



CREATE story of national-level policy change

Over the past several years, CREATE has worked with local Ghanaian researchers, universities and policy-makers to increase the use of local research in the policy dialogue. This was part of a more specific attempt to shift policy discourse of the ministry from a focus on gross enrolment figures to thinking about the underlying factors that affect them. In previous instances, researcher participation in the policy process had been very weak, so CREATE has really provided the opportunity for closer dialogue and enriched the policy debate. This increased participation revolved around three senior stakeholders: the Chief Director from the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (MOESS), the Minister of Education and the lead Ghanaian partner from CREATE, Professor Djangmah, the former director general of the Ghana Education Service.

Previously, the debate on educational access in Ghana was led by MOESS through its annual reviews of education. Usually the ministry would invite international consultants to look at the data and information provided by the Education Management System and to help analyse the data and shape the agenda. Historically however, this process hadn't sufficiently reflected local context – analysis was strongly influenced by an international perspective and Ghanaian researchers played a limited role.

CREATE sought to tackle this disconnect by ensuring stronger linkages with in-country research on education. In particular, CREATE's research has emphasised the patterns of participation over the education cycle to move the agenda beyond discussions of gross enrolment figures and the influence these factors have on accessing education.

In order to influence this policy dialogue, the first action taken was the establishment of a national reference group consisting of the three RPCs in Ghana that look at quality, access and outcome, with the Chief Director for MOESS as the chair. Directors from the ministry also participated in these meetings. This group allowed for dialogue between researchers and policy-makers – while researchers were making suggestions, policy-makers also gave input into research findings and directions. All of the reports, for example, were sent to key stakeholders so they could review the evidence and make sure that the messages reflected the problems from the ministry's perspective and the policy direction. Outside of this working group, CREATE has also given presentations to Ghana's parliament on educational issues highlighted by their research.

The serious engagement with policy-makers has led to two significant changes both in terms of policy and in terms of operation. First, the policy dialogue now recognises the importance of age as a factor affecting enrolment. Also, field work is beginning to show that, in some of the poor areas in Ghana, there is an interest in private schooling. It is counterintuitive that rural poor could afford this private education, so convincing the ministry that they need to look at this aspect has been another way CREATE has input into the policy-making process.

Secondly, the ministry has given strong support for increasing its own capacity to understand and incorporate research. The Chief Director is currently a student at the University of Sussex (where the RPC is based), and he has helped five of his directors to enrol on a professional doctorate programme there. Beyond the \$250,000 the ministry has committed to its internal capacity development, it is also supporting the establishment of a research centre on basic education at the University of Education at Winneba. The idea is for this centre to engage in research that reflects issues on basic education policy and practice in Ghana. Two researchers from the University of Winneba are currently studying for their doctorates at Sussex under the CREATE programme and will be returning to strengthen this new centre in Winneba.

In terms of influencing policy, it was recognised that to get research into policy, maintaining dialogue is essential, and it has become a key strategy. CREATE has established a series of two-page policy briefs to help open the discussion, and having a national reference group is also an important way to keep the dialogue going both ways.

It is clear that none of this would have been possible without a receptive ministry, and in particular the Chief Director. This has been highly effective in giving the project momentum, but there are risks with relying too heavily on a single stakeholder. If a significant part of the funding and progress hinges on a single director, what happens if he changes jobs? The capacity development of other staff at the ministry is central to sustaining locally informed and developed research, but will this be enough? The Chief Director recognises this challenge and hence his commitment to send five of his senior officials at the Ministry to train at Sussex. He has already moved some of them into key leadership positions and handed over some of his responsibilities to ensure there is smooth transition into a new leadership team when he eventually leaves the ministry. According to him, giving these officials the opportunity to upgrade and improve their understanding of research and how it is used in policy will ensure that the Ministry continues to make research evidence a key part of the policy making process to improve educational quality and access.

During CREATE's last visit to Ghana, they realised that spending 10% on communications is actually very little, especially considering the amount of funding the ministry has dedicated to the project. As more research happens, more communication support is needed, especially as momentum is gathered. They've done policy briefs, met in a national reference group, had several special features in a national newspaper and participated in media interviews.

Further information on this project can be found on the [CREATE website](#), where programme policy briefs have been [compiled](#). See specifically the [Access, age and grade](#) policy brief and the [Ghanaian overview](#).

RiPPLE: Making research more demand-driven

Focusing on issues of water and sanitation in Ethiopia, RiPPLE has sought to make research more demand-driven through establishing collaborative Learning and Practice Alliances (LPAs). These LPAs bring together diverse stakeholders, including donors, service deliverers, practitioners, researchers and government bodies to discuss, debate and learn about research and practice in the water sector. This is one strand of a three-pronged communication strategy that involves internal learning and exchange, broader dialogue and dissemination of research findings and creating an enabling environment for the uptake of research into policy.

In Ethiopia, the lines between researchers, policy-makers and beneficiaries is traditionally distinct. This meant that the agenda of various stakeholders at best lacked coordination and at worst were in direct competition. Recognising these challenges, the International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC), one of the main consortium partners, were interested in blurring these lines through LPAs, and pushed to make them part of the original project plan.

If the overarching goal was to bring diverse stakeholders together to work collaboratively, the main challenge was implementing this diverse engagement.

RiPPLE decided the best approach would be to work its way up from the *woreda* (district) and sub-national regional levels. More recently they have turned to facilitating learning across the LPAs, horizontally, vertically and 'diagonally', at the national level. They have also established a virtual LPA for the greater Nile River Basin region. There are currently three *woreda* and six regional LPAs, whose activities focus around shared experience and understanding of what the problems are in water and sanitation at each of these levels. By discussing and refining issues, they can then decide together what the research focus should be. In terms of implementation and sustainability, each LPA has a coordinator who is in charge of sustaining interest and managing LPA activities. In order to this, the focus in 2008 has been on longer-term action research projects (LARs).

Although establishing these LPAs hasn't necessarily been easy, there is a growing recognition that they're doing something worthwhile. They have been quite effective as a device for working across the research-practice interface and for helping foster understanding among disparate stakeholders. It has proved particularly successful when there is a limited research budget, as it's a way of narrowing down and focusing through institutions and teamwork. They have also helped to improve the coordination, discussion and debate of service delivery issues. At the national level, the Ministry of Water leads the national LPA, FIOWS. This buy-in from the government has helped raise the profile and the effectiveness of the overall LPA initiatives. Although there have been some initial successes, since the project is only in the second of its five-year duration, it is difficult to gauge the ultimate impact of these initiatives, especially since they take a significant amount of time to establish.

This buy-in didn't evolve organically: it took a lot of planning and hard work to generate interest, identify partners and support participants who are not necessarily trained researchers. For the latter, it's important not to have mentors 'breathing down the neck' of these researchers, but rather supporting and guiding them, particularly with data analysis and interpretation. But it's often a difficult balance to strike. It's also often difficult to navigate around the diverse agenda and special interests that the diverse participants bring to the table.

The 10% for communications rule from DFID has helped the LPAs think about how they are using communications. Good communications between and among LPAs has been essential in generating shared understanding, ownership and sustainability of outcomes. As the LPAs have developed, this means that communications is becoming integral to research, not just in terms of uptake and dissemination, but as a support to and part of the action of research. Thinking about communications from the beginning of a project has also been a helpful motivating factor: if LPA participants understand what's going to happen to the results, it's a lot easier to get them interested in researching. At the same time, pinning down what constitutes 'communication', and therefore as falling under the 10% rule, has been difficult. Including staff time to support communication, for example, quickly eats up this budget, so RiPPLE has committed the 10% to producing outputs and finding additional money for communication staff.

There is a question of how sustainable these LPAs are beyond the lifespan of RiPPLE, especially since it is clear that each LPA needs a full-time coordinator. But RiPPLE has already started exploring alternative funding opportunities by shifting focus to a local Ethiopian NGO – Hararge Catholic Secretariat (HCS), one of the stronger local NGOs in agricultural marketing and extension. The hope is that this partnership will help sustain the LPAs, as they want to help scale up the initiative across the rest of Ethiopia through their umbrella organisation.

Additional information about how these LPAs are structured and what they are working on is available on the RiPPLE website at <http://www.rippleethiopia.org/page/learning-and-practice-alliances>.