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# Use of Evidence-Based Advocacy in Pro-Poor Policy Formulation and Implementation in Ghana

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## ABSTRACT [ENGLISH/ANGLAIS]

Policy making processes for many governments are increasingly shifting away from 'firefighting' approaches to opening up space for other actors with the requisite information, knowledge and experience to take part in policy formulation and implementation processes. Evidence-based policy influence in Ghana however, remains a challenge as actors devise innovative approaches. The paper assessed how the quality and type of evidence used by Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) is influencing pro-poor policies in Ghana. It explores the interplay of evidence, links and context in the policy space (and a review of literature) on the political and economic terrain in Ghana leading to popular conceptual positions on the policy process and the different roles played by NGOs. Two case studies were used: The first one shows a success story in NGO-evidence use to illustrate how links, the use and type of evidence impacts on the policy process. The second shows NGO failure to influence policy even with the use of evidence. The methods used includes review of existing literature on the subject matter, discussions, and key informant interviews among others.. Drawing from the first case study, this paper finds that evidence based policy if properly anchored in quality and using the appropriate links amongst other ingredients, has a higher chance of success.

**Keywords:** Policy influence, evidence-based advocacy, political context, policy formulation, policy implementation

## RÉSUMÉ [FRANÇAIS/FRENCH]

Politique processus pour de nombreux gouvernements sont de plus en plus s'éloignent des approches «lutte contre l'incendie» à l'ouverture de l'espace pour d'autres acteurs les informations requises, les connaissances et l'expérience de prendre part à la formulation des politiques et des processus de mise en œuvre. Evidence-based influencer la politique au Ghana reste cependant un défi que les acteurs de concevoir des approches novatrices. Le document évaluait la manière dont la qualité et le type de données utilisées par les organisations non gouvernementales (ONG) qui influence politiques pro-pauvres au Ghana. Il explore l'interaction des preuves, des liens et le contexte dans l'espace politique (et une revue de la littérature) sur le terrain politique et économique au Ghana populaires menant à des positions théoriques sur le processus politique et les différents rôles joués par les ONG. Deux études de cas ont été utilisées: La première montre un exemple de réussite dans les ONG des preuves utiliser pour illustrer comment les liens, l'utilisation et le type de preuves sur les impacts du processus politique. L'échec des ONG seconde montre à influencer la politique, même avec l'utilisation de preuves. Les méthodes utilisées comprend l'examen de la littérature existante sur le sujet, les discussions et entretiens avec des informateurs clés, entre autres .. Dessin de la première étude de cas, ce document constate que la politique fondée sur des preuves si elle est bien ancrée dans la qualité et en utilisant les liens appropriés entre autres ingrédients, a plus de chances de succès.

**Mots-clés:** L'influence politique, fondée sur des preuves de plaidoyer, le contexte politique, la formulation des politiques, la mise en œuvre des politiques

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## INTRODUCTION

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) engaged in service delivery are found to be the majority in the Ghanaian context of civil society organisations [1]. NGOs are traditionally known for their gap- filling role between the vulnerable and policy makers. They usually aim to complement and in a few cases, supplement government efforts [2]. Beneficiaries of their services see NGOs as most appropriate (the 'good guys') since their service

delivery function shows results in most cases. In Zimbabwe, church missions provide 68% of all hospital beds in rural areas. They provide about 40% of health services in Zambian rural areas. Perhaps, this is a classic example of how NGOs are seen to be accountable to their clients [3]. Service delivery may be the most directly visible and directly observable evidence of NGO development work [4]. How about government's policy towards providing those services? Are NGOs merely a

means to an end or an end in themselves? In recent times, NGOs are becoming more concerned with defending citizen's rights through advocacy, lobbying, conscientisation and sometimes, open confrontation [5]. At the same time, there are growing calls on governments to deliver transparent governance and be accountable to citizens by, amongst others, ensuring citizen's participation in policy processes. What are the opportunities for intervening in the Ghanaian policy processes by NGOs? How have they participated? What sort of research findings, information or views do they bring onto the policy process? Is the evidence credible and acceptable to and usable to the policymaker? Will the answers to these questions improve NGOs at influencing policy? Or will it be any better for pro-poor policymaking in Ghana?

Partly due to the shifting focus of most donors including the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) from projects to budget support, NGOs are adopting broader processes of development to include policy advocacy [6] This informed the choice of research question in order to contribute to discussions on the above concerns. The analysis focuses on interpretation, conceptualisation of policy processes vis-à-vis NGO role while also arguing from the Ghanaian context (with its political, institutional and the state of the NGO sector), evidence based policy engagement by NGOs and what dividends accrue to all stakeholders especially on pro-poor policy influence.

We used findings from library based desk research of documents from CJA and ISODEC, drawing on secondary and academic literature that focus on conceptualisations of the policy process with case studies focusing on work of advocacy and networked NGOs and the PRSP process from the Ghanaian context to examine the subject further.

### **METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

The research purposively selected contrasting operations of two NGOs as case studies; one of which was successful in influencing pro-poor policy and the other unsuccessful. A case study on the 'water for all' campaign by a network of NGOs led by ISODEC in and outside Ghana illustrates the successful case. A contrasting case study was of the Committee for Joint Action (CJA) on the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) processes in Ghana. In both cases, we looked at their annual reports and spoke to key informants to extract data. Guided by the conceptual framework, we

explored the extent to which political context allow for NGO participation in the policy process, how the quality and use of evidence influenced the 'GPRS' and the 'water for all' process. The paper also explored a possibility that, even in the face of evidence, NGOs can still fail to influence pro-poor policies. We also looked at other factors as indicators and conditions that will contribute to NGOs ability to influence policy such as effective mobilisation, lobbying style, nature of the issue; is it widespread and concerning the citizenry, information reliability and strategy.

### **FROM THE LITERATURE**

The literature reviewed centred on some conceptual debates surrounding policymaking process and the role of actors outside the state with an emphasis on the NGO sector. It then focussed on the policy issues in Ghana and the role of the NGO sector in information use to influence policy. Drawing on discussions on social policy, non-profit sector and evaluation reports from related agencies, this section looks at practical and policy related implications of NGO- Policy synergy in the Ghanaian policy process. The subject matter stressed the way in which policy is shaped in concrete historical or research based processes. It discounts the assumption that policies are natural phenomena or automatic solutions to social problems in a country and it does not see the state as an actor fundamentally different from other social actors. It recognizes though that in the particular case of Ghana, the state still remains a dominant actor around which the political agenda is set. After all, and quite ironically, the successful implementation of reform policies depends on a capable state – even though IMF/WB ideology stresses a reduced role for the state.

### **The Policy Process Debates**

It is argued that policymaking and implementation are non-linear processes that require consensus building, compromise, conflict resolution and resource management, and are not necessarily a series of phases as the linear model suggests [7]. They are best understood as 'chaos of purposes and accidents' [8]. In reality, implementation cannot be separated from policymaking as implementation affects policymaking and policies often change as they move from planning to implementation [9].

"Public policy is about communities trying to achieve something as communities"[10]. This is contested though over what a community's goals should be and who its

members are. The view of policy as a set of legally binding techniques or tools handed down by some authority can be misleading. Instead, the policy enterprise is conceptualised as a dynamic dialogue between competing and converging positions held by the various actors and interests in the larger community [10]. It is the interaction of the different notions in the policy stream that policy is continuously reshaped again and again in a constantly evolving garbage-can of choices sort of process [11]. Essentially, the role of ideas and knowledge become crucial in the policy process. Going by this conception of the process therefore, NGOs who, by definition, are agents of change with a goal to articulate and actualise a particular social vision or agenda and best described as policy entrepreneurs become indispensable [12]. The institutional landscape, especially for any policy relevant discussion, is best understood as constituting three distinct sets of institutions: The first is the state sector that is primarily concerned with the preservation of social order; represents the interests of the majority (or dominant groups); and operates in the realm of the political system. The second, being the market sector, is concerned with the production of goods and services; does so through mechanisms of negotiated economic exchange and profit maximization; represents individual self-interest; and is market oriented. Najam therefore defines citizen organizations as 'Para-policy organizations' on the basis of their principal normative characteristic being the bringing together of actors with shared values and for actualising particular social visions and that the growing interaction between the citizens sector and governments suggests that the citizen shadow over the policy enterprise is likely to grow bigger as much of the NGOs influence on policy is through lobbying and more subtle forms of interaction within the policy stream [13]. Najam further proposed a template for mapping the varying stages of the policy process to the possible influence by the citizen's sector. This conceptual framework is highly relevant but not used in this paper because it is not comparatively suitable to be applied within the scope of this paper.

The most common conceptualisation of the policy process is a critique of the linear model whose assumption is that the process is rational and made up of separate stages of agenda setting, formulation and implementation with emphasis on the policy formulation as the most important stage. It does not recognise that omission or commission of some other factors including

role of 'street level bureaucrats' at implementation, could have a totally different effect on policy outcomes [14]. This separation between policy decision and implementation enables policy-makers to escape responsibility if policy fails [15]. Policy is what it does and the way in which decisions are used in actual practice, rather than on the decision itself should interest our discussion.

Another approach to analysing conceptions of the policy process often argued is the role of interest groups in shaping the policy process could be looked at in terms of 'society-centred' classes, interest groups, political parties and voters or 'state-centred' forces such as technocrats, bureaucrats, state interests (e.g. interests of maintaining power) in originating policy or facilitating the process. Either way, the policy process could still be stifled by this very dichotomy and may eventually backfire on the poor [7].

Sutton's view on policy using a multi-disciplinary lens centred on the idea that the linear model of the policy process is inadequate, and hence, concludes that social and other factors can lead to policy change. It is also common knowledge that because of the different actors involved in the various stages of the process, the argument for a linear nature of the process becomes myopic and unrealistic even though useful for academic analysis. The paper therefore utilized the linear model and its ordered stages for the simple reason of easier academic argument.

The policy process can also be looked at as consisting the following components: political context, links, evidence and the external environment. First, the *political context*, structures, processes, institutional pressure and the production of research are themselves political processes from the initial agenda setting through to the final negotiations involved in implementing policy and evaluating outcomes. Second, the framework upholds that, the nature of *evidence* is crucial to policy uptake. The research approach, credibility of the finding and how it is communicated are as influential as the content itself. Thirdly, *links* between epistemic communities, advocacy coalitions, intermediaries and the media has a huge influence in policy change [16]. We find the framework easier to use and effective in communicating what it takes to influence policy.

### ROLE OF NGOS AND EVIDENCE USE

In their book, the 'third world non-profit sector in comparative perspective', shows that much importance is

increasingly being attached to the NGOs sector but that, it remains dimly understood along the following levels: firstly, that basic descriptive information on these organisations is lacking (though apparently growing in scale and importance) [2]. Their size, areas of operation, legal and policy framework within which they operate are unavailable in a systematic way. The other reason is conceptual in that, the sector has existed in a peculiar way reflecting the socio-cultural complexity of the people outside the state and market; Village associations, grass-root development organizations amongst others form the majority in the developing world including Ghana [17]. Majority of the registered NGOs in Ghana are welfarist with a single community focus and may have identifiable church connections [17]. Their networking and coordination efforts are being intensified thus, reflecting NGOs desire to share information, facilities and lessons. 'In recent years, there has been increasing concern on the part of government that NGO activities should have some sort of formal framework to facilitate regular consultation and collaboration between government and NGOs' [18]

In our assessment, following the repeal of the *criminal libel law* that gave much freedom of expression to the people, the media role has been less antagonising and their engagement with policy advocacy has been more productive in recent times. NGO networks and think tanks such as Centre for Democratic Development (CDD), Centre for Economic Policy Analysis (CEPA), Integrated Social Development Coalition (ISODEC), and Committee for Joint Action (CJA), IMANI Ghana amongst others have been making significant contributions to the policy process in Ghana. This paper will do a detailed case examination of contributions of two of these NGOs to pro-poor policy influence.

NGOs, third sector, not for profit sector, voluntary sector, civil society organization (CSOs) and think tanks are popular labels used in Ghana for the citizens sector outside the state and market [17]. The sector has multiple meanings that may be useful in different ways to different people; to development policy-makers and academics, the local struggles and political nature of the concept itself, engage their interest. It is described as a 'code for a set of ideas related to participation, good governance, human rights, privatisation and public sector reform' [19]. A thriving civil society can widen democracy by promoting divergence and strengthening development to transform the circumstances of people. NGOs have been placed at the centre since some policy

makers and activists see NGOs as the short hand for civil society itself [19]. The equation of NGOs to CSOs is widespread in the Ghanaian context and is the main reason why this paper has focussed on NGOs. The NGOs engaged in advocacy are increasingly concerning themselves with policy influence whether it is by gaining membership, lobbying, campaigning or use of the media [19]. NGO role in the policy process thus, becomes crucial especially that, they are positioned to counterweigh the domineering force of the state and market [13]. Direct forms of engagement in the political process by NGOs is likely to provoke opposition from governments, consequently, aid donors favoured organisations engaged in activities that increase government accountability, broaden participation in governance and influence state policy as potential recipients of grants and technical assistance [20]. We find that, the relationship between government and the non-profit sector has been characterized more by cooperation than conflict. Contrary to the rhetoric of conflict, relations between the citizen sector and the state in Ghana have generally been collaborative.

The policy process is not simply one of presenting objective evidence but of dialectical argumentation and persuasion [21]. Evidence is understood as an available body of facts or information demonstrating the validity of a proposition, stance or belief [15]. Availability and validity are critical here. Grayson posits that it is common for evidence to be equated to research finding and for academic researchers to fantasise that only academic research is final and therefore, the basis of all knowledge. She further makes a case that if you question any professional how they gain knowledge in their work, their answers will range from direct personal experience, shared norms/values, ideas to results of relevant research which may change as they pass on. She concludes that even in complex arrangements, the availability of all relevant knowledge will still encounter validity and acceptability challenges. This paper contends that, to enhance the power of persuasion, a useful approach could be to analyse information or evidence in terms of *quality type and use*.

Lewis and Madon contend that in the face of criticisms of NGOs accountability, they are finding ways of increasing their impact, effectiveness and professionalism: High quality information about NGO work on the ground is critical to questioning their accountability. Also, that access to wider contextual information such as macro-economic policy, political climate and ongoing

operations of other actors is important especially for NGOs wishing to campaign for policy changes [22].

### THE CASE OF ISODEC GHANA

This is the 'water for all' campaign led by ISODEC-Ghana on the coalition against water privatisation which sufficiently illustrates the role of NGOs in the process. NGOs must negotiate with evidence that is relevant, appropriate and timely in a specific social, political and economic context to achieve policy influence. We examine the *political context* of policy streams or windows, political structures and institutional pressures which will reflect on the nature and extent of ISODEC engagement in the policy process. We also look at the *link* between policy makers and other stakeholders. Finally, *evidence* in terms of type, use and quality to influence government of Ghana policy on privatisation of water. Thus, we examine the tools for success in policy influence by NGOs.

ISODEC argues that the government of Ghana has no coherent water sector policy of its own and have basically relied on the World Bank for policy direction and that, two important World Bank-backed policies have been key to setting the stage for privatisation of water in Ghana: *decentralization and separation*.

The privatisation drive by the government of Ghana is a way of rolling back central government and shifting developmental responsibilities to local government structures such as the district assemblies. This is said to be very distressing to most districts due to difficulties in raising sufficient revenue to address poverty in their areas. The rural communities are expected to provide substantial back-up funds for decentralized water projects but that proved unrealistic and the high poverty levels could be a reason [23]. It is generally thought that decentralization can increase participation, accountability and transparency. World Bank-prescribed decentralization at least in the case of Ghana, is primarily driven by fiscal expediency in reducing central government expenditures and increasing revenue generation responsibilities at the district level [24]. Furthermore, the process set the stage not only for devolving to the districts the responsibility for the provision of drinking water and sanitation services, but also shifted some of the responsibility for the government's international debt burden repayment to the impoverished rural and semi-rural areas. The World Bank prescribed the policy of separation or segregation in order to create a segment of the water sector that

would be attractive to and profitable for foreign private investors. Prior to the segregation policy, there existed an integrated water and sewerage system, which ensured that drinking water and sanitation were managed together. It also facilitated cross subsidies. The relatively better resourced metropolitan and urban communities together with industry paid a small levy to support government delivery of water to the relatively poorer rural communities. The policy further provides that, prospective investors will not be responsible for providing water to low-income communities in the urban areas but that it will be the responsibility of the Government of Ghana. Also, the segregation of rural water from urban water ensures that the majority of the people who live in the rural areas will not benefit from the expected "efficiency miracles" envisaged under privatisation. This has been made even more unlikely as a result of the imposition of an automatic water rate adjustment mechanism on the State regulator, the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURC), which ensures that water rates adjust automatically as the local currency appreciates or depreciates against the US dollar

### The Political Context

Ghana has about two decades record of a process of re-democratisation with a new constitution based on multi-party elections and the emergence of a working Parliament. By the end of 2000, there was a peaceful transfer of power from a President Jerry John Rawlings and the National Democratic Party (NPP) that had been in power, in various forms, for nearly twenty years to its prime opponents, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) led by John A Kufour. In January 2009, there was again a peaceful transfer of power to the National Democratic Congress (NDC) led by Professor John Evans Atta-Mills. In consequence, a gradual sharpening of political and governance rough edges and opening up windows for inclusion of actors outside government in many policy deliberations, improvement of a free press and electronic media even though political expedience and nepotism still prevail. The media have become a major forum for the discussion of national policy [25]. Policy research think tanks have all been gaining ground in accessing policy-making and decision points such as Parliament, National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) and the sector ministries. NGOs are increasingly forming networks and coalitions among themselves to actively promote policy alternatives.

### The ISODEC Strategy

ISODEC- Ghana organized a National Forum on water sector reforms in Ghana and involved a broad cross section of civil society and NGOs in Ghana. The forum evolved a National Coalition against Privatisation (CAP) of Water based on resolutions by participants. The resulting declaration included conducting a broad-based campaign to guarantee safe and affordable potable water for all Ghanaians; critique of privatisation, providing alternative models, good research on social impacts of water privatisation in other countries, Analysis of what led to the failure of the Ghana Water Supply Company (GWSC), promoting public awareness of privatisation through educational videos, newspapers articles, radio and TV programmes T-shirts, car stickers, banners and so on. Developing and promoting alternative solutions to the problems militating against 'water for all' and problems of public management and efficiency. The coalition's work compelled the revision of the contract documents to include public/community options, the World Bank (WB) to improve its disclosure policy in Ghana and the creation of a unit at the Ministry of Works and Housing to look at the critical issue of access for the poor [23].

### The Links

A new NGO engagement culture emerged between community activists operating within the local action committees, organized labour and faith based organizations such as the Catholic Bishops Conference that issued caution statements in support of water for all. In lobbying government and World Bank, ISODEC established and maintained contacts with government through officials at the Water Sector Restructuring Section of the Ministry of Works and Housing and officials of the World Bank in Ghana to ensure a window was left open for dialogue. Sign- on letters were distributed by ISODEC-Ghana and other collaborating NGOs in and outside Ghana to sympathizers, key persons in government, the WB, IMF and the UN bodies demanding the freeing of the Ghanaian government from privatisation. Efforts at building international solidarity were rigorous.

### Evidence

ISODEC used information it obtained on the policy of the World Bank as a strategy to argue for greater transparency and public participation thus challenging the WB to its own declaration of full information

disclosure, transparency and participation. Demanding that, the Transaction Advisor's report is put in the public domain. This information was used as a basis to explain to the WB officials why water privatisation is an inappropriate conditionality for granting loans to a poor country. The type of evidence was the World Bank's own policy documents on transparency, participation and good governance obtained by the NGOs. Case studies of how privatisation of essential services such as in Peru had impacted negatively on the poor majority in many countries were crucial to this effort by the CAP.

### THE CJA CASE

Policy initiatives or agenda setting in Ghana usually emanate from official government circles. However, government sometimes invites international organisations to collaborate or assist in the conceptualisation and formulation of policy. Significant influence is undoubtedly exercised over Ghanaian officials by international organizations such as the WB and IMF [26]. The perception that these organisations are imposing or 'setting unrealistic and inapplicable objectives and targets' is gaining a huge currency amongst many ordinary people on the grounds of persistent high poverty levels.

The PRSP approach was intended to provide a framework for addressing poverty in a comprehensive and long-term manner, as well as guide donor assistance strategies and coordination [27]. For the WB and the IMF to endorse a PRSP, they must be satisfied that it fulfils their conditions. Once endorsed, the PRSP also forms a framework for all other donors to relate to the country [28]. However, many NGOs in Ghana have expressed concern on the requirement that a country's overall strategy to produce growth and poverty reduction be endorsed and approved by International Financial Institutions (IFIs) arguing that they only contribute small parts of the total cost and that, it seriously infringes on sovereignty and is only a means of forcing poor countries to bow to the interests and ideology of these institutions.

### Political and Policy Context

The Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRSI) [2000-2003] process started with a preliminary study to identify five major thematic areas of significance to poverty reduction and growth: The restoration of macroeconomic stability (the Macro Economy), the promotion of employment through sustainable economic growth (Production and Employment), Human resource

development and basic services, the development and implementation of special poverty reduction projects for the vulnerable and those at extreme risk (Vulnerability and Exclusion), and Good Governance.

The growth approach envisaged in the GPRS is a classic trickle down growth approach, with emphasis on agriculture. The key innovation in the GPRS though, is a realization that inequality is both a constraint on growth and a constraint on well-being. It is argued that, interventions focusing on the poor may be the most effective way of raising average incomes. Again, the character of growth and distribution is not seriously discussed, the sources of the modest growth projections themselves are not so apparent and therefore, a partisan rhetoric. Some could well be dependent policies that have failed in the past to deliver growth such as trade, market liberalization and a financing of growth models relying on foreign resource expectations especially private foreign income. No wonder the budget of Ghana is still very much along the paradigms of heavy budgetary support from the international community. Consequently, there arises a tendency for agenda-setting phase to be compromised and controlled from without.

Issues of credibility of the consultation process came up on several NGO deliberations. We contend that the problem of participation is not so much the numbers of persons reached, but the quality of the discussion and the credibility of the consultations. The quality of the discussions is determined both by the diversity and knowledge level of participants and the information they bring on board. The CJA team was more a political pressure group and could not garner adequate evidence for any meaningful influence to the policy. A lot has been wanting on information parity, a situation not caused merely by the government of Ghana but also by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs). On the part of government, few people outside the capital Accra and a limited number of organisations have had access to the key documents and when they are provided, they tend to come too late for meaningful consultation. The GPRS has been described as bulky and not reader-friendly, making it difficult for the privileged few in the NGO sector to study the draft and comment. The officials charged with implementation of the GPRS policy document otherwise known as street level bureaucrats also find it lacking clear actionable guidance for successful implementation. The credibility of the GPRS process has particularly been questioned at three levels: First, the transparency of the process has been compromised by the inaccessibility to

key information held by the IMF and the World Bank. For example, the WB letter of Development Policy remains secret. The IMF's reviews or reports are released selectively even to Parliamentarians let alone NGOs. Secondly, the credibility of the process has also been undermined by parallel commitments with the IMF (e.g. the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility) and the World Bank (Poverty Reduction Support Credit), which predetermine the conclusions of especially key macroeconomic and structural reform policies. Thirdly, major sectoral policies contained in the GPRS were shrouded in secrecy and never discussed. Some aspects appear to have either been transported from past programme commitments or strongly pushed by donors. The credibility of the whole exercise becomes doubtful. Even when the NPP government took over power from the NDC who executed the GPRS process, they wrote an executive summary that reflected the party's manifesto and not the content of the GPRS document [25].

### Links

An NGO limitation in ensuring independent consultations for the development of alternatives is a crucial factor. NGO weakness in capacity, the lack of resources as well as the level of maturity of the NGO sector in Ghana appear to be a reason. Participation in economic policy making and the budget process in particular is a new phenomenon in Ghana and is viewed as a purely technical subject handled only by the highly educated few in society and politicians. Consequently, even in the face of some NGOs establishing the necessary links and relationship with policy makers, they have generally not been successful in influencing economic policy and the GPRS for that matter.

### Evidence

NGOs will need to demonstrate a capability to handle expenditure data and set agenda for monitoring in order to track some of the envisaged changes to the GPRS process. Evidence of improvements in the level, composition, or efficiency of social spending will be an important element in assessing the change in Ghana's budget strategy towards the GPRS. Greater focus and emphasis in improved accountability for resource management is an IMF conditionality that NGOs can use as a tool. It appears convincing evidence to influence the various stages of the GPRS process will be successful by subjecting fiscal objectives and policies to open public debate and transparent monitoring systems to improve

efficient delivery of public service. This remains only wishful as NGOs lack such a quality of evidence to shape policy along these lines.

Internally generated information is complemented with information obtained from external sources. Officials welcome opportunities for exchanges with other institutions, for information on success stories, and to update knowledge on current technologies through networking. This type of information is often not easily available and is therefore seen as an information gap that the CJA was not equipped to fill. Other information gaps one could identify are the detail workings of the macroeconomic environment and the motivation for the type of attention given to poverty related policies. Some NGOs especially research scientists and think tanks such as ISODEC, IEA and CEPA complain of lack of current journals and magazines, quantitative data on poverty trends and information flow and availability among departments. Consequently, clear empirical evidence upon which NGOs can base their claims as evidence in quest of policy influence is simply not accessible in most cases. Much advice however, is usually available through the network of personal contacts established by officials with experts and consultants, both locally and overseas. It was on this basis that NGOs sought to influence the GPRS policy process but of course, the quality of the evidence they had was not convincing enough.

### Challenges

Expertise has been found to be a crucial element in ensuring that issues are well analysed before presenting them to policy makers [29]. In both case studies, we find that, expert knowledge of issues of water privatisation and the poverty reduction process to build evidence and communicate it well enough to affect policy was much effective in the 'water for all' case but not in the GPRS case. In the case of the GPRS, expertise in the areas of macro economy and information therein was found to be low or nonexistent among the CJA operators/members. They generally lacked quality evidence to communicate a pro poor position on the GPRS document even though there were adequate links and the political context allowed it to an extent. In the end, they were branded as a political pressure group aligned to the opposition NDC party at the time.

Financial resource availability for NGOs to carry out mass education and other advocacy activities is a serious challenge. Consequently, most of them rely on external sources of funding whose strings may conflict with the

ideals of the NGO. The NGO funding source may then dictate the NGO agenda and thereby compromise their credibility to influence policy. If the local NGOs in Ghana who are engaged in economic policy issues had their own financial capacity to be able to gather the relevant information, they could have recorded a better success story in the quest to effectively influence the GPRS process. It can be especially more frustrating if the NGOs have some form of funding from government sources. This way, it becomes difficult to turn their back against the very source of their survival. NGOs may need to further look at the role of research findings in their advocacy work. Would evidence from research add value to the quality of advocacy? What are the ingredients of NGO credibility and legitimacy? These questions came up forcefully in the CJA case and are worth investigating further.

Capacity building becomes highly useful in helping NGOs build the necessary knowledge or ideas and the ability to achieve legitimacy. There remains a need for training, research and institutional strengthening. A line of thinking looks at capacity building from a systems perspective that recognises links between actors and issues. Successful capacity building is integral on broad-based participation and a locally driven agenda; building on existing local capacities; ongoing learning and adaptation; integrate activities at different levels to address complex problems [30].

To what extent could CJA have worked in networks or coalitions to coordinate strengths of the citizens sector in Ghana? Is there a window for NGOs to utilize the expertise of senior members of the academic community and senior civil/public servants who are involved in the policy enterprise?

### Discussions and Conclusions

It has avoided the differing conceptual debates surrounding the NGO sector. The discussion have utilized NGOs as the organisations concerned with activities that increase government accountability, broaden participation in public life, engage in dialogue and advocacy with governments over key areas of policy and legislation as a contribution to broadening the parameters of public debate and rendering decision-making processes accessible and monitoring implementation of programmes. The initial assumption was that, service delivery and advocacy NGOs will dominate the discussion since they appear to be the majority in the specific context. It turned out however



that, the think tanks reputed for their research credentials and the advocacy NGOs were central to policy influence. NGO vulnerability to criticisms of lack of effectiveness, accountability and legitimacy is found to be pushing most of them into sourcing strong enough evidence to influence government policy in favour of the vulnerable. As shown in the two case studies, the NGOs quest to influence government policy even in the face of evidence is conditioned on other factors; *evidence, political context* and the *links* NGOs have with the policy community [15] op cit. The influence of international *organizations* is also a crucial factor in the equation.

Moving on, we have explored a number of models of the policy process. Grindle and Thomas argued that policymaking and implementation are on-going, non-linear processes better still, understood as chaos of purposes and accidents that requires strategic ideas and knowledge. The paper has argued that NGOs can provide these strategic ideas and knowledge if the political context, evidence and links are favourable. In drawing lessons on the influence of the policy process in Ghana, it might be useful to question if a third world policy exist and if so, how different is it from that of the developed world? A paper by Jude Howell suggests it exists. She argues that the process, the constraints, innovations and surprises and consequences, has many similarities in developed and developing countries. In her view, it is possible to understand many policy phenomena in terms of already embedded general concepts. It may not so much be the level of development that makes the difference, but the extent to which there are democratic structures and the right institutional arrangements in place [31]. We find that in the Ghanaian case with a political history of fifteen years multi-party democracy, most of the crucial institutional arrangement allows for a relatively open engagement. The quest by political leaders to ensure authority to formulate and implement policy appears to militate against engagement with NGOs and their stakeholders in the policy process by wider actors. Government literally does not want to be seen as being told what to do even though their capacity to effect policy is apparently weak. Many people tend to believe that information is important and that research and understanding have to precede decision-making. However, one can question if government is opening up and making information available. The analyses also show importance of foreign models and the dependence on foreign experts is large in the Ghanaian case.

Many debates on the role of NGOs in influencing policy have put the nature of governments in the spotlight. This paper has been looking at the policy process itself and the use of evidence by NGOs to influence the process. The focus has been to look at the various elements of agenda setting, policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and how NGOs use evidence to variously influence these stages whilst acknowledging that, in reality, the process is not always linear and ordered stages as such.

We find that the agenda setting stage is perhaps the most difficult to influence stage of the policy process in Ghana. International organizations such as the WB and IMF are found to wield a lot of influence on the agenda and pro-poor policy direction. For example, ISODEC finds that the government of Ghana had no water sector policy of its own at the time of IMF requested for privatisation of the sector and so the IFIs set the agenda. A few reports show that some NGOs such as ISODEC, CEPA are able in a lot of cases to consolidate evidence into policy narratives that is communicated to effect change. In furtherance to the 'water for all campaign', the quality of the available evidence was not in doubt, which was used accordingly to build momentum amongst ordinary people and network of NGOs till it reached a point where government had no choice but to change the status quo.

The type of evidence effectively brought by NGOs into the formulation stage of the policy process is crucial for a number of reasons: evidence is crucial to establish the credibility of the NGO. If the evidence is of a high quality, it will reflect as such on the reputation of the NGO. But how do we determine the quality of evidence? Is it necessarily high quality if it can influence policy formulation? Is it considered high quality evidence if it is coming from a particular type of NGO? It will be useful therefore, to look closely at how NGOs use the evidence available. If they use it to establish credibility and contacts with the technocrats and raise the consciousness on the policy context within which they operate, they could influence of pro poor policy formulation. We also find that at the implementation stage, the type of and quality of evidence again becomes critical to the effectiveness of policy implementation. NGOs need to make the evidence they have about policy implementation relevant to differing contexts and be able to link practical experience to expert knowledge. It is implementation that demonstrates if a particular policy change is effective or not.

For various reasons, we find that NGOs tend to be less bureaucratic and more informal than government departments and have more direct contact with local people at the grassroots level [32]. NGOs are able to gather useful statistical and other baseline data and information on cultural practices that may be described as indigenous knowledge that serve as a crucial body of evidence to influence policy. A typical example is shown in the water for all campaign case study in which NGOs were able to utilize their capability to mobilize the grassroots to participate in the advocacy process. In this context, NGOs may be better equipped than their counterpart governmental institutions to address the needs of rural people in a more holistic and more appropriate manner.

### Tools for Successful Policy influence by NGOs

From the case story on the water for all campaign, we find that the coalition of NGOs led by ISODEC achieved what they set out to do: to influence government policy against privatisation of water. The state in Ghana is still responsible for the provision of water to its people although one can question the effectiveness of service delivery. Even so, some form of reforms has taken place anyway in the water sector in Ghana in line with government policy of full cost recovery in the provision of social services such as water, health, education and electricity. Sustainability of NGO achievements in policy influence would be an interesting area of further research.

A number of implications come up in the success story of the 'water for all' campaign. An evidently well-researched (quality) evidence use by NGOs in policy influence is an important source of credibility and legitimacy. They are more likely to be listened to and better positioned to mobilise grass root support. Another implication we can draw from the story is that while evidence use can greatly enhance the influence of policy design, impact can be fatally marred if the state context with its political structures and systems does not support implementation. If the role of international organisations were not in influencing agenda setting in ways that necessarily meet their own interest but solely assisting NGOs through expertise and funding, they could build a capacity to influence pro poor policies.

The GPRS case study reveals a rather complex and yet important area in which NGOs should operate if they are to achieve pro poor policy influence. The process required the government of Ghana to come out with a

national plan for reducing poverty through participatory processes. Two levels of argument could be made: first that, the process was not participatory enough as many organised groups including women's groups and parliamentarians were excluded [28]. Secondly that, the NGOs did not even have the courage and capacity to be part of the GPRS process. Those issues were in the realm of macroeconomics and national budget that NGOs thought they could not do much to influence. That the planning, formulation, implementation and even monitoring and evaluation of the GPRS was shrouded in some form of secrecy with no information available to NGOs to be able to make informed inputs and thereby influence the process. Whichever level you assess this from; some fundamentals such as the political context, the type, quality and use of evidence will greatly determine the success or failure of NGO policy influence. In answering the research question (*in what ways does the use, type and quality of evidence by NGOs in Ghana contribute to their ability to influence pro poor policies*) therefore, our analysis show that NGOs who use high quality and well researched evidence in their work are seen to be credible and amongst others, which enhances their ability to influence policy. Their stance on issues would less likely be misrepresented and they may find it easier to obtain information from government. The benefit of quality evidence though will be an integral of whether the political climate allows for open dialogue at the different stages of the policy process and the links NGOs are able to establish with other NGO networks and the policymakers while recognising the strong arm of international organisations such as WB and IMF in setting agenda for pro poor policies in the third world. Ghana requires an enforceable legislation to make information freely accessible to other actors outside government. Evidence-based approach is so much emphasized as central to policymaking but one has to recognise the role of other factors such as extent of democracy, NGO credibility, legitimacy and participation in the policy process. This paper recommends further studies be carried out to address these gaps to address these gaps.

A vibrant NGO sector founded on participation of the people, open dialogue with all stakeholders and a pro poor focus is critical to the survival of democracy, reduction of poverty and the promotion of the general wellbeing of all citizenry.

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