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

Recommendations for the International Development Community

Discussions with policy actors yielded nine key recommendations about how the development community can provide constructive support to the policy process in Zambia:

Contribute more effectively to the policy debate

- Recognize the importance of formal communication channels and understand the supporting role of informal networks

  Zambian policy actors rely heavily on formal channels of communication and are reluctant to trust and use information obtained through informal networks. It is therefore imperative for the development community to make submissions and lead the dialogue with policy actors, primarily through organized channels, for example, regular official meetings or sector work groups. Development actors looking to make their views known should also maintain regular communication with other influential and trustworthy sources of policy data and information, such as surrounding government agencies, policy actors’ field teams and their internal research departments.

- Provide input in the appropriate format

  Policy actors prefer policy input as concise, written submissions (preferably printed, although submissions via email are becoming more frequent). The majority of interviewees also expressed a preference for following up written submissions with face-to-face discussions (workshops, round-table meetings, etc.), to either clarify certain points or obtain further details from stakeholders.

- Get involved at the right time – ideally, at the very beginning of the policy process

  Interviewees concurred that input from the development community should be provided as early as possible in the policy formulation process. Aside from contributing to the policy design, development partners should provide constructive feedback to proposed policies and maintain regular dialogue with policy actors also
during the implementation and evaluation stage. Several policy actors also explicitly called on development actors to assist them with impact assessment.

- **Use radio to raise awareness**

  Due to their wide reach, radio stations—particularly community radio—can be used to raise awareness of individual policy issues and programs among the general population. Partnerships with individual media outlets (as well as policy actors) to co-produce radio and TV stations should also be considered.

**Improve the policy information environment**

- **Fill the data gap**

  Policy actors highlighted the lack of baseline data as the most acute gap in the policy formulation process. Development partners can help fill this gap by making sure internationally comparative data and reports are regularly shared with Zambian policy actors and by helping to reinforce the capacity of Zambian organizations to collect and analyze data themselves. This effort might include investments in appropriate data collection technologies and tools, provision of training on data collection and data analysis, as well as collaboration on individual research projects.

- **Invest in communications structures and new technologies**

  Inadequate national communications structures, as well as a lack of access to new technologies, emerged as two of the key hurdles for efficient public dissemination of policy information. Several policy actors also felt frustrated about not having access to 3G mobile phones. They said that email/internet-enabled phones would significantly help the information-gathering process and would make the exchange of information within and between organizations faster and more efficient.

- **Help policy actors find innovative ways to disseminate policy-relevant information to the public**

  Support Zambian policy actors in finding new, innovative ways of disseminating information to constituents, particularly through the use of mobile technology. Development partners can also develop specific dissemination activities targeting the illiterate and support translation of written materials into local languages as well as provide training on how to translate policy-relevant information into formats appropriate for the wider public.

- **Support the training of skilled, professional journalists**

  Policy actors do not consider media important sources of policy-relevant information, as inconsistent and low-quality coverage and a lack of professionalism and expertise among journalists deters them from using media as a source of policy information. Targeted media training is therefore needed to equip journalists with necessary knowledge and skills rendering high-quality, effective reporting, which will not only feed into daily flow of information between policy actors, but will also gradually improve media’s own engagement and role in the policy making process.

- **Facilitate systematic and regular information flows between policy actors, stakeholders and the grassroots**
Policy actors rely heavily on stakeholders to supply them with policy-relevant materials, act as reliable sources for cross-checking information received through other channels and provide policy advice and feedback when needed. Therefore, it is important to maintain continuous and open two-way flow of information between these organizations and the policy actors.