

Influencing Policy

The experience of CATIA

Summary

This paper illustrates how it is possible to influence policy formation. CATIA (Catalysing Access to ICT in Africa) was a multi donor funded pan African programme that worked through a number of partner organisations. It successfully influenced information and communication infrastructure policies without using the tools of conditionality or direct budget influence. The paper draws on the experience of CATIA to present an overview of key issues and challenges likely to face others who seek to influence policy in the African environment.

Introduction to CATIA

The CATIA programme aimed to bring the maximum benefit of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) to poor people in Africa and to act as a strong catalyst for reform. It intentionally worked on influencing ICT policy by building capacity among stakeholders, increasing awareness, and lobbying for policy change.

CATIA has played a part in achieving changes and benefits in more than 10 African countries; for example:

- Improved conditions for political reporting through successful regulatory lobbying
- Lower international call charges (by almost 20%) by legalising calls using the internet (VoIP)
- Adoption of common guidelines for wireless policy and regulation in three regions (14 SADC, 22 COMESA and 16 ECOWAS groups of countries).

This has improved the:

- licensing procedures and reduction of licensing fees
- bureaucracy involved with technical standards
- assigning of frequency
- transparency in procedures for users
- Good policy environments that enhance services and support economies (for example, the Kenya Revenue Authority saw a 7% increase in tax revenue in the first year when it started using the internet exchange point (IXP)).

Policy Processes

Recent research has led to an improved understanding of practical policy development processes:

- They should not be assumed to be linear
- They need not necessarily be excessively time consuming
- They are greatly influenced by 'Windows of Opportunity'
- They revolve around 'Communities of Change'

Windows of Opportunity

'Windows of opportunity' typically occur when there are changes in government or when changes in social economic environment require policy to be developed or reviewed.

"Policy does not happen in isolation. It is not formulated and implemented solely by policy makers in government offices. A range of institutions, such as markets or the legal system, and organisations such as NGOs or bureaucracies, mediate a messy relationship between policy and people's livelihoods. This is the interface where policy and people meet."

Pasteur K 2001 Tools for Sustainable Livelihoods: Policy Analysis Institute of Development Studies.

Policy reviews may be prompted by a number of factors. New technology in infrastructure is one such factor. Radio and the internet, for example, provide a good comparison of the ways in which windows of opportunity open up.

The internet is a fast changing technology that creates opportunities to influence policies that affect long term economic growth and the price point of internet access. In response to this rapidly changing environment, CATIA was able to inform policy makers of latest developments and future possibilities. This built capacity to make complex decisions. By comparison, since developments in radio broadcasting technology occur less frequently, policies are not reviewed on a regular basis. In response to this slower policy environment, CATIA undertook lobbying and advocacy to raise awareness of changes that were happening, and thereby created windows for policy review.

Communities of Change

Engaging with ‘Communities of Change’ is about finding the right people, engaging with the right organisations, negotiating common ground and win-win changes.

CATIA worked with regulators who are key stakeholders in the execution of government policy on ICT. But it also worked with multi stakeholder processes. This meant that many different players could get involved and allowed the policy makers to find the right people to give clear opinions and advice. The African partners were instrumental in achieving this. It is important to identify the right people to support – champions with vision and enthusiasm who can help bring conflicting interests together.

Kenya provides two good examples of how CATIA brought together ‘communities of change’ to influence policy making in that country. A number of civil society, private enterprise and political organisations formed a multi stakeholder network called Kenya ICT Action Network (KICTANet). The advocacy of KICTANet and other CATIA partners contributed to the process of liberalising the use of internet for phone calls (VoIP) by the Communications Commission of Kenya (CCK). On another occasion when the ‘independent regulator’ came under apparent attack from the Government of Kenya, KICTANet joined others in lobbying for the reinstatement of the CCK board.

Engaging with the processes of policy formation

Among other activities, CATIA identified four actions that were key to engaging with the policy making process:

- Stakeholder Mapping
- Capacity Development
- Talking in the right language
- Face-to-face meetings

Stakeholder mapping

CATIA learnt that there was a need for a clearer, more detailed stakeholder map to track the role and influence of each institution and network, and, in some cases, of individual champions.

ICT is a fast changing sector that influences all other sectors. Policy formation therefore involves a wide range of stakeholders including government, civil society, private sector and donors. A stakeholder map was drawn up to represent different networks being drawn together by issues of common interest. The monitoring and evaluation team were able to assess the effectiveness of the CATIA programme by undertaking a ‘social network analysis’ of the stakeholder map. Understanding the relationships between individual groups was an important part of this work.

Capacity Development

Policy development and implementation is often held back by a lack of capability within Government.

One of the key areas where capacity was required was that of the regulators. They are key stakeholders in the changing ICT climate. CATIA supported the provision of African focussed courses and an effective peer-to-peer meeting for sharing expertise and experience among African policy makers and regulators. This led to support for NetTel@Africa which is now active and building capacity in 22 countries. CATIA also learnt and demon-

strated that it is possible to influence policy by building capacity in the media. The emphasis on involving the media has resulted in increased media participation and coverage associated with ICT issues in almost all the countries.

Talking in the right language

Catia learnt that using the language of poverty reduction helps to engage with a wider set of policy makers.

ICT is a technically complex sector and ICT regulation often needs to engage engineers because technical issues need to be understood to ensure sound decision making. Nevertheless, some policy makers and consumers need to have a nontechnical explanation to help them make decisions. The advocacy component of CATIA worked with civil society and the media to create information that non-technical groups could understand. It also used pro-poor language of other sectors such as agriculture, education and commerce.

Face-to-face meetings

CATIA’s experience also showed that face-to-face meetings with policy makers are essential.

Although the programme personnel were recognised as leading authorities in the ICT sector, policy makers did not successfully engage in email correspondence until there had been at least one initial face-to-face meeting.

Conclusion

CATIA was able to strengthen and influence African policy processes in a relatively short time period. By working with strategic partners, it was able to identify and even create windows of opportunity. This, together with the emphasis on networks, enabled CATIA to engage with policy formation processes and led to notable successes in a number of countries.

CATIA was a programme of the Department for International Development (DFID) in close collaboration with other donors and role players (e.g. Sida, IDRC, CIDA and USAID). It was implemented in close coordination with the Canadian government’s Connectivity Africa initiative.

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