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Successful deliberative polling conducted in Tamale

Tamale, Oct. 12, GNA - The West Africa RILab, working in close collaboration with the Center for Deliberative Democracy (CDD) at Stanford University, has set October 28, 2015 to disseminate its first successful Deliberative Poll (DP) results conducted in Tamale last January.

The poll involved a random, representative sample of the Tamale Metropolitan Area, which convened a two-day deliberation in Tamale on face to face basis with participants.

DP assesses the representative opinions of a population, both before and after it has had a good chance to really think about an issue and discuss it in depth with the idea of gathering a good sample and engage it in transparently good conditions for considering the pros and cons of competing policy options.

Mr Dennis Chirawurah, Director of the West Africa RILab, speaking to the GNA in Tamale after a stakeholders' planning meeting towards the dissemination of the DP results, said citizens most of the time did not spend much effort considering public policy questions in depth.

He said the premise of the DP was that when policy options were important for a community, then public consultations about them should be representative of the population and thoughtfully based on the best information available.

He said there was a strong case for engaging a good random sample through transparent and good conditions for considering the issues and arguments for and against various policy options.

Mr Chirawura said there had always been a movement in development work toward consulting the people who may be affected by new policies.

He expressed worry that most of the time people were not consulted before citing projects in their communities.

He said the poll discussed one of the first efforts in Africa to consult the public about policy issues with a method that combined random sampling with informed opinion, which had been fruitful.

On how the sample was done, Mr Chirawura explained that it was recruited through random selection of households and random selection within the households with a very high response rate.

He said the deliberations produced 29 significant changes in policy attitudes out of 39 proposals, and that his outfit measured knowledge before and after with knowledge index that showed significant changes.

He said they also employed regressions with the available explanatory variables to explain the changes in policy attitudes where excerpts from the transcripts were used to share light on the policy attitudes, which participants arrived at.

He said the method offered certain advantages over other methods of public consultation, such as self-selected town meetings unlikely to be representative because they only involve those who feel strongly enough to attend.

He observed that focus groups could be used to represent opinion because they were too small to be statistically meaningful, saying, "they are useful for uncovering the way the public frames an issue as a step in facilitating more systematic research."

The report said Tamale as an administrative and commercial capital of northern Ghana, was the country's third most-populated city with a population of 461,072 in 2010, and that the 26 per cent increase in population over the last decade outstripped the government's capacity to provide sufficient water resources, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure.

It said investments made by the government in recent years had been ineffective in improving the situation, and as a result Tamale residents suffered from a range of problems, including disease and food insecurity.

The DP was focused on two main categories of issues: Water, Hygiene, and Sanitation (WASH); and Livelihood and Food Security, and the purpose of the poll was to provide direction for local government as well as donor agencies on how to address the most pressing needs of the people in the metropolis.

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