

AFRICAN PARLIAMENTS

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Systems of Evidence in Practice



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AAAS	The American Association for the Advancement of Science
AAPR	Africa Association of Parliamentary Researchers
ACEP	African Centre for Energy Policy
ACEPA	African Centre for Parliamentary Affairs
ACET	African Centre of Economic Transformation
ACFIM	Alliance for Campaign Finance Monitoring
AEN	African Evidence Network
AfCoP	African Community of Practice
AfEA	African Evaluation Association
AFIDEP	Africa Institute for Development Policy
AfrEA	African Evaluation Association
AG	Auditor-General
AGDEN	Africa Gender and Development Evaluators Network
ANC	African National Congress
APNODE	African Parliamentarians' Network on Development Evaluation
APR	Annual Progress Report
ATC	Announcements, Tablings and Committee
ATRs	Action Taken Reports
B-CURE	Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence
CA	Constitutional Assembly
CCEDU	Citizens' Coalition for Electoral Democracy in Uganda
CDD GHANA	Ghana Center of Democratic Development
CGAs	Committee on Government Assurances
CGW	Chief Government Whip
CIMES	County Monitoring and Evaluation System
CoB	Controller of Budget
CODESA	Convention for a Democratic South Africa
COPE	Congress of the People
COSATU	Congress of the South African Trade Unions
CPA	Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
CPST	Centre of Parliamentary Studies and Training
CSIR	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSRO	Committee on Standing Rules and Orders
DAP	Data for Accountability Project
DFID	Department for International Development
DGF	Democratic Governance Facility
DIRS	Directorate of Information and Research Services

DLPS	Department of Legislative and Procedural Services
DP	Democratic Party
DRS	Department of Research Services
EA	Executive Authority
EAC	East African Community
EACJ	East African Court of Justice
EALA	East African Legislative Assembly
EAPI	East African Parliamentary Institute
EC	Electoral Commission
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
ESK	Evaluation Society of Kenya
FDC	Forum for Democratic Change
FES	Friedrich Ebert Foundation
FMPPLA	Financial Management of Parliament and Provincial Legislatures Act
FPTP	First-Past-the-Post
GII	Ghana Integrity Initiative
GIJ	Ghana Institute of Journalism
GINKS	Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing
G-IPEN	Ghana Network of Independent Professional Evaluators
GMEF	Ghana Monitoring and Evaluation Forum
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
HoDs	Heads of Departments
HRAC	Human Rights Advocacy Council
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICED	International Centre for Evaluation and Development
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IDRIG	Inter-Departmental Research and Information Group
IFLA	International Federation of Library Associations
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
INASP	International Network for the Advancement of Science to Policy
INESOR	Institute of Economic and Social Research
INGSA	International Network for Government Science Advice
IPAC	Inter-Party Advisory Committee
IPS	Institute of Parliamentary Studies
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
ISSER	Institute for Statistical, Social and Economic Research

JEEMA	Justice Forum
KEMRI	Kenya Medical Research Institute
KEWOPA	Kenya Women Parliamentarians Association
KEWOSA	Kenya Women Senators Association
KIPPRA	Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis
KLISC	Kenya Library and Information Consortium
KSG	Kenya School of Government
LEGCO	Legislative Council
LGB	Leader of Government Business
LoP	Leader of Opposition
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDAs	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MDGs	Millenium Development Goals
MED	Monitoring and Evaluation Department
MMD	Movement for Multiparty Democracy
MMS	Management Monitoring System
MNDP	Ministry of National Development Planning
MoGCSP	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPEP	Malawi Parliament Enhancement Project
MPs	Members of Parliament
MPS	Ministerial Policy Statements
MPSI	Malawi Parliamentary Support Initiative
MPWC	Multi-Party Women's Caucus
MTBPS	Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement
NA	National Assembly
NACOSTI	National Commission for Science and Technology Innovation
NAMs	National Assembly Members
NBFP	National Budget Framework Papers
NCOP	National Council of Provinces
NDC	New Democratic Congress
NDPC	National Development Planning Commission
NEAPACOH	Network of African Parliamentary Committees on Health
NIMES	National Monitoring and Evaluation System
NPP	New Patriotic Party
NRMO	National Resistance Movement Organisation
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme

NSS	National Service Scheme
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OGP	Open Government Partnership
PAC	Public Accounts Committee
PBO	Parliamentary Budget Office
PC-EIDM	Parliamentary Caucus on Evidence Informed Oversight and Decision-Making
PEA	Political Economy Analysis
PIC	Public Investigation Committee
PUIC	Parliamentary Union of Islamic Countries
PMG	Parliamentary Monitoring Group
PMU	Policy Management Unity
PoG	Parliament of Ghana
PoZ	Parliament of Zambia
PP	Public Protector
PPM	Public Participation Model
PRS	Parliamentary Research Services
PSC	Parliament Service Commission
PWD	Person with Disability
RPLP	Regional Peer Learning Programme
SACP	South African Communist Party
SALGA	South African Local Government Association
SAPST	Southern African Parliamentary Support Trust
SCoPA	Standing Committee on Public Accounts
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIU	Special Investigating Unit
SO	Standing Orders
SOSC	Standing Orders Select Committee
Stats SA	Statistics South Africa
TMT	Top Management Team
TORs	Terms of References
TPTTP	Taking Parliament to the People
TWGs	Technical Working Groups
UDM	United Democratic Movement
UHC	Universal Health Coverage
UK-POST	United Kingdom Parliamentary Office on Science and Technology
UNASA	Uganda National Academy of Sciences
UN-DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UPC	Uganda People's Congress
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Force
UWOPA	Uganda Women Parliamentary Association
VOPEs	Voluntary Organisations of Professional Evaluators
WFD	Westminster Foundation for Democracy
ZaMEA	Zambia Monitoring and Evaluation Association
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front
ZEC	Zimbabwe Electoral Commission
ZeipNET	Zimbabwe Evidence Informed Policy Network
ZEPARU	Zimbabwe Economic Policy and Analysis Research Unit
ZIPAR	Zambia Institute for Policy Analysis and Research
ZPC	Zimbabwe Power Company
ZSA	Zambia Statistics Agency

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**PARLIAMENTS AND THE NATIONAL
STATISTICS SYSTEM IN GHANA:
A CRITICAL RELATIONSHIP FOR
EVIDENCE USE**



Issifu Lampo and Emily Hayter

Introduction

Agenda 2030 recognises that ensuring accountability during SDG implementation is of paramount importance to guarantee its effectiveness in delivering results. Parliaments are one of the most powerful national domestic accountability mechanisms and their critical role in ensuring the implementation of the SDGs at country level is recognised by the UN, Inter Parliamentary Union and others (IPU, 2016; UNDP, 2017; UN-DESA, 2019). The IPU and UNDP call for close involvement of national parliaments during all stages of the SDGs, recommending that parliaments conduct a thorough review and formal debate before endorsing the national SDG plan; ensure the necessary legislation to implement the SDGs; use the budget process to ensure sufficient resources are allocated to the goals and monitor government expenditure towards attainment of the goals; and monitor results in response to evidence and public feedback (IPU & UNDP, 2016). In this chapter we focus on the Parliament of Ghana showing how its role in the SDGs is intertwined with its engagement with key aspects of the national evidence system, as well as reflective of deeper structural aspects of Ghana's political economy – in particular the relationship between the executive and legislative branches of government.

As shown in Chapter 2, frameworks for evidence use, particularly those which focus on parliaments, emphasise the importance of formal and informal relationships across the evidence system. Critical to this are parliament's relationships with the executive (as highlighted by Rabie and Ajam in chapter 2 of Volume one), as well as with a range of external actors. We use the approach to systems thinking offered by our colleagues in Chapter 2.1: "Systems thinking should assume a holistic approach; recognise the interconnectedness of the various components of the system; identify and understand feedback loops and understand how the system structure influences system behaviour" (Goldman et al., p. 2). We focus on one specific node in the Ghanaian evidence system – the three-way intersection point between parliament, the national SDGs structure and the Ghana Statistical Service. Strengthening relationships across the national evidence system is a recognised priority at national level in Ghana and is shared by each of these actors. The structure of the SDGs provides opportunities and even imperatives for parliamentary engagement; parliament itself seeks to engage more with external evidence producers as well as with SDG structures; and the GSS aims to leverage the renewed focus on statistics provided by the SDGs to strengthen its engagement with data users.

We argue that these entry points within each of these three key actors in the system combine to create a window of opportunity to strengthen democratic accountability in Ghana.

In order to exercise robust oversight over government and to represent citizens effectively, parliaments need to make use of high quality, independent statistics and other forms of evidence. Parliamentary researchers, librarians, committee clerks and other parliamentary staff who are responsible for providing evidence to decision makers need to be able to easily access, interpret and use data to answer MPs' questions and prepare reports and analysis to inform effective oversight. MPs need to be able to oversee progress on development outcomes such as health, education and infrastructure in their constituencies to effectively represent constituents' needs. To hold the government to account on its progress towards the SDGs, parliaments therefore require strong and multifaceted internal data analysis and use capacity. They also need strong relationships with other actors across the national statistics system.

However, the SDGs pose challenges for the statistics systems in many of the countries which have committed to the 17 goals but are not equipped to monitor progress using the corresponding 246 indicators. Incomplete statistical coverage of the indicators is a major challenge. For example, it has been noted that data on more than half of the global indicators is not collected by most countries nor have measurement methods been established to track progress (UN-DESA, 2019, p. 6), including in Ghana where just over half of the indicators are covered by the national statistical system (NDPC, 2020). While enormous global effort has been invested in national statistical systems to help improve the tracking of SDGs, additional resources are still required. However, the production of high-quality data is not in itself sufficient for monitoring progress towards the SDGs, but this must be accompanied by its systematic use to track government implementation and expenditure. This need is recognised under Goal 17 of the SDG structure which focuses on strengthening capacity of statistics systems to provide quality and timely statistics by ensuring that there is an enabling legislative environment and by adequately resourcing statistics bodies. Global advice from UNDP (2017), IPU (2016) and others emphasise the important role of parliaments in supporting the independence and resourcing of statistics systems, fostering collaboration for oversight of implementation and using their representation function to 'localise' the SDGs.

In this chapter, we will illustrate the unique opportunities in Ghana to strengthen the interface between parliament and the national statistics system in support of the SDGs. We draw on preliminary analyses carried out for the Data for Accountability project,¹ combined with a desk review of key literature. We are also informed by the experience of ACEPA in working with the Parliament of Ghana for nearly 20 years, as well as by inputs from staff of both the Ghana Statistical Service and Parliament of Ghana who have contributed to this paper. After a brief background situating our contribution within the growing literature on evidence-informed policy and parliaments, we begin our analysis by outlining the internal components of parliament of Ghana's evidence system highlighting the issues affecting statistics use. We then move outside parliament to consider its relationship with the executive. This fundamentally affects its engagement in the second and third aspects our three-way interface – the structures of the SDGs and the statistics system. We discuss key issues within the national SDG response which we believe offer entry points to strengthen the parliament–statistics interface. Finally, we provide an overview of the statistics system, outlining how recent reforms offer new opportunities to strengthen its relationships with users, including parliament. This completes our picture of the windows of opportunity within each of our three focus areas of the Ghanaian evidence system which the DAP project aims to work on.

A growing global discussion: Evidence use in parliaments

While literature and practice on both parliamentary strengthening and evidence-informed policymaking are growing, the intersection between the two remains limited and there is little focus on the role of statistics at this interface. Information and evidence systems within parliaments are often overlooked within parliamentary strengthening programmes in the international development arena, although they are critical elements of parliament's ability to perform its three core functions (Cunninghame, 2009; Menocal & O'Neil, 2012; IPU & IFLA, 2013). At the same time, the evidence-informed policy sector

¹ The DAP project is a two-year initiative led by the African Centre for Parliamentary Affairs, in partnership with the Ghana Statistical Service and INASP. Funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the project aims to strengthen the use of statistics in parliamentary oversight and representation in Ghana. At the time of writing, the project is in its inception stages and the emergence of the Covid-19 crisis means the project anticipates some changes or delays to activities. The authors have therefore drawn on the first two pieces of internal analysis emerging from the project (a political economy analysis and a needs assessment), in combination with other literature, to produce this paper illustrating some of the issues the project will aim to address. Emerging learning from DAP implementation will be shared via ACEPA and INASP communication channels during the course of implementation.

has until recently focused to a much greater extent on evidence use within policy formulation and implementation in the executive side of government, rather than on the role of legislatures (Langer et al., 2016; Draman et al., 2017; and others, e.g. Head). Previous authors have highlighted the importance of parliament's relationships with actors in the national evidence ecosystem (Ndiaye, 2009; Datta & Jones, 2011; Draman et al., 2016; Weyrauch et al., 2016) and UNDP emphasises the importance of parliaments strengthening linkages with national statistical offices in support of the SDGs (UNDP, 2017). However, we are not aware of any studies which have focused specifically on the relationship between parliament and the statistics service in an African country.²

In recent years there has been growing interest globally in the use of evidence in parliaments. In 2015 the Inter Parliamentary Union and IFLA produced a new guide to the role of research in parliament offering advice for establishing a parliamentary research service (IFLA & IPU, 2017). The guide highlighted the value of external linkages between parliament and the national research system which is seen as a way of strengthening evidence use in parliaments where the breadth of issues requiring evidence is too extensive to be met by in-house capacity alone. From 2014-2017 the UK parliament conducted a research project to explore the use of evidence at Westminster (Kenny et al., 2017) and in 2018 the inaugural UK Parliament Evidence Week was held; it was then repeated in 2019 (Sense About Science, 2018; 2019).

In 2018 the American Academy of Sciences partnered with a new legislative science advice network under the auspices of the International Council for Science to run a global collaborative exercise to identify the most important research questions on legislative science advice (Akerlof et al., 2019). The priority areas for further study identified through the consultative process included uptake of evidence in parliamentary decision-making; more information on the needs and behaviours of producers and users of evidence in parliaments and the brokering individuals and organisations that link them; and additional insight into the institutions and systems that shape these parliamentary evidence relationships. This is emblematic of a burgeoning interest in the role of evidence and research in parliaments.

² See for example the work done by CLEAR-AA and APNODE on parliaments and use of evaluations; by IFLA's network of parliamentary research departments and libraries on the role of research, including in collaboration with the IPU; and by INGSA and the AAAS on the role of science advice. The UK Parliament's report on the use of evidence (Kenny et al., 2017) emphasises the importance attributed by both MPs and staff to statistics but is not solely focused on statistics.

Several parliaments on the African continent have been focusing increasingly on evidence use issues in recent years. In 2015, Kenya Parliament formed its innovative Caucus on Evidence Informed Decision-Making, a collaborative exercise between staff and MPs to champion evidence use within the institution which successfully navigated the sustainability challenge presented by the 2017 election and continues to thrive in the 12th Parliament (see Marale's chapter; IPU, 2020). Uganda's first parliamentary Research Week was held in 2016, and parliament has since expanded its evidence partnerships to include commissioning rapid response services from Makerere University and obtaining specialist academic support from the National Academy of Sciences (refer to other relevant chapters for more detail). A new group of African parliamentary researchers was hosted by Parliament of Kenya in 2019 to explore the role of research in the strengthening of parliaments on the continent. However, much of the work so far on internal parliamentary procedures and capacities has focused either on a broad definition of evidence, or on specific types of evidence such as research or evaluations – with minimal focus on official statistics. While there has been extensive exploration of the importance of parliament's relationships with evidence producers, no studies that we are aware of have focused specifically on the relationship between parliament and the statistics service in Africa.

Evidence structures and data use capacity in Parliament of Ghana

In Ghana, parliament is already exploring how to strengthen its relationships with the national research system, which is an African leader in producing SDG-relevant research (Nakamura et al., 2019, p. 9). Representatives from PoG observed Parliament of Uganda's 2016 Research Week through a peer-learning scheme facilitated by the VakaYiko programme, later adapting and implementing a similar event in Ghana. Parliament of Ghana's research department has also been actively engaged in contributing to the analysis and dialogue around evidence use in parliamentary contexts, presenting on its evidence use efforts at the 2018 conference of the Africa Evidence Network, and participating in the Africa Evidence Network's virtual 2019 Evidence Week through a series of events in Accra in collaboration with PACKS-Africa. These broader engagements are complemented by issue- or sector-specific gatherings, such as the annual budget workshop which enables input from think-tanks and other actors (Zacharia, 2018).

However, parliament has not taken a specific data focus in any of these engagements and has never had an institutional partnership with GSS. DAP will be building on these efforts to strengthen relationships and collaborations with stakeholder engagement including a Data Fair and other activities aimed at fostering dialogue between PoG, GSS and other data producers and users in Ghana. As shown in the records of parliamentary debates and discussed further below, some members of parliament do not trust GSS data, especially politically sensitive data such as inflation and unemployment statistics (e.g. Parliament of Ghana, 2019, p. 3618). Some MPs have viewed GSS as an appendage of government and this undermines confidence in the data emanating from GSS. The corollary has been the case with staff of GSS; because MPs viewed them with suspicion as far their neutrality in data production was concerned, the GSS staff, in turn, were disinclined to collaborate with MPs/parliament lest they were tagged with a political label that could erode their credibility. The DAP project will be providing sensitisation sessions for GSS and parliament to explain to each organisation how the other works, including the context and challenges faced by each.

PoG's basic internal evidence structures are similar to those of other parliaments in Africa and around the world. It has a research department and a library, as well as other staff units which support MPs and committees with gathering, synthesising and appraising evidence (Draman et al., 2016b; Global Partners Governance, 2017). Uniquely among its regional neighbours, PoG has also established an internal coordinating body, the Inter Departmental Research and Information Group (IDRIG), which brings together the different staff units responsible for gathering evidence within the institution and providing evidence to decision makers.

PoG's internal evidence system is affected by various challenges. Internal institutional inefficiency is manifested in the bureaucratic difficulties in accessing human and financial resources for research and evidence, as well as a lack of clarity surrounding parliament's institutional priorities (exemplified by the Strategic Plan process which was ongoing for a number of years and was eventually launched in May 2020).

The need to strengthen data and statistics capacity among parliamentary staff in Ghana has consistently been identified in recent years through projects the authors have been involved in or had contact with.³ Staff capacity is an important target point for evidence-use interventions in general (Langer et al., 2016), but particularly so in parliaments because of the high turnover of MPs which leads many development programmes to see staff capacitation initiatives as entry points for more sustainable programmes (Draman et al., 2016a). While all Ghana's parliamentary researchers receive mandatory research methods training through ISSER, researchers have identified specific data areas where there is a need for further support. These include accessing and gathering data from a variety of sources, and understanding 'big data', data analysis and handling. DAP is also in discussion with parliament and GSS to institute a placement scheme to enable virtual and face-to face mentorship support for individual research and committee staff by data specialists drawn from the GSS and other research institutions.⁴

The DAP needs assessment was carried out by the parliamentary research department to understand specific capacity gaps related to the SDGs and statistics as reported by the department as well as by MPs with whom it worked (Zackaria, 2019). In playing their legislative, oversight and representative roles vis-à-vis the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, MPs need to understand and raise awareness on the SDG framework among constituents, assess readiness, and provide oversight to enhance peoples' participation (Together, 2016). The research department is the main institutional mechanism which provides evidence to MPs to accomplish this. With regard to the SDGs, the needs assessment found that the Parliament of Ghana's research staff feel that they lack the capacity to track the implementation of SDGs and to support individual MPs and committees in these oversight roles. Needs were identified for strengthened capacity in a number of areas to be able to use SDG data to support oversight activities of the House. These include areas broadly related

³ This need was identified via the Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence (B-CURE) the VakaYiko programme funded by DfID from 2013-2017, which the authors were involved in, as well as several other subsequent projects and initiatives which we are aware of conducted by different partners.

⁴ The scheme is expected to be driven largely by the demand and needs of the Research Department and Committees. Mentorship support will be tailor-made to suit the kind of needs emanating from the target group within parliament relative to data usage. To foster close collaboration between parliament and the GSS, visits to parliament and GSS by the various actors will be encouraged and facilitated. This will provide opportunity for GSS officers to familiarise themselves with parliament and build relationships. The corollary is the case with parliament.

to the SDGs such as an understanding of their links with Agenda 2063; an understanding of the indicators; information on data-specific topics such as the use of statistics to forecast achievement of SDG goals; the analysis and interpretation of SDG data; and effective communication of the information to MPs. DAP has used these findings to inform the design of a series of training workshops for parliamentary staff which will be conducted by statisticians from GSS. It is also working with parliament to support the establishment of a dedicated SDG Desk within the research department which will designate specific research officers to lead on SDG-related issues within the department.⁵

Staff have also reported that data is not presented in the required format for MPs' use, MPs have inadequate time to use data to inform their decisions, and that most MPs are not interested in using data to inform decisions. When consulted directly, however, MPs listed a number of types of data that they believe could help them in their representation role to understand needs in their constituencies including data illustrating age demographics (youth and elderly were populations of particular interest); employment data; gender; farmers' data; data on access to water and sanitation facilities; population dynamics; and development progress information (Zacharia, 2019).⁶

DAP will incorporate these findings in the design of a series of training workshops to be conducted with MPs by GSS staff.

In addition to the individual capacity of staff and MPs, embedded institutional use of evidence requires organisational processes and systems. One of the most critical processes within parliament through which data can support representation and oversight is by means of the constituency profiles process. Effective representation of citizens requires that MPs are knowledgeable about

⁵ While this is in the early stages of writing, the scope of work is expected to include: acting as a focal point/coordinator on all SDG-related matters within the Research Department including producing briefs on the SDGs and responding to requests for MPs as well as committees and research staff; serving as a liaison between parliament and the national SDGs Implementing Coordinating Committee; acting as liaison between the research department/parliament and the GSS and allied data producing institutions; link with the Parliamentary Training Institute (PTI) and GSS to coordinate training on SDGs for members of parliament on a rolling basis; gather quarterly data on the performance of specific SDGs indicators.

⁶ DAP is working with two committees whose members provided responses to the needs assessment; **Finance Committee (Permanent Parliamentary Committee)** was selected because it is the parliamentary committee mandated to approve the budget for SDGs related programmes and it also has some of the able and influential MPs in Parliament. Potential champions for SDGs could be identified in this committee. **Poverty Reduction Committee (Ad-Hoc Parliamentary Committee)**. This committee is not as powerful in terms of mandate compared to the Finance Committee, however, the committee has the sole mandate to oversight poverty related interventions including most, if not all the SDGs goals.)

their constituencies and this requires information on the characteristics and the needs of the groups of people they represent. As noted by UNDP, the focus on 'localisation' in the SDGs means that MPs need constituency-related data and information to ensure that the aspirations of citizens find expression in policy, especially as it relates to the SDGs. However, in many African parliaments, including Ghana, constituency-level data on key indicators such as health, education, and unemployment is not available to MPs. This has important implications for evidence-informed representation and for MPs' constituency-level engagements. This has already been identified as a key issue in Ghana: "Effective implementation of the SDGs requires adequate capacity at local authority level to engage with local communities and other stakeholders. This implies that the capacity of District Assembly members and Members of Parliament must be enhanced for effective engagement with their constituents" (Government of Ghana, 2019, p. 116). The DAP project will be trialling the development of the first constituency data profiles in Ghana. A second relevant aspect of parliament's capacity to respond to the SDGs concerns the use of the committee system to exercise oversight over government in delivery of the SDGs.

The parliamentary leadership, including the Speaker of Parliament, has expressed commitment and readiness to ensure that parliament plays a pivotal role in the implementation of SDGs by establishing a dedicated Ad hoc Committee with responsibility to monitor Ghana's progress on the implementation of the SDGs. According to the Speaker of Parliament, the committee will, among its other duties, have the additional responsibility of considering progress reports from implementing Ministries, Departments and Agencies. The committee will also advise parliament on budgetary allocations and other appropriate interventions to ensure that government is on track in the implementation of the SDGs. However, this is yet to be realised. Data for Accountability Project (DAP) will leverage this unique opportunity by engaging parliamentary leadership and other key actors, such as chairpersons of the Finance and Poverty Reduction Committees of parliament, in advocating for the establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee and for the requisite budget allocation to support its work.

As this section has shown, DAP aims to respond to a number of opportunities within parliament to strengthen the use of data to support oversight and representation with regard to the SDGs. Importantly, these comprise both

'hard' technical issues as well as 'softer' issues relating to organisational culture, trust and relationships. Both staff and MPs require greater individual skills and knowledge of how to find, appraise and communicate statistics to understand Ghana's progress towards the SDGs. Parliament's internal structures and systems have an important role to play and there is an opportunity to test a standard model for production of constituency profiles in order to strengthen MPs' ability to understand SDG progress at the local level and to represent their constituents effectively. Underpinning and fundamentally affecting the capacity needs in parliament, however, is the broader relationship between parliament and the national statistical system, as well as the SDG structures. In subsequent sections, we show how entry points within each of these parts of the system combine to form a window of opportunity to strengthen statistics use by parliament to monitor the SDGs.

Parliament and the executive in Ghana

In this section we move beyond parliament to consider parliament's relationship with the executive branch of government, which is a fundamental aspect of its role in the national evidence system. An analysis of the foundational and institutional factors affecting parliament's relationship with the executive in Ghana offers some insights which could help to explain why evidence use is both critical and challenging for Parliament of Ghana, and why this has not yet been fully engaged in the SDG process.⁷

Ghana has had a continuously functioning democracy since the restoration of a democratic Constitution in 1992 (the first democratic government, the Fourth Republic, being installed in January 1993) (Ninsin, 2006). The president is the Head of State and Commander in Chief and is elected for a term of a maximum of two four-year terms. The constitutional provision which allows the president to appoint a majority of his ministers from parliament presents a structural challenge to parliament in the performance of its main functions of executive oversight, legislation, and constituent representation.

Since 1992 there has been a peaceful transfer of power from incumbent regimes to election winning opposition parties over the course of four election cycles. Power has alternated between the two dominant political parties, the New

⁷ This section is based on a more extensive political economy analysis produced for the DAP project (Lampo, 2019).

Patriotic Party (NPP) and the New Democratic Congress (NDC) throughout the Fourth Republic to date. The NPP is a centre-right party, grounded in values of liberal democracy. The NDC believes that economic prosperity for all Ghanaians can best be achieved through appropriate regulation and strategic investment for inclusive development. Much of Ghana's SDG architecture was established during the 2016-2020 NPP administration under President Akufo-Addo. Notwithstanding the seeming ideological differences between the two major political parties, when it comes to the adaptation of the global SDGs to national development agenda, the two main political parties are united in pursuing the implementation of the SDGs as they relate to Ghana's development goals. It should also be emphasised that parliament's relationship with the executive during the administration of either the NPP or NDC has not altered in any shape or form.

Oversight

The concentration of power in the executive branch poses challenges to the consolidation of democracy in Ghana and affects the separation of powers in the state. This poses further threats to the SDGs structures and the statistical system. The president is a powerful political actor in Ghana and has extensive control over significant parts of the state and the economy. The deficiencies that the control of power by the office of the president creates are evident throughout the political system. The structure of the national SDG process – in which the executive plays a dominant role to the exclusion of other critical stakeholders such as parliament – exemplifies the executive concentration of power. Aggressive campaigns for control of the presidency, strong loyalty to the president from the ruling party's MPs, lack of power of opposition parties in parliament, and weak oversight over the president all derive from this concentration of political power (USAID, 2011, p. 28). As with any such concentration of power, influencing policymaking processes at the presidential level is often a question of access – either direct or indirect – to the president and his/her circle of advisors and aides. The 1992 Constitution set up a hybrid system, giving broad powers to the president with half of the Cabinet being appointed from parliament. In the New Patriotic Party (NPP) administration elected in 2016, the majority leader is also a Minister of Parliamentary Affairs with a seat in Cabinet.

While the constitution is designed to ensure that the president has sufficient power to provide direction and leadership over government, in practice, however, the president's interpretation of those constitutional powers has weakened the power of parliament. For example, under Article 70, the president has the power to appoint all high-ranking officials of state including, but not limited to, the following: Metropolitan, Municipal and District Chief Executives, Regional Ministers, National Security Heads, and members of supposedly independent commissions such as the Independent Election Commission. Although these appointments are constitutionally subject to confirmation by parliament by virtue of the fact that the party in government has a majority of members in parliament, confirmation becomes a mere formality. The partisan nature of voting in parliament has had a deleterious effect on parliament's ability to effectively oversee the executive. In a 2019 speech delivered at a National Dialogue on Public Accountability organised by the National Commission on Civic Education in Accra, the Deputy Minority Leader of Parliament, Hon. James Klutse Avedzi, bemoaned this practice. He noted that "Decisions in Parliament are taken by the number of votes so if the issue on the floor is to be voted for, who do you think would win? The majority party wins, because we vote on party lines, we don't vote on issues."⁸

Ghana's political system, like many political systems in Africa, is a hybrid: nominally, it is a unitary presidential and legislative system. A presentation by the Parliament of Ghana's research department at a regional conference in 2018 explained the structure of the parliament as an effect of the aforementioned executive control in simpler language: "Most ministers are also MPs, and most MPs aspire to become Ministers. This lack of political will negatively affects evidence up-take by Members" (Zacharia, 2018).

The relationship between the presidency and the parliament and, in particular, parliament's ability to hold the executive to account, is shaped more by informal power networks than by constitutional and political power. During the years since the inception of the Fourth Parliament of the Fourth Republic, the institution has been defined by a series of tussles between the presidency and parliament, mainly over ministerial appointments, legislation and the implementation of government projects. As mentioned above, all members of the High-Level Ministerial Committee as well as the SDG Implementation Coordinating Committee are appointed by the president including ministers who double as

⁸ J.Klutse Avedzi. *Parliament in Ghana is Handicapped*. <https://mobile.ghanaweb.com>. 26 June 2019

MPs. The import of the preponderance of the president's appointees on such important committees lies in the fact that the implementation of the SDGs is unlikely to be subjected to proper scrutiny and accountability. The presidency appears to regard parliament as an institution that needs to do its bidding, instead of seeking constructive engagement with parliament. Even though parliament enjoys reasonable powers in each of the areas highlighted above, its attempts to secure oversight and accountability have been tentative and unconvincing.

For example, Draman illustrates how the president can co-opt active MPs through their nomination for ministerial posts which contributes to shifting their allegiance to the executive (Stapenhurst et al., 2019, p. 53). He further notes that MPs have built very strong collegial relationships prior to and in parliament, which tend to trump the formal institutional infrastructure ushered in by the constitution (Stapenhurst et al., 2019, p. 53). In fact, Ghana's parliament has been described as a 'talking shop'.⁹ However, other research presents a more mixed picture with regard to the responsiveness of Ghanaian members of parliament between the provision of public goods of benefit to the general population in their constituencies versus the provision of private goods that benefit patron–client networks (Lindberg, 2009; 2010.) These findings are particularly encouraging as they indicate that advocacy amongst MPs on issues related to the general good of all their constituents (for example, with respect to environmental protection) can be effective.

Representation

Ghana has a unicameral legislature composed of 275 Members of Parliament from single-member constituencies. A major limitation to political representation in Ghana is the gender balance of MPs. With just 36 of the 275 MPs being female, Ghana ranks at 149 of 190 countries in the IPU's ranking of women in parliaments (IPU, 2020). This is illustrative of a broader issue with political participation across government; the World Economic Forum's 2020 Global Gender Gap report combines the status of women in parliament with data on women in ministerial positions and other factors to place Ghana at 107 of 153 countries for political empowerment (World Economic Forum, 2020). In its study of female MPs' participation in parliamentary committees

⁹ M. Ofori-Mensah and Lucas Rutherford. *Effective Parliamentary Oversight. Mission Impossible?* 01 June 2011

in Africa, however, a study from the Westminster Foundation for Democracy suggests that the regional trend of having women overrepresented on perceived 'softer' committees such as health is not the case in Ghana where female representation, while low, is roughly the same in the health and budget committees, and higher in defence (10.5%, 9.5% and 16.7%, respectively) (Dodsworth & Cheeseman, 2019).

All too often, MPs in Ghana lack the capacity and institutional support to scrutinise legislation in a rigorous and critical way, even amongst those members of sub-committees or other oversight mechanisms where one would expect some specialisation of roles. As noted above, constituency-level data on key indicators is often not available, thereby limiting the capacity of MPs to effectively represent their constituencies. The consistent use of the party whip by the governing (majority) party also means that opposition parties have had little chance to influence Bills as they proceed through the legislature. It is possible that these dynamics will change in the future should the party of the president lose its parliamentary majority or become reliant on one of the smaller parties in the context of a 'hung' parliament. However, for the time being it is reasonable to assume a relatively consolidated and essentially single-party system of government, with the possibility of loss of incumbent power every four years through electoral processes. Nonetheless, space exists for more work to be done with parliamentarians in cooperation with other CSO actors already working in this area.

Legislation

It is noteworthy that most laws that have been passed in Ghana's parliament have originated from the executive. Warren et al (2005) have argued for the important role that opposition MPs have played in identifying gaps in the legislation, for example, boycotting parliament as a means of protesting against some legislation. In addition, in a number of cases parliamentary debate has led to substantial amendments being made to Bills before they became law.¹⁰ It is further argued that "the Ghanaian Parliament has moved beyond being a

¹⁰ Examples include the National Reconciliation Commission Act 2002 (Act 611), the Labour Act 2003 (Act 651), the Public Procurement Act 2003 (Act 663) and the Civil Aviation Act 2004 (Act 678).

rubber-stamp institution".¹¹ However, as Tsekpo and Hudson note (2009, p. 11), only one Private Members Bill, introduced by parliament, has been passed into law in the fourth republic.

The literature also suggests that Parliament of Ghana's legislative capacity is constrained by the constitutional requirement to blend legislative and executive functions of government. This is specified in the 1992 Constitution, in which Article 78 (1) provides for the appointment of most ministers of state from among MPs. Interviews conducted with MPs from majority and minority parties revealed that this affects their work to a significant degree, with MPs reporting that this has resulted in a reduction of time and energy that legislators have to devote to parliamentary work (Sakyi, 2010). Article 78 (1) has been reported by several MPs as contributing to executive control and manipulation thereby compromising oversight processes.

Moreover, Sakyi (2010) argues that Article 78(1) has not only subverted the powers and autonomy of the Ghanaian legislature but has also rendered its control over executive arbitrariness ineffectual. This backdrop of structural and overweening executive dominance strongly affects parliament's effective engagement with other aspects of the evidence system. This affects its ability to engage both with the statistics system and with the SDG structures that have been established thus far by the executive in Ghana.

Ghana and the SDGs

The Government of Ghana has played a unique leadership role among African countries within the Sustainable Development Goals framework, but this has been a largely executive-driven effort with limited participation of parliament thus far.

Ghana has played a significant role in preparations leading to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, for example, President Nana Akufo-Addo has served two terms as the co-chair of the Eminent Group of Advocates for the SDGs. Amongst other key roles, the country has also played an important role as Chair of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) during the Open Working Group of deliberations, as well as during as intergovernmental

¹¹ Shana Warren. *Legislative Performance in Ghana. An Assessment*, 2005. <https://bit.ly/3BHHFOc>

negotiations on the formulation and adoption of the SDGs. This section describes the national-level SDG infrastructure that has recently been put in place in Ghana, and the window of opportunity that this appears to present for strengthening the role of parliament by using statistics.

Ghana's national SDG structure

In this section, we describe the structures which have recently been established in Ghana to implement the SDGs. Further analysis of the emerging successes and challenges of the practical implementation of these structures would, we feel, be a valuable contribution to this discussion for future researchers.

In 2016 Ghana established the requisite national architecture to facilitate multi-stakeholder engagement in the SDGs involving the government, CSOs and the private sector. A High-Level Ministerial Committee, a multi-stakeholder Implementation Coordinating Committee and a Technical Committee are responsible for coordinating and implementing the SDGs nationally. The ministerial committee consists of 15 ministers of state and is chaired by the Minister of Planning with the president's special advisor on SDGs in the role of Secretary. It provides strategic direction for the implementation of SDGs and Agenda 2063 by means of the cross-sectional and coordinated manner in which it actively engages all facets of government to ensure a 'whole-of-government' approach to implementation.

The SDGs Advisory Unit is responsible for providing technical, policy and strategic support to the president in SDG advocacy interventions. The unit further supports the president's role as the co-chair of the UN Secretary General's Eminent Group of Advocates and the SDGs Advisory Unit also supports the High-Level Ministerial Committee which, in turn, is supported by an SDGs Implementation Coordination Committee (ICC), encompassing the Office of the President, 10 key ministries and agencies, the SDG Philanthropy Platform, civil society organisations and the National African Peer Review Mechanism Governing Council. The ICC's core function is streamlining and strengthening cross-sectoral coordination and multi-stakeholder partnership in implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. The ICC further conducts the VNR process for Ghana under the supervision of the High-Level Ministerial Committee.¹²

¹² The ICC predates the HLMC, having been established in 2016 by former president John Dramani Mahama. The HLMC was established in 2018 by current president Nana Akufo-Addo.

The national development plan drives the implementation of the SDGs as it guides the integration of the SDGs into Ghana's national development agenda (2017-2024), the medium-term national development policy framework (2018-2021), and the sector and district development plans. The SDGs' Technical Committee is made up of SDGs' focal persons of MDAs and representatives of CSOs, the private sector, academia and other stakeholders. Members of the committee are responsible for ensuring integration of SDGs into development plans, and the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of reporting on the SDGs in the various sectors. The committee also provides support to local authorities and other stakeholders for implementation, tracking and performance, advocacy, awareness creation and public education. The committee further has responsibility for ensuring the provision of accurate and timely data for tracking the progress of the SDGs and Agenda 2063.

The SDGs' structure is further supported by a wide range of multi-stakeholder umbrella bodies such as youth and CSO SDG forums. A youth-focus sub-platform addresses youth-related concerns in all the SDG goals. The platform serves as the focal point for engagement between CSOs, the private sector, and government on the SDGs. Furthermore, a CEOs' Advisory Group engages leaders of key private sector entities, and a Delivery Fund aims to harness CSR resources of the private sector to support SDG initiatives. This arrangement encourages the institutionalisation of partnerships and collaboration between business leaders, traditional authorities, and the government in pursuit of SDGs in Ghana. In addition, it aims to heighten awareness of the importance of data thereby encouraging data use and accentuating the need to strengthen the data ecosystem.

Entry points for strengthening the parliament-statistics interface

SDG Goal 17 contains specific indicators on the need to strengthen statistical systems, which Ghana has not yet provided data for. Indicators 17.18.1; 17.18.2; and 17.8.3 point to the need for strengthened and fully resourced national statistical capacity, as well as the necessary enabling legislation (UNDESA, 2020). While Ghana is still exploring data sources for these indicators (Ghana Statistical Service 2018), this focus on data within the SDGs aligns with the long-standing domestic process of reform of the national statistical system, including a focus on strengthening use of statistics by diverse actors. This has included mapping, gap analysis, the development of a national statistical plan, and a

new Statistics Act – described in more detail in the next section. At the global level, advice from UNDP (2017), IPU (2016) and others points to the important role of parliaments in supporting the independence and resourcing of statistics systems as part of their role in the SDGs and for the achievement of SDG 17.

The global and regional emphasis on strengthening parliament's relationships with actors across the national research system is consistent with GoG intentions as expressed in the VNR process to strengthen national research-to-policy linkages in response to the SDGs. The first VNR report notes that while the role of universities and research institutions in supporting the SDGs has been recognised, the prevailing coordination and communication challenges mean that collaboration is limited between research institutions, academia and government evidence producers such as GSS (Government of Ghana, 2019, p. 116). Recent reforms of the national science, technology and innovation system under the Akufo-Addo government have included the development of a new Presidential Advisory Council on Science and Technology accompanied by new national mechanisms to identify and fund research priorities (GhanaWeb, 2019); these also offer new opportunities for strengthening Ghana's national evidence system.

Finally, aligning the annual national budget processes to the SDGs has also been a critical element of Ghana's implementation of the SDGs to date, and this has required the involvement of parliament. As UNDP emphasises, it is critical for parliaments to be able to "assess the impact of spending in terms of achieving the overarching goals of the SDGs, namely to be 'people-centred' and to particularly target efforts towards the marginalised and the excluded" (UNDP, 2017, p. 37). As part of the GoG's participation in the Voluntary National Review processes, annual SDG budget reports have been prepared by the Ministry of Finance under the auspices of the ICC since 2018 when the baseline report announced the intention for the SDGs to "flow through the DNA of all Ghanaians" (Government of Ghana, 2018, p. 3). Following the 2018 budget report, the Ministry of Finance directed all Ministries, Departments, and Agencies to align their 2019 and subsequent budgets to the SDGs' targets. In the 2019 SDGs budget report, Ghana shared its pioneering system for tracking budget allocations for the SDGs at target level across all areas of government. This was developed by MoF to enable tracking of actual expenditures on a quarterly basis and has the potential to become an important resource for government, parliament, and civil society organisations to understand progress and spending commitments towards the SDGs.

Parliament's involvement in SDGs and VNR in Ghana

Parliaments have a critical role to play in domesticating the SDGs' framework, as well as ensuring that the SDGs' aim of promoting inclusive and accountable development is achieved by reviewing what the executive has done. Parliaments' engagement is critical to facilitate domestic resource mobilisation, outline and monitor budgetary allocations for implementing and reaching targets, scrutinise national plans to ensure harmonisation, and make and review laws to facilitate implementation at local, regional and national levels. Furthermore, a key lesson learned from the implementation of MDGs concerns the central role that parliaments can and should play in ensuring that SDG implementation reflects the diverse needs of the constituents that it represents and benefits all groups of people, especially the most disadvantaged (UNDP, 2017). This is especially relevant given the ongoing challenges and data gaps faced by many executive branches of government in using evidence to identify and meet the needs of marginalised groups: as the International Institute for Environment and Development (iied) notes, "although the VNRs demonstrate that countries consider gender equality and equity to be essential for achieving the SDGs, integrating equity-focused, gender-responsive evidence seems to be a blind spot in reporting" (Hofur-Olusanmokun et al., 2019). As noted above and in Box 1, this is certainly a challenge that has been experienced in the Ghanaian context, both in terms of political representation within parliament itself, and in terms of the gender gaps shown in statistics.

Box 1

MDG implementation experience indicates greater success when implementation was localised via appropriately-mandated and capacitated sub-national and local governments, and when these local institutions were engaged from the early stages of the process. Under the MDGs, there were experiences in which accountability was not well developed and the MDGs were 'hyper-centralized.' This resulted in a lack of inclusiveness and permitted the continuation of persistent social and regional disparities within a country. A clear link between accountability and representation (at national and local levels) can create an important leverage effect that fosters a fairer distribution of public resources and greater inclusiveness of women, youth and marginalised and vulnerable groups. (UNDP, 2017, p. 54)

In Ghana, parliament has not been deeply involved in the national response to the SDGs so far, despite the apparent opportunities for engagement around the budget process, research-to-policy relationships, and supporting the statistics system outlined above. The role of MPs in the SDG structures described above has been peripheral. Parliament has not been fully engaged in the alignment of the SDGs to national development goals, though it has made some inputs to consultative processes with other stakeholders. Although the High-Level Ministerial Committee of the SDGs comprises 15 ministers who are also MPs, the main focus of SDG activity has been through executive mechanisms rather than through parliament. There have, however, been some early signs among key stakeholders of the recognition of the importance of engaging with parliament on which the DAP project hopes to build.

The Implementation Coordinating Committee has made overtures to parliament by initiating a meeting in late 2017 aiming to sensitise parliament on the SDGs and their implications for national development. The leadership of parliament participated in this meeting and subsequently announced a commitment to establish a parliamentary sub-committee on the SDGs discussed above. In 2018, Ghana's first SDG Budget Report highlighted the role of parliament in monitoring the SDGs suggesting (p. 46) that a checklist should be developed to enable parliament to assess new policies tabled for approval, as well as those that are in the process of approval or have already been approved, to ensure that SDG targets are comprehensively integrated within all existing policies.

In 2019, the National Development Planning Commission together with other government agencies, including GSS, organised a Voluntary National Review event of the SDGs with parliament with the aim of increasing awareness amongst MPs. During this event, parliament reiterated its commitment to setting up a parliamentary sub-committee of the SDGs, although at the time of writing this has not been established. The leadership of parliament also indicated its approval of the final VNR draft report. Therefore, while there appears to be recognition of the potential role of parliament in exercising oversight over SDG implementation in Ghana, involvement thus far has been limited. However, we see key windows of opportunity to strengthen parliament's role in the SDGs by focusing on the relationship between parliament and the national statistical system, which has been a key actor in SDG processes and which provides opportunities for parliamentary engagement.

The statistics system in Ghana

GSS and the SDGs

In this section, we show how recent reforms in Ghana's statistical system offer potential entry points to strengthen the relationship between parliament and the Ghana Statistical Service through the framing of the SDGs. As noted above, The production of high quality, timely and disaggregated data that provides SDG indicators has been a major focus of SDG efforts in Ghana so far. GSS has led the process of establishing a baseline for the SDGs in Ghana and in coordinating reforms within the statistical system to be able to address the data gaps and effectively monitor progress towards the SDGs. Of 246 global SDG indicators, only 129 are available in Ghana's national statistical system (NDPC, 2020). An initial mapping exercise in 2016 resulted in the identification of gaps resulting in a subsequent review of the processes and guidelines for data gathering and the establishment of standard data and metadata templates for use by all MDAs in reporting SDG data (Government of Ghana, 2019, p. 28), and this is published on an online hub (Ghana Statistical Service, 2018). An SDGs' data roadmap guides the government's activities in strengthening the data system by focusing on filling data gaps, strengthening the data ecosystem, and encouraging data use (NDPC, 2020). GSS is supporting MMDAs to revise their data collection templates, as well as training staff of MMDAs on SDG data issues.

Effective interaction between statistics users, suppliers and producers is critical in informing and measuring overall development process and programmes against global, regional and national targets such as the SDGs, Agenda 2063, as well as national and sectoral plans. The data challenges arising with respect to the SDGs are thus symptomatic of broader issues within Ghana's National Statistical System which is described by the OECD as "the ensemble of statistical organisations and units within the country that jointly collect, process and disseminate official statistics produced and published by and on behalf of government, with the Central Statistical Agency at the hub" (OECD). In Ghana, GSS, as the central statistical agency, produces and disseminates official national statistics as well as coordinating and collaborating with MDAs and other organisations such as CSOs, academia, the private sector, and development partners, which together "collect, compile, process, analyse and disseminate official statistics" (NDPC, 2020). The coordination role of GSS

includes providing advisory and technical services to all users on statistical matters and ensuring the production of official statistics by promoting the use of internationally accepted standards across all national data producers.

The GSS is responsible for overseeing the consistency, quality and continuity of official statistics. The production and dissemination of official statistics involves the organisation and implementation of the census, along with the production of a range of economic and social statistics, including compilation, processing and dissemination of national accounts statistics, consumer price indices and demographic statistics. With the growing demand for data, Ghana's national statistics system has in recent years come under greater scrutiny and pressure to deliver timely, relevant, high quality and disaggregated statistics. There has been concern for some time on both the capacity of public institutions to generate routine data from their administrative processes, and the extent of their use of statistics over the planning cycle (National Statistical Assessment Survey Report, 2018).

One of the recent challenges for Ghana's national statistical system, as in many African countries, is that it neither has a clearly centralised nor a decentralised statistical system. A statistical system is centralised when all or most of the products of the statistical system are produced, processed, and disseminated by a central organisation. On the other hand, systems are said to be decentralised when different ministries and agencies on the sector for which they have responsibility produce statistics (Edmunds, 2005). In Ghana, government documents show that GSS had no clear legal mandate to play a central role in the national statistical system¹³ and that there was no clear linkage of GSS with the Research, Statistics and Information Management Directorates of the MMDAs in the production and publication of official statistics for policies and decision-making. The reliance on data from different MDAs without recourse to any fundamental principles governing their operations or to the GSS, was seen to create 'systematic uncertainty' (Strengthening Stats in Nat Dev Planning, p. 5) by giving rise to a situation of conflicting statistics being disseminated.

¹³ The statistical units of Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), are governed by PNDC Law 327, enacted in 1993. The GSS in Ghana evolved from the office of the Government Statistician (set up in 1948), to the Central Bureau of Statistics in 1963. It then finally become the Statistical Service in 1985, by PNDC Law 135. The Local Government Act 2016 (Act 936) established the District Statistical Department (DSD) to further enhance a decentralised statistical system. While the DSD administratively operates under the local government, GSS is expected to provide guidance and technical backstopping.

The Statistics Act 2019

The Statistics Act 2019 provides opportunities to address many of these challenges. The Act provides the GSS with a clear mandate which will enhance its ability to capture and share SDG data and to expand its partnerships within and outside government. This new legislation was keenly anticipated in the government's 2018 baseline SDGs' budget report, which noted that data availability had been a challenge when attempting to establish a reliable baseline and anticipated the new legislation playing a fundamental role in guiding future reports (GoG, 2018, p. 3). At the time, the presentation of the Bill in parliament was firmly rooted in the language of evidence-informed policy, which is also a dominant narrative framing Ghana's VNR reports. Presenting the Bill for its second reading in parliament, the Deputy Minister for Finance argued that "the principle to use an evidence-based decision-making process is critical both at the centre of government business as well as at the decentralised level. Better development decisions are taken when there are good statistics" (Parliament of Ghana, 2019, p. 3582).

The law provides a refined legal and implementation framework that emphasises the leadership and coordination role of GSS in statistics production. This addresses a number of challenges that have affected it in the past including data inconsistencies due to coordination and quality assurance issues. It aims to strengthen the quality of data production by mandating all MDAs and MMDAs to submit their statistical products to GSS while at the same time requiring GSS to establish a quality assurance framework including a code of ethics and practice for statisticians to regularly report the quality of statistics in the country to the government and people of Ghana.¹⁴ Consequential amendments have also been made to other Acts, notably the Civil Service Act, 1993 (PNDC Law 327) and the Ghana Revenue Authority Act, 2009 (Act 791) which seek to ensure consistency and coherence in the production of statistics. The law aims to enhance the ability of GSS to modernise and innovate to enable the production of relevant and timely data. It also addresses new emerging areas for statistical data collection including reporting on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, African Union Agenda 2063, and the National Development Framework. Furthermore, the law emphasises the importance

¹⁴ To enable GSS to quality assure these additional publications, adequate resourcing will be important to ensure that it does not become a bottleneck for other agencies to publish statistics, thereby reducing the amount of statistical information published by the government.

of adequate funding for the GSS – an illustration of parliament exercising its authority to protect a robust statistical system, a key role, as was emphasised by IPU (2016, p. 9) and UNDP (2017, p. 25), of national legislatures in supporting transparency and accountability for the SDGs.

In addition to supporting the core functions of the GSS, the law also creates space for it to operate more independently on its own mandate as well as in its relationships with other stakeholders. Notably, the law emphasises the independence of the Government Statistician in line with international best practice, as is emphasised in the African Charter on Statistics (AU, 2009). This is a significant development in the Ghanaian context where the president appoints the Government Statistician in consultation with the Council of State (GoG, 1992, Article 186). MPs were quick to point out that the new Act must still operate within the bounds of the constitution, with the Majority Leader arguing:

People tend to lampoon the Statistical Service because they think that since the President appoints the head, necessarily the person must bow to the dictates of the President ... My proposition is that we may have to look at that construct in the constitution [that the President appoints the Government Statistician] I believe that the President may be required to do that with the prior approval of Parliament, as that would insulate the Statistician from the politicization that people subject that office to. That is one way of clearing mischief (Parliament of Ghana, 2019, p. 3629).

The Act also allows GSS to form partnerships for the production of statistics, data sharing and facilitation of innovations in statistics. The Act provides for the establishment of a National Advisory Committee of Producers and Users of Statistical Research. This is an important development in a context where the government describes “low appreciation and knowledge of the use of statistics for development among leadership of MDAs [and] the commitment to support statistical activities is low” (Parliament of Ghana, 2019, p. 3583). This also aligns with global advice, for instance, from UNDP which advises parliaments to “consider working with national statistical offices to identify gaps in data collection and reporting and to work on how information is collected, disaggregated and provided to parliament” (2017, p. 37). This refined mandate to work with external stakeholders has important possible implications for the perceived integrity of government-generated data and the trust that consumers of data place in the data.

The passage of the new statistics law provides the GSS with several opportunities to expand partnerships with critical stakeholders, both data producers and consumers of data. As a member of the SDGs' Implementation Coordinating Committee, GSS is involved in streamlining, strengthening cross-sectoral coordination, and building multi-stakeholder partnerships in the implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting of the SDGs. GSS thus has the opportunity through DAP project to better engage parliament in terms of knowing how parliament works, building relationships with some of the key actors in parliament, and appreciating and understanding the SDGs' data needs of parliament. This has the potential to help GSS frame and adapt data to the specific needs of parliament and thus engender trust and enhance uptake of data from parliament. Parliament can play its part by leveraging its partnership with the GSS to become much more involved in SDGs' implementation, especially in tracking budgetary allocation to SDG-specific interventions and carrying out more effective assessment of national SDG goals. Global guidelines identify two major ways that parliament can engage with statistics services: by protecting their independence and resourcing, and by enhancing partnerships and collaboration. In Ghana the important groundwork has been laid for both.

Conclusion

Monitoring the implementation of the SDGs presents a global challenge for governments and statistics agencies, not least because of the sheer number of goals and indicators and the many data gaps across these. **Having been largely overlooked in the MDGs, parliaments around the world are now exploring their role in the SDGs as fundamental actors in modern democracies tasked with the responsibility of holding government to account on behalf of citizens.** This includes a focus on 'localising' the SDGs and their improved integration within domestic accountability mechanisms at multiple levels. It also includes protecting the independence and resourcing of national statistical agencies as well as deepening engagement with these and other actors in the statistics system.

Ghana has played a leading role in the SDGs globally and has established a detailed multi-stakeholder national SDG architecture in recent years with the Ghana Statistical Services playing a critical role. **However, while there has been shared recognition of the role of parliament within this response, engagements between parliament and the national SDG bodies in Ghana,**

including the Statistics Service, have so far been limited. We have shown that the executive branch of government continues to dominate the SDGs' agenda and structures in Ghana, despite the explicit aims in the SDGs to include a greater focus on accountability than in the MDGs. This is emblematic of Ghana's overall democratic structure which is characterised by a concentration of power in the executive branch as well as by the blending of executive and legislative functions. There are a range of capacity gaps in parliament which limit the ability of staff and MPs to effectively access, appraise and use data and other forms of evidence to inform decisions. Within the statistics system, a number of factors affect this interface, including the need to strengthen the quality of data production on the SDG indicators; the limited overarching links between research producers and users in Ghana; and the nascent mechanisms to track budget and expenditure on SDG targets.

Against this backdrop, the new Statistics Act, combined with the new SDG engagement and implementation structures and the recent science advisory system reforms, create a unique opportunity to strengthen the interface between parliament, the statistics system and the SDGs in Ghana. At this early stage these new structures appear to present simultaneous windows of opportunity, and we anticipate that the degree to which these can be leveraged will be affected by how the structures are practically implemented in the future and by any shifts in the political landscape during the 2020 election. While there is important progress being made and there are a number of encouraging recent developments to build on, there is also an opportunity to strengthen trust and understanding between parliament and the statistical system and thereby contribute to strengthening democratic accountability in Ghana. In the coming years it will be important to see to what extent the key actors are able to leverage these windows of opportunity for greater collaboration.

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