The Policymaking Process in Ghana: a Step-by-Step Discussion of Opportunities for Evidence Uptake

This publication is a brief presentation on the policy-making process in Ghana, considering the different factors, actors (influencers), their roles and opportunities for evidence uptake in the process. A working definition for policy (as defined by MacDonald, 2005) applied in this publication; which indicates that a policy is 'a principle or a course of action adopted by an institution or individual, and may either aim to maintain the status quo or bring about change' (see more in Vaka-Yiko's EIPM training toolkit).

This summary of the policymaking process in Ghana in presented in the diagram annexed, and was informed by our extensive experience working with policymaking units and staff, as well as by available literature. The blue shaded ovals (in the diagram), representing key players for evidence uptake in the process, are considered entry points for any intervention to promote uptake of evidence in public policy. The steps in the diagram give a flow of different activities that lead to the introduction of policies, and these are discussed next.
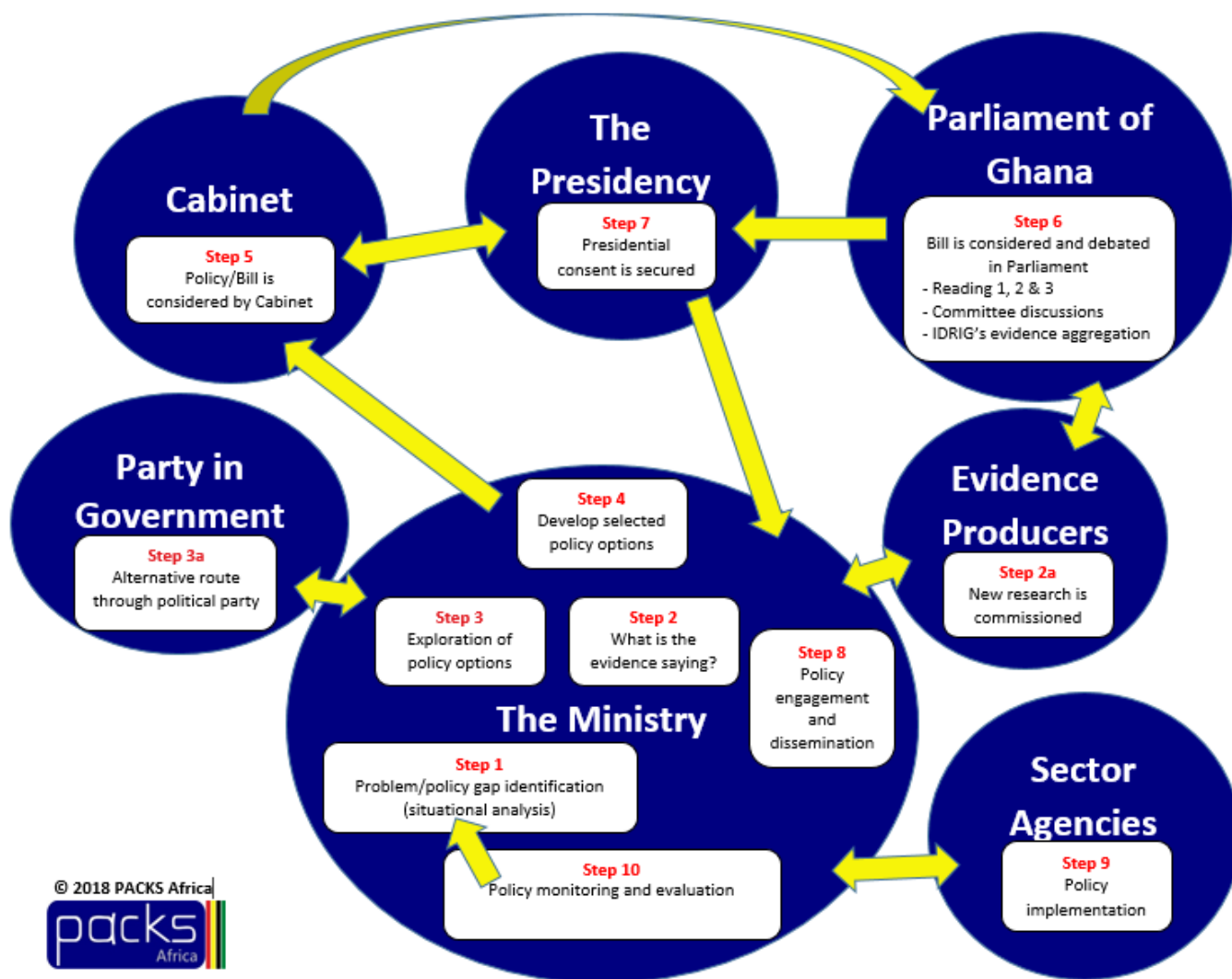

Cabinet
Step 5
Policy/Bill is considered by Cabinet

The Presidency
Step 7
Presidential consent is secured

Parliament of Ghana
Step 6
Bill is considered and debated in Parliament
- Reading 1, 2 & 3
- Committee discussions
- IDRIG's evidence aggregation

Party in Government
Step 3a
Alternative route through political party

Step 4
Develop selected policy options

Step 3
Exploration of policy options

Step 2
What is the evidence saying?

Evidence Producers
Step 2a
New research is commissioned

Step 8
Policy engagement and dissemination

The Ministry
Step 1
Problem/policy gap identification (situational analysis)

Step 10
Policy monitoring and evaluation

Sector Agencies
Step 9
Policy implementation

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Figure: A 10-step flow of the policymaking process in Ghana

The first Step is supposed to be the entry point for all policies, and every policy loops back into this stage. But this is not always the case.

Step 1: Problem/policy gap identification

A problem/policy gap is identified, either solely by the Ministry, sector government agency, or collaboratively with other stakeholders as in a technical working group. Also known as situational analysis, the policy need at this could arise from feedback from Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) exercises, public discourse in the Media, agenda pushed by some academic or research organisation, political parties or their agents, or any of such policy stakeholders. But the Ministry decides to consider it for evaluation towards a policy or not. Theoretically, it is the entry point for all policies, and every policy loops back into this stage (as gaps in M&E reports) if the problem they were designed to solve are not completely addressed.

Step 2: What the evidence says

Request for available evidence is normally (or should be) made to the Research Statistics and Information Department (RSIM) of the Ministry or similar evidence aggregation unit of sector agencies. The Ministry of Health for example, through its RSIM, may reach out to the Research and Development Division (RDD) of the Ghana Health Service to get insights on the issue from its Health Management Information System (HMIS) or research agencies. Within the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA), the Statistics Research and Information Directorate (SRID) may consider evidence on the issue from its vast database including those from agricultural statistics and censuses, sector programmes and projects, and its resource centre. There is great potential for the use of administrative data and grey literature at this point, but poor knowledge management has stifled uptake at this point in most Ministries.

Supplied evidence is juxtaposed with the policy problem to examine opportunities/options for addressing it. If available evidence is insufficient to address the policy issue, two options are explored;

Option 1: a new research is commissioned to fill in evidence gap (*Step 2a*) – this is highly recommended.

Option 2: alternative policy options are presented to address the policy gap, based on the gut feelings/perception of policymakers, sometimes supported by available experiences from other contexts such as other African/developing country contexts.

There is great potential for the use of administrative data and grey literature at the point of Step 2.

Step 3: Exploration of policy options

Policy options/alternatives are presented and discussed by senior officials of the Ministry (including the sector Minister and representation from the ruling political party), putting in consideration other factors that influence public policy such as political gains to the ruling political party, the economic factors, cultural sensitivity, and potential stakeholder buy-in. Currently, political influence seem to dominate the factors considered at this stage, overriding the argument presented by available evidence (if there are any).

Alternatively, there is *Step 3a*, through which political parties in government, bypassing the earlier steps, present policy options to the Ministry, and encourage their implementation. Such options arise as a result of promises made by political parties during electoral campaigns and manifestos. The Free Senior High School (popularly called Free SHS) and the One District One Factory (1D1F) policies of the Ministries of Education (MoE) and the Ministries of Trade and Industry (MoTI), respectively allude to such instances. It would therefore be useful to consider capacity development for an improved use of evidence at political party levels due to these reasons, since the political influence have so far proven to be highly insurmountable.

Step 4: Develop policy options for Cabinet consideration

Staff of the Ministry from the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (PPME) directorates then develop at least three of the policy options into policy documents for the consideration of Cabinet. Depending on the nature of the issue to be addressed and the response to be secured from Cabinet, different document options may be explored for consideration. Some of these may be policy papers or strategy documents, others may be operational manuals and protocols. These documents are normally supported by information or briefing papers, or cabinet memos (which also contains summary reports on impact estimates and resource requirements for each policy option recommended).

Step 5: Policy and/or Bill is considered by Cabinet

The Sector minister makes a presentation of the policy options (from their different perspectives) to the Cabinet, where justification is made for cabinet decision one of them. In instances where the introduction of these policies will require legislative enactments or amendments, Bills are raised to that effect, also by the policy sponsoring Ministry through the Office of the Attorney-General, who heads the Ministry of Justice and Attorney

General (MoJAG). If this is the case, then the process continues through **Step 6** to the final step; otherwise, there is a skip after **Step 5** (from Cabinet) to **Step 8** (back to the Ministry) to continue with stakeholder engagement and dissemination.

An instance of policies which do not need legislation within the Ministry of Health is a change of antibiotics treat-

ment/options due to identified resistance at facility levels, or the more practical example of a recent change in drug for treating malaria cases from chloroquine-based drugs to artemisinin-based combination therapy (ACT). Since these are purely technical decisions informed by sound evidence from available sources, the Ministry proceeds to adopt the policy after deliberation, and presents information papers to Cabinet.

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Step 6: Bill is considered and debated in Parliament

With the consent of Cabinet, the Bill is forwarded to the Parliament of Ghana for consideration and approval, being the entity with Sovereign power and representing the people. The Bill is first presented to the House (first reading) and then referred to a Committee of Parliament for scrutiny and recommendations.

The committee works with other evidence-related units of Parliament (currently clustered into IDRIG – the Inter-departmental Research and Information Group) and is open for submission from any interested party within the larger society. Upon completion of its work, the Committee presents its report and makes recommendations (second reading). Any recommendation(s) that needs the attention of sponsors (the Ministry/the Executive) are presented to them for improvement.

Once these are addressed, the Bill is presented for a third reading, for which consent of the legislature is secures (if not contested). If there is still a strong division among members on the Bill, a voting procedure is issued in plenary and a majority of two-thirds (2/3) of Members of Parliament (MPs) in attendance will secure the passage of the Bill into Law. These are referred to as Acts of Parliament.

Step 7: Presidential accent is secured

Upon passage of the Bill into Law by the Legislature, the only next step before operationalization of the law is the assent of the President. This completes the process for law making, which in this case is a necessity for the introduction of a policy in the country.

Step 8: Policy engagement and dissemination

> **Committees in Parliament work with other evidence-related units of Parliament (clustered into IDRIG – the Inter-departmental Research and Information Group)**

With authorisation secured from Cabinet for the policy, the sponsoring Ministry continues with stakeholder engagements through various mediums, but the focus at this point is to disseminate the policy. In cases where legislation is necessary, the sponsoring Ministry would have to wait for the passage of such legal instruments before it could under-

take its dissemination work.

Dissemination may include the organisation of workshops to brief stakeholders collectively on the policy, and sometimes launch the policy. Sector government agencies, academic and research institutes, think tanks, the Media and other civil society groups

are invited to such events. These partners, identified in the policy document, are made to know their expected responsibilities in implementation. Dissemination may also include issuing directives/guidance to these partners, and such information is cascaded to the decentralized units/offices of the agencies (if it is decentralized) for implementation.

Step 9: Policy implementation

After the dissemination work of the sponsoring Ministry, sector agencies get responsible for implementation portions of the policy related to their mandate. This is cascaded to the decentralized levels of implementing agencies. These decentralised units work with district assemblies for the implementation of policies, but report to their Head offices and not the assemblies. There are ongoing amendments to encourage the sharing of data by district representations of government agencies with the assemblies for planning purposes at that level.

Step 10: Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of the policy is also undertaken by the implementing agencies, under the auspices of the sponsoring Ministry; and they do periodically report progress on implementation and associated challenges to the Ministry as learning avenues from the policy. Feedback from such activities are used to review the policy for two potential actions: revision of the policy or to inform the introduction of another policy. This is done again by the Ministry as part of policy gap identification process in *Step 1*.

Conclusion

So the process for public policy making in Ghana, although seemingly cyclical, is also complex, multifactorial and 'chaotic', involving multiple stakeholders with different interests. Most of these actors potentially (or actually) produce and use evidence as a tool for influence throughout the process. They therefore present opportunities for interventions aimed at improving the uptake of evidence in policymaking processes within the country.

Acknowledgement

About PACKS Africa

PACKS Africa is an indigenous Ghanaian think tank operating in Accra (Ghana) and providing support services in the evidence-to-policy sector.

We have the ultimate aim of improving the uptake of research and other types of evidence in policy, and we do this through structured programmes aimed at improving public sector reform and management, namely;

- Information Systems Research

- Knowledge Management for development, and

- Advocacy for Evidence-Informed Policy Making (EIPM)

As a not-for-profit organisation, we are officially registered in Ghana as a company limited by guarantee with the name *Centre for Knowledge Management and Research.*

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