Communicating With Policymakers In Zambia About Development
A Guide For The International Development Community

Policy Information: Public Dissemination and Feedback

Public Awareness and Dissemination of Policy-Relevant Information
Interviewees perceive that the Zambian public as a whole is poorly informed about policy issues. Reasons they cited include inadequate communication structures, the lack of an appropriate communication strategy on the part of policy actors, and high illiteracy levels. Cultural and psychosocial factors may also represent further barriers, particularly on more sensitive issues. Two interviewees highlighted gender as an example:

I think the gender topic is a controversial one, because people want to hold on to their traditions—negative traditions, negative customs—so you find that even when there’s an opportunity for someone to get educated on what gender really is and why it is important, a lot of people are very defensive and they close up....I think the topic of gender is more difficult than HIV/AIDS. [Policy actor 1 working on gender issues]

People seem not to be aware, and not because [information is not available]; I think...people are closing up because [gender] is a topic that touches on their fundamentals. If you can talk to somebody who is benefiting from the current situation and then you ask them, ‘Can you [cede] part of your powers so that we give [them] to the other party?’, naturally each one of us would like even more [power] to be given to us. [Policy actor 2 working on gender issues]

Policy actors address some of these challenges by concentrating their information dissemination activities on those channels most widely available to the general population as well as those to which illiteracy does not represent a significant hurdle.
Public perspectives on Gender issues

Interestingly, some gender topics such as equal rights for men and women do not feature in the list of issues that Zambian citizens perceive as serious problems facing Zambian society. According to the findings of the 2010 AudienceScapes nationally representative survey in Zambia, only about a quarter of respondents consider this a serious problem in their country.

![Graph showing share of respondents who consider equal rights for men and women to be a serious or very serious problem in Zambia.]

Note: The respondents were able to choose between the following answers: Not a problem, Minor problem, Moderate problem, Serious problem, Very serious problem, Don’t know, Refuse to answer.

Traditional media (particularly radio, which is available in nearly three-quarters of Zambian households), represent a central channel for sharing policy-relevant information with the citizens. Policy actors participate in radio call-in shows, grant interviews and occasionally co-produce radio (and more rarely TV) programs on selected topics, such as environment and agriculture. While such venues are considered highly effective in reaching the public, financial constraints limit their frequency.

Other media engagement activities include press statements, media briefings, responding to media queries, engaging with journalists at parliamentary debates, and public hearings (also open to the general public). Occasionally, policy actors also write newspaper columns.

Public gatherings in constituencies and face-to-face meetings during field visits are another important avenue for policy actors to raise awareness of policy issues. They are crucial for reaching the illiterate and those who are not a part of the traditional media audience.

If we had the money, [producing] programs on TV and radio would really help, because they would be interactive. It would allow people to give feedback on...the policy and we would be sure that after doing 12-13 programs, a good number of Zambians would understand the content of the policy document and how they can use it. [Policy actor working on agricultural issues]

I think the role of the community media in our society has really developed so much and cannot be underplayed, because they are the ones that get down to the communities. [Policy actor working on information issues]

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173 percent of all respondents said they have radio available at home (in working order). On the other hand only 44 percent said they have a TV, 53 percent have a mobile phone and only 7 percent have access to the internet. AudienceScapes Zambia, April-May 2010, n = 2000, 15+
Multiple interviewees also spoke about teaming up with different stakeholders to disseminate information to the public. A policy actor working on community development issues, for example, mentioned collaboration with the Senior Citizens Association of Zambia, which helped raise awareness of the national aging policy; another interviewee working on empowerment issues described how their organization partnered with banks to distribute specific forms to citizens via the bank’s local branches.

Engaging with youth

Several policy actors highlighted the importance of creating specific dissemination and education activities for youth. One policy actor described how his organization translated a human rights report into a “child-friendly” document, so that even the youngest Zambians could understand the issue.

Another interviewee talked about his visits to primary and secondary schools where he personally delivered information about the prevention of HIV/AIDS, while one interviewee uses a more interactive approach:

At youth festivals in the provinces, we reach out to children who take part in various competitions, essay writing, drama, etc., which are all aimed at sensitizing the general population to the work we do. [Policy actor working on governance issues]

New technologies play a less significant role in public communication—for now. Although some policy actors share reports, newsletters and other content with citizens via websites or email, most recognize the audience remains very small, given current access constraints, notably for the internet.

This view is supported by the results of the 2010 AudienceScapes Zambia survey, which shows that only 8 percent of Zambian adults surveyed are regular internet users (that is, at least once a week) and only 14 percent have ever used it at all. Regular internet use therefore remains a privilege of the urban educated elite, with 78 percent of all who have used internet in the past week residing in urban areas and 68 percent having at least some post-secondary education.

Access to mobile phones is substantially higher, with 55 percent of all adults using mobiles at least once a week\(^2\). That said, most interviewees do not consider mobiles as a key tool for delivery of policy-relevant information to the public. The policy actors did not elaborate as to why this might be the case.

\(^2\) AudienceScapes Zambia, April-May 2010, \(n = 2000\), 15+
**Gathering Public Feedback**

Zambian policy actors obtain citizens’ feedback through a mixture of organized channels and ad hoc mechanisms. Some adopt a very proactive approach and regularly seek the public’s views through established channels and methods; others take a more passive role and rely heavily on the media and citizens’ letters and phone calls. Overall, policy actors use a combination of the following mechanisms:

- **Traditional media:** Generally, all policy actors consider radio, TV and print media important sources for gauging public opinion and obtaining citizens’ feedback on the effectiveness of individual policies. Call-in shows, citizens’ letters published in the print media and constituents’ views cited by journalists in their reports represent an important feedback channel for policy actors.

- **Stakeholders:** As mentioned, stakeholders—particularly civil society—play a central role in channeling constituents’ views to policy actors, either through formal written submissions, or other mechanisms such as Sector Advisory Groups and Ward Development Committees. Government’s local and regional representatives and members of parliament, who are in more regular contact with citizens, also play an important role.

- **Face-to-face interactions with citizens** during field visits, at open forums, lectures and other public gatherings in constituencies are some of the most valued channels, as they enable policy actors to obtain direct and real-time feedback. However, their frequency is often limited by budgetary constraints.

- **Citizens’ letters, phone calls, emails and walk-ins:** Multiple policy actors expressed problems managing the large amount of spontaneous feedback they receive from constituents through these conduits, and some felt particularly frustrated by the absence of appropriate technological or procedural systems for capturing such input.

- **Market research:** Some policy actors also seek citizens’ feedback through market research methods, such as surveys and focus groups, although their use is rather sporadic.
In-Depth: Mapping Information Flows
These diagrams highlight the various paths through which policy information flows between high-level policy actors and the Zambian public.

Disseminating information

Public Awareness and Education on Policy issues

- **MEDIA**
  - Interviews; Press releases, TV & radio co-productions, Radio call-in shows
  - TV, radio, print media coverage: Raising awareness of policies and programmes

- **INTERMEDIARIES**
  - Field officers, CSOs, Traditional leaders, Sector advisory groups
  - Mobilizing communities, Program implementation

- **FACE-TO-FACE APPROACH, CREATIVE STRATEGIES**
  - Public gatherings, Seminars, Competitions, Drama
  - Used for targeting specific groups and the illiterate

- **NEW TECHNOLOGIES**
  - Website, Email
  - Outreach to the internet-savvy, i.e. urban educated elite
CONSTITUENTS
- Regular written reports, verbal feedback, meetings

FIELD TEAMS
- Regular updates from the field project sites visits, ad hoc feedback

TARGET GROUPS
- Solicited feedback

CIVIL SOCIETY
- Sector Advisory Groups, written submissions, field visits

Verbal feedback, reports, written evaluations

Letters, calls, walk-ins, feedback through the media

Regular written reports, verbal feedback, meetings

Surveys, focus groups, other research methods

Obtaining feedback

Policy Design and Evaluation
**Summary of key gaps and challenges**

Policy actors identified four core challenges related to sharing policy-relevant information with citizens and obtaining their feedback:

- **Inadequate communications infrastructure and low access to new technologies**, i.e., the internet. This is a particular constraint in communicating with rural constituents.

- **Skills shortage and financial constraints.** Policy actors complained about the lack of organizational capacity and skills to translate complex policy materials into something easily understood by the general public, to package the information appropriately, and to identify the most effective channels for distribution. Financial constraints hamper dissemination efforts; several interviewees spoke about having to significantly curb the frequency of co-produced TV and radio programs, as well as the amount of printed policy materials or personal visits to constituencies.

- **Language and education barriers.** Multiple interviewees identified high levels of illiteracy and the lack of a reading culture as two important obstacles to successful information dissemination and policy awareness campaigns. In addition, policy-relevant materials and information are often available only in English and are rarely translated into other official languages.

- **Cultural and psychosocial factors.** These can represent a challenge not for the dissemination of information as such, but rather for achieving behavioral changes in certain areas, such as in gender relations. Policy actors found that even when sufficient data and information are available, certain population sub-groups are resistant to change as they feel that it would compromise their position in society.
In-Depth: Mapping the Sources of Informed Decision-making

The policy community’s sources of information can be mapped according to their type (traditional media, new technology, or direct contact with individuals and institutions), their purpose (to monitor news and the public agenda, to provide input for policy design, implementation, and evaluation, or to educate the public), and the manner in which they are typically used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional media</th>
<th>Primary Outlets/Sources</th>
<th>Use in Monitoring News &amp; Public Agenda</th>
<th>Use in Policy Design, Implementation, &amp; Evaluation</th>
<th>Use in Public Awareness &amp; Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>Radio Phoenix, ZNBC, BBC</td>
<td>Listen to top news stories early in the morning and while driving to work</td>
<td>Grant interviews and participate in call-in shows to obtain citizens’ feedback and raise awareness of individual policies/programs</td>
<td>Invite journalists to media breakfasts/briefings; grant interviews; participate in call-in shows; distribute newsletters and press statements; respond to media queries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>ZNBC, BBC, CNN, SABC, Sky News</td>
<td>Watch international TV in the morning and ZNBC for local news in the evening (schedule permitting)</td>
<td>Monitor world events</td>
<td>Invite journalists to media breakfasts and briefings; grant interviews; distribute newsletters and press statements; respond to media queries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Print media</td>
<td>The Post, The Times of Zambia, Zambia Daily Mail</td>
<td>Browse through several newspapers for key stories</td>
<td>Monitor public opinion</td>
<td>Invite journalists to media breakfasts and briefings; grant interviews; distribute newsletters and press statements; respond to media queries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>New technologies</th>
<th>Primary Outlets/Sources</th>
<th>Use in Monitoring News &amp; Public Agenda</th>
<th>Use in Policy Design, Implementation, &amp; Evaluation</th>
<th>Use in Public Awareness &amp; Education</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>International organizations’ websites</td>
<td>Cross-check information and skim online media for news stories</td>
<td>Use internet to source reports on global and regional development and other background policy information, cross-check information</td>
<td>Post information on agency website (where available), distribute newsletters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Receive periodic newsletters</td>
<td>Set up meetings, communicate with colleagues and other organizations, receive feedback from constituents</td>
<td>Send updates to colleagues and stakeholders, disseminate newsletters (rarely)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mobile Phones</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Receive information on local events from constituents and colleagues in the field, cross-check information</td>
<td>Receive information from field teams on implementation/impact of individual policies, receive feedback from constituents, coordinate with colleagues and set up meetings</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Outlets/Sources</td>
<td>Individuals and Institutions</td>
<td>Use in Monitoring Public Agenda, Policy Design, Implementation, &amp; Evaluation</td>
<td>Use in Public Awareness &amp; Education</td>
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<td>Written documents</td>
<td>Government departments and agencies, International and bilateral organizations, Civil society</td>
<td>Provide reports on the latest activities and research findings, provide comments to draft policies, keep minutes of meetings, convey opinions</td>
<td>Publicize policy decisions, inform stakeholders about policy issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stakeholder Consultations</td>
<td>Local NGOs, Traditional authorities, Business associations, Faith-based organizations, International NGOs, Bilateral and multilateral organizations</td>
<td>Quarterly Sector Advisory, Group meetings to provide policy input and feedback on implementation of existing programs, workshops and briefings</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meetings &amp; Briefings</td>
<td>Colleagues, Local NGOs, Traditional authorities, Business associations, Faith-based organizations, International NGOs, Bilateral and multilateral organizations</td>
<td>Seek policy input and feedback on impact of existing policies</td>
<td>Inform key organizations and individuals about the latest policy developments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td>Colleagues, Local NGOs, Traditional authorities, Business associations, Faith-based organizations, International NGOs, Bilateral and multilateral organizations</td>
<td>Learn about policy issues, report on activities, evaluate programs</td>
<td>Educate stakeholders about the content and the impact of individual policies on communities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informal consultations</td>
<td>Colleagues, field teams, constituents</td>
<td>Seek feedback during field visits, cross-check information</td>
<td>Create public awareness about policy issues; draw media attention to policy issues.</td>
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