

## Chapter 3. Recommendations for the International Development Community



*The picture of Ghana's policy environment sketched in the in-depth interviews reveals several ways in which global development organizations and other stakeholders can better interact with and assist Ghanaian policy actors, with a view toward promoting constructive policies and improving development outcomes.*

### ***I. Contribute More Effectively to the Policy Debate***

Six key points arose from our discussions with policy actors that can help development partners more effectively navigate the current policy environment and make useful contributions to policy debates:

- **Understand the national political culture, in which personal connections play an important role, and policymakers face intense public expectations and limited time.**

Policy actors repeatedly mentioned their reliance on friends and contacts to circumvent slower formal channels; it is therefore vital for development groups to expand their definition of “influentials” to include these broader

personal networks, and to tap into them whenever possible.

Time is also of the essence when it comes to policy dialogue. Commenting on their schedules, interviewees cited not only their work, but broader expectations from the public about their roles. Several indicated that citizens make appeals for assistance on personal matters as or more often than appeals for policy-related action. This adds an additional burden for already

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taxed policymakers, arguing for brevity, efficiency and convenience when interacting with them.

- **Understand the existing conduits of policy information**

Local media are seen as the primary source for determining which issues are on (or should be on) the public agenda—despite policy actors’ criticisms about local media content and coverage. Staying abreast of, and remaining conversant in, the flow of information from these media sources is critical to speaking credibly about trends in policy issues. In addition, getting a story picked up by domestic radio and newspapers may help put an issue onto policymakers’ and influencers’ radar screens.

Key media outlets monitored by policy actors include radio (particularly Joy FM, Radio Gold, Peace FM, Unique FM, and Citi FM), newspapers (especially the *Daily Graphic* and *Ghanaian Times*), international news stations (CNN, BBC), and to a lesser extent Ghanaian television (GTV, TV3, Metro).

For input on particular policy issues, a prominent policy influencer recommended working through an established organization rather than approaching politicians individually. He argued that they place more weight on information that is seen to represent the view of a broad coalition or array of interested parties rather than a single individual or institution.

- **Cater to policy actors’ need to perform due diligence on information and their hunger for examples of best practice elsewhere.**

As previously mentioned, members of the



policy community stress the need to cross-check and verify the information they receive, regardless of the source. The most helpful information, therefore, comes from a known and trusted source which can be readily corroborated by one or more other sources.

Thus, development actors seeking to make their views known would benefit from first finding trusted allies who can corroborate their views before presenting them to policymakers.

A related strategy: bolster an argument with relevant examples from other countries, showing that similar approaches have worked or are being used, thus providing credible evidence of likely development outcomes from a proposed policy change. In general, making comparative and well-analyzed project information readily available to policy actors is a wise practice.

- **Use preferred formats for presenting information—notably (though not exclusively) concise written or text briefs that summarize key points, complemented by face-to-face meetings.**

With policymakers so pressed for time, it is incumbent upon development groups to make

sure information is presented to them in the most manageable format possible. A large majority of interviewees expressed a personal preference for concise written documents so that they can make notes and keep a record of what has been presented. There was no consensus on whether hard copies or digital formats are more manageable, in part because interviewees' quality of internet access varies widely.

**There was nearly unanimous demand for brevity,** however. Larger briefings and meetings were frequently cited as common or effective, but not as preferred means of receiving information; having a short written document to take away from a meeting seemed to

increase its usefulness.

- **Contribute at the right time—preferably, early in the policy process.**

Most policy actors agreed that the earlier information is provided, the better. This implies that information supplied to the executive branch (which typically initiates legislative or regulatory action) can help when issues are just entering the public agenda. Parliamentarians, meanwhile, said they need information as soon as they begin to draft and revise the details of bills on subjects initiated by the executive branch.

One parliamentarian complained that he often receives input too close to decision-making

### **In-Depth: Lessons from Policy Influencers**

The four interviewees outside of government spoke directly to their experiences providing information to help shape development policy in Ghana. The most successful methods described by them included:

**Hold regular meetings or briefings with upper-level executives or ministry staff to help set the policy agenda.** Interviewees reported that monthly or other regular meetings provide an opportunity to stay informed and also to provide input early enough in the policy design process to have an impact.

**Be patient but persistent about grabbing decision makers' attention.** Knowing that politicians and government staff are always pressed for time, "you take your time, find the right time... [even if] sometimes it becomes expensive to sort out, because you have to take them out of Accra" for special meetings and programs.

**Act as the single, unified voice of a particular constituency.** For the two business organizations, they believe the reason they have the ear of policymakers is that they are the recognized representatives of a large interest group. They debate and resolve issues within the membership first, and then present a unified front to policymakers.

**Cooperate with other development organizations.** A representative of a global development organization warned that part of the overload drowning government officials stems from a lack of harmonization among development groups: "We are tearing [government officials] into pieces. [Our requests take] so much time, they don't even have time to do their own things, so that's a challenge."

deadlines for it to be useful. Instead, information early in the parliamentary session and in the life of a particular bill would be more helpful. Since formal stakeholder consultations provide one of the primary means of reviewing draft policies, they could be a useful time to provide input.

- **Facilitate connections between grassroots implementers and high-level policymakers wherever possible.**

Several policymakers suggested that development organizations, particularly NGOs, could play a larger role in helping to provide a voice for relatively unorganized segments of the population (such as youth) in the policy process. Organizations that have connections both to grassroots implementers and high-level policymakers and influencers could help build stronger bridges between the two and ensure that community-level concerns are raised via a credible channel. Meanwhile, investments in organizational management training and ICT resources could address the related problem of slow communication between government agencies' headquarters and district-level offices.

One model for this "intermediary" style of advocacy is the work of business associations, whose members are spread across the country but work through national-level representatives to influence policy.

**Another option might be to conduct focus groups or other types of "market" research on specific policy issues at the grassroots level,** as a presidential advisor proposed, and report the results to the relevant government agency.

### **In-Depth: Investing in Supporting Infrastructure**

One parliamentarian suggested that upfront investments in better supporting infrastructure could actually save resources in the long run. For example, for capacity building in government, he argued that instead of paying for every individual to stay in a hotel and attend a training course in a central location, "you could as well use that money to install internet services for people, where you can even have video conferencing and we can ask questions from the lecturer, take notes." He went on, "This idea of everyday ... printing these booklets? Do you know how much this one will cost parliament, the taxpayer? [*holds up some documents*]. If we had [digital] copies, just put copies on everybody's ... [computer], just put one copy for ... the public view or at our library here for public [view].... Do you know how much we would be saving this nation? ...But this doesn't seem to be what everybody is thinking about."

## **II. Improving the Policy Information Environment**

As described above, Ghanaian policy actors said they face numerous structural impediments to effective policy communication. Some suggested interventions:

- **Fill the data gap.**

The need for better data could be met through more accessible and targeted research on Ghana, including raw economic, social and technological data that are disaggregated by key demographics such as gender, age or

region. At the same time, the capacity of Ghanaian institutions to collect data themselves could be improved through training in research methodology or investment in technology. Filling the data gap would then allow decision makers to better analyze and weigh their many options.

- **Bolster information management.**

In addition to the data gap, interviewees highlighted the prevalence of weak information management systems throughout the policy community. The idea of a centralized depository for development data could be realized through improved capacity at the Ghana Statistical Service. Better archival systems (such as electronic archiving) require investments that, Ghanaian policymakers suggested, are not likely to come from the government budget.

- **Invest in supporting infrastructure and organizational capacity.**

Additional supporting infrastructure and capacity-building should focus on the areas highlighted by interviewees: office, administrative and research support for parliamentarians; faster reporting from remote areas; and better processes for preserving institutional memory at the highest levels of government. Programs in these areas might focus on a particular agency or work to improve practices and capacity horizontally.

- **Help policymakers disseminate information by developing materials that are accessible to illiterate members of the public and that attract others who have not previously engaged in the policy process.**

The need for creative strategies to provide policy information to the public was stressed by interviewees. Development organizations with experience in other countries can share strategies that have been effective in other locations. They can also ensure that the **policy information they provide can be easily adapted to a general audience, perhaps saving policymakers time by presenting both a high-level technical summary and a summary in layman's terms.** One option mentioned: more support for community radio stations that allow community members to discuss development issues in their local language.

- **Support the training of skilled, impartial journalists.**

Two ministry officials reported having supported training for journalists to improve the quality of reporting on their particular sectors. Given widespread complaints about the accuracy and impartiality of local news reports, such targeted training would be useful on a larger scale.

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