

## Kenya Survey Research: Report Summary



InterMedia conducted in-depth interviews with senior Kenyan government officials and policy influencers outside government (collectively referred to in this report as “policy actors”), to find out how they gather, assess, share and disseminate information critical to development policy work. The aim was to understand how external stakeholders, particularly members of the international development community, can most effectively engage and assist these policy actors.

The 15 interviewees described several measures that development organizations can take to improve the policy information environment. They also mentioned several challenges in communicating with the public about development issues but also suggested some creative solution.

### ***Habits of Gathering Information***

Although traditional media (radio, television and print) is viewed as a good source for staying abreast of general news and trends, it is not necessarily considered a good source for informing longer-term policy formulation. Kenyan newspapers are a particularly important daily news source for policy actors, even though there is frustration with a perceived lack of accuracy and objectivity.

Most policy actors said they listen to the radio daily for both recent news and entertainment. Policy actors usually listen to the radio during “downtime,” such as during drives to and from work or in the mornings at home. Television, while not considered a critical everyday source for news for most actors, is often watched at the end of the day (if there’s time) to review the day’s news. **To compensate for a perceived lack of objectivity in local media coverage, most policy actors said they compare multiple news sources.** For coverage of international news, policy actors tend to favor a few prominent global outlets, such as CNN, Sky and the BBC’s East Africa service.

A majority of policy actors have incorporated new technologies into their everyday information-gathering habits.

They and their staff use the internet on a daily basis to conduct research on specific topics or to visit particular websites (often those of popular newspapers).

Interviewees said they often use email and mobile phones to communicate more rapidly with colleagues and stakeholders. It is also common practice for policy actors to sign up for SMS or email alert services that notify them of the latest news. These services are often provided by mobile service providers or news outlets with a web presence.

Policy actors rely on a combination of formal institutional channels and informal networks for gathering policy information and advice. Formal networks are policymakers' most important sources for policy information; multiple policy actors felt that informal contacts provided more candid opinions than they would get through official channels.

Politicians are able to monitor public opinion in their constituencies via mobile phone calls or emails from constituents or local contacts, and by participating in semi-formal public forums generally known as *barazas*—a Swahili term referring to a local social gathering where current events are discussed, knowledge is built and relationships forged.

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***Policy actors highly value empirical policy research, particularly the use of case studies or comparative policy studies*** analyzing the experiences of foreign governments and international development organizations that may be applicable in the Kenyan context. This type of research is considered more helpful to the Kenyan policy design and implementation process than policy prescriptions lacking real-world examples or experiences. Policy actors or their staffs typically track down such studies on the internet or in workshops held by development groups.

A crucial gap in the policy design and implementation process is the lack of knowledge management systems. Policy actors spoke of their ministries' or agencies' inability to properly organize and exchange information, which ends up getting lost in the paper shuffle. Although a few government offices have been able to tap into the organizational power of new knowledge management software, (one example given was KOHA, an open-source library system), many initiatives fail to extend beyond central offices to include regional or local offices, where much of the critical information-gathering takes place.

### ***The Role of Global Development Partners***

**How** information is exchanged between policy actors and global development partners varies considerably by individual policy actor. Descriptions of information sharing with organizations ranged from regular formal consultations to sporadic ad hoc discussions.

***Perceptions of the role of international development organizations in the policy***

***process also varied considerably—from policy advocates, to technical advisors, to regular source for information, to project implementers.***



Although a majority of interviewees felt their relationship with donors was a positive one, many described concerns about the ability to retain control over Kenya’s development agenda. Specifically, some policy actors called on global development partners to better consider Kenya’s own development plans. Another complaint, particularly of Kenyan policy influencers, is that, primarily, development partners tend to work through the government instead of forging closer relationships with NGOs and advocacy groups active on the ground and ostensibly more in touch with the needs and priorities of target populations.

### ***Recommendations to Development Organizations for Interacting with Policy Actors***

- Policy actors will pay more attention to a given point of view if it is shown to be the consensus of a large, representative group in Kenya. Thus, there is good reason to ally with other influential interest groups before attempting to promote a particular development initiative or approach.

- It is vital to engage with policy actors at the right time—early and often. Many stated that stakeholder feedback is crucial not only at the early stages of the policy process but also during the implementation period (if not at all stages of policy implementation) so that programmatic adjustments can be made when and if they are needed. Policy input can be delivered through a number of feedback mechanisms discussed throughout this report.
- Try to use local traditional media (radio, TV, newspapers) as a conduit to inform about and raise awareness of particular policy issues. Despite policy actors’ criticisms about local media content and coverage, traditional media remains an important means of gaining the attention of both the public and politicians.
- Present material in preferred formats—concisely written briefs in electronic or hard copy that summarize key points, complimented with face-to-face meetings.

### ***Helping Policymakers***

Policy actors face some common challenges in the conduct of their work that development groups can help to address. Here are a few general suggestions of how development organizations can help:

- Bolster development data resources by supporting targeted and easily accessible research on Kenya and comparative country studies on a range of areas. Development groups should make sure that comparative studies relate to the lessons learned about the particularities of the Kenyan context.

- Assist in forging stronger communication links between on-the-ground implementers, development stakeholders and policymakers wherever possible. This will help to improve the flow of timely evidence-based development information, contributing to more effective policy and project design and implementation.
- Support efforts to employ newer ICTs (e.g., mobile communications and the internet) for engaging the public and gathering policy information. As access to mobile technology expands among all segments of Kenyan society, there is ample opportunity for development partners to create appropriate programs and projects focused on improving information flows.
- Improve administrative capacity and information management systems within governmental agencies, and invest in supporting infrastructure. An improved information management system and increased staff capacity would help policy actors and staff cope with another paradoxical yet real challenge: information overload.
- Support the training of journalists, particularly those involved in community radio stations, to strengthen their ability to judge the importance of, and report accurately on, various development issues.
- In addition, development organizations with media or communications campaign experience in African countries are encouraged to share successful strategies with Kenyan policy actors, so they may convey their message more effectively.

### ***Information Exchanges with the Public and other Stakeholders***

Policy actors identified a number of challenges in disseminating policy information to the public, including illiteracy, a general lack of understanding of development policy issues and a limited capability or willingness of local media to accurately disseminate such information.

- When considering the role of the public in the flow of development information, development organizations should be aware of how different government agencies and organizations interact with the public. This tends to vary depending on each body's typical level of engagement with citizens. For example, organizations or agencies that already engage the public regularly during policy implementation (such as the ministries of health or agriculture) are more likely to conduct localized information campaigns using barazas, vernacular radio, or district chief meetings. Other ministries or groups less engaged with the general public (such as the ministries of finance or energy) are more likely to use national media, press releases, or press conferences. The latter group may require more assistance to get the public involved in a development dialogue.
- A chief complaint among policy actors was that citizens do not understand the policy making process, making it very challenging to engage the public in a constructive dialogue. This knowledge gap was viewed as an area in which development organizations could step in and sponsor or conduct civic education programs that otherwise would not be publicly available.

- Policy actors stressed the need for more creative strategies to engage hard-to-reach members of the public—particularly illiterate individuals, geographically remote groups or those who are simply not interested in the policy process. Some suggestions offered: use more local individuals as field officers or liaisons in development initiatives; work through traditional community leaders to better engage their communities, particularly among pastoralists and nomadic groups; use vernacular radio to a greater extent as an outreach tool; and conduct more public events such as barazas, which allow people to interact directly with policy actors.
  - Using newer ICTs (email, blogs, SMS) as a public dissemination tool is still in the nascent stages, though their use is growing. One policy actor reported creating online discussion groups exclusively for people with an interest in his agency’s sector of activity, and another spoke of the benefits of using mobile phones to streamline public surveys. As access to newer ICTs continues to expand, particularly to mobile phones, assisting policy actors in exploiting these technologies as information disseminating and collection tools will be all the more important.
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