ABSTRACT

This research investigates how community education initiatives (CEIs) implemented by civil society organisations (CSOs) promote rural development (RD) in the Eastern Region of Ghana. Adopting an interpretivist stance, the study uses a qualitative inquiry approach, specifically Stake's (1995) collective (multiple) case study design. The study collected data through in-depth interviews and document analysis across six CSOs and their beneficiary community leaders. The study further uses Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) in the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). The Social Empowerment Theory (SET) provided the critical lens, framing the inquiry and analysis around processes of empowerment. The study reveals diverse initiatives undertaken by CSOs, including adult literacy and complementary basic education programmes, vocational skills training and livelihood workshops, health and sanitation education, civic and rights-based education, climate/environmental awareness programmes, and agricultural extension services.

The thesis finds that these initiatives collectively promote RD by enhancing literacy and education outcomes such as increased school enrolment and women's and youth empowerment, improving livelihoods and income generation and promoting hygiene through water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and environmental practices in rural areas. In contrast, the study identified key challenges facing CSOs in delivering CEIs: long-standing underfunding and resource constraints, inadequate infrastructure and technological access such as the slow pace of electricity extension and internet connectivity issues in rural areas, limited government support and collaboration, and political and socio-cultural obstacles that impede community participation. In response, CSOs employ various ways to improve and sustain their initiatives. These include diversifying funding sources and introducing income-generating ventures (social enterprises) to fund CEIs, forging partnerships with government and other stakeholders, investing in staff capacity building and volunteer training, and encouraging deeper community involvement and local leadership through the establishment of community development foundations to promote local philanthropy and ensure relevance and ownership of CEIs.

Hence, the study's implications for adult education and human resource development highlight the need for participatory, context-specific learning approaches and continuous capacity building for both practitioners and community members, to embed sustainable empowerment within RD programmes. As a contribution to knowledge, the study conceptualised a Community Empowerment Transformation Framework (CETF), an integrative framework that links inputs or enablers to CEI interventions by CSOs and to empowerment processes, which eventually promote RD outcomes. This operationalises SET and addresses identified gaps by emphasising structural supports, including digital inclusion and institutional support.

The study concluded that CSO-led CEIs are an essential stimulus for socio-economic and political transformation in rural areas, showing the power of adult education in empowering marginalised populations. Nonetheless, the impact of these initiatives is dependent on an empowering environment: the absence of adequate policy support, infrastructure and resources can constrain

long-term outcomes. The study offered practical and policy-oriented recommendations, calling for stronger government–CSO collaboration, inclusion of CEIs in local development plans, improved funding and infrastructure provision, and coordinated actions to build local capacity and multisector partnerships, to underscore the need to sustain CSOs' CEIs in promoting rural development.