

THE PROCESS OF POLICY FORMULATION

Institutional Path or Institutional Maze?

A Study Based on the Introduction of Cost-Sharing for Education
in Three African Countries

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Foreword

Good policies are fundamental to progress in the economic and social spheres. Policy formulation is a central function of government and the quality of the policies therefore depends on the capacity of government to manage policy-making processes. But, there has been no clear understanding of what constitutes this capacity, nor of what the policy formulation process really looks like. As a result, it has been difficult to know how to enhance it.

What is clear however, is that adequate capacity has not necessarily followed from all the efforts already expended on the training of civil servants. In discussing this anomaly, the African Association for Public Administration and Management, the European Centre for Development Policy Management and a number of very experienced African public servants concluded that a study of the process of policy formulation would be a useful contribution to the debate. This report is the principal output of a study developed by the two organisations, and carried out in collaboration with local organisations in Ghana, Tanzania, and Uganda.

We believe that this report, together with the country studies that inform it, will be a significant contribution to the bank of material that reflects African realities. I believe that the study has drawn some significant conclusions that have a direct bearing on efforts to improve the institutional capacity for development policy management in Africa, and elsewhere. I am sure that this report will be useful to the policy-makers of today as well as to those of tomorrow.

AAPAM is pleased to have been associated with the study and I hope that readers derive as much benefit from the text as I have.

Professor Ali Yahaya
Secretary General
African Association for Public Administration and Management.

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The field studies and the country reports which provided the input for this publication were ably executed by three teams: H. Akuoko Frimpong and C. Ó Nualláin in Ghana; the late R. Baguma, F. Francis and J. Rugumyamheto in Tanzania; and T. Dejene and F. Byarugaba in Uganda. It was to our advantage that they worked within clear guidelines that facilitated comparison of the country experiences, and that they did all the interviewing and review of data. Undoubtedly however, it was their knowledge and experience of the policy formulation process that really helped in the design and implementation of the overall study.

We thank also the many people in the three countries who gave freely of their time and participated in the review workshops. We hope that they found the experience useful and that this document is a fair reflection of their concerns.

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Chapter 1. Why Study the Policy Formulation Process¹?

Current development thinking suggests that the policy framework is critical in determining the performance of firms, farmers, households, public sector bodies, and other economic units. By extension therefore, the economic development of a country depends on the quality of this policy framework, the decisions taken, and the processes involved in formulating each decision. It is clear also that countries throughout the world - developed and developing - vary considerably in their ability, and perhaps their willingness, to formulate and implement policies that will generate improved development performance.

At the outset, it should be emphasised that weaknesses in the policy formulation process are not exclusive to Africa, nor indeed, to the developing world. They can be found, to a greater or lesser extent, in all administrations. Examples abound where lack of attention to implementation strategies during policy formulation results in shortages of required resources or an underestimation of the complexity of the policy². In countries that have better developed and equipped institutional arrangements, unforeseen difficulties can often be addressed, through additional resource allocations for example. This is in contrast to most developing countries where capacity shortages, especially in the area of policy formulation, pose serious problems. African countries seem to have had particular difficulty in this respect.

The development record of sub-Saharan African countries since they became independent some thirty years ago is generally recognized to have been disappointing. Many reasons for this have been advanced. In some cases, the causes have been outside the control of national governments. Natural disasters (such as drastic climatic fluctuations leading to droughts) and global economic factors (such as declining terms of trade for traditional exports) have been particularly significant. While national governments can do little to remove the causes of such economic and natural shocks, ill-conceived, inadequate and poorly implemented national policies have undeniably been a factor in reducing the ability of countries to deal with them.

Concern about this distressing experience within Africa itself, within the donor community, within research organisations, and within NGOs, has tended to focus on shortcomings in the *content* of economic policies pursued by most African countries. Thus, increased emphasis has been given to the role of the private sector, the role of the state, the importance of prices and markets, the contributions of primary education and health in reducing poverty, and a whole series of other issues which represent the 'content' of development policy. In fact, policy-makers and researchers have reached considerable agreement regarding the range of policy measures needed to achieve sustained economic growth and poverty alleviation. However, knowing what to do is not the same as knowing how to do it. The problem now is to discover how policies can best be implemented.

The emphasis on the content of development policy is in sharp contrast to the lack of attention to how policies can be made operative within a national policy framework. Without any clear understanding of the institutional processes needed to make policy formulation effective, knowledge of the needed policy measures is of little use. Much needs to be done to correct this imbalance; to ensure that effective policy formulation processes exist -- processes which would

¹In this report, the Policy Formulation Process includes: a) determination of policy content, b) design of implementation strategies and c) monitoring, review and revision of policy.

²A recent example is the experience with the policy decision to introduce a common currency for the members of the European Union.

allow appropriate development policies to be introduced and implemented with some degree of confidence (Lamb, 1987). This study contributes to addressing this imbalance.

But why has this imbalance arisen? First, policy formulation capacity has been seen as "a residual that has to be created after technical prescriptions have been formulated" (Glentworth, 1989), and its creation and enhancement is still one of the least understood aspects of institutional capacity. Doubtless, the fact that it is conceptually an untidy subject, arising in every sector of national interest, yet with no single discrete disciplinary boundary, loaded with political connotations and heavily determined by the surrounding environment, contributes to this (Corkery and Bossuyt, 1990). Essential questions such as how public policy is generated within the political system, how organisations and processes handle demands generated in the institutional environment, and how different actors behave in the policy-making process, remain largely unanswered -- encapsulated in a "black box."

Second, not only is the enhancement of institutional capacity a complex and inadequately understood topic; it is also a slow process. In this respect, once again, it stands in sharp contrast to decisions. These may have a long lead time - the process of formulation - but the actual decision taking is generally quick. It can, equally, change a situation very quickly. For instance, decisions to raise incentive prices for farmers or to devalue the currency are likely to produce perceptible short-term economic changes. By contrast, enhancing institutional capacity by developing personnel with the requisite knowledge and skills and by developing enabling organisational structures and systems often takes quite a long time. There are no quick fixes. Operationally, the development of institutional capacity requires that both governments and external agencies take a long-term view and sustain their commitment and support to measures required to strengthen this capacity. However, such long-term perspectives are rare. Several studies of technical assistance to strengthen African institutional capacity report the failure to recognize the need for a sustained commitment. Statements by some major agencies (World Bank, UNDP) indicate that this is now recognised in principle. However, a lot of adaptation is needed, by both the external agencies and the countries working with them, to ensure that development cooperation programmes are designed with this in mind.

Finally, there has been a fundamental defect in the conceptual framework within which the policy-making process is examined, and within which programmes to improve it are formulated. This process has typically been seen as a linear model (Linder and Peters, 1989) within which the complexities of policy-making are reduced to a sequence of steps, each with an identifiable beginning and an end. In this model, policy formulation is seen as a rational outcome of detailed data analysis with choices optimised to suit existing circumstances. It assumes that decisions are made centrally in a 'top-down' manner and on the basis of analysis by highly trained personnel.

These decisions are then announced to the public and handed down to subordinate agencies for implementation according to predetermined schedules and procedures (Jain, 1990).

The mechanistic view of policy formulation processes has major flaws. It draws an artificial line between the process of policy formulation (usually ending at the stage of decision-making) and the process of policy implementation. It fails to evoke or even to suggest the distinctively political aspects of policy-making, its apparent disorder, and the strikingly different ways in which policies emerge. It provides little understanding of the process of designing policy alternatives, nor of the politics, rules and intergroup competition that influence policy-making.

In practice, a strikingly different picture of the policy formulation process emerges. It is typically "an iterative, often haphazard and highly political process" (Lamb, 1987). At the top, it inhabits a

grey and sensitive area at the frontiers of the administrative and political worlds. Policies are often made on the basis of perception, stored conventional wisdom, and attitudes of particular interest groups or bureaucratic interests, to which some partial technical analysis and information, whenever available, are added in the form of a brief technical memorandum written hurriedly at very short notice. Policy-makers often decide on matters without first having obtained full and detailed knowledge of the possible consequences of their decisions. They start running and take the consequences as they occur. In this respect, they come close to the "motivation outruns understanding" style of policy-making (Hirschman, 1975). Policy decisions emerging from such a process are likely to set off a chain of unanticipated actions which, in turn, lead to a swift policy reversal (Howell, 1992). As will be seen later, the country studies illustrate the truth of this observation (see especially chapter 4). In short, the journey between identifying a policy issue and promulgating a policy decision - far from being a well-signposted path across level playing fields, more closely resembles movement through a maze.

The Governance Framework for the Study

It was from a recognition of the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of the process of policy formulation at the national level that this study began. It was not seen as just an issue of academic interest. On the contrary, it was and remains a matter of profound importance for designing programmes to address institutional weaknesses that constrain policy management. In particular, the study was anxious to understand why so many previous efforts by governments and external agencies to improve the capacity for policy formulation in African countries had such disappointing results.

Most of these efforts were based on the belief that improvements to policy formulation could be achieved by simply strengthening the technical-economic capacity of central governments. Staff training and the use of expatriate advisers were thought to be the most effective instruments to build up a critical mass of policy analysts and managers in the public sector. However, the outcomes of these efforts show that this was insufficient. By concentrating on only one aspect of the problem - personnel - they paid less attention to other parts of the governance framework within which national policy has to be formulated and implemented. It was a serious oversight.

This study looks at the process of policy formulation by and for government within the context of the broader institutional environment in which a policy is introduced and implemented. It relates primarily to the capacity of a government to design, formulate and implement policies and to discharge its functions - one of three elements of the governance environment (see Box 2).

The study identified three main components as forming this element of governance: the institutional environment, the core policy formulation process within government, and the involvement of civil society.

First, the study recognised the need to consider policy formulation processes within the context of the national institutional environment -- political, economic, cultural and social. It is frequently overlooked that, in sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, policy formulation has had to take place in environments where governments have been pre-occupied with nation-building and with the complex social and political problems inherited from their colonial past. In addition, development policy issues have normally been addressed by governments that have been almost continually confronted by financial crises. These pressures have been particularly significant in shaping (and reducing) the ability of African states to formulate indigenous policies that reflect local needs and priorities. Very often it has been external organisations that have set the pace and direction of development policies, adding an international dimension to national policy-making processes (Mutahaba, Baguma, and Halfani, 1993).

Second, a core policy formulation process within government was identified. This comprises the identification of the policy issue, specification of policy objectives, the development of policy options, decision-making, promulgation, and implementation. It also includes the gathering, processing and analysing of data in connection with each of these activities. Thus stated, this internal process seems to conform with traditional presentations of policy formulation as a linear process. However, as already stated, this is not so. Instead, it is a complex process, without clear beginnings and ends, involving a varying group of people, with many seemingly unsystematic steps, and that some elements may be missed out completely.

Third, the approach recognised the importance of the roles and involvement of non-governmental actors and stakeholders - civil society - in policy formulation. Civil society is not a passive element in policy-making. Its members (farmers, workers, industrialists, parents, teachers, either individually or in groups and associations) have vested interests in the outcomes of the process of national policy formulation. It includes all those people and institutions who assume, based on their expertise and specialist knowledge and the significance the policy will have for them, that they have as much right to be part of the policy formulation process as those within government.

Chapter 2. Carrying out the Study

The overall aim of the study was to increase knowledge and understanding of the actual policy formulation process within the broader institutional context of policy management in sub-Saharan Africa. To achieve this aim, the study sought:

- to provide better insights into the institutional roles of, and interactions between, the various actors and stakeholders in the decision-making process
- to identify critical factors affecting the effectiveness of the process

Approach and Methodology

For practical reasons, including to facilitate the comparative nature of the study, the study was limited to three countries with reasonably similar histories and institutions. In response to expressed national interest in the study, Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda were selected as the three case study countries.

It was also necessary to define the primary focus of the study. It was agreed that the emphasis had to be on the 'process' of policy formulation and not on policy 'content'. Beyond this, participants decided to focus on the formulation of policy rather than its implementation. Nevertheless, it was recognised that a rigid line could not be drawn between the two. In real life, implementation is not simply a mechanical translation of stated policies into action programmes but part of "an ongoing process of decision-making by a variety of actors" (Grindle, 1980). Indeed the iterative model of policy formulation includes the amendment of policies in the light of implementation experience. Consequently, policy formulation in this study was agreed to include the design of implementation strategy but not the details of the implementation itself.

Three major problems were confronted in designing an approach and methodology to achieve the objectives of the study:

- policy formulation is a complex political and administrative process that often crosses organisational and sectoral boundaries;
- getting reliable information on the formulation process is difficult;
- a widely-accepted conceptual framework and theoretical approach for analysing the process was not available.

In dealing with these challenges, a cooperative approach was adopted. Coordinated by the African Association for Public Administration and Management (AAPAM) and the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), the study was carried out by a two-person team in each of the three countries. Each team was assisted by a senior administrator in each country who liaised with the national administration.

The study began with a Planning Workshop. The main agenda item was to agree on a common policy area on which all the cases would focus. Several characteristics were seen to be important if the results were to be useful:

- it should be a priority area of policy;

- it should have undergone substantial change(s) in recent years;
- it should interact with other sectors in national policy;
- it should be of interest and significance to different levels of society within each country;
- it should involve, to some extent, agencies external to the country;
- it should be a decision taken some time previously so as to allow consideration of experience in implementation relevant to the formulation process.

Participants agreed to focus on primary education and, within this broad policy area, the specific issue of the introduction of cost-sharing measures. Cost-sharing policies were defined as those that transfer direct costs away from public budgets to individuals or to communities³. It was also agreed that the main sources of primary data and information would be structured interviews with a wide cast of actors and stakeholders supplemented by a review of existing documents.

In any policy formulation process there are both actors and stakeholders. The distinction between the two groups is not watertight. Indeed, actors are also likely to be stakeholders. *Actors* formally contribute to the policy formulation process through their organisational roles, either in their normal work or as members of official committees or commissions. *Stakeholders* have a vested interest in a policy issue -- for example, parents and teachers. They are frequently organised in associations or groups. While they are not necessarily actors in the policy formulation process, they are often invited to participate in the consultation process. They may also make informal contributions through lobbying or through the media. Actors within government, such as bureaucrats with responsibilities in, say, the administration of education, and those outside of government such as teachers' trade unions may also have vested interests. Like most components of the policy formulation process, these two interest categories cannot easily be confined within rigid boxes. However, members of the first group are in the main, precluded from informal lobbying.

The scope of the interviews, including the actors and stakeholders to be approached, was agreed at the Planning Workshop. Draft guidelines for the interviews were discussed, amended and agreed and critical elements of the process of policy formulation were identified (see Annex). These were intended to be a framework within which information was collected and collated rather than a comprehensive formula to be rigidly followed in the fieldwork. It was clearly understood that they did not imply any internal sequential relationship.

The presence at the Planning Workshop of virtually all who would be preparing the country reports helped to ensure that there was a common understanding of the methodology. Comparative study by different teams is always difficult. When it involves people from different backgrounds and with varying amounts of time to devote to the work, it is even more complex. Involving the teams in developing the approach helped to create common acceptance of the instruments and methods to be used and an understanding of the thinking behind the agreed process. Thus, when the methodology was adapted during the fieldwork, adaptations were within the broad philosophy of the approach.

Some four weeks were devoted to the fieldwork. National Workshops were held to review the draft country reports. Most of the actors and stakeholders interviewed during the fieldwork also

³During the course of the fieldwork in Uganda it was agreed, for practical reasons, to focus on the introduction of cost-sharing measures in tertiary level education.

participated in these meetings, as did the researchers and liaison persons. The workshops provided an opportunity to check the reports for accuracy and completeness and to identify the critical policy management issues for further attention.

The methodology allowed the opinions of a very wide range of persons to be canvassed and represented in the report. For the reader, however, a few words of caution are required.

First, it was often difficult to get adequate information on a particular element of the process; indeed, some of the findings are impressionistic. For example, as is common in most countries, access to details on discussions within the Cabinet or its equivalent was not always possible.

Second, since it was necessary to have information on the implementation as well as the formulation of the policies, the focus was on policy decisions taken some time in the past. This means that even as the field studies were in progress, changes as a result of, or in spite of, the original decisions were in progress.

Third, there is the question of the extent to which the findings are sector-specific or generic. We believe that they are mainly generic. However, we accept that our belief may not be enough. It was originally intended to organise a consultative meeting with experienced top civil servants to assess the cross-sectoral relevance. For logistical and other reasons, this meeting was not possible so it was decided to publish the output of the study itself without further delay.

Presentation

As was already stated, the absence of a linear sequence in the realistic world of policy formulation has to be recognised. Yet, some order needs to be introduced to make it possible to assimilate the output. This is done by presenting the principal findings of the study in two separate chapters: Chapter 3 on the institutional environment for policy formulation, and Chapter 4 on the stages and action instruments used in the policy formulation process. Chapter 5 identifies the key factors which influence the policy process, and presents some issues for consideration in developing capacity in this area.

Presenting the findings in such a structured manner gives rise to its own dangers. There may be some repetition. Despite warnings, a sequence of stages may imply orderly progress from one to the other, when this is certainly not the norm. Stages for which little data emerged from the studies are treated briefly or in conjunction with related stages. This should not be taken as a judgement of their relative importance to the overall process; rather as a reflection of what was held to have happened in the cases being observed. All that can be done is to warn the reader in advance that the sections are not watertight -- and to reiterate the warning from time to time.

Chapter 3. The Institutional Environment for Policy Formulation in Africa

The critical importance of the institutional environment within which policies are formulated cannot be overstated. This environment is the source of the demands to which policy-makers must respond. It is also the main source of constraints on what can be done by the policy-makers.

Since state boundaries in sub-Saharan Africa often owe more to colonial rule than to natural frontiers, this has sometimes given rise to weak national allegiances and strong attachments along ethnic lines. Most of the countries have suffered from political instability. In many countries, prevailing poverty was exacerbated by vulnerability to external economic shocks -- shocks which increased in intensity after the early 1970's. Levels of formal education among the general population are still generally low. Public sector employees work in a context where expectations constantly exceed what can realistically be attained. Add to this the critical financial situation with which most countries had to deal and one can see why environmental factors are often said to be more of a constraint to effective policy management in Africa than elsewhere.

Environmental constraints to effective policy formulation were addressed in all three country studies. Each concluded, explicitly or implicitly, that adequate enabling institutional environments for policy formulation did not exist. All three countries shared a culture of governance based on centralised and bureaucratic decision-making. Little 'political space' was made available for inputs in policy formulation from sources other than the state. All have experienced severe economic crises, and in two of the countries there have been periods of political instability. In all three, wider issues of governance emerge from the studies as having a central importance for policy formulation.

The Political Dimension

In Ghana and Uganda, arguably among the brightest hopes on the African continent at independence, political turmoil seriously diminished organisational capacity for policy management.

Uganda at the time of independence had the best expectations for economic growth, for institutional strengthening, and for human development of any country in sub-Saharan Africa. Shortly after, however, it became a victim of chronic political instability, war and civil strife that brought the whole human, economic, and institutional framework of the country to collapse. When a new administration took office in 1986, political stability and security were gradually restored and a reversal of the downward spiral of political chaos and economic decline began to emerge. However, beyond this, the policy environment was still extremely fragile and highly centralised at the time the cost recovery policy was introduced. The party structure still extended down to the village level. There was still no distinction between the powers of the Executive and the Legislature.

The Ghana case makes the point that the country at independence was relatively better endowed than most other African countries in terms of its institutional capacity for policy management. However, this capacity could not be sustained in the 1960's and 1970's when the acceptance of, and support for, a rational approach to policy formulation were seriously undermined by the combined effects of political instability and economic decline. Existing institutions decayed; the scope for wider participation in policy-making declined, and a tremendous exodus of skilled people took place.

During the 1980's, the Government sought to create a general institutional environment for policy formulation which would be more conducive to wider consultation. Major structural changes were introduced in the functioning of the state machinery. The changes centred on twin programmes: First, to decentralise government and to increase popular participation. Second, to restructure the ministerial structure and give ministries the capacity to coordinate policies.

The Ghana study reports that these structural changes gradually allowed a more participatory approach to policy formulation to emerge. Increased political stability helped. Yet, the need for some cost recovery policy in education was recognised by the National Consultative Committee for over a decade before government felt strong enough to take action. This indicates that political stability was still perceived to be a fragile plant. Even when the policy was introduced, it was the externally promoted and supported Economic Reform Programme which was the main catalyst for action on this sensitive issue.

While Tanzania enjoyed relative political stability, its institutional capacity to formulate policy was highly constrained. For most of the period since independence, Tanzania had a single party system with a constitution that established the supremacy of the Party in the national policy-making. The Party had a highly organised structure from the local branch to the national level. It embraced a number of mass organisations which participated in the deliberations at various levels. Some assumed that this was sufficient to provide a genuine basis for consultation with intended beneficiaries.

Even before the end of the one-party state, some changes had been introduced into government. For example, as early as 1984, local government was re-established as part of a drive towards more efficient role division in which local authorities financed and managed primary education through, for instance, the collection of parents' contributions. It is not clear, however, to what extent these authorities played a direct role in policy formulation. Another change was the establishment of a Policy Unit in the Cabinet Secretariat of the President's Office and of parallel Policy Analysis and Review Units in the Prime Minister's Office and in the Civil Service Department. While these units were designed as 'think-tanks' to advise policy-makers, it was difficult to find the expertise necessary to staff these units, as well as those planned in other ministries (Shellukindo, 1992).

The Economic Dimension

The three studies identify the economic crisis as the main environmental issue to constrain effective policy formulation processes. Policy-making was reduced to ad-hoc responses to urgent problems, leaving little room for more fundamental and long-term policy analysis, consultation, design of effective implementation strategies, monitoring, and evaluation. There has also been little time to develop effective cross-sectoral linkages. While it is generally considered that effective policy formulation is most needed in situations where resources are scarce, all three studies demonstrate that short-term crises tend to receive top priority and this leads to grossly inadequate political, analytical and administrative effort being given to development policy formulation.

Aggravating these features of the institutional environment, African countries have confronted difficulties in dealing with both the "pressing nature and the low degree of understanding of problems" (Hirschman, 1975). Most African countries have had to formulate policy in situations

in which immediate financial crises have inevitably taken precedence over policy issues with more long-term, strategic and development-oriented objectives. In such conditions, policy-making is often a question of slipping from one expedient to another without tackling underlying problems. The inevitable result of these ad-hoc responses is policy decisions that may be well-intentioned but, in many cases, are ill-conceived.

The Administrative Dimension

Another feature of the institutional environment has been the centralisation of policy decision-making. Since independence, top-down policy-making based on one-party systems and the absorption of independent institutions by the state was the norm. The Tanzanian and Ugandan studies exemplify this.

In Tanzania, overall responsibility for policy formulation was given to weak central government agencies. The system, in practice, amounted to equating 'policy management' with 'control of everything and everyone' (Mukandala and Shellukindu, 1991). The Uganda study notes that "authority is concentrated in the hands of the Minister of Education. District Education Officers routinely request intervention by the Minister on issues that should be resolved at lower levels. But despite this highly centralised system, the central administration does not have the ability to ensure that its policies are implemented. It lacks adequate resources, including finances, to monitor what is happening at lower levels let alone to control the finances that are collected at that level. The capacity to deliver high quality work is hampered by the lack of motivation and of basic skills at the support level. Because of inflation, civil servants get very low salaries and are forced to do other things to supplement their incomes."

The centralised, top-down approach has usually confined policy formulation to a narrow elite. In the absence of organised political opposition, independent trade unions, interest groups, and free media, involvement in policy-making is largely restricted to upper echelons of the political and bureaucratic system. This small circle "tends to make decisions on the basis of intuition, ideology or a process of give and take. They have little appreciation of how technical policy analysis can feed into the decision-making process. Consequently the ruling circle has not articulated much demand for policy relevant studies" (Gulhati, 1990).

The country studies illustrate the narrowness of the inner policy formulation circle; the paucity of institutional provision for policy analysis; and the general underutilisation of what is or can be made available. One result of this has been the failure to create institutional capacity (including the development of adequate statistical services) for policy analysis inside or outside of government. A second has been a failure to provide opportunities for non-governmental actors and stakeholders to contribute to the process of policy formulation.

The lack of demand from decision-makers for analysis is a very important point in accounting for the disappointing outcome of past efforts to improve the policy-formulation capacity of governments through training, and by the deployment of expatriate advisers. It has become increasingly clear, even though it should perhaps be obvious, that it is of little or no use to improve the capacity of the 'supply side' of policy formulation if there is virtually no action to improve the 'demand side'. According to a senior Ghanaian civil servant, "no significant improvements will be forthcoming in the generation and processing of information unless greater efforts are made to inculcate into policy-makers a greater sense of information awareness" (Sai, 1993).

Some commentators, including an FAO adviser on an early warning systems project in Zambia, do not perceive the problem as a lack of information. "A lot more statistical information exists than is often assumed and, with appropriate strategies, the usefulness of this information for policy analysis and decision-making can be considerably enhanced" (Kiregyera, 1993). It is interesting that similar points were highlighted by a senior Kenyan civil servant - Harris Mule - six years earlier (ECDPM, 1987).

An adequate and appropriate information base is a precondition for effective policy formulation. In the case of education, this must include data on such obvious and basic matters as enrolment rates, the numbers of children of different age groups and their geographical distribution, the numbers of teachers and their age profiles, the current accommodation, school equipment and supplies situation and future needs. In the case of the policy proposal to introduce cost-sharing measures, information on parental and student incomes is also required if policy formulation is to have a realistic information base.

However, building a reservoir of data and knowledge, no easy task in itself, is even more complicated if it is to be presented in a 'user-friendly' form accessible to those involved in the process of policy formulation. In the western world, there may often be too much data available for it to be adequately accessed, processed and analysed in the time available. On the other hand, Kiregyera notwithstanding, the general perception is that most countries of Africa suffer from a shortage of detailed, up-to-date and reliable data. The scarcity of data usually reflects technical and organisational problems at the level of collection, analysis and dissemination of information.

In some cases, the problem is not lack of data but poor management of information flows, with data production exceeding the institutional capacity to target it appropriately to potential users and in general to process it in a user-friendly way. Stanley Please (1993) in his editorial for the DPMN Bulletin special issue on information points to another problem. This is the failure of decision-makers to identify the kind of guidance they want from policy analysts and to put in place procedures that will ensure that the analysts are provided with the necessary data in a timely and reliable manner. The present situation with regard to information in African countries on the whole has led some to argue that African governments are data rich but information poor.

The absence of any significant demand by governments for technical policy analysis has a pervasively negative effect on bureaucratic behaviour. This was brought out in a study of bureaucracies in Southern Africa (Montgomery, 1981) in which the author concluded that policy issues occupied only a minor part of the work of permanent secretaries in the civil service. They did little strategic analysis. Work aimed at adapting their organisation's mission to the changing environment was much less prominent than might have been expected. Bureaucrats tended to respond defensively when confronted with policy questions, believing instead that policy came to them from the party political process rather than from processes within the civil service. Moreover there is hardly any room for feedback from experience with policy implementation.

According to Hyden (1983), "whatever is being fed back at the top is in the form of praise rather than critique." There may also be cultural elements at play. In the case of Ghana, for instance, it was observed that respect for elders and reverence for authority may inhibit subordinates from contributing to policy formulation.

The counter-productive behaviour of the bureaucracy was also a problem in at least one of the three countries, but possibly more generally. Withholding of information and failure to coordinate with units working in related fields were identified as problems. More worrying was mention of the poor commitment of officials to the common good, lack of transparency in proceedings and even mention of corrupt practices (Mutahaba, Baguma, and Halfani, 1993).

The External Dimension

The extensive involvement of external agencies in sub-Saharan Africa represents a further environmental factor which impacts on the process of policy formulation. Economic dependency on the outside world has become the rule rather than the exception, with many countries becoming almost completely dependent on external sources for their development finance. During the 1980's, the functioning of several African States was only made possible by external aid flows of a level relative to GNP rarely seen in other parts of the developing world. Donor conditionalities - explicit or assumed - as well as actual availability of resources, affect policy at both the macro and the sector levels.

The lack of sufficient institutional capacity to cope with the scale and strength of external intervention increases the impact of this intervention on policy formulation, in some cases to a point where "the state as a nerve centre for national policy-making may risk collapse" (Doornbos, 1990). What the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) describes as "the growing influence of officials of international institutions and donor agencies on policy design, implementation and monitoring, without any accountability to the people of Africa" (ECA, 1989) leads, in the view of that organisation, to "a gradual erosion of sovereignty."⁴ But how dependent, in fact, on outside influences has policy formulation been in the three study countries? The picture conveyed by the studies is mixed. In Ghana, external agencies appear to have led the government, as part of the Economic Recovery Programme, to adopt policies which had been recommended by the National Consultation Committee ten years earlier but which the government had been unwilling for political reasons to implement. In addition, external agencies insisted on the need for government to address long-standing problems of policy management in the education sector - eg. the inadequacies in the information and data base and in its capacity to undertake monitoring and analytical work.

Recognizing these institutional weaknesses, a Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring and Evaluation Division (PBME) was set up in the Ministry of Education. The aim was to provide a division inside the ministry to generate policy relevant data and information. The belief was that by establishing such a division, policy planning and formulation would be separated from implementation. This would enable the Ministry to concentrate on its primary function of policy planning and allow it to be the central coordinating agency for the educational sector. However, evaluation revealed major weaknesses in the functioning of the PBME. Part of the problem arose from unclear definitions of its functions and links with other units of the Ministry. The existence of a Project Management Unit supported by external finance was also a contributing factor (see page 31).

In Tanzania, the evidence suggests that external agencies did not play a very significant role in the formulation of the cost-recovery policy in education, and that this was largely consistent with the intentions of government. The study team found "no evidence that external agencies exerted any influence in respect of this particular policy decision." Local representatives of donor agencies saw their role as being ready to assist the country; they did not consider that it should be part of their role "to attempt to influence policy which they fully accept to be the prerogative of the Government." The report, however, recognises that, in some cases, the distinction between assisting and influencing policy may be a very fine line. This is the case, for instance, when a donor agency offers or is invited to undertake the management of a programme because there is no local capacity to do the job. This may result in an external agency becoming so deeply involved in management details as to become virtually a part of the system.

⁴This view is not peculiarly African. The current concern of many European Union member states at the increasing volume of legislation emanating from Brussels and taking precedence over national legislation shows that national sovereignty is still a sensitive issue.

Only in Uganda, does it appear that policy was provided virtually as a package by the donors to the government. The basic studies which recommended policies for the education sector as a whole and tertiary level education in particular were carried out by donors. The latter were instrumental in identifying the problems, in setting objectives and in the analysis of options. This may have led to an underestimation by government of the interdependence of the several elements of the policy. Because national personnel had not been centrally involved in its formulation, they had not brought a critical eye to bear on likely national reactions to the specific element of the overall policy -- cost-sharing. To use a somewhat overworked word, they did not feel ownership of the policy. In this context, the ensuing political difficulties were, perhaps, inevitable.

Chapter 4. The Policy Formulation Process

Participants at the Planning Workshop identified seven 'stages' in policy formulation that represent nodal points in an effective policy formulation process. While the stages can be placed in a linear sequence, the process is not normally an orderly progress from one to the next. It is likely to require a good deal of doubling back to adjust earlier stages in the light of fresh information. In other words, it is an iterative process. The stages identified were:

1. Issue/Problem Identification;
2. Specification of Objectives;
3. Development of Possible Options;
4. Choice of Preferred Option;
5. Policy Decision Making;
6. Design of Implementation Strategy;
7. Policy Review and Reformulation.

They also identified three "action instruments" which animate the process and provide inputs at each of the various stages: information gathering, information analysis, and consultation. Resulting from the inputs supplied by these instruments, the journey along the path from issue identification through policy decision-making to review and eventual reformulation takes on much of the appearance of a journey through a maze.

While there is some artificiality in making a distinction between the stages and the instruments, such a distinction was judged to provide a useful framework within which to examine the findings of the case studies in this chapter.

Stages in Policy Formulation

Identification of the Policy Issue

It seems a truism to state that the starting point for policy formulation is to have a clear and detailed definition of the issue to be addressed. While this is easy to state in principle, the reality is far more complex. It is often difficult to decide precisely what the issue is that needs to be addressed. In particular, the distinction between the symptoms and the real causes of a problem is often not sufficiently analysed.

A number of factors affect the articulation of the issue. To begin with, there is the question of how the agenda is set, how an issue comes to light. The power to decide what will or will not be a

policy issue has a significant impact on the evolution of the policy process. Identifying an issue, bringing it to attention, and then mounting pressure to have action taken are important political tactics. Equally, keeping attention away from certain issues is as important. "Non-decision making" occurs when influential individuals or groups, or the political system itself, prevent the emergence of challenges to the dominant values or interests in society (Bachrach and Baratz, 1970).

Then there is the nature of the policy issue. It may be an issue which has been chosen; one which arises out of a normal process of monitoring and review; or one which is thrust on government by a crisis. It has been argued that the process of policy formulation tends to unfold differently depending on whether policy elites perceive they are dealing with a crisis situation or with orderly progress of a political agenda. Pressures for reform, stakes involved in change, the level of decision-makers involved, the degree of change considered and the timing of reform all influence the process. (Grindle and Thomas, 1991).

The institutional environment within which a specific issue arises will also affect the way in which it is expressed. The immediate issue may be relatively narrow but the 'ripple effect' in the policy 'pool' may be wide-ranging. For instance, the issue for this study raises fundamental philosophical and political issues related to the objectives of education policy in low income countries. Germane too are issues of social equity; of the importance of education to economic growth and to the alleviation of the poverty of the most disadvantaged members of society. At a more mundane but equally important level of consideration, are issues of budgetary policy within the constraints of macro economic management, particularly in situations of financial crisis.

The background to policy initiation in relation to cost-sharing was strikingly similar in all three study countries. At independence, each of the countries wanted to radically review the education system inherited from the British. In Ghana, the Government decided, as a matter of national policy, that primary education should be free and compulsory. In Tanzania, the government had committed itself to primary education for all as early as 1964. Following the Arusha Declaration, Government committed itself to achieving the goal of Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 1989. In 1974, however, the Party directed, in the Musoma resolution, that UPE should be accelerated and reached by the end of 1977. Uganda gave priority to higher education, with a view to producing sufficient highly qualified civil servants. Tertiary level education would be free and, in addition, students would be paid several allowances (free room and board, books, stationery, travel and spending money).

The level of investment in education implied in each of the policies proved to be unsustainable. This spurred the need for policy change. Proposals for cost-sharing were a clear response in all three countries to a severe financial crisis resulting from a mismatch between societal demands and previous government policy on the one hand and available government resources on the other. Thus, budgetary provision became the framework within which remedies would be sought.

The experience in Tanzania illustrates the complexity of the issue. The political environment was one where the decision to undertake UPE had already been taken and the political leadership was committed to its realisation. Thus, the issue of cost recovery could be construed as incremental in the context of UPE. But, the decision taken at Musoma to cut the original timespan for realising UPE by about half may be described as bold or idealistic -- but unrealistic.

The issue arose in the first place from problems related to effective implementation of the existing policy and the perceived need to correct those problems without changing in any substantial manner the goals and content of UPE. The big increase in school attendance in the framework of UPE was not matched by an increase in budget allocation for school materials. This

led to public complaints over the deteriorating quality of education. The matter was raised in Party meetings as well as in the press and other media. A question was put to the Minister in the National Assembly as to the cause of shortage of exercise books in primary schools. The Treasury articulated the problem by identifying scarce financial resources as the main constraint. The policy objective, then, was how to get more finance. Subsequent policy analysis was more concerned with this than with addressing the problem in a broader frame of analysis of the delivery of an education service.

Cost recovery proposals also constituted a significant departure from the previous policy and practice, i.e. of the Government's commitment to finance primary education. It was a high profile issue related to a central government policy and affecting society at the broadest level. This made the policy issue in itself a critical one.

Specification of Objectives

Just as the policy path should have a beginning - the issue to be addressed -- it should also have, from the start, at least a general idea of a destination -- the objective to be achieved. As soon as the issue to be addressed is identified, it is necessary to agree a statement of the objective. The objective at this stage will be tentative. It may, indeed almost certainly will, be modified in the light of information gathered on the way. But an initial statement of the issue and of the objective will help to determine the nature of the information required and the actors and stakeholders who need to be brought into the process. Moreover, it is essential that there is a clear policy objective at the end of the formulation process, one that can provide a basis for useful monitoring, evaluation and review of policy implementation. Without a clear ex-ante statement of objectives of the policy eventually agreed, no serious ex-post evaluation can be made.

Often, there may be different understandings among the several actors and stakeholders involved of what this objective means. The Tanzanian and Ugandan studies, in particular, give some insights into how these differences can arise. They highlight the need for clarity at this stage of the process.

In Tanzania, parents and pupils as well as the wider public were the first to recognise and react to the imperfections of the existing primary education situation. They perceived the issue as a shortage of education materials, particularly exercise books. Getting the issue on the policy agenda was precipitated by public outcry about shortages of education materials. This prompted responses and reactions from the various actors, but each of these in their turn had different perceptions of the specific issue. Regional and district authorities were more concerned with the quality of the immediate service being delivered as a consequence of the lack of paper and other school materials. The Ministry of Education was primarily concerned with the quality of education in general. The Treasury, was worried about the rising demand of primary education on the public purse. The political leadership was concerned to achieve the goal of UPE, as well as to contain public dissatisfaction.

The non-governmental stakeholders were motivated by interest in a single issue which affected them and their families in a very real and personal way. But, the various ministries responded to the issue within their broad institutional mandates and obligations. Their perception was inevitably influenced by their role in relation to the achievement of what was a major policy aim - Universal Primary Education (UPE).

The Treasury took the first step in officially setting the issue on the policy agenda when it put a question to the Minister of Education on financing of education policy proposals. The Ministry of Finance was sensitive to the seriousness of the unrest and identified the problem as being able to meet the financial implications of a major part of the education policy of the country. So, the initial issue emerged as a symptom of the real problem rather than the problem itself.

Variations in the perception of the objectives also appeared at an early stage in Uganda. There, a general review of education policy was in train and, due to the general shortage of funds, the issue of cost-sharing was taken out of a broader policy discussion. The general objective of the policy change was to diversify sources of finance for tertiary education through cost-sharing and by containing unit costs to government.

From the outset, however, different actors within the Ministry of Education saw the policy as having different objectives. For instance, the Department for Higher Education assumed that resources raised would be used to increase the quality of tertiary education, while the department dealing with primary and secondary education expected a reallocation of resources in its favour.

It was interesting to see how the way in which the issue was finally identified and the objective(s) set influenced the thinking on how the matter should be dealt with.

Development of Options and Process of Choice

Choice is at the heart of policy formulation. Choice between different options with differing resource requirements and differing impact on perceived problems. What might achieve one objective might be of no use, or even be disastrous, for the achievement of other objectives. The role of policy analysis is to help formulate the policy options from which a choice can be made. In theory, each option would be given a different weighting based on its advantages and disadvantages in relation to realising the objectives of the policy. It would set out, for instance, who would gain and who would lose from each option.

Under a linear model of policy formulation, officials set out all the options along with all the advantages and disadvantages of each in terms of the objectives to be achieved. In some instances and in some administrations, they might recommend a particular option; in all cases, they would leave politicians to decide which option to adopt. However, the more realistic iterative model of policy formulation recognises that, at an early stage in policy analysis, there is likely to be interaction between technical and political considerations. Thus, the elimination of certain options as politically unacceptable and the modification of other options to make them more politically acceptable, takes place during the analytical process. The final decision on policy from a sometimes very limited range of options will be made at the political level at a late stage in the process.

The need to articulate options for the government was implicitly included in the terms of reference given to the consultative commissions and committees that were set up in both Ghana and Uganda to review education finance. However, in Ghana, the Consultative Committee did not articulate options but made a single proposal, namely a cost-sharing partnership between Government and parents on a 50/50 basis. This proposal was rejected by the Government on the grounds that "as far as practicable, primary education should be free." Yet another Commission suggested "devolution of responsibility" to local communities with the understanding that "when genuine help was needed it will be forthcoming."

This may have been a useful principle to guide policy action, but could hardly be considered to have resulted from an analysis of options. In fact, the country report says that it found no evidence of multiple options having been analysed within the Ministry of Education or within the related institutions and thus it found no evidence of any process of choice having been undertaken. The delay in introducing a policy which had been on the stocks for over a decade had certainly given time for the population to become somewhat accustomed to the idea of having to pay something for education. It had not produced a strategy for implementation which was likely to meet with an acceptable level of success.

The Uganda study asserts that "lack of reliable data and overall inadequacy of the information base did not enable the identification of cost-sharing policy options." Important aspects of the envisaged policy were not analysed before decision making. For instance, no proper study of the income profile of students or of their parents was done. While the Education Policy Review Commission did identify options, it did not provide information on the process of their selection and the report is silent on options considered but not recommended.

The Tanzania report presents an interesting contrast. No evidence was found of any real identification of options having been undertaken. Government was committed to achieving UPE and this was seen as having an irreversible social and political momentum. It was a 'given' and so eliminated any consideration of options which would alter it. As a consequence, financing options were rigidly constrained. According to the study report, there was no need for consideration of options. The "only option was to find a source of additional funds and the only available source was some kind of cash contribution from parents". Whether this was, in fact, the only option may be open to question but the fact is that what was seen as the higher imperative of a basic policy of the politicians led to the adoption of this line.

Having a large quantity of data may itself present a problem for analysis almost as great as having too little. The review of previous implementation experience becomes part of the analytical process and of the identification of options. The experience of the personnel involved becomes a very important component. Time, too, or more often the lack of it, is always a dimension in the policy formulation process. It is probably unrealistic, even naive, to assume that if a vast amount of data and information were available to policy analysts they could anticipate all the effects which would flow from given policy options including the political, personal and other reactions. Even the most sophisticated of analytical work could hardly do this.

Nevertheless, ex ante review of options should still be adequate to avoid the need for a complete volte face of the type that occurred in Uganda where the introduction of cost-sharing led to student and faculty riots including deaths, to the closing of Makerere University for eight months and to the policy being reconsidered in its totality. In the event, the ensuing review of policy led to a package of measures which was far more acceptable to all parties involved. These measures, for instance, established a special fund for "needy students", introduced a Book Bank Scheme to compensate for the abolition of book allowances, and partly reversed the abolition of all travel allowances. Similarly in Tanzania, the achievement of UPE within three years was declared as a political objective without any consideration of its feasibility or implications. Civil servants were left in complete disarray and were invariably forced to modify the original policy objectives as resources rarely permitted the attainment of the ambitious targets set by the politicians.

These experiences point to the need to spend as much effort as possible in analysing the likely results of different options so as to avoid problems. The decision in Uganda to impose cost recovery measures in tertiary education which were part of a wider policy proposal in advance of the completion of the global education sector study, was, certainly in retrospect, far too

precipitate and inadequately considered. The ten year delay in Ghana between the initial recommendation by the National Consultative Committee that parents should pay 50 per cent of the cost of text-books and stationery supplied to primary school children, and the eventual decision of the government to introduce some cost recovery measures may be questioned, even though the intervening period was well used to sensitise parents to the need for such measures. It must be recognised that the process of analysis is time consuming and, particularly in the context of financial crises, can be carried to excess.

Policy Decision-Making

In all three countries, the policy was decided at very high level. As a result, it was not easy to get much information on the considerations that eventually informed the policy decision. It is common experience in most administrations that the nearer decisions are to the apex of the policy pyramid, the more the process involves confidential discussion. Often only decisions are recorded and everywhere, for researchers and practitioners alike, it is difficult to get access to what really happened during cabinet meetings.

In both Ghana and Tanzania, the political sensitivity towards introducing or increasing parental contributions to primary education meant that these decisions were made at the highest levels of government. Background documentation and advice for the decisions would have come not only through the civil service and ministerial channels but also, and perhaps mainly, through the internal consultative processes of the ruling parties. The advice was not necessarily of the objective genre presumed to be produced by the administrations on which those of the countries in the study were modelled at least initially. The advice would almost certainly have had at least a leaven of what the decision makers wanted to hear.

In Uganda, a somewhat different path was followed. As already noted, the cost recovery measures were part of a comprehensive education sector policy report which had been prepared by the Government and submitted to the Cabinet by the Minister of Education. From its package of recommendations on financing tertiary level education, the Cabinet singled out a few measures for immediate implementation. The Cabinet, including the President who is also chairman of the ruling party, the National Resistance Movement (NRM), made the final decision although, given the sensitivity of the matter, it could have been expected that the final decision would have been made by the highest body, namely the National Resistance Council (NRC).

Design of Strategies for Implementation

Promulgation and dissemination of a decision among the actors and stakeholders emerged as a significant element of the policy formulation process though it was not identified explicitly as a stage at the planning workshop. It may be regarded as the bridge between formulation and implementation and is thus treated in this section.

The way in which the policy was announced and promulgated was raised explicitly in all the reports as having a significant effect on the implementation of the policy. "Managing the message" is increasingly recognised as necessary for effective realisation of policy goals. In Tanzania, for instance, great care was taken at the highest levels to ensure that the decision on cost-sharing was not interpreted as any weakening by the government of its commitment to UPE or to its implementation. The President reiterated this commitment. One report in a Government owned newspaper stated that the President warned parents who kept their children from attending

school because of the new policy that they would be dealt with severely. He also added that "no pupil shall be turned away from school if his parents fail to pay the contribution." This ambiguity appears to have led some people to believe that the payment was not obligatory. The country report argues that this ambiguity gave rise to the situation in which, even after several years, there was still a low level of compliance with the policy.

In Uganda, evidence suggests that the Government underestimated the importance of this stage of the process. The decision was passed to the Ministry of Education where it was simply signed by a Permanent Secretary and then circulated to the appropriate educational institutions for implementation. The letter of transmittal gave neither an implementation strategy nor a monitoring and evaluation procedure. Most of those interviewed criticised not the policy as such but the piecemeal and ad hoc basis on which a single element of a larger policy package was introduced and the fact that there was no real effort to popularise the decision. The abrupt method of policy announcement was consistent with the top-down way in which the Government had handled earlier stages of the policy formulation process when no effective consultation had taken place. The result, however, was that key actors and stakeholders were taken by surprise sparking the resistance and rioting already noted.

In Ghana, the study report also judged that managing the message was inadequately handled. Despite the fact that the policy was introduced a long time after it had been recommended for the first time and the efforts of the government during that period to sensitise the population to the rationale of the policy, the consensus building that was essential to the effective implementation of the policy had not been achieved.

Action Instruments

Three main action instruments provide links between the stages in the policy process. Their use means that the process cannot be represented as a straight sequential line, but rather as a web or maze with the analyst having to double back to review earlier stages in the process in the light of events or information occurring at a later stage. These action instruments are:

- Information Gathering;
- Information Analysis;
- Consultation.

Information Gathering

The importance of having adequate provision for information gathering has already been highlighted in the section concerned with the administrative dimension of the institutional environment (see page 15-17).

Both the Ghana and Uganda reports saw the quality of the information base as a critical factor in the process of policy formulation. They also referred to several weaknesses. The main reason for the observed gap in data provision was said to be the hostile political and economic environment in which, for instance, salaries and morale of civil servants were low, and the basic means of state functioning (such as paper) could be lacking or in short supply. Another contributing factor, was a 'confidentiality syndrome' within the bureaucracy. This hampered the free flow of information both within the ministry primarily involved and between it and other ministries. The Ghana study also reveals the possibility that data were often 'enhanced'. The fact that head teachers had an

incentive to present favourable enrolment figures to the Ministry of Education was said to be one reason for enhancing data.

One consequence of this lack of reliable data was that external agencies (such as the World Bank) felt obliged to collect data themselves. This sometimes resulted in a situation where field offices of external agencies were much better informed about the local situation than the local administrations.

In the case of Uganda, the problem faced by the Education Policy Review Commission established specifically to provide background for the intended policy change on cost-sharing, was reported to be "not a lack of cooperation with government officials in getting information but the absolute lack of detailed, up-to-date and reliable data."

According to the Tanzania report, there were comprehensive and regular reporting arrangements between Regional and District Education Officers and the Ministry of Education, including a regular flow of information about the payment of parental contributions to education costs. These arrangements were, on the whole, judged to be adequate by the study team though it was not possible to ascertain the precise use that was made of the information during the process of policy formulation. However, reference in the report to a belief that District Committees were diverting some of the funds to other purposes under their responsibility suggests gaps in the nature and quality of the information available. The report somewhat provocatively makes the point that because the shortcomings of the education system were sufficiently known to policy-makers and to the public, there was hardly any need for data to be used in monitoring and evaluation. The failure to correct deficiencies was said not to be a matter of information but almost entirely a matter of lack of funding. This would seem to bear out the truth of Gulhati's point referred to earlier that there has not been much demand for policy relevant studies by those making policy decisions. They believe they know the score already!

Closely linked to the issue of demand for such studies is that of the extent to which analytical capacity to produce them exists.

Information Analysis

An effective process of policy formulation has to include the capacity not only to generate and analyse new policy options but also to monitor, evaluate and review ongoing policies as a basis for their modification or discontinuance. In all three countries the capacity to undertake these tasks was both weak and underutilised. Many of those involved considered that the weakness of the information base was not so much a result of lack of information but of lack of the institutional capacity for adequately processing and analysing this information. Several factors contributed to this problem.

First has been either the absence of policy analysis units in government or, where they formally exist, their widespread under-utilisation. According to a World Bank study of education policy in Africa, "lack of staff and other resources had reduced central policy and planning units to the status of statistics offices, concerned primarily with meeting the information needs of external funding agencies. Such units are not able to generate a range of policy options for review or to monitor and thus to learn from the implementation of policy decisions" (World Bank, 1988). The country reports for the three studies show that this has been the case in Ghana and Uganda where institutions for policy analysis and advice to government existed but were allowed to decay. Once created, they were left on their own; their roles were not clearly spelt out and understood; and

they were not given adequate financing and support. In Ghana, for instance, the budget of the Education Commission dried up and vacancies in its membership were left unfilled.

In Tanzania, the report noted that lack of policy analysis capacity at ministerial level badly affected sound policy formulation including the review of ongoing policies. As mentioned earlier, policy analysis units have been established in a number of central ministries. While this represents a move to create analytical capacity, it still leaves unresolved the issue raised by a senior Tanzanian civil servant, who points out that even if these units were universally established it "may not be easy to find people who have the necessary expertise" to staff them (Shellukindo 1992).

Secondly, the absence of any significant analytical capacity in government had been aggravated by the existence of few applied research studies undertaken by independent research institutions. At the Ghana review workshop, for instance, it was noted that despite "a long-standing tradition of community participation in financing education... its main features have never been analysed." Yet, the relevance of experience with this tradition in the context of the decision to introduce cost-sharing schemes was obvious.

This reflects a chronic mismatch between the demand for and the (potential) supply of applied research. Researchers are seldom asked to develop alternative policy options. Decision-making on research priorities is often an arbitrary process with few attempts to link specific applied research assignments to the priority needs of policy-makers. Boards of research institutes (such as the Institute of Educational Planning and Administration in Ghana) were perceived to act as mere rubber stamps for government policies. Participants in the Ghana workshop attributed this to the fact that board members were usually not aware of their institutional roles in the process of policy formulation.

A third factor was the often simultaneous existence of several units with the same or closely related policy functions. For example, in Ghana, the decision to establish Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring and Evaluation (PBME) units was a move by government to strengthen the capacity for policy formulation within the ministries. However, in the case of the Ministry of Education, before the PBME was established, a Policy Management Unit had been set up on an ad-hoc basis with support from a major external agency to oversee one of its projects. Some claimed that these two units had complementary functions. Others acknowledged that the similarities of functions of the two would lead to overlapping though they were of the view that any confusion of role and functions would gradually fade away as the PMBE increased its capacity to fulfil the different aspects of its mandate and thus to take over (from the PMU).

At the time of the study, the PMU had not faded away. Partly this may reflect that the PMU had been first in existence and had, therefore, marked out its functional 'territory'; that it had access to external financing; or even, that, like the Marxian state, once established, institutions never fade away. But it also reflects a view of the people involved in the PMU that PBME, as a regular unit of the Ministry competing for resources with the rest of the organisation, might face a deeper problem to develop greater analytical capacity and move beyond mere statistical descriptions of the system.

Consultation

Consultation has several forms and functions and it is relevant to many of the stages of the policy path. It may be used to secure expert views, to determine the relationship and interaction between the policy in question and other policies of the same or other ministries, or to garner the views of stakeholders in the broader societal environment. It can contribute to data collection and to the processing and analysis of these data in the national context.

Two main groups may be included in the consultation process -- public bodies including ministries and agencies of central government, and civil society. Active linkages are required between ministries in order to draw on the technical and specialist knowledge of other ministries, to ensure that the interests of these other ministries are included in the policy formulation process, and to seek their cooperation when this is required to implement a policy proposal. The inter-dependent nature of much public policy makes linkages all the more necessary. In many cases there may be several policy groups considering similar or related issues simultaneously. Given the relative scarcity of policy formulation capacity, it is important to avoid any overlapping of functions leading to waste or underutilisation of existing resources. To ensure the necessary consultation, institutional mechanisms need to be in place and in working order. It is too late to begin setting them up when a policy issue, particularly if it is critical, urgent or controversial, demands it.

In many countries, the need for intra-governmental consultation is recognised, at least in principle, even though it may come at too late a stage. Consultation with civil society, is, as we shall see, not so clearly part of the process with often unfortunate consequences at the implementation stage.

Consultation Mechanisms

In all three countries, lack of adequate inter-ministerial linkages was seen as a major defect in the policy formulation process relating to education and specifically to the cost-sharing policy.

In two of the countries, Ghana and Tanzania, there was recognition that Finance as well as Education was involved in the policy under study. In each of these countries, the Finance Ministry (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning in Ghana) was very much aware of deteriorating conditions in schools. In fact, in the case of Tanzania, it was the Treasury which initiated the policy process in relation to cost-sharing with its request to the Ministry of Education for a "lasting solution" to the budget problems of primary education. From the beginning, therefore, there was an explicit linkage between the two ministries. Likewise in Ghana, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning was closely involved. In fact, the Ministry was aware that some parents were prepared to buy text-books. Its officials felt that there was no valid reason why parents should not, in the spirit of community participation, share the costs of education. Thus, they discussed the issue with their counterparts at the Ministry of Education. But the issue was considered to be so sensitive politically that the proposed action was greatly delayed and had been weakened long before the dialogue with the World Bank took place.

The Uganda case provides an interesting contrast. Here the role of the Ministry of Finance was limited. It was not represented in the Education Policy Review Commission nor in the White Paper Committee despite the obvious financial implications of the various policy options.

At a general level, it is typical to establish inter-ministerial working groups where policies cross ministerial responsibilities. In Ghana, such working groups had in effect been established at the level of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) Committee of Secretaries (i.e. Cabinet) and, ultimately, in the PNDC itself. The researchers were given to understand that policy proposals submitted for decision to PNDC were scrutinised to ensure that inter-ministerial linkages had been made. If this was not the case, the submission would be referred back for further review. A similar structure existed in Tanzania where the Principal Secretaries, assisted by the Cabinet Secretariat, constituted an Inter-Ministerial Technical Committee (IMTC). This committee scrutinised all policy proposals before submission to Cabinet. Neither report provides any indication as to the extent to which these procedures operated in relation to the introduction of cost-sharing in education.

It has to be recognized that major constraints exist to effective inter-sectoral policy formulation. The prevailing administrative culture favours a mechanistic, routinized approach to policy management. The administration is generally vertically organized into sectoral or functional ministries and departments and information flows tend to be vertically structured. Notwithstanding the multi-sectoral composition of the Cabinet, inter-sectoral linkages may neither be recognized nor managed at that level because issues are usually presented from a narrow sectoral perspective. They are also, of course, difficult to manage both technically and politically. Battles of competence and mandate at the bureaucratic level are not to be excluded.

It is interesting to note that none of the three reports refers to an active role of central planning function⁵ in the policy process under review. This possibly may well have reflected the withering away of planning in favour of finance - a widespread phenomenon throughout sub-Saharan Africa.

Tools for Consultation

All three country studies indicate that there was extensive use of appointed Commissions and White or Green Papers to inform policy formulation.

Commissions may be either interministerial or public. They may also have several sub-committees. Organised groups as well as interested citizens can be invited to give evidence to them and the former at least may have representatives on commissions and any sub-committees. To be credible, such consultation must take place at a stage when the output can be taken into account in arriving at policy decisions. It emerged on a number of occasions during the field studies that it is important to keep those consulted informed of progress including, if their recommendations do not appear in the final decision, some indication of the considerations which led to their omission. There was some cynicism about the degree to which such consultations could be regarded as genuine with an effective input to the process of policy formulation. One participant in the in-country workshop cited his experience of receiving a request for views and comments after the closing date for receipt of responses as supporting the suspicion that his potential impact was limited!

Some interviewees considered Commissions useful in terms of gathering data and analysing policies in general terms, but others saw them as window dressing or a delaying tactic by government. This latter was a perception which was reported in Uganda. Several macro-economic and sectoral studies were made on educational policies. In particular, in 1987 an Education Policy Review Commission was appointed to review and appraise the education system at all levels and to formulate policy recommendations. Extensive reviews of experience in other countries around the world were undertaken and the final report was a comprehensive study of the sector with concrete proposals for action. After receiving the report, the Minister appointed yet another consultative group (i.e. a White Paper Committee) to examine the report of the previous Commission. The costs of such duplication of efforts as compared with any possible benefits to the policy-making process can certainly be questioned.

In Ghana, there was institutional provision for consultation in the process of policy formulation in the field of primary education and the report stated that it had been used, in the main, satisfactorily. Following a long-standing tradition of committees on education policy,⁶ a National Consultative Committee on Educational Finance was established which had no less than 54 members drawn from a very wide spectrum of relevant knowledge and interest groups. In March 1984, the Education Commission was appointed. Between then and 1988, it produced four reports. Nevertheless, there was still widespread concern among the stakeholders with what was seen as lack of adequate consultation.

⁵The linkage with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning in Ghana was in relation to the financial aspects of the issue.

⁶The Ghana report refers to a period from 1962 to 1975 when two Review Committees, an Advisory Committee and the National Consultative Committee reported on various aspects.

Consultation with Civil Society

While this might be considered part of the consultation process, it emerged as such a significant but under-recognised factor and is so central to governance that it is dealt with separately.

Consultation is at the centre of studying the role of actors and stakeholders outside of government in the policy formulation process. Policy is not made in a vacuum but within the socio-economic complexity of the country. It has earlier been emphasised that a more realistic and more effective concept of the process of policy formulation has, *inter alia*, to include the role of actors and stakeholders in this process. This is consistent with the current emphasis on adopting a "governance approach" in addressing issues of policy management.

Government has a major initiating role to play if civil society is to be effectively included in the policy formulation process. First, government has to recognise the need to stimulate public debate on policy issues, through the media for example, thereby encouraging more participatory forms of policy formulation. This would provide a channel through which to identify, publicise and influence policy issues. It would also pass part of the responsibility for ensuring that stakeholders are involved in the policy formulating process to the stakeholders themselves and to the leaders of their associations. The policy formulation process would be able, thus, to take account of bottom-up views and ideas while, at the same time, helping to increase the political awareness of the population.

To tap the opinions of civil society, especially through formally constituted groups, specific mechanisms need to be put in place. As with interlinkages with other government bodies, they need to be developed independently of any specific policy issue so that they can be mobilised quickly when necessary and be part of the accepted institutional infrastructure. As is evident from some of the remarks made in relation to tools for consultation, there is critical need to ensure that involvement does not appear to be artificial to have a mechanism for keeping civil society informed or in the loop.

While Ghana was found to have a good provision for consultation, people and institutions outside of formal structures often felt that no consideration had been given to their evidence and proposals if these did not feature in the final policy choice. There was also a belief among officials that objective comment was unlikely from members of the public who had a vested interest in the policy issue. Also, the Ghana study makes the point that no consultation with parents took place on the basis that "parents who had not previously been required to pay anything for their children's education could not be expected to agree to the introduction of any charge."

The Tanzania study found no evidence of any prior consultation between decision-makers and other actors or stakeholders. However, the Tanzania Parents' Association asserted that extensive consultation had in fact taken place within the ruling Party structures "from local branch up to the national Executive". The study could not confirm the extent or content of this consultation or whether the details of this consultation process had been made available to the Government officials dealing with the specific subject of cost-sharing for primary education. It may be assumed, however, that while there were certainly parents of children still in the education system in the Party structures, they were not there primarily in that capacity. The more likely reason for the paucity of consultation was that it simply was not part of the process. The richness of what

they had missed because of the lack of consultation which emerged during the review workshop amazed senior officials.

In Uganda, the Education Policy Review Commission solicited views from individuals, groups and institutions. However, as a consultative mechanism it was seen to have two significant weaknesses. First, there was major criticism of its membership. It was asserted that the Commission was much too narrowly based thus excluding major actors and interest groups from participation directly in its deliberations. Out of the 28 members, 22 were from the Ministry of Education (including the University); one was from a party; the rest were from other government organisations. Cynics understandably wondered what was the point in setting up a Commission with this membership in the first place.

Moreover, there was deep concern, as in the case of Ghana, that those people and institutions that gave evidence to the Commission had no idea of what consideration had been given to suggestions that they had presented. There was no standing mechanism for communication and no feedback had been given. This encouraged the sense that neither the Government nor the Commission was serious in undertaking a consultation process with actors and stakeholders in civil society. The levels of trust, confidence and openness between the government and civil society actors and stakeholders were low. Actions taken by the government further eroded the existing low level of trust. Some actors and stakeholders felt that being asked to comment a year and a half after the publication of the report of the Commission, when a White Paper based on its contents was already before the Cabinet for decision, did not suggest a genuine interest in their views or any likelihood that they would be taken into account. All this is likely to have contributed to the fact already noted, that they did not perceive themselves to be involved in a process of policy formulation.

In all three countries, it was believed that effective policy formulation would benefit from increased participation of the various actors and stakeholders. The Ghana and Tanzania studies suggest that the levels of participation were better than in Uganda. However, participation was confined within the structures of the one party system in the case of Tanzania, and participation was held to have had only limited impact on final decision-making as in the case of Ghana.

Much of the frustration, particularly in Ghana and Uganda, derived from the failure of governments to communicate regularly and effectively with them, including the almost complete absence of feedback when they had previously been asked for their advice. When no explanations were given as to why a particular policy option had been rejected or another had been adopted, there was a disposition to assume that no attention had been given to their own input into the process. While it is easy in these circumstances for people to be cynical over the genuineness of the government's consultation process, it is quite possible that the situations arose simply out of the sluggishness or incompetence of the bureaucratic machinery of government rather than of anything more politically sinister. Whatever the case, attention should be directed to improving the process of communication both within and outside of government. This can, of course, be costly but it is unlikely to approach the costs arising from an inefficient and often ineffective policy formulation process.

Chapter 5. Enhancing Capacities to Formulate Policy -- Critical Factors and Key Issues

The three country studies reveal a number of key factors which influenced the process through which the policies on cost-sharing in the education sector were formulated. These factors are presented in this chapter in the context of the three components of governance introduced in chapter 1 -- the institutional environment, the core process of policy formulation, and the involvement of civil society.

The identification of these factors provides a base on which to signal key issues to consider when developing a programme to enhance capacity for policy formulation. The study confirms that the policy process is indeed complex. Any programme to enhance capacity must be multi-pronged and tailored to the specific institutional environment.

Institutional Environment

Characteristics of the broader institutional environment, shown to influence policy formulation include:

- the extent to which the environment may facilitate or constrain the policy formulation process.
- the political nature of the process, reflected in issues of timing
- the level of external agency involvement in the policy process

A Facilitating Environment

The need for a facilitating environment at all levels is made clear in all the reports. While there are some specific characteristics relating to the political, economic, social and cultural realities of individual countries, many characteristics of an institutional environment may be common to most situations. What the Ghana study makes clear is that one essential pre-requisite for achieving this facilitating environment is the existence of mutual trust between the various actors. This immediately brings to the fore the importance of two of the characteristics identified with governance -- transparency in decision-making, and accountability of the executors of policy to the concerned sections of civil society. It also highlights the need for government and civil society to interact fully.

Like so much else about institutional issues, it is much easier to agree on the need for a facilitating environment than to achieve it. In many instances, achieving it calls for far-reaching changes involving a new administrative culture on the one hand and raised awareness by non-governmental actors and stakeholders of their potential contributions to policy formulation on the other. The current recognition of the wider governance environment supports this. It underlines the importance of setting policy in its proper environmental context, of having the institutional means to ensure that the views of interested groups can be ascertained and that they can be kept informed of the reasons why certain policy options have been chosen.

In the past, the top-down and centralised approach to policy-making practised in many African countries did not provide a positive environment in which participatory policy formulation could flourish. However, since the policy decision studied in this exercise was made, there have been many political changes on the African continent that have helped to create institutional environments that favour more decentralised and open policy-making. The increasing number and openness of elections is helping to develop a political awareness among the general public while African governments have moved (or are moving) away from the doctrines of central control.

Currently most public service reform programmes in Africa have a large decentralisation component (see Conyers, 1983). But decentralisation is a means to an end rather than an end in itself. It needs a sustaining environment to operate effectively. A recent paper identifies a number of "environmental" conditions important for the successful introduction of decentralisation (UNDP, 1995). It states that the country must have a strong national identity, with mutual respect between local and central levels, so that

"local levels feel that the centre speaks for them, and national identity comprises central and local elements." There must also be political commitment which is "reflected in the diffusion of human and economic resources to the periphery." It is also necessary to put in place the institutional provisions required to make the system work. There must be clear definitions of the roles, missions and responsibilities of each of the levels of government and of the individual organisations at each level. For many African countries, realisation of these conditions requires a large degree of institutional readjustment. All three studies support decentralisation, but do not underestimate the size of the task involved.

Implementation of the twin policy of ministerial restructuring and decentralisation in Ghana, for instance, would transform the central Ministry of Education into what is essentially a planning, budgeting and monitoring and evaluation organisation able to coordinate the policies, programmes and budgets of all the agencies in the education sector. Implementation responsibilities would be transferred to the Education Services and its regional and district offices. The reorganised Service would have to contend with possible vested interests of existing organisations which might be adversely affected by the proposed changes. The process of creating space for wider participation therefore calls for highly capable leaders and managers.

Key Issues for Enhancing Capacity

Any programme to enhance the capacity of government to formulate policy needs to assess the institutional environment within which administrative processes take place. Such an assessment provides a basis on which to identify constraints and opportunities in the environment which could affect the viability of proposed capacity building activities.

Moves toward more pluralistic systems of governance, and toward decentralisation are expected to create a more facilitative environment for policy management, albeit one that is more institutionally complex. This will require more attention to the design of organisational structures and systems to facilitate coordination and consultation, clearer role and mission definition, and means for identifying, recruiting and retaining capable managers and leaders.

The Time Dimension

A significant factor in the policy formulation process identified explicitly in both the Ghana and Uganda reports was the timing of the policy decision -- both in terms of when it was introduced and the duration of the process. The Ghana report illustrates how, for a policy issue that materially affects the public, timing the introduction of a policy is primarily influenced by political considerations⁷. The delay of ten years⁸ in introducing a policy of cost-sharing can be attributed to such considerations. The Uganda study states

⁷ While Brinkerhoff (1995) states that "the policy process is at least as political as technical," it is not always possible to have accurate information on all of the considerations which influence political actions at cabinet level. However, critical factors with a political character can often be inferred by examining outcomes in the light of the existing political situation in the country concerned.

⁸ Account would need to be taken of the fact that the institutional as well as the economic, political and social environment is likely to have changed over such an extended period.

that the decision to introduce cost-sharing was both timely and justified. It was widely accepted that something had to be done about funding education and it needed to be done quickly. However, there was less agreement on what needed to be done. Almost all those interviewed suggested that the solution proposed would have been relevant and appropriate if the government had been able to introduce the whole new education policy at the same time, or at least the part that contained measures to accommodate students with financial problems. It was timely, but the timing of its introduction ahead of other policy provisions to deal with the situation which produced the serious reactions was not good.

Another aspect of timing is the question of the duration of the process. Here, the judgement of the politicians and officials involved must play a large part. If there is acute urgency, it may be necessary to move quickly although this may mean curtailing the time available to consult and evaluate several possible courses of action⁹. In Ghana, the decision to introduce the policy took ten years; in Uganda, it was an element of a national education policy still being processed at the time of introduction of the cost-sharing initiative. In Ghana, it was claimed that the long lapse of time had allowed the population to be sensitised to the need to adapt the policy of free primary education. In Uganda, the main dissatisfaction with the policy was the ad hoc nature of the decision to go ahead, before interactions with other parts of the main policy had been thoroughly examined. Some were of the opinion that the action was not warranted by the relative urgency of the problem if this was viewed within the overall economic situation in the country.

Key Issues for Enhancing Capacity

Political considerations can be a major factor influencing the timing of policy decisions and the overall duration of the process. It is therefore important that programmes to enhance capacity take account of the overtly political nature of policy formulation. The strategic importance of time should be more fully explored so that those involved in the process can take cognisance of any likely hostile reactions on the political front and highlight how these might be ameliorated or removed.

The 'Donor' Dimension

As reported in chapter 3, the studies give a mixed picture of the perceived influence of outside agencies on the policy formulation process. Only in Uganda was it acknowledged to have been significant in determining policy content and then more with regard to the overall review of education policy than the specific element of cost-sharing. In Ghana, external pressures related to provision of finance brought the government to the point of implementing a policy they had long recognised as necessary, but had hesitated to apply because of fears that it would be politically unwise. Tanzania did not consider there had been any external influence. There was, however, considerable reliance on external technical assistance, and the country report suggested that the line between support and influence might on occasion be so fine as to disappear.

⁹The level of trust existing between the government and the different parties affected by such a policy can be very important in such cases.

From the study, three forms of donor influence emerge: conditionality (with or without consultation with national officials and politicians); use of external agencies by national governments to introduce a desired policy likely to carry a high political risk if introduced by the government alone; and influence by default, for example, through the use of expatriates in advisory and operational positions where they necessarily became involved in the policy process.

The extent to which donors directly influence policy will vary with the level of political stability and institutional capacity within a country. However, even where a recipient country has its own highly competent and experienced personnel, the strength of some external agencies and the traditional relationship that characterises donor-recipient relations often results in donors having a greater influence than might be desired. The task of building institutional capacity is a long one. As widely admitted, approaches to achieving it during the first 25 to 30 years of independence were not particularly successful in the holistic sense, though they did produce some highly qualified personnel. How to capitalise on the availability of this resource, and build up the confidence as well as the competence of African personnel so that they can negotiate on an even playing field with the funding agencies is now a major task¹⁰.

Another aspect of donor involvement relates to coordination, both between several donors, and between separate projects supported by the same donor. Just as it is necessary for ministries to have internal consultation on policy proposals, donors should ensure that separate initiatives in a single country are complementary. The case of the the Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit (PBME) and a Project Management Unit in the Ministry of Education in Ghana is a good example. Both were funded by the same donor (through different projects) and introduced a degree of overlap of roles as well as competition for expert staff.

Key Issues for Enhancing Capacity

External agencies can be both actors and stakeholders in the development process. The country reports suggest that they influence the policy formulation process in both direct and indirect ways. Programmes to enhance capacity need to take account of the donor dimension. Measures to enhance institutional capacity, as identified in this study, should necessarily reduce such external influence, but it is a long-term process. In the short to medium term, more specific attention might focus on:

- *strengthening overall coordination of national development within which to evaluate the relevance, utility and longer-term benefits and costs of externally resourced programme offers*
- *building negotiating skills to enable more effective operation at the international level*
- *assuring that donors have up-to-date understanding and appreciation of the political, economic and social realities within which policies are to be applied*
- *ensuring that donor projects and programmes are mutually consistent.*

Core Process of Government

¹⁰ Despite some progress, an experienced African cabinet secretary said an April 1995 workshop that, on returning from visits to the World Bank, he sometimes asked himself why and how they had agreed to the terms!

The country reports identified three fundamental action instruments which support the policy formulation process within government administration: i) information gathering, ii) information analysis, and iii) consultation. The studies show that the extent to which these are used in the formulation process influences policy outcomes. Programmes to enhance capacity for policy management have focused largely on the first two of these. They have led to the development of systems and structures such as modern computer-based management information systems and policy analysis units, and have provided technical and professional training. The fact that the benefits which might have been expected from these programmes have not been fully realised underlines the importance of the institutional environment - the culture of the administration and the capacity to recruit and retain effective personnel.

Information Gathering

The studies confirmed the importance of better and more accessible information, as well as its wider use. Defining the issue presents an interesting example of the complexity of the policy path. There is a common perception that databases are weak in most African countries. However, this is not uniformly so. In most countries, coverage of the formal sector is adequate. Outside this, there is a scarcity of dependable data in the traditional quantified meaning of the word.

However, this raises the issue of what constitutes data and information. Is it a question of better systems to collect and process non-quantifiable but available data? What Harris Mule (ECDPM, 1987) refers to as "casual empiricism" - the views of those with long experience and knowledge handed down from generation to generation, by farmers for example may well be a source of information to be used in policy analysis. It would, of course, need to be organised in a way that makes it useful as a base on which to build policy options. Those accustomed to quantified data may find this less than satisfactory. There are risks in using such information; it would certainly need to be assessed by experienced policy-makers. But then, using econometric or mathematical techniques to arrive at conclusions on the basis of incomplete (even if quantified) statistics may not enable decision-makers to come up with the right policy. Indeed, there may be an additional risk if the result is wrong; information backed up by quantitative data tends to appear reliable, even if the data itself is unreliable.

Agreeing on the need to improve the quality and availability of information is closely interlinked with the perception by policy analysts and decision makers of the importance of information to policy formulation. An ECDPM workshop (1987) identified something of a vicious circle here. Because there was a lack of appreciation of the importance of accurate data and information for good policy formulation at the early stages of independence, gathering it was not a very prestigious job; so the best people did not want to be involved in it; so the information was not very good; so policy makers did not tend to use what was available; so there was no tradition of calling on such services as statistics because of the distrust of them; so they did not improve.

Key Issues for Enhancing Capacity

Enhancing the generation and utilisation of information in the policy process is an essential component of enhancing capacity. It is generally acknowledged that the provision of structures and systems to facilitate the collection and use of data and information will not guarantee their use, unless accompanied by measures to raise awareness of the value of information at different stages of the process. Civil servants need sensitisation in this respect. Account must also be taken of the importance of culture in influencing perceptions on the role of information, and on the potential value of different types of information, such as indigenous knowledge sources.

Information Analysis

Making good use of information demands the availability of good analytical capacity. This capacity is needed to define issues, determine the criteria for choice, generate alternative policy options and appraise political feasibility. As the country reports demonstrate, the way in which the issue of cost recovery was addressed was substantially influenced by how it got onto the policy agenda -- who brought it forward as a matter to be addressed urgently at that time. In each case, there was little analysis applied to its definition. The extent to which development of alternative options was undertaken is not clear from the information available. Even in Uganda where, according to the report, options were elaborated for the overall education policy, there did not appear to be any such study in relation to the issue of cost-sharing. The Tanzanian study went so far as to say that there was no other option than to go to the parents for the additional money required. The fact that, in the event, large numbers of parents did not pay suggests that, farther down the line, some other option would need to be sought.

The studies also revealed a lack of attention paid to the design of implementation strategies. Some of the less fortunate consequences of the policy choices in each of the three countries was imputed to the lack of proper consideration as to how the policy should or might be implemented. Such consideration would also have helped the announcement and promulgation stage. There was no evidence available to the study teams to suggest that much attention had been given to this in any of the three countries.

What is clear from all three studies is that, at the time the decisions were taken, there was little capacity within the central administration devoted exclusively to analysis and little, if any, constructive relationship between the administration and possible sources of such capacity outside it. Steps were, however, being taken at the time of the field work to address this deficiency. The setting up of the Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring and Evaluation units in Ghana is one example. So is the decision in Tanzania to provide similar capacity.

The optimal location of analytical capacity within government administrations is debatable. It could be argued that it should be located in each ministry. Such a solution might, however, fragment already scarce analytical capacity. If this is the case, the capacity might be more appropriately located in a central or core ministry such as planning. In any event, it is not sufficient to have good policy analysis capacity in

specialised units. It is necessary to consider how to develop and strengthen the management capability of an organisation as a whole, such as a ministry, to contribute to and support the policy process. It is, for instance, essential for line managers to understand and appreciate the importance of the policy analysis and planning processes. Here, as in so much else related to the development of institutional capacity, the solution will have to be adapted to local institutional circumstances.

Capacity for policy analysis does not have to be completely internalised within the public service. Indeed, there is a very strong case to be made that some of this capacity is best located outside the formal government organisation. Universities, independent research institutes or advisory bodies are often better placed than civil servants to provide objective analysis and review of policy options. Also, they would be less likely to have a commitment to previous policy decisions not having been involved in their final selection or implementation. However, as is clear from the study findings, the existence of such organisations does not guarantee either their effectiveness or their use by governments. Africa, like many other parts of the world, seems to have a 'glass wall' between researchers and practitioners. They see each other but cannot hear in any real sense what are each other's needs. To be effective contributors to the policy analysis process, non-governmental organisations would require access to requisite information from government sources. Their functions vis-a-vis government and the channels of communications between themselves and government would have to be clearly identified.

Two things may be said in general. First, whatever the solution adopted, it is essential that those responsible for the final proposals and the ultimate decision appreciate the vital importance of the process of policy analysis and the signal contribution that well executed analysis can make to policy decisions. This will increase demand which will, in turn, stimulate the supply of valid and reliable information. Secondly, no institutional options, whether within or outside government, will be successful unless financial resources are provided and sustained to enable analytical capacity to be maintained at the requisite level.

Key Issues for Enhancing Capacity

The study points up the weakness of the available analytical capacity. Some of the difficulties in implementing the selected policies may be attributed to this weakness. The enhancement of analytical capacity must begin by creating awareness of the value of good policy analysis, and of the consequences of adopting policies which have not been rigorously analysed.

Having generated demand, actions need to be taken to develop the personnel, structures and systems to support and deliver policy analysis. A key issue is where best to locate the capacity. Within the government administration, the relative merits of centralised coordinating units or sector specific units needs consideration in the context of available resources. The potential value of capacity outside of government and of how to promote the development of such non-governmental capacity needs also to be examined.

Consultation

A factor closely related to the generation of information and analytical capacity is the need for adequate intra and interministerial consultation. Interministerial consultation serves to identify components of policies of other ministries that may be relevant to the policy issue under consideration. It also provides an opportunity to draw on existing relevant information and expertise in those ministries.

Within a ministry also, there are likely to be several departments or units involved in the formulation or implementation of a particular policy. As is clear from the Uganda study, there may be different perceptions of the objectives of a given policy. These perceptions may determine the internal support for the policy measures decided on and may, in some cases, give rise to conflict at the policy implementation stage if the perceived objectives differ from the real ones.

A culture of internal consultation is, moreover, essential to the proper functioning of policy analysis unit. This raises the issue of clarity of roles of organisations and of units within them. It is also very important to consult with the Ministry of Finance so as to have accurate information on financial constraints within which the policy will have to operate. For example, the situation which gave rise to the need for the policy of cost-sharing might not have arisen at all, or at any rate not have constituted such a break with previous policy, if the political wish to offer free education had been closely examined in the light of its likely costs relative to the available funding. Such a culture must be consciously fostered. Dealing with requests from other ministries as part of a consultation process must be perceived as a legitimate part of the work of civil servants and their political masters. Otherwise, the response may not get the required attention and therefore is unlikely to be of a quality which is useful to the requesting ministry.

Key Issues for Enhancing Capacity

The study indicates that while inter and intraministerial consultation would have helped the quality of the policy decision, this was generally weak. The promotion of a culture of consultation is thus an important element of any capacity development initiative. Appropriate mechanisms to facilitate the consultative process will also need to be identified. But, developing a culture of consultation is likely to call for changes in the behavioural and attitudinal characteristics of civil service administrations. This is, and should be recognised as a long-term process.

Involvement of Civil Society

The study points to instances of the participation of non-state actors and stakeholders in the policy formulation process, and to instances where such involvement did not occur but would clearly have been advantageous. Each of the three countries acknowledged that the policy formulation process could have benefited from more active involvement of civil society. Two critical factors which affect participation are: i) the overall awareness of the value of civil society contributions, and ii) the availability of institutional mechanisms to facilitate participation.

Awareness of The Value of Civil Society Contributions .

The discussions at the in-country review workshops showed that participants from both the civil service and from civil society had little appreciation of the potential value of consultation between them in the policy formulation process.

On the side of civil society, the views varied from scepticism that anything they said or did would have an effect on the eventual outcome to disbelief that they could have anything of interest to offer. Some were very surprised to learn that their experience and knowledge were of value to the work of the people they saw as the policy-makers. From the discussions, it is evident that teachers could have suggested modes of implementation of the policy (particularly in relation to how to levy and collect the contribution of parents) better suited to the situation on the ground than those developed without their input. One teacher attending the Tanzanian workshop remarking on the fact that the teachers did not have a lot to say in the plenary sessions mentioned that they had never realised that what they had to say might be listened to 'on high'. She said that this was the first time any of them had been involved in such an exercise. They did not really know what to expect but, if given the opportunity again, would hope to make a larger contribution. It is noteworthy that they had plenty to say in the small group discussions during the workshop -- where the fact that the language used was Swahili may also have helped.

Other civil society participants - mainly some NGOs who had, from time to time, been asked for comment on policy proposals - were more cynical. As reported earlier, the cynicism arose from being asked for comments when the matter was already at Cabinet level or having their advice ignored in the final decisions. They felt that such consultation was 'window-dressing'. This reaction was further vitiated by the fact that many of the non-governmental actors - especially those who were members of representative bodies - appeared to be unclear about their roles in relation to policy formulation. These factors had an effect not only on what they could do to influence policy but, more perniciously, on their own attitudes towards their involvement in policy formulation activities.

Equally, civil servants were surprised at the richness of the largely untapped source of data, ideas and practical suggestions that was available among the non-governmental actors and stakeholders. Lack of a culture of consultation on policy matters was in part responsible for this remaining unexplored and un(der)utilised. Apprehension among civil servants that drawing the stakeholders on them would risk delay and special pleading may also have been a factor. They feared that non-government stakeholders might not differentiate between policy at national level and the needs of their individual organisations or perhaps not be willing to do so. It was clear from the level and content of the discussions at the review workshops that this is a misjudgement in relation to both the capacity and attitude of these groups.

Key Issues for Enhancing Capacity

Two issues arise in the context of this critical factor. The first is the need to sensitise government decision makers to the benefits to be gained from consultation with non-governmental actors and stakeholders in seeking to formulate sustainable policies. The second is how to make civil society aware of its own potential on the one hand so that it will participate in the policy formulation process and, on the other hand, of the responsibilities accompanying such participation.

The current moves towards more transparency and accountability in the governance environment increase the importance of these issues in seeking to enhance overall institutional capacity for policy formulation.

An Infrastructure for Consultation with Civil Society

The study shows the importance of inputs from actors and stakeholders outside as well as inside the government structure for the development of achievable and sustainable policies.

Effective access to these inputs does not happen by chance; it needs functioning institutional machinery. For example, there was no evidence in the study that ignoring non-governmental actors and stakeholders was a conscious decision. Rather, it reflected a lack of institutional infrastructure for such consultation. Civil society organisations, where they existed, were weak and were not clear on their roles. Civil servants - often operating against tight deadlines - had to maintain ongoing policies as well as develop policies to deal with emerging issues. They had no time (or even awareness of the need) to review this element of the policy process and create mechanisms for consultation.

The lack of an effective institutional infrastructure is both an outcome of lack of appreciation of the importance of consultation with non-governmental groups and a cause of their non-involvement. When the policy decisions being studied were taken, there was an absence or discouragement of organised political opposition, independent trade unions, interest groups, and free media. The Ghana study, for example, makes specific reference to the scarcity of journalists specialising in political and economic matters which stood in stark contrast to expertise available in sports journalism. Involvement in the policy formulation process was, as a result, largely restricted to the upper echelons of the political and bureaucratic system. Even where some formal consultation structure existed, the system did not seem to work satisfactorily -- in part because of the feeling among civil society members that no notice was taken of their submissions.

Addressing the institutional infrastructure issue involves both the government and civil society. The government can take a lead in creating the governance environment in which public debate can flourish. Civil society has to gear itself up to benefit from such a climate. It has to understand the context in which policy is formulated, to be able to take account of the broader picture within which policy at national level is framed and to appreciate the most useful inputs which it can contribute. It may well be a 'chicken and egg' situation with the various elements of civil society reluctant to spend time, energy and resources on activities and the development of skills which they cannot effectively

use. However, until they are able to contribute effectively to the policy debate when asked, they are unlikely to be invited to do so.

Key Issues for Enhancing Capacity

Consultation with civil society as an integral element of the policy formulation process calls for procedures for such consultation within government which are effective and are used. It also requires that there are aware and informed 'focal points' in civil society capable of making or responding to opportunities to participate. The study highlights the need to develop trust on the part of civil society that with it consultation is real.

Timing is a key element of any effective process for consultation. It must ensure contact at a sufficiently early point in the formulation process to show that the consultation is in good faith. It must also ensure that realistic time is allowed for reaction - realistic in the context of the communications infrastructure of the country.

Endpiece

This study aims to increase knowledge and understanding of the actual policy formulation process within the broader context of policy management in sub-Saharan Africa. It seeks to provide insights into the roles of, and the interactions between, the various actors and stakeholders in the decision-making process, and to identify factors critical to the effectiveness of the process.

There is no universally applicable recipe for creating policy management capacity. Understanding the process as it occurs in real life in sub-Saharan Africa helps to identify where there are capacity gaps. This is a first step to taking action to enhance the capacity. But the findings are not only relevant to the countries of the region or to their citizens. As was said at the beginning of this report, many of the issues identified in the study can be found in countries with ostensibly more advanced institutional infrastructures. The factors emerging as significant will also be of interest to agencies that fund programmes of public service reform or of the development of institutional infrastructures to ensure that civil society can be and is involved in the formulation, monitoring and adaptation of national policy.

The potential contribution of civil society to the process stands out in each of the country studies. So, too, does the lack of appreciation of its value, both by government and, at least in some cases, by civil society itself. While consultation is time-consuming and expensive, the value of uncovering possible pitfalls and ways to avoid them at the policy formulation stage makes it worthwhile to give these matters sufficient attention early in the process.

Such interactions between central government service and civil society may increase the iterative nature of policy formulation. The resulting policy formulation process becomes less and less a linear path, more and more a maze, with routes to information potentially relevant to the decision at hand crossing and running parallel. The way through a maze from "entry" to "exit" is not often, perhaps is never, the shortest line between two points. However, knowing that the process is complex and messy is itself a help. Having a menu of potential sources of information, a map showing where they are located, and an

effective system of signposting or signalling to remind the traveller will, at the end of the journey, make the journey through the process much smoother and the resulting policy more effective.

This study has tried to help travellers on the journey from identification of a policy issue to the formulation and promulgation of a policy. It signals some of the possible pitfalls on the journey. Many of them are generic, but their precise nature and impact is situation-specific. By paying attention to the policy process, and by anticipating how obstacles will be met and overcome, participants in policy-making can have much more confidence in the quality, relevance, and acceptability of their product.

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Annex: Guidelines for Interviews

Ten critical stages in the policy formulation process are identified. They are being proffered as a framework for the interviews to help ensure a uniform approach. The indicative points listed at each stage of these guidelines are directed towards enhancing the comparability of the reports from each of the three participating countries. It will be helpful if each of these points can be covered (indicating if necessary where there was no information available). It is recognised that not many actors / stakeholders are likely to have been involved in or affected by all stages of the process. Interviews will be tailored to the areas of experience / involvement of the interviewees.

The guidelines are not intended to be restrictive. Study teams are free to include further relevant information which may come to their notice. Each study team is asked to identify the different stages in the process, the actors / stakeholders -individual and organisations / agencies - at each point and the process of consultation.

The stages identified are as follows:

1. Issue / problem identification
2. Search for causes of issues / problems
3. Fact gathering and analysis including linkages with other policy areas
4. Identification of options to address issues / problems
5. Process of choice of preferred policy option
6. Specification of policy objectives
7. Design of implementation strategies
8. Process of policy decision making
9. Existence and use of monitoring and feedback mechanisms
10. Policy review and reformulation

Desirable background information

- Organisation chart of machinery of government or list of ministries and relevant government agencies.
- Organisation chart of Ministry of Education.
- Statistics on population, school-age population and school enrolment (in primary sector), and average annual growth of population and other available national statistics on education.
- Details of public expenditures on education, by sector, as percentage of GNP and details of GNP per head of population.
- Primary education budget.
- Any relevant background information from national and international sources (e.g. World Bank, UNESCO, African Development Bank) about primary education in the country concerned.
- Draft schedule of appointments with actors and stakeholders (or representatives of stakeholders). People to be seen are likely to include ministers (e.g. education and finance), top/senior civil servants in presidents/prime minister's/cabinet offices, ministries of finance, education, interior/local governments, public/civil services, centre statistics office, and personnel in union/association representing parents/teachers, district/local councils with primary education involvement or responsibilities.

1. Issue / problem identification

- a) What is the issue / problem identified?
- b) In what terms was it defined and by whom?
- c) How did it manifest / present itself?
- d) Who noted it; brought it to attention?
- e) By whom and at what level was formal / informal processing initiated? What means (e.g. memorandum, ministerial statement, report, meeting) was used?

2. Search for cause(s) of problem

- a) In what context, (e.g. as an element of national social policy, education policy, budgetary review) was the issue / problem considered?
- b) Was it seen as one that could be dealt with in isolation, or in a wider context? If the latter, what interlinkages with actors / stakeholders outside the immediate policy area were identified? What implications did this have for further stages of the policy process?
- c) How was it initially explored and by whom?
- d) What causative factors or issues were identified and considered, and by whom?

3. Fact gathering / analysis

- a) What information was considered necessary for analysis?
- b) Who was / were assigned the task of providing / collecting the information?
- c) Was any or all of the information available within the organisation responsible for the policy area? Was it necessary to seek information elsewhere?
- d) What was the nature of the information and by what method(s) (e.g. letters, memo's, personal enquiry, survey, interviews) was it collected?
- e) How much of the desired information was it possible to acquire within the requisite timeframe?
- f) How was the information organised / processed for analysis and who was involved?
- g) Who was / were involved in the analysis of the information?
- h) In what form was the outcome of the analysis presented and by whom?

4. Identification of options

- a) Were a number of policy options identified? If not, why not? If so, how many and by whom?
- b) In identifying options what reference, if any, was made to experience with issues / problems of a similar nature nationally, internationally (especially in countries with similar levels of development)?

5. Process of choice

In assessing alternatives:

- a) What political considerations (e.g. public reaction, leadership commitment, parent-teacher reaction) were taken into account?
- b) What social considerations (e.g. impact on rural-urban population, on different income groups, on other relevant target groups) were taken into account?
- c) What economic criteria, (e.g. costs and benefits to governments, groups and individuals) were applied?
- d) What institutional considerations (e.g. availability of sufficient personnel of appropriate calibre and capacity; existence of adequate systems and procedures) were taken into account?
- e) What consideration was given to the congruence of options with existing policies in the sector and other related sectors in terms of the likely feasibility of each option?
- f) What consideration was given to possible spill-over effects of options on related policy areas?
- g) Who / what agencies were involved in the process of choice and what specific role did they play?

6. Specification of objective(s) of selected policy option

- a) Were specific objective(s) articulated?
- b) Did the detailed objective(s) include quantification of expected output; qualitative description of outcome to be expected (attitudes, perceptions, etc.)?
- c) Who / what agencies were involved in the process of specification of objective(s) of selected policy option?

7. Process of policy decision making

- a) Who / what agencies - minister / ministry, cabinet, president, party, etc. - were involved in the final decision process and what specific role did each play?
- b) What specific input to the decision process (e.g. memoranda, ministerial / position papers, brief) were utilised? By whom were they prepared and presented?
- c) Which processes and what actors were involved in final decision making and ratification; what communication channels and linkages were involved in making the decision and its ratification; what modus operandi (at various

stages) was employed for reaching a decision - through debate, cross consultations, committee work, etc.?

d) By what mechanism was the policy decision communicated?

8. Design of implementation strategy

- a) Was an implementation strategy designed?
- b) Was it part of the policy formulation process or a post-decision event?
- c) If it was not part of the original decision, by whom and when was the design of implementation strategy initiated?
- d) Was there scheduling of activities and distribution of roles / responsibilities for each activity?
- e) Were roles assigned explicitly to key players?
- f) Were requisite resources and the location(s) (internal / external) where they could be accessed/identified?
- g) Was a mechanism for coordination and compliance put in place?

9. Monitoring and Feedback

- a) Was a monitoring and feedback mechanism / procedure established?
- b) Were roles assigned explicitly to key players?
- c) What mechanism existed or was put in place to facilitate utilisation of information acquired from monitoring and feedback?

10. Policy review and reformulation

- a) Has the policy been reviewed and / or reformulated?
If yes, at what point was this done, who were the actors involved in it, what was the process for the review / reformulation?