requires an open and an all-inclusive institution—including civil society actors, community members as well as the political and professional bodies—to guarantee the procedural legitimacy of the collaborative process (Conti et al. 2019; Marcaletti and Riniolo 2015). It is only groups that feel they have had a legitimate opportunity to participate that are likely to develop a commitment to the process (Ansell and Gash 2008; Bäckstrand 2006; Musavengane and Simatele 2016). Reilly (2001) for example found that successful collaborative institutions give priority to getting stakeholders to participate and that exclusion of critical stakeholders portends failure. Knight (2010) in a review of Botswana's Tribal Land Act which established land boards as collaborative local land governance institutions found that, the boards excluded women groups and other minority ethnic groups and hence eventually affected the Board's legitimacy in enforcing decisions. Kansanga, et al. (2019) emphasize that ensuring an all-inclusive arrangement at the community level can help reduce customary land boundary conflicts; a key objective of decentralized land governance.

Also, the literature suggests that clear ground rules are essential for a sustainable collaborative institutional design (Hardy and Koontz 2009; Ishimaru 2014; Lai 2011; Murdock et al. 2005). Lai (2011) observed that ground rules do not only regulate interaction among stakeholders but also ensures that stakeholders concentrate on fruitful discussions that will sustain actors' interest in the collaborative process. These rules may include both formal and informal rules (Thomson and Perry 2006). Emerson et al. (2012) noted that informal rules must always be supplemented with formal rules for collaborative governance to thrive. However, Ntумы (2014) in an exploratory survey, observed that Botswana's land boards are creatures of a legislative process with no room for informal rules and hence making them inherently

inflexible to cope with evolving challenges of contemporary land governance.

Transparency and accountability is critical to the sustainability of collaboration in governance (Bergh et al. 2012; Lathrop and Ruma 2010). Transparency and accountability ensures that actors in collaboration have access to information on the progress of the collaborative process and can enable members to make informed decisions about the way forward for the group (Bäckstrand 2006; Bergh et al. 2012). It also serves as a check on the use of power by the leadership of the collaborative process. To sustain collaboration, transparency and accountability mechanisms should be well spelt out in the ground rules of collaboration. Transparency driven accountability mechanisms are widely encouraged (Bäckstrand 2006; McManus et al. 2006). McManus et al. (2006) argue that an open and transparent collaborative process fosters accountability. This increases the level of trust and cooperation among stakeholders.

Moreover, leadership is widely recognized as an essential ingredient in developing and sustaining collaboration. While acephalous collaboration may be possible in some contexts, the literature overwhelmingly finds that facilitative leadership is imperative for bringing stakeholders together and getting them to engage each other in a collaborative spirit (Ansell and Gash 2012; Emerson and Gerlak 2014; Morse 2014; Purdy 2012). Ansell and Gash (2012) argue that leadership plays an iconic role in collaboration by empowering and involving stakeholders and then mobilizing them to move collaboration forward. Though, cases of local community leaders collaborating with public agencies in land governance processes are reported in some African cities where urban growth is incessant and customary land management practices thrive (see Cotula et al. 2019; Durand-Lasserve et al. 2015; Musyoka 2006; Ntумы 2014; Nkurunziza 2006; Nnkya 2007; Onyebueke and Ikejiofor 2017), the institutionalization of such practices are not ubiquitous in Ghanaian cities (Akaateba 2018; Ayitio 2019). Albeit, the burgeoning nature of local community action in land governance in many cities in Africa implies that such arrangements represent ingenious institutional adaptations to the overarching land governance challenges. These arrangements thus have the opportunity to emerge as alternative and novel routes for decentralized land governance in the continent.

## Decentralized land governance in Ghana

Ghana as in many developing nations, decentralization has been adopted in different spheres of governance through policy reforms. Generally, decentralization refers to the transfer of authority and resources from central to lower levels of government in a political, administrative and territorial hierarchy (Smoke 2003; Zuka 2016). Notwithstanding the variance in the types and objectives of decentralization, all decentralization reforms have a common goal of advancing mechanisms that shape formal linkages, thereby generating new relationships between central and local government structures (Smoke 2003). The shift towards decentralization is generally on grounds of increased access to decision makers, increased local participation in decision making, improved responsiveness to citizens needs and enhanced accountability mechanisms (de Satgé 2017; Diep et al. 2016). However, in contexts where local structures are weak and poorly organized with low institutional capacity, the transfers of authority and resources may lead to abuse of power and increased marginalization of vulnerable individuals and groups (Zuka 2016). Also, there is the potential for conflicts between local and national interests where power is shared and the risk that each will advance their individual goals is higher and how 'democratic' the governance structure really is, then becomes questionable (Diep et al. 2016).

Within the context of land governance, Ghana as in other developing countries has been rolling out decentralized land governance reforms over the past two decades (Bruce 2014). Decentralized land governance involves the transfer of customary land management and administration functions from national and regional statutory land sector institutions to customary landholding institutions (see Biitir et al. 2017). According to de Satgé (2017) negotiating and restructuring power relationships between local actors and the state regarding access to, control over, and use of land resources is the path to decentralized land governance. The argument is that local land tenure institutions have better understanding of local context and hence are able to aptly respond to local land needs because they are nearer to local communities and have mandated responsibility, and accountability to the whole local population (Amanor 2012). Land is inextricably communal and this gives credence to the decentralization of land governance (Bruce 2014).

Therefore, scholars argue that land reforms in general must consider legal and institutional reforms that seek to recognize customary land tenure and traditional landholding institutions within the broader context of decentralization (Byamugisha 2014; Bruce 2014; Durand-Lasserve et al. 2015).

Accordingly, Ghana's National Land Policy launched in 1999 had among its key objectives, the promotion of local participation in decentralized land governance by entrusting customary land management into the hands of customary landholding groups. The right of the customary land owners to manage their lands is backed by the 1992 constitution of Ghana. Article 267 Clause 1 provides that "All stool lands in Ghana shall be vested in the appropriate stool on behalf of and in trust for the subjects of the stool in accordance with customary law and usage." Article 5 further provides that "... no interest in or right over, any stool land in Ghana shall be created which vests in any person or body of persons a freehold interest howsoever described."

In order to operationalize Ghana's National Land Policy and further guarantee the right of customary landholding groups spelt out in the constitution, the government of Ghana initiated the LAP. Under the LAP, the state exercises oversight responsibility over customary institutions through the Lands Commission and the Office of the Administrator of Stool Lands (OASL) (Blocher 2006). The Lands Commission grants consent and concurrence to the disposition of stool/skin lands. The OASL in addition to the collection and disbursement of ground rent is responsible for coordinating with customary land groups on issues relating to the administration and development of stool/skin lands, including the policy framework (Biitir and Kuusaana 2019; Arko-Adjei 2011). Also, the LMCs which superintend the work of the CLSs was established to reinforce the role of the customary land owners in the management of their lands at the local level. The LAP sought to: clarify customary land holding, foster links to land-use planning, encourage active participation and engage customary land owners in decision-making, clarify the roles defined for the land sector agencies, and foster coordination and cooperation among the land sector agencies, District Assemblies, customary authorities and the private sector (World Bank 2003). The LMCs through the CLSs were made the cornerstone of decentralized land



governance at the local level with little involvement of the statutory land agencies.

## Study context and methods

### Study context

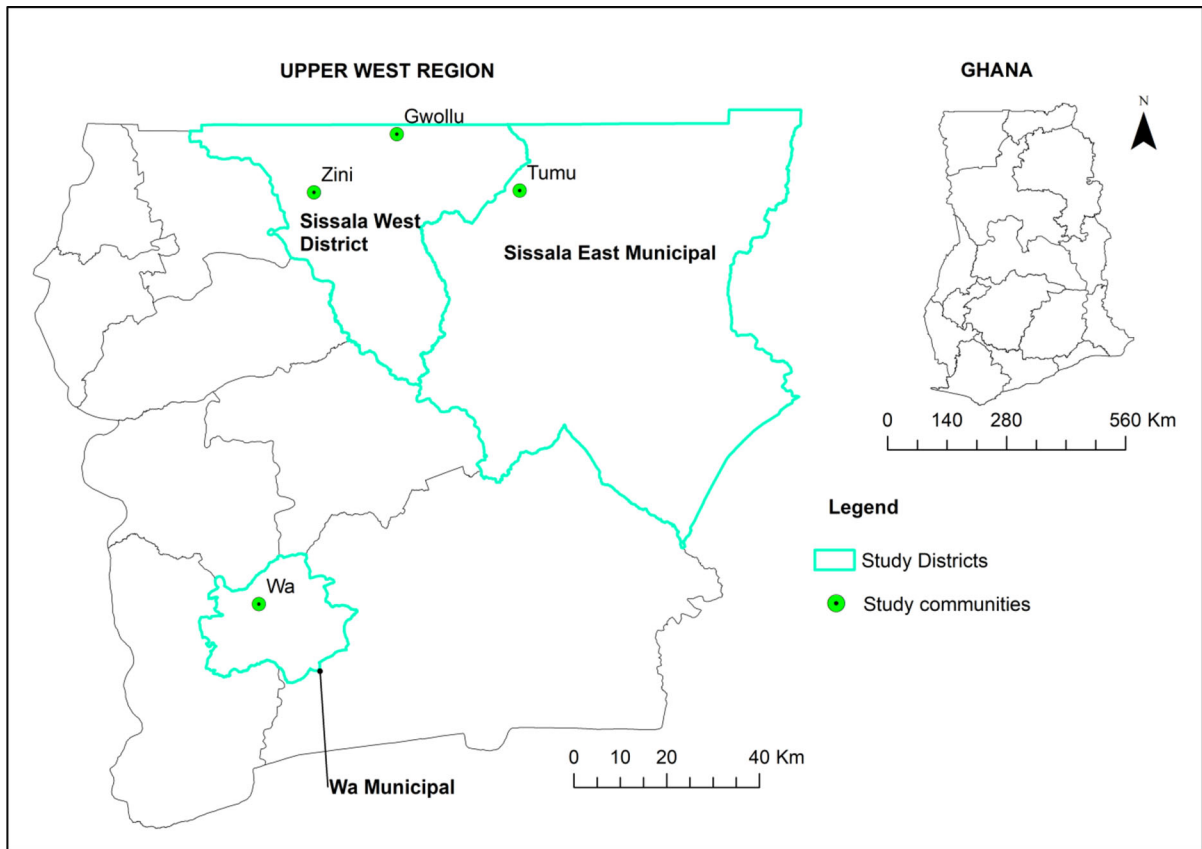
The LMC is a novel institutional arrangement under Ghana's LAP which engages both state and non-state stakeholders in a collective decision making process. The LAP which has two phases was initiated by the government of Ghana with support from the World Bank and other donors to implement the policy actions outlined in the 1999 National Land Policy of Ghana (Nyarko and Adu-Gyamfi 2012; World Bank 2018). The first phase which ended in 2010 was initiated in 2003. The second phase took effect in 2011 and is scheduled to end in 2021 after several years of reformation (World Bank 2018). Under the LAP, the customary land institutions in Ghana have been restructured to adequately deal with the increasingly complex customary land sector challenges (Arko-Adjei 2011; Sarah 2017). Thus, the LMC was created as a collaborative interface between the state, customary land owners, land users and professionals such as lawyers, surveyors and town planners. The LMCs were to setup CLSs to administer customary lands on their behalf. The functions of the LMC include: exercising general oversight responsibility over the operations of the CLS; Offer policy direction to the CLS; hire all categories of staff of the CLS and to fire any such personnel where necessary; determine salaries and allowances for CLS staff; provide the CLS with details of all persons with capacity to execute instruments affecting land within the CLS area; offer guidelines for determination of 'drink money'<sup>1</sup> and ground rent; review performance of the CLS and determine new direction for effectiveness and growth; resolve land related disputes through ADR; perform any other functions to be determined from time to time by the customary land owning group (LMC) (Kakraba-Ambah 2008). The LMCs thus performs land management and administration functions which Bugri (2012) refers to as land governance.

As shown in Fig. 1, the study took place in four communities in the Upper West Region of Ghana. Land in the study communities is predominantly owned by families with chiefs exercising administrative functions. Prior to colonialism, the social structure of these communities was predominantly acephalous. The *Tendamba* or earth-priests who were and still the family or clan heads wielded power and hence serves as the guardians of the land, 'landlords' in Ghanaian phrasing (Blench 2006). Wa, and the Wale (the people of Wa) constituted something of an exception, since they have had a centralized monarchy since the 19th century (Blench 2006; Wilks 2002). With the establishment of the state-systems, chiefs were appointed in parallel with the *Tendamba* creating a system of dual authority (Lentz 2003).

In the acephalous areas, there were many more landlords, many more shrines and the spiritual authority of any individual was more diffuse (Lentz and Sturm 2001; Kuba and Lentz 2002). The chiefs were much less able to exercise authority, partly because of the dispersed settlement patterns and because there were no traditions of respecting such individuals in these areas. Though a colonial creation, chieftaincy has become an esteemed institution and a key avenue for community mobilization in the Region (Ghana Statistical Service 2013). We must emphasize that contrary to the tradition in other parts of Ghana where chiefs are allodial title holders (Wily and Hammond 2001; Bugri 2012), the family heads hold allodial title to land in the study communities (Biitir and Kuusaana 2019; Yaro 2010). This traditional notion of customary land provides the context for communities and customary authorities in particular to take center stage in land ownership, and fosters the sense of belongingness without state interferences (Kuusaana and Gerber 2015). The family head manages the family land on behalf of the whole family in consultation with other elders in the family. The benefits accruing from the lands are expected to trickle down to the whole family (Kuusaana and Eledi 2015). However, studies have shown that some family heads in the Region are using the family lands as if it is their personal property (Kuusaana and Eledi 2015; Ubink and Quan 2008).

Due to urbanization and the resulting increase in the economic value of land and within the context of the LAP, the families and other interest groups including chiefs in the Region have constituted themselves into

<sup>1</sup> 'Drink Money' is the local term for capital payments made by a tenant which may be equivalent to premium.



**Fig. 1** Map of Upper West Region showing study communities. *Source:* Authors own 2020

LMCs to administer their family lands. Based on the records of the Ghana's Lands Commission, there are seven LMCs in seven customary areas in the Region. They include Wa-Central, Wa-Sungmali, Zini, Gwollu, Tumu, Tabiasi and Lambussei. However, only Wa-Central, Zini, Gwollu and Tumu have functional LMCs and hence served as the study communities. Wa-Central and Tumu LMCs are located in Wa and Sissala East Municipality respectively while Zini and Gwollu are located in the Sissala West District in the Upper West Region of Ghana. These LMCs are distinctive by virtue of being indigenous and rooted in their traditional values, neither arising nor delivered through state mechanisms (Bugri 2012). As participation in these LMCs is voluntary, questions have been raised as to the sustainability of such arrangements within the context of growing desire of the family heads to pursue their parochial objectives. This study therefore explored how the LMCs were formed and how they have been

sustained as contribution to the literature on how effectively collaborative arrangements could be used to enhance effective and sustainable land governance at the local level.

## Methods

The study purposively selected four LMCs—Wa-Central LMC, Tumu LMC, Gwollu LMC and Zini LMC— from the seven LMCs in the UWR based on their functionality. The other three LMCs from our pilot study were all not functional. A functional LMC is defined in the paper as a LMC that has a legitimate membership (membership recognized by the community) and a secretariat that is open to members and the public during the weekday. Our inquiry revealed improper constitution of the membership of the three LMCs (Foundation members were not *Tendambas*) as the reason for their closure. Consequently, they could not win the trust of their respective *Temdamba's* in

order to keep the LMCs in operation. The four functional LMCs therefore constituted the context for examining their formation and sustainability in real-life setting using the exploratory case study research design. The case study design made it possible for the use of different data collection methods including in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) (see Creswell and Poth 2016). The study took the form of a multiple-case study on the grounds that it involved four LMCs in the UWR of Ghana. The multiple case studies allowed for the analyses of the data within each case and across different cases. This made evident the similarities and differences between the cases.

A sample of 28 respondents was purposively selected for the study. This comprised seven (7) LMC members each in Tumu, Wa-Central and Zini, six (6) LMC members in Gwollu as well as a key informant at Ghana's Lands Commission. We collected primary data from the regional lands officer, the coordinator of each of the CLSs, the chairman and the secretary of each of the LMCs as well as one technocrat each on the LMCs and representatives of landowning families on the LMCs. The data collection and analysis were done simultaneously. Notes were taken in the field and at the end of the entire data collection, the audio recordings were transcribed. The transcripts were then validated and arranged in a chronological order for within case and cross-case thematic analysis. The thematic analysis involved a careful reading and re-reading of the transcripts in order to identify, analyze and report patterns within the data (see Braun and Clarke 2006). This was done within each case study area and then across the cases. The emerging themes constitute a coherent integration of the disparate voices observed by the study.

## Findings

### Understanding the formation of the LMCs

We examined how the concept of LMC was initiated and constituted in the communities. This was to enable us understand how collaboration was initiated locally as well as the institutional framework for collaboration.

### *Initiation of the formation in the communities*

After the government through the LAP provided the policy context, different stakeholders then initiated the formation processes in the study communities. Though chiefs have no absolute control over all the lands within their jurisdiction in the study communities, they played significant roles in the initiation of the process of forming the LMCs in their customary areas. In all the study communities but Wa-Central, the president of their respective traditional councils initiated the process of forming the LMCs. In Tumu for instance, the Tumu 'Kuoro'<sup>2</sup> cum the president of the Tumu traditional council contacted the OASL on how they can help constitute the LMC in the Tumu traditional area. A representative of the Tumu 'Kuoro' on the LMC disclosed that:

“There was a joint discussion between the Tumu kuoro and the OASL at Sunyani. The president later shared the information with the traditional council made up of the chiefs. When he shared the idea with us, we all saw the need for it especially looking at the spate of land conflict in this community” (In-depth interview, LMC member, Tumu, 16.11.2018).

In Wa-Central, though the president of the Waala traditional council played a significant role in the process, the entire process was led by the head of the Balun Clan. The head of the Balun Clan is the chief landlord of Wa from whom all the other families derive their authority to own land in the customary area. A LMC member in Wa-Central narrated that:

“The head of the Balun clan and the president of the Waala Traditional Council had a discussion with the Regional lands officer. The Head of the Balun Clan and the chief were particularly unhappy with the establishment of the first CLS in Tabiasi and not Wa Municipality which is the Regional capital. The Regional Lands Officer then explained to them the reasons for their action and how they could also get one in Wa. Following from this, the head of the Balun clan then extended invitations to other recognized Tendamba within the Wa Municipality for

<sup>2</sup> Kuoro is the traditional name of the paramount chief of Tumu traditional area .

a discussion on how to constitute the LMC in order to establish the CLS” (In-depth interview, LMC member, Wa-Central, 23.03.2019)

After the processes were initiated in all the customary areas, proposals were then sent by the various land owning groups together with their chiefs to the OASL in Sunyani. When those proposals were approved, next was for them to set up the LMCs in their customary areas.

### *Setting up the LMCs*

The LAP through the OASL provided preconditions to the various customary areas on how to constitute the LMCs. The OASL recognized that the traditional council/authority/family is the allodial owner of the lands under its jurisdiction and hence should exercise control over how land is managed in their areas. The OASL therefore recommended the bringing together of all allodial title holders to form the LMC. In Tumu, the setting up of the LMC began with the appointment of the acting coordinator of the CLS. The acting coordinator together with the president and vice president of the Tumu Traditional Council then held a meeting to discuss how the LMC should be constituted. A LMC member in Tumu explained that:

“In a meeting involving me as the acting coordinator at the time, the president of the traditional council and his vice, we decided to give six slots to the landowners. I was then tasked to go round the various landowning communities to inform them on how to select reps to form the LMC” (In-depth interview, LMC member, Tumu, 16.11.2018).

In the Tumu Traditional Area, land is owned by families. A number of families constitute a section. That is, each section is made up of lands owned by different families. In order to avoid swelling the size of the LMC, the families in a section were made to nominate a representative of the section to the LMC. These sections were given six slots on the LMC. Similarly in Zini, LMC membership were selected from the five divisions in the traditional area. In Gwollu, the traditional council was divided into three sections. Like the Tumu Traditional Area, each section selected one person to represent them on the LMC. On the contrary in Wa-Central, which is the regional

capital, each landowning family had direct representation on the LMC. Each land owning family was allowed to select two people to represent them on the LMC as explained by a LMC member in the following:

“Every land owning family was given direct representation on the LMC. This was to avoid the feeling of being shortchanged by any decision that will be taken by the committee” (In-depth interview, LMC member, Wa-Central, 04.11.2018).

Chiefs who have no control over land but only perform administrative functions were given representation on the LMC in all the four study communities. The traditional councils in these customary areas selected two members each to represent them on the LMC. To help the original land owners and the chiefs to properly make decisions with regards to land, the OASL recommended the inclusion of technocrats on the LMCs. The LMCs in Tumu, Wa-Central and Gwollu had some of these technocrats on their respective LMCs. In these areas the chiefs together with the representatives of the landowners wrote to the various institutions they think could help them execute their functions effectively. The technocrats on the Tumu LMC include; a police officer, a representative of the physical planning department of the District Assembly, manager of Radford FM (PRO of the LMC), and a representative from Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ). In Wa-Central, the technocrats on the LMC include two (2) from the court, an independent lawyer and a police officer. In Gwollu, the professionals on the LMC include a representative from the Physical Planning Department and the District Assembly. Zini had no such designation as technocrats on its LMC. The only member of the Zini LMC considered a technocrat is the chairman of the LMC. The Chairman of the LMC is a lawyer and a chief. However, he is not on the LMC as a technocrat but a chief. When asked why they didn't have technocrats coming from other fields, a LMC member expressed that:

“It has been difficult getting such people on board because lands do not have so much economic value here. Also, we don't have such institutions here in Zini. Getting them from the district or regional capital will be extra cost to

the LMC” (FGD with LMC members, Zini, 09.02.2019).

In terms of gender representation on the LMCs, there are two females on the Zini LMC. Gwollu and Tumu LMC had one female each. However, the Wa-Central LMC had no female representation. A LMC member gave the reason as follows:

“When it comes to land issues in the Waala tradition women are not included. Woman cannot offer sacrifices to the gods. In the olden days even if women wanted land to farm, they could not come forward unless through a man” (In-depth interview, LMC member, Wa-Central, 08.11.2018).

In total, the Wa-Central LMC is made up of thirty-five (35) members with thirty-one (31) representing families and 4 members serving as technocrats on the committee. The families include; Suuriyiri/Wodaanayiri, Puohuyiri, Sokpayiri, Kpaguri, Fongu, Nayiri (Gates), Tagranaasualayiri, Limanyiri, Dondoli, Dokpong, Dolbile, Mangu, Arhiyor, Cheria, Kambalipaani, Guli, Chegali, Nyagali, Bamahu, Biihee, Sing, Boli, Loggu, Tanina, Siiruu, Kpongo, Nakori, Wa-Sombo, Tuomuni, Jonga, and Busah family. In Tumu, the LMC is made up of thirteen (13) members with six (6) members representing landowning families, two (2) members representing chiefs and four (4) members representing technocrats as well as the coordinator of the CLS. The sections include; KuoroJan, Tokrojan, Ballenjan, Beinjan, Nyafajan and Napulajan. In Gwollu, the LMC is made up of seven (7) members with two (2) technocrats, two (2) chiefs and three (3) representatives of landowning families. In Zini, the LMC is made up of eleven (11) members. There are five divisional areas in the Zini Traditional Council. Each of these areas has two representatives on the LMC with the exception of the Zini division which has three representatives on the LMC. The other four divisions include, Puzini, Nimoro, Niator and Fatcho division. In each of these divisions, there are different sections each of which is made up more than two landowning families. The variation in the number of LMC members in the different cases is attributed to the flexibility that was allowed by the OASL for the customary areas to constitute the committees base on their own sociocultural context.

## Sustaining the LMCs

The study examined how the LMCs are sustained in the study communities. The LMC members are from different families with varied motives and expectation of the collaborative process. How they are able to manage their differences in order to achieve their private and shared interests is the focus of this subsection.

### *Common traditional values*

The LMC members in the study communities have strong attachment to their traditional values. In Tumu, Zini and Gwollu, all the chiefs and landowners in the LMCs are from the Sissaala ethnic group whilst in Wa-Central, all the LMC members but the technocrats belong to the Waala ethnic group. They all share similar customary values of trust, norms, reciprocity and respect for chiefs and family heads in their communities. These values are particularly helpful in building trust and confidence among the landowning families in the operation of the LMCs. A LMC member asserted that:

“Due to our shared values, anytime a dispute is referred to the LMC, we first of all use our local norms and values to deal with it. Often we are able to resolve such matters amicably as the parties understand the process and the outcome of the process. Also, because we trust that our chief wouldn't want to do anything that will destroy but develop our community, anytime we are unable to resolve an issue we refer it to our chief to assist us” (FGD with LMC members, Wa-Central 24.03.2019).

These shared traditional values which served as social capital were also relevant in the selection of the leadership of all the LMCs. The leadership of the four study LMCs were all selected based on consensus with no competitive elections. The common traditional values and employment of customary systems for conflict resolution provided the context for common understanding among LMC members as LMC members hold their values in high esteem.



### *Shared economic interest*

The value of land in the study communities is gradually appreciating due to increasing demand. Land speculators and other interest groups are using various means to acquire land at lower cost in these communities. Some families sell their land only to realize later that they were shortchanged and could have gotten a higher value if they were in contact with other land owners in the community. Consequently, land owners came to realize that it will serve their collective economic interest if they collaborate. The economic benefit the landowning families stand to gain from the collaboration, made the sustainability of the LMCs a success in the four study communities. The individual families had managed their lands for some time and now see its economic value increasing wanted to have a platform where they could engage other landowners in order to have good value for their lands:

“Every family wants to get the maximum benefits from its lands. This LMC has continued to enjoy the support of most families because it serves our economic interest through the provision of information to our family heads that will enable us have a good value for our lands” (In-depth interview, LMC member, Wa-Central, 05.11.2018).

The study identified that, families who were skeptical about the formation of the LMCs and were unwilling to lend their support to the LMCs changed their minds upon seeing the economic benefits of the group:

“My family initially rejected the idea of the formation of the LMC, but with time as we began seeing the economic benefits we have since given it our full support” (FGD with LMC members, Tumu, 28.01.2019).

### *Payment of token to run the activities of the LMCs*

The LMCs designed local arrangements where people who want to buy or register their land pay a token to their CLSs. We observed that the LMCs developed templates to facilitate these registration processes to enable them obtain revenue to carry out their activities. In Tumu, clients who buy land from landowning families are made to pay GH¢ 100 in order to register

their land at the Tumu CLS. Similarly in Wa-Central, clients pay one percent (1%) of the monetary value of their land to the Wa-Central CLS for registration. In Zini, though land is not of high economic value compared to the other three study communities, they also had an arrangement for people to pay some token for the running of the LMC:

“Our LMC met and decided that all settlers here come to the CLS and register their land and annually renew their licenses so that we can have something to run our activities. We also decided that individually we will not sell lands but any person who wants to buy land must go to our CLS. We have an officer there who bargains for us” (FGD with LMC members, Zini, 09.02.2019).

The study identified that the LMCs have Alternative Disputes Resolution (ADR) committees which also receive token from both complainants and defenders before hearing their cases:

“When people bring their cases to the ADR of our LMC to handle, they pay a token for the refreshment of the LMC members who will sit on the case. Both the complainant and the accused will pay before we deliberate on their case. Even sometimes the courts refer land issues to us to handle at our ADR and so we also get something from that” (FGD with LMC members, Wa-Central 24.03.2019).

### *Respect for and enforcement of collectively agreed rules*

All the LMCs established rules that guide their activities. This has helped to keep members in check and hence their sustainability. The LMCs operate on rules decided and agreed upon by all members. This makes compliance to those rules tranquil. Some of the rules include respect for collective decisions and divergent views on the committee; fair application of rules; respect for the leadership of the LMC and the traditional council; non-interference in individual family land issues except when there is a dispute and an official complaint is lodged with the ADR of the LMC. We observed that these rules cut across all the LMCs and are constantly evolving:

“After our inauguration, the first day we met we agreed on the rules that should guide our operations as a committee. As you know every human endeavor must be regulated in order to yield positive outcome. These rules have been reviewed with time and we all abide by them” (FGD with LMC members, Wa-Central 24.03.2019).

The leadership of the LMCs ensures that every member abides by the rules regardless of the individual's status in the community:

“In our LMC no one is above the law. There was an incident where one of the chiefs on our LMC was involved in a dispute. We met and set him aside for investigations to take place. This equality before the rules of the committee ensure that everyone respect our rules” (In-depth interview, LMC members, Tumu, 17.11.2018).

#### *Documentation of all landowning families and their land titles*

Before the idea of LAP and the resulting LMCs, there was limited documentation of landowners and their respective land titles in the study communities. Land boundaries were defined through natural features such as big trees, rocks, rivers, foot paths and tenure histories. As physical landmarks have the potential to disappear and the tenure histories that back customary land boundaries are entirely unwritten, they tend to be liable to multiple interpretations. This resulted in some incidence of customary boundary disputes in the communities. However, through the LMCs, landowners and their land titles were documented to facilitate local land transactions:

“Land titles, sizes and names of all land owners in this community were documented through the efforts of our LMC. Our lands are assigned family names. So if somebody brings a land document and the family head name and signature is not on it then it is not a valid document” (In-depth interview, LMC member, Tumu, 17.11.2018).

We identified that, whilst some landowners view the documentation as recognition of their land titles, others view the registration as a form of securing their

titles to the lands and hence winning their support for the LMCs activities:

“During the preliminary stages, some of the land owners' thought we were to take over their lands. Later on as we began the processes of documenting all the original land owners they felt we were recognizing their status in this community” (FGD with LMC members, Gwollu, 26.03.2019).

#### *Public education*

The study revealed that the LMCs in the communities embarked on public education campaigns to win the support of community members and the landowners within their jurisdiction. The public are made to understand the functions of the LMCs as well as how and why they should support the LMC to succeed. This has helped to make their LMCs relevant to their communities and hence their sustainability. A LMC member expressed that:

“Periodically, we are given time at the radio stations here in Wa to educate people on the need to make use of the ADR and CLS. The general public is made to understand why they should trust their land disputes to the ADR and why they should register their land at our CLS. This has increased the number of land disputes reported to our ADR and clients at our CLS” (In-depth interview, LMC member, Wa-Central, 29.01.2019).

Similarly in Tumu, the manager of the only radio station in the community was selected as a public relation officer of the LMC to facilitate the dissemination of information to the general public:

“Our LMC made the manager of the radio station in this community the Public Relations officer of the LMC. Through their medium we have been educating the public of this community on the need to make use of the CLS. You know the concept of the CLS is new and so we have been making efforts to ensure its acceptability here and the results have been very positive” (In-depth interview, LMC member, Tumu, 17.11.2018).

The traditional leadership has been very supportive in the educational campaigns to ensure the sustainability of the LMCs in the communities as a LMC member explained that:

“...at the divisional chief level, dates are set for the chiefs to organize their community members for us to sensitize them on our activities. We also do the education through the youth groups as one of the leaders of the youth groups is a deputy coordinator of our CLS and he has been very helpful in this regard” (In-depth interview, LMC member, Zini, 01.01.2019).

#### *Transparency and accountability*

The LMCs leadership and membership have made transparency and accountability an integral part of their core values. We found that the LMCs do not leave room for backroom dealings. The leadership is open about any activity they engage in on behalf of the LMCs. This increases the trust of the membership for the leadership:

“Any transaction that is going to commit our LMC to any obligation, we always ensure that the chairman, the secretary, the coordinator and the president of the traditional council signs such a document. This is to ensure that no member does anything that can bring the name of the institution into disrepute. Also, in our biannual meetings we always give an account of all that happened within the period. This is to enable members get an understanding of what went right and what went wrong so that measures can be taken to further advance our strengths and deal with our weaknesses” (FGD with LMC members, Tumu, 28.01.2019).

Since most of the membership represent sections (i.e. a number of families), they also leave by the principles of transparency and accountability as they often have to report back to their constituents about the activities of the LMC. This is to give the family heads a feel of the happenings at the LMC:

“Anytime we meet as a committee, I will go to the section that I represent on the LMC and brief the family heads on what happened at the meeting. This is to make them feel that they

are controlling the whole process at the LMC and enables me to win their support and trust for me and the committee as a whole” (In-depth interview, LMC member, Zini, 01.01.2019).

#### *Government support*

As the LAP and LMC for that matter are the initiatives of the government of Ghana, mechanisms were instituted by the OASL to sustain these local collaborative institutions for decentralized land governance. The government through the OASL furnished the offices of the CLS with all the necessary office equipment to ensure the smooth running of their activities. In addition, the OASL annually organize workshops for the LMC members to keep them up to date with modern land governance practices and also sustain their interest in the collaborative institutions:

“Every year, the OASL call us for workshops. This is to help improve our skills in customary land governance. Even if you are about losing interest in it, those programmes help to renew our interest in the concept of the CLS” (FGD with LMC members, Zini, 09.02.2019).

#### **Discussion**

Facilitative role of government and local champions in collaborative initiatives at local level: The empirical case studies show that the LAP which sought to implement the policy actions set out in the 1999 national land policy of Ghana provided the foundation for collaboration in decentralized land governance in the study setting. Though the traditional leaders in the study communities played principal roles in the initiation of the process of forming the LMCs, their efforts were based on a policy and institutional context provided by the government. Under the LAP, sensitization campaigns were organized for the traditional rulers in these communities to understand how they can collaborate to locally manage their lands with limited state involvement. The provision of office equipment and the organization of regular workshops for LMC members by the OASL facilitated the LMCs formation and sustainability. Without the support of the government, some of the landowning families would have lost interest in their LMCs. This

corroborates the literature that emphasizes the role of the government in initiating and sustaining collaborative processes (Gunningham 2009; Koontz et al. 2010; Roth and de Loë 2017) especially within the context of land governance (Obaikol 2014; Seufert 2013).

We found that though nationally, the government provided the policy context through the LAP, locally the facilitative leadership of the traditional councils—chiefs—and landowning groups played vital roles in the formation and sustainability of the LMCs. Leadership is generally seen as a vital element in getting stakeholders to participate and for routing them through the irregular blotches of the collaborative endeavor (Ansell and Gash 2012; Vangen and Huxham 2003). The traditional leaders took advantage of the policy context and organized their communities to form the LMCs. The willingness of the leadership especially the presidents of the traditional councils to bear the high (possibly restraining) transaction costs of commencing the collaborative effort, for instance, by organizing the land owners in their jurisdiction helped fortify the collaborative process. This affirms the significance of leadership in collaborative governance which is extensively acknowledged (Ansell and Gash 2012; Westerink et al. 2017; Heikkila and Gerlak 2005; Vangen and Huxham 2003).

**Demand-driven approaches:** The LMCs were formed through a bottom-up process. The landholding groups initiated the process by writing proposals to the OASL stating their willingness and capacity to establish the CLS. This demand driven process also had an impact on the sustainability of the collaborative process as it encouraged ownership and participation (Bugri 2012).

**Adherence to rule:** The study revealed that respect for and enforcement of collectively agreed rules as well as the use of cultural processes for selection members of the LMCs as well as conflict resolution were significant in the sustainability of the LMCs. In a regional capital/urban setting like the case of the Wa LMC, fairness in the application of the rules emerged as key to the acceptance and respect for the LMC by landholding families as well as land trustees. This assured participant that the processes are fair, equitable and that the collaborative process is open with no concealment for secretive individual deals (Ansell and Gash 2008; Murdock et al. 2005). This can further boost the trust of participants in the collaborative process. In the case of LMCs in rural settings as

is the case of the other three LMCs, reliance on tradition and cultural processes were key to the sustainability of the LMCs.

**Representation of technocrats on the LMCs:** Our analysis showed that the addition of technocrats, chiefs and landowning families on the LMCs allowed diversity in their membership. Inclusion and diversity are acknowledged not simply as normative organizing ethics but also for instrumental reasons: they create room for many viewpoints and diverse interests, enabling the emergence of more selfless outcomes that take a wider view of the beneficiaries or losers of an action (Sirrianni 2010). There is consensus in research and practice that getting the “right” actors to participate is essential in collaborative governance (Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson, et al. 2009). Within the context of land governance, Seufert (2013) emphasizes the need to ensure an active, free, effective, meaningful and informed participation of individuals and groups in collaborative processes taking into consideration existing power imbalances between different interest groups. Thus, the inclusion of females on the LMCs of Zini, Tumu and Gwollu allowed for the incorporation their (female) perspectives on the LMCs. However, the absence of females on the Wa-Central LMC indicates a manifestation of hegemonic relationship between men and women in the community. Moreover, the caliber of personnel (Layers, surveyors) expected to be on the LMCs to assure their sustainability was observed as an issue which is tandem with OASL reports which reveal how the busy schedule of such professionals affect their effective participation in the work of the committees and thus affect the optimal operations of the LMCs and ultimately their sustainability. In our study, however, the challenge with professional representation is not with their effective participation but their non-availability in many cases to be to part of the Committees. This obviously has critical sustainability implications for the LMCs in terms of the availability of the necessary knowledge to regulate the activities of the CLSs.

**Flexibility in approaches to formation and composition of LMCs:** It is noteworthy that though the OASL made diversity in the LMC membership a precondition, we observed that the composition of the various LMCs was left to the discretion of the initiators of the process of forming the LMCs. This has its pros and cons. It allows different contexts to create a system

support anchored on their context and therefore, the sustainability of the system. However, it has the potential to defeat the purpose of such an initiative by the government if proper monitoring measures are not established to ensure that the preconditions provided are adhered to by the various landowning groups before they are given the nod to establish the CLS. Otherwise some critical stakeholders who have interest in land would be left out of the process as in the cases of Zini and Wa-Central.

Trust: Ansell and Gash (2008) argued that robust trust and interdependence among subgroups of participants may serve as a disincentive to collaboration among a wider set of stakeholders in some contexts. On the contrary, we found that shared traditional values of the people engineered trust among LMC members and hence contributed to the sustainability of the LMCs. The shared traditional values examined within the context of 'social capital', includes trust, norms, reciprocity, obligations and expectations, values and attitudes, culture, information and knowledge (Davies et al. 2004; Musavengane and Simatele 2016). Trust allows actors to move above individual, institutional, and jurisdictional standpoints toward appreciating other actors' welfare, needs, morals, and limitations (Thomson and Perry 2006). This provides the grounding for common understanding and hence sustaining the collaborative system.

Transparency and accountability mechanisms: Transparency and accountability were critical for the sustainability of the LMCs. Collaborative systems due to the diverse interest involved must run on the bases of transparency and accountability in order to be successful. Transparency implies that the collaborative process is open with no room for underhand dealings. Accountability implies that the leadership is answerable to the membership for the obligations imposed on them by the membership. Since land in the study setting is communally held and entrusted into the hands of family heads, transparency and accountability in the dealings of the LMC as a collaborative system enhances the legitimacy of the institutions. These principles increase public trust and confidence in the collaborative system and hence their public acceptability and sustainability (see Musavengane and Simatele 2016).

## Conclusion

This study examined how LMCs are formed and sustained as collaborative institutions for decentralized land governance in the Upper Region of Ghana. The study concludes that facilitative traditional leadership, inclusiveness, context driven approaches and transparency and accountability sustains decentralized collaborative arrangements for land governance. Whilst the collaborative governance literature acknowledges that in some instances, strong trust may serve as a disincentive to collaboration, this study has shown that strong trust through social capital could actually serve as the foundation for sustaining collaborative systems. We identified that social capital provided the bases for winning the support and legitimacy of community members for collaborative systems. Also, this study has shown that it is possible to sustain collaboration when collaborative policies are situated within the cultural context of stakeholders and empower groups to abide by the principles of transparency and accountability through effective traditional leadership. Through this, collaboration is able to leverage on the cultural idiosyncrasies of communities in order to sustain interest in collaborative systems for decentralized land governance. Though these sustainability conditions do not represent an exhaustive set and may not be generally applicable to other collaborative systems, they contextually provide an understanding of how collaboration can be attained and sustained in decentralized land governance where groups of competing interest are involved as in the case of the Upper West Region of Ghana. To further earn the trust and confidence of community members and other local stakeholders in land governance, LMCs must hold in high esteem the principles of transparency and accountability in their dealings with community members and external groups. Traditional leaders must be encouraged to leverage on their status as revered institutions to maintain order in the LMCs so as to ensure its local acceptability and sustainability. We recommend regulated flexibility in the operationalization of collaborative arrangements in order to ensure that they are context dependent for their sustainability to be assured.

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