



RAO CONVENTION 2007

RAO ENGAGEMENT WITH THE GPRS FRAMEWORK

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1. Introduction

A new environment has been created by the new democratization process in Ghana which provided a context for legitimate civil society engagement of public policy processes. The level of civil society engagement is however held down by weak capacity and inadequate resources. Until recently, the nature of engagement has been driven largely by the priorities of the external agencies that funded civil society work. The trend has changed and there is an observable pattern towards engaging national development policies. Even in this case, the evidence seems to point to active engagement by only a limited number of top end urban-based civil society groups.

G-RAP as a response to the funding constraint is targeted at supporting the effort of civil society to engage public policy, particularly the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) and the Multi-Donor Budget Support (MDBS) funding scheme. Grantees are enjoined to produce narrative reports to a given format, consistent with programme logical framework and that are reflective of engagement with the public policy processes. After two and half years of implementation the Programme has found the need for a nuanced analysis of the reports and commissioned this study to assess the outputs of G-rap funded Research and Advocacy Organizations (RAOs) against the frameworks of the GPRS and the MDBS.

2. Study-Objectives and Methodology

The methodology employed essentially involved content analysis within the framework of the broad objectives of the programme itself, the policy objectives of the national policy instruments (MDBS and GPRSII) and the declared orientation, operational goals and actual research activities of grantees. A cross-case analysis approach was used and an analytical framework was developed which made it easy for cross-referencing of the content and outputs of the grantees reports against policy objectives of the two major national policy frameworks to determine compatibilities and to observe levels of goal attainment. The analytical framework is organized around themes namely, the promotion of gender empowerment, enhancing CSO advocacy, promoting research as a basis of evidence-based advocacy, entrenching good governance and enhancing the macroeconomic policy making. The work of RAOs was examined in relation to these themes

3.0 Findings

3.1 Women Empowerment

It is observed that the RAOs involved in gender work are very active in securing opportunities for women and enhancing their capacity to participate in public life. ABANTU established a link with Parliament which enabled the organization to have easy access to all Parliamentarians, especially the 25 female Parliamentarians. Similarly ARK foundation in collaboration with a number of Civil Society organizations held several dialogue sessions with Parliamentarians to facilitate the passage of the Domestic Violence Bill. The Ark's *Rights Empowerment Access and Participation (REAP) Project* in the Eastern Region, extended a capacity enhancing training to five CBO's which enabled them engage the East Akyem District Assembly on issues of service provision. FIDA promoted women empowerment through training community leaders in the basic laws, to enable them identify human rights violations at the district and community levels. WiLDAF on its part hosts, a Coalition of Women in Governance (COWIG) with representatives from government, private sector and civil society as part of its 'Women in Governance' Project.

The assessment shows that there is a great deal of collaboration among the gender advocacy groups around issues considered to be of common interest them but there are also considerable differences in approaches to pursuing advocacy. No evidence was found in the reports that indicated resource pooling to fund programmes. Given that all training is targeted at enhancing women's capabilities, the RAOs can plan joint training programmes and co-sponsor these. It will reduce the dreariness women suffer from attending different workshops held by different RAOs within the same communities.

3.2 Advocacy

Effective advocacy-organizing to bring about public change- is based on strong coalitions. The advantages are many-a stronger public image, the pooling of diverse resources and ideas, avoiding needless duplication, building a network of macro and micro level national groups, offering a learning opportunity for new advocacy groups, providing moral support during tough fights and creating a platform for negotiation with opponents. It is not clear from the reports which of these have been deliberately incorporated into the schemes of work of the RAOs. It is not even evident whether there is a plan to work towards a strong civil society coalition of the kind that can produce the results above. The RAOs are at present, loose parts of a funding mechanism.

3.3 Research

The grants under G-RAP are not targeted at altering the fundamental mandate of the research institutions, but they are not targeted at rigidity either. Research outputs from the grantees are not the preferred instruments for evidence-based advocacy by CSOs other than the author institutions themselves. But the lack of use appears to derive from the overly technical nature of these reports. We also note cases of subject overlaps. These institutions could begin thinking about producing joint publications on specific subjects. The alternative is the development of niches on the basis of complementarity.

3.4 Good governance

This field is dominated by high profile RAOs such as IEA, CDD, IDEG and ILGS and their activities have enhanced interaction between state and non-state actors. IEA engagement with the GPRS Process resulted in the invitation to the Institute to the membership of a Working Group to evaluate the GPRS in the thematic areas of Production and Gainful Employment. CDD-Ghana has been invited by many Government Organizations (e.g. NDPC, National African Peer Review Council, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, Ministry of Manpower, Youth and Employment, etc) to participate in many important discussions of sector issues. The Center was also consulted to undertake a joint evaluation of the MDBS with the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). The Growth and Poverty Forum (GPF) established by IDEG to monitor the GPRS has brought civil society and NDPC closer. Within the IDEG's Governance Issues Forum (GIF) programme, a good number of CBOs have joined to form regional networks, to promote civic participation in the district decision-making and resource allocation processes.

3.5 The Macro economy

Generally it is observed that the economic policy institutions have contributed greatly to macroeconomic policy formulation, implementation and monitoring. Representatives from economic think tanks sit on several public committees and are consulted widely locally and internationally. Their contributions to fiscal policy making are also publicly acknowledged. But as with the previous comments, these institutions hardly do grassroots advocacy. Engagement principally occurs at the macro economy level. Emphasis must be shifted gradually to micro economic considerations. This cross case analysis has given an insight into the operations of the grantees. The next sections give an account of how the activities of these institutions interface with the major policy instruments, the GPRS and the MDBS.

4.0 Complementarities of RAO outputs and GPRS and MDBS Policy Objectives

A scale with a value of 1-4 was used to determine the strength of association between RAO activities and the two policy frameworks. Active engagement means active participation in policy formulation, implementation and monitoring, organisation of workshops, seminars, conferences on specific policies related to the GPRS and MDBS, conducting relevant studies, disseminating research findings and undertaking general advocacy work. No engagement means the RAO does nothing in relation to the specific area of focus as contained in the GPRS or MDBS programme. Our analysis generally shows that grantees have engaged more readily with the GPRS II than with the MDBS. The low engagement with the MDBS programme may be a result of the exclusive nature of the programme. Discussions of the MDBS take on a conclave nature to which only selected institutions and individuals are invited. Only CDD had the most direct engagement with the MDBS having been contracted to assess its effectiveness in delivering pro-poor development. It is also noted that grantees maintain core activities that are associated with their declared mandates but engage policies that have some bearing on their main activities.

4.1 Policy Engagement Value of RAO outputs and activities

In view of the above, it is observed that outputs and activities of RAOs have been extremely relevant to the public policy process in Ghana. TUC notes for instance that, CSOs (including the RAOs) have made considerable progress in their participation in national policy-making. CDD, IEA, IDEG CEPA and ISSER have made direct contributions to public sector reforms through representation on public bodies and through providing policy inputs. Gender advocacy groups have succeeded in advocating for the appointment of more women into leadership positions in the public service. Advocacy for democratizing fiscal and economic policy making spearheaded by ISODEC, IDEG and CEPA among others has led to a more open and transparent budget formulation process.

Another key contribution of RAOs is the issue about rights assertion. Even though there is no direct linkage between the reforms and civil society work, it is not an exaggeration to say that intermediation by CSOs has led to a speedy introduction of major policies that related to citizens right to public goods such as education, health, water and sanitation services. The Campaign for free compulsory and universal basic education initiated by the Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition (GNECC) made up of many RAOs who are beneficiary of G-RAP grants has contributed immensely to the introduction of the cash transfer scheme-the Capitation Grant- and a school feeding programme. Similarly, government was compelled to back down on the policy of wholesale privatisation of water due to sustained advocacy work by a coalition of RAOs. The space for more participatory decision-making is growing at all levels of policy making in Ghana and there is increasing recognition of the role of civil society. All RAOs are equivocal on the recognition given by government and citizens to the work of civil society groups.

These claims of success by the grantees in engaging public policy may be overestimated for a number of reasons. First, the space for civil society is to some extent an imposed requirement on government as part of the set of triggers for external resource releases Government is thus obligated to show evidence of civil society input. Second, the claims ignore the weight of conditionalities in determining the directions of public policy. Some of these conditionalities (good governance as a basis for resource release) and civil society demands overlap and therefore claims of public policy change could be attributed to either of these sources of pressure. Third, the declared ideological stance of the NPP government and the global ideological context for policy formulation may also account for the type of policies pursued. Some policy prescriptions in a free market system, allow for social protection programmes that aim at mitigating the harsh knocks of economic policies. Fourth, civil society operation is still very weak due to low capacity and the constraints of resource that inhere in the broader environment. Finally there is evidence of government and citizen discomfort about civil society activism. The persistence in demands for change in policy has sometimes led government and the general public to accuse CSOs of pursuing selfish interests or representing foreign interest that conflict with national goals. The resulting cautions and hostilities however do not blight the increasing recognition of the contributions of civil society.

4.2 RAO Responsiveness to Changing Policy Issues

In the past resource constraints accounted for inability of CSOs to occupy policy space that new development policy frameworks provided. The constraints also resulted in large swings in core mandates of CSOs in response to the agenda of funding agencies, essentially compromising on their own original mandate. G-RAP funding acts a lifeline fund for many grantees. The funds have been used for different purposes by the grantees. Among the uses to which the funds have been put are

- a) recruitment of professional staff to augment institutional capacity
- b) building capacity of public officials
- c) procuring equipment and materials
- d) publications
- e) conducting outreach programmes
- f) organizing workshops, conferences and seminars (sharing knowledge)
- g) organizing retreats
- h) programme development
- i) redefining organizational goals and activities
- j) meeting overheads

4.3 Introducing Diversity in Programming

Apart from the traditional programmes of the RAOs the funds have led to structural and programme changes in the RAOs as well. First, RAOs are shifting paradigms of engagement. ISSER for instance now focuses on issues of equity and poverty reduction. Similarly, IEA has expanded its agenda to include gender mainstreaming. It has admits introducing more participatory and inclusive decision making. Second, planning has improved within RAOs. Most RAOs have now developed strategic plans that guide programming. IDEG has improved its planning, and decision-making processes. ISODEC has also developed a strategic plan. CEPA and WILDAF have reorganized their governance structures. Third, communication within RAOs and between RAOs and the external environment, has improved. TWN, WANEP, ABANTU have improved ICT systems which have facilitated information sharing. And fourth, RAO ability to secure additional funds has been enhanced. ISODEC, IEA, CEPA, ABANTU receive additional funds from other sources on the basis of good programming and high levels of credibility.

Clearly, the funds have helped to promote research and advocacy activities within civil society. The vibrancy in RAO work is attributable to a large extent to core funds provided by G-RAP. However, questions remain on the actual effects of the advocacy work public policy processes.

5. Key Lessons

Among the lessons learned is that dialogue and participation have aided effective collaborative relationships. Coalitions around specific issues (water privatisation, education, GPRS policies) have emerged. Collaboration has also been secured vertically (between RAOs, policy makers, development partners and external institutions). These have advanced engagement. Also the credibility and legitimacy of RAOs continues to grow in the eyes of the GOG and the public because RAOs conduct groundbreaking research and make authoritative pronouncements on a wide range of issues. It is noted further that policy makers seem to be



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more open to policy recommendations from RAOs. A more open and participatory process is gradually replacing the practice of unilateral policy making. GPRS II had provided a better opportunity for RAO engagement than GPRS I. Virtually all RAOs have participated in diverse ways in the formulation of GPRS II. This has enabled the inclusion of civil society input in developing the framework. RAOs served in the Cross-Sectoral Planning Groups (IDEG, ABANTU, IEA, CDD, ISODEC), and provided advice (CEPA) and memoranda on specific issues. The TUC participated at the high end; serving as a member of the National Development Planning Commission itself.

6. Recommendations

The RAOs have not covered the entire policy ground. There is need to move from a marginal to a more direct engagement with the MDDBS process. This review points to the need to redesign the report format to allow RAOs to report on the specific areas of the GPRS/MDDBS they engage and also on the nature of the engagement. The reports should focus on what has specifically been done to engage these major policy frameworks-which constitute a core objective on the G-RAP fund. The reduction in the frequency of reporting suggested during the Mid-Review is endorsed by this study.

With regard to the substance of engagement, RAOs should focus increased attention on decentralization. Local government brings governance closer to citizens. It offers citizens the opportunity to hold public office holders accountable and it leads to better pro-poor service delivery.

Advocacy for mainstreaming gender will need to be intensified. Public resource allocation is still gender-neutral, a factor which accounts in a large measure for the weak effectiveness that has been characteristic of public finance targeted at pro-poor development.

Thank you.