



# Institutionalizing evidence use in the Parliament of Ghana

Reflections from the first year of Data for Accountability

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## Acknowledgements

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## Introduction

**Comprehensive data for monitoring the progress of SDG implementation is crucial to enable parliaments to perform their oversight and accountability role effectively.**

**[Data for Accountability](#) is an ambitious 2 year project helping the Parliament of Ghana to improve national quality of life through evidence, by using data to oversee progress towards SDGs.**

**Led by African Centre for Parliamentary Affairs, and supported by INASP and the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), the project seeks to build greater collaboration between data producers – in particular, the GSS - and parliament.**

The end of 2020 provided an important midway point for the project partners to take stock, review progress and reflect on the learning generated on institutionalizing evidence use.

During a pandemic such as Covid-19, the need for evidence and data that ensures no part of the country is left behind is more important than ever. While there have been significant challenges for a project working with MPs in a year disrupted both by a general election and by the closure of parliament due to the Covid-19 pandemic, DAP has been able to take advantage of a key window of opportunity, and convergence of entry points in both parliament and the national statistics system to strengthen data use.

As such, the project has rapidly made strides in effecting institutional and cultural changes related to appreciation and use of evidence and data - within both the parliament of Ghana and the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS). Project engagements have helped in shedding more light on the way the institutions operate, build trust as well as underscore the need and importance of collaborating – resulting in a number of unintended outcomes that go well beyond project expectations.

Data for Accountability builds on and responds to learning from prior INASP and ACEPA work with Parliament of Ghana, including a [parliamentary learning exchange](#) between the parliaments of Ghana, Uganda and Zimbabwe, and a FCDO (formerly DFID) funded [review of information support systems in African Parliaments](#) and the factors that influence them in order to improve understanding of factors shaping evidence use in African Parliaments

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## Key achievements

### **Strengthened oversight capacity in two committees**

We have supported the Research Department of the Parliament of Ghana to expand its focus on SDGs related issues by establishing an SDGs and Statistics Desk that provides dedicated support to MPs on monitoring progress towards the SDGs. Alongside this, a mentoring and coaching placement scheme is in development, matching research officers/committee clerks with data experts from the National Statistics System (NSS) for technical backstopping.

Seventeen Research officers of the Research Department and nine clerks of the Committees of Finance and Poverty Reduction of the Parliament of Ghana have been trained by Ghana Statistical Service to understand the available data sources for SDGs monitoring, statistical processes and tools and their use to inform policy. Specifically, training has covered the role of Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) and the wider National Statistics Service in the SDGs implementation in Ghana; the SDGs indicator framework and global indicators that Ghana is able to report on, localized SDG indicators and institutions with data production responsibilities; the SDGs data flow system and the role of international agencies in estimating indicators for which national data is not available; navigation of



the national reporting platform and other complementary data platforms, including the global SDGs data repository; and the linkages between the SDGs indicators, the national medium-term development framework indicators and the national budget.

The trainings, together with the SDGs desk and continuous mentoring has positioned the parliamentary staff to provide important technical advice and evidence around the SDGs to committee members and individual MPs for purposes of oversight.

### **Improved capacity to generate and use constituency level data in representation**

Parliament's access to data has also been improved through the relationship that has been fostered with the GSS. Staff capacities to analyse data and put the data in a format that is user-friendly around the SDGs have been significantly enhanced.

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The project is supporting the implementation of constituency profiles to present MPs a holistic picture of what is happening at the local level in terms of commitments made by government around the SDGs and development in general. Access to this data will enable MPs and committees to advocate better for their constituents and oversee SDGs implementation. Data collection for building the profiles of five pilot constituencies is underway.

The data collection process currently ongoing is also unearthing learning around the statistics system at the district level, providing a unique opportunity for GSS to amplify challenges with data at the local level and make a case for investments to improve capacity to generate and store data at the local level.

### **Improved collaboration between data producers and parliament**

Significant progress has been made towards improving collaboration between parliament and GSS (as well as other actors within the NSS). High level meetings between the Government Statistician, the Executive Director of ACEPA and the Majority and Minority leaders were successful in providing strategic meaning to the much needed collaboration that is being sought between data producers and parliament. There have since been number of engagements between various actors within the two institutions; among them, a meeting between the Government Statistician/his senior staff and staff of the parliament's research department led their Director.

## **Evidence of emerging lasting impact**

Prior to the Data for Accountability project, collaboration between GSS and Parliament had been constrained by limited mutual understanding of how parliament operates and vice versa. Mechanisms to foster and deepen collaboration between the two institutions under the project, have been approved and hugely welcomed by Parliament, and we are seeing increased trust between parliament and GSS.

### **Systemic changes in how policy decisions are made**

DAP aimed to foster greater levels of engagement and appreciation on the part of parliamentarians about the value of data, the role of GSS and the existing gaps. But the extent of cultural and institutional change within Parliament has gone beyond project expectations. The institutional acceptance of the need for policy debates to be anchored on reliable evidence and data has resulted in an unexpected – but welcome - policy shift towards more investments to position the research department to adequately support MPs. Capitalizing on the development of the SDG and statistics desk, Parliament has initiated steps to set up a Data Centre within the research department to respond to all the data needs of parliament.

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The high level institutional acceptance and interest is again manifest in an invitation for ACEPA Executive Director and the Government Statistician to brief the Parliamentary Service Board at its next meeting.

### **Formal and informal mechanisms for collaboration emerging between parliament and GSS**

GSS is taking some important steps to solidify its relationship with parliament. There are plans to include parliament on the Statistics Advisory Board, stemming from an acknowledgement that parliament is a key ally and actor when it comes to data producers and users in Ghana. In addition, GSS now includes parliament in the list of state institutions that receive GSS press releases, and is also providing micro data to parliamentary research officers (a form of data that is not available to the public). There are also processes underway to formalize the collaboration between the two institutions with an MoU that will clearly define and institutionalize their relationship.

## **Navigating challenges**

### **Engaging with MPs during an election year**

The political economy analysis (PEA) undertaken at the beginning of the project had pointed us towards the difficulties of engaging MPs close to election periods, and that the chances of any engagement becoming a political platform would increase. As a result, we chose to invest in research and committee staff to serve as institutional memory and provide support to the project in building new relationships and engaging the two committees after the elections.

### **Difference in the audience and potential use of data**

MPs originally selected for the pilot project came from the 2 major parties represented in parliament, with the intention that data from the constituency profiles would enhance their advocacy skills in parliament, enabling them to effectively represent their constituents by being conversant with the pressing issues and work needed to bring change in the lives of their people.

However due to delays, the profiles will now be provided to new MPs, thus, a different political climate and potential use of the profiles. This is not entirely out of place, since as a pilot product, the profiles are designed to benefit all MPs beyond the 5, whose constituencies have been selected.

### **Effects of force majeure**

COVID-19 was not expected. Extensive groundwork was done through personal and formal channels to make connections which will lead to full engagement with MPs as soon as the inception phase was completed. However, the global pandemic and its resultant restrictions and protocols stalled the momentum of the project. The combination of COVID-19 and then the elections meant the implementation of many activities, particularly those involving MPs, was not possible.

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The effects of the pandemic were also reflected in the availability of GSS project staff. The project had already anticipated that GSS availability will be a challenge based on the fact that they are a state agency with a huge mandate. What was not anticipated was the extra demand on their time as a result of a pandemic.

For instance, the GSS has had to conduct a number of surveys on the impact of the pandemic and statisticians across the country were deployed for these surveys. While this delayed the onset of data collection for the constituency profiles, the resulting visibility of the value of data and evidence in supporting the pandemic response has provided an important window of opportunity for the GSS to establish trust and value.

State of Statistical data at the local level: Our efforts to collect constituency level data has exposed inherent data challenges at the district and constituency levels in Ghana. One of our assumptions was that data to monitor the SDGs is available. What we are learning in the field does not speak to a lack of data but rather the processing and storage of statistical data at the local level. These gaps may not have received any attention from high level policy makers like this before. The project therefore has provided an opportunity for the GSS to strengthen its argument for making local level statistics more efficient, leveraging the mandate conferred by the Statistics Law 2019.

## What have we learnt?

### **Timing is crucial**

The timing of this project to meet a specific window of opportunity has been a critical factor in the progress to date. The project correctly assessed and capitalized on the window of opportunity presented by the Statistics Law 2019, which gives GSS quality assurance mandate over all statistics produced in the country. This, coupled with the interest/buy-in from both parliament and GSS means that parliament can be assured of receiving reliable and quality data support from the GSS.

### **Relationships matter – gaining buy-in and building trust**

Despite the fact that DAP is the first formal collaboration between Parliament and GSS, we have been able to leverage both ACEPA's longstanding relationship with Parliament, and strong high level buy in from GSS, to lay new groundwork for long term institutional collaboration beyond the confines of the project timescale.

The project has prioritized building strong relationships within Parliament. Extensive preparatory work was done at inception to get high level buy-in - engaging key actors like the Chair of the Finance Committee, as well as the Majority and Minority leaders.

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Meetings with the Clerk have raised awareness of issues; a timely occurrence that helped direct human resources (research officers) which Parliament had committed to hiring (pre-program) into support for the new Data Centre. A recent meeting between the Speaker, the Government Statistician and Executive Director of ACEPA is indicative of buy-in and engagement with DAP from the highest levels within Parliament. . In addition ACEPA’s Executive Director was recently invited to make a presentation to the entire Parliament on Evidence use in legislative work during the orientation of the new Parliament. The first invitation of this kind.

The project has benefited from the active involvement and support of the Government Statistician (e.g. Officially opened one parliamentary staff training and training for regional statisticians, met with Directors and research officers from parliament, met with DAP project team during inception phase etc.). These relationships within both core institutions have laid important groundwork to achieve buy in, share learning and seize windows of opportunity as they arise.

The project is faced with the likelihood of losing MP “champions” due to the electoral cycle. If need-be, we are prepared to re-strategize and identify new “champions” that we could work with for the next four years – hopefully, a long enough time to shift cultures and attitudes.

### **Recognizing the differing entry points for change within parliament**

Many of the most important unforeseen successes of the project so far, have come from the institutional layer of parliament—the administrative arm headed by the Clerk and overseen by the Parliamentary Service Board.

The projects’ Theory of Change (ToC) rests heavily on MPs (the political layer of parliament) as change actors within parliament. We knew it would be difficult to engage MPs close to election periods, and that the chances of any engagement becoming a political platform would increase.

Therefore, working at the administrative level was an important way to mitigate the potential turbulence and loss of MPs and foster a sustainable base for change. This expectation has been borne out in practice in 2020- the project made strong gains in securing institutional buy-in which were not fully captured in our original ToC or MEL plan, but which we have updated our structures to better capture in future.

### **A new window of opportunity**

The new parliament presents an opportunity to work with first-time MPs as well as returnee MPs who will be thirsty for knowledge and eager to make an impact during their new term. That notwithstanding, we are mindful of the fact that new MPs may be having a lot to learn about their new role internally and perhaps find it difficult to engage with the project.

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Another challenge for the project is how to get MPs to give much consideration to evidence and data in the face competing demands, including making decisions based solely on partisan considerations. The macro environment provides so many incentives for MPs to lean in to patronage especially in dealing with the Executive. But with Parliament itself moving towards setting up a Data Centre, we are hopeful data and evidence will take centre stage in the workings of parliament.

**Challenges in both statistics and parliamentary systems come to the fore at constituency level.**

Work at constituency level has illustrated many of the issues/gaps the DAP team knew existed both within statistics systems and within parliament systems. At constituency level there is a direct tension between how MPs might see evidence, (eg citizen knowledge/consultations) vs how a statistician views it (eg via admin data units) and gaps and inconsistencies in both. Working at the intersection of these systems provides the DAP project with an opportunity to address these gaps and challenges in a holistic way.

**Data for Accountability is situated in an emerging, but important, intersection between the evidence informed policy, parliamentary strengthening and data sectors. In the final months of the project, we look forward to generating further crucial learning on how using data to support the legislation, representation and oversight functions of parliaments could further progress towards the SDGs.**



## About Data for Accountability

**Data for Accountability (DAP)** helps Parliament to improve quality of life in Ghana through evidence. The project is helping Parliament to oversee the implementation of the SDGs in Ghana, by providing the evidence needed to monitor progress and advocate better for their constituencies

Data for Accountability is the first focused effort to introduce data for SDG monitoring to any sub-committees in Parliament, and has strong Parliamentary support, with both minority & majority buy in. The first partnership between GSS and ACEPA, this project is situated in an emerging, but important, intersection between the evidence informed policy, parliamentary strengthening and data sectors, and will generate crucial learning on how using data to support the legislation, representation and oversight functions of parliaments could further progress towards the SDGs.

In addition to supporting Parliament’s oversight of SDG progress, the project aims to strengthen:

- MP’s appreciation of the value & contribution of data to parliamentary decision making
- Credibility and trust in data from the Ghana Statistical Service and other data producers,
- The Capacity of GSS statisticians and other data producers to engage with Parliament and provide data to inform policy and decision making
- The capacity of parliamentary research officers to provide MPs with data and evidence that is most relevant to their work

## The Data for Accountability Partners



The African Centre for Parliamentary Affairs (ACEPA) is dedicated to building the capacity of African Parliaments and elected representative bodies at all levels of governance. ACEPA is the first African institution dedicated to supporting national and sub-national Legislatures across the continent and was created to respond to the urgent need for an

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indigenous African institution that truly understands the needs and demands of African Legislatures.

[acepa-africa.org](http://acepa-africa.org)



The **Ghana Statistical Service (GSS)** is the National Statistical Office of Ghana, with a mission to lead the efficient production and management of quality official statistics based on international standards, using competent staff for evidence-based decision-making, in support of national development.

[statsghana.gov.gh](http://statsghana.gov.gh)



**INASP** is an international development organisation with a global network of partners in Africa, Latin America and Asia. With a vision of research and knowledge at the heart of development, INASP works to support individuals and institutions to produce, share and use research and knowledge, which can transform lives. INASP has worked with partners

across 28 countries, supporting all aspects of research and knowledge systems, from facilitating the provision of information to researchers to helping parliamentarians and civil servants to use research and evidence in policy making.

[inasp.info](http://inasp.info)

### Our funder



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