

Achieving change through partnerships



The Oxford Policy
Fellowship

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A Most Significant Change study conducted by the Oxford Policy Fellowship finds that Fellows who are successful at contributing to impact are flexible and respond to a clear need, that they have built trusting relationships with colleagues, and that their supervisors are good managers with strategic vision. Success also depends on there being broad support for change at the technical and political levels in government.

Introduction

The Oxford Policy Fellowship works in partnership with governments in low- and middle-income countries to address shortcomings in local capacity. The goal is to support governments in their efforts to deliver ambitious policy reform agenda with often very limited resources in environments of rapid law and policy change. Central to these partnerships is the placement of early career law and policy professionals that are placed in partner government ministries. These Fellows are employed by, and directly accountable to, the ministry, working within government teams on a full-time basis over two years.

Partnership working is at the core of how the Fellowship works and delivers impact. The partnerships are initiated when government identify embedded technical assistance as the appropriate solution to a problem or challenge. They are built around a culture of knowledge sharing and learning among peers. This is achieved through the programme's Community of Practice and a range of monitoring, evaluation, and learning-focused activities, some of which have provided the evidence base for this brief.

As part of its commitment to continuous learning, the Fellowship conducted a Most Significant Change (MSC) study to capture Fellows' impact and the contextual factors enabling it. The methodology involved collecting stories from a sample of Fellows on their

perceived most significant contributions to their ministries to date. These stories were filtered down to the *most significant* stories and interrogated further through interviews with Fellows and their managers in government (for more on the methodology for this study, see the Annex).

This brief presents an outline of three 'stories of change' where our Fellows have helped achieve impact. It is important to note that each Fellow's experience is unique, and findings are not necessarily generalisable. However, across the three case studies, a number of themes emerged about what makes change possible through partnership-driven programmes such as the Fellowship.

The first three sections present MSC case studies from Fellowship postings in ministries in Sierra Leone, Ghana, and Ethiopia. The final section concludes by distilling common themes and lessons learned from across the MSCs.

CASE 1:

Reforming the Public Health Ordinance in Sierra Leone

The Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoHS) in Sierra Leone is reforming the Public Health Ordinance 1960. Oxford Policy Fellow, James Cooper, is supporting the reform process to address key issues for better health outcomes for citizens of Sierra Leone.

Reform of the Public Health Ordinance of 1960 had long been a priority of the MoHS when Oxford Policy Fellow, James Cooper, joined as a Legal and Policy Advisor (and the only lawyer in the ministry). MoHS identified that the Public Health Ordinance 1960 presents an outdated approach to public health – one focused mostly on sanitation and based on a colonial system of administration. The old act does not account for current administrative systems in Sierra Leone or prevailing public health concerns, and in particular, health emergencies and communicable diseases.

Dr SAS Kargbo, the Director of Policy, Planning and Information, envisioned an act that would reflect a modern view of public health and provide a framework for how government powers can be utilised. There was concern within the ministry that the initial draft reforming the act did not match current needs, and when James joined he was designated to review it. James's previous work on Sierra Leone's National Medical Supplies Agency Act, 2017 and the National Health Sector Strategic Plan 2017-2021 helped provide him with the contextual understanding and knowledge needed to successfully work on the reform.



James's review of the current draft revealed that the initial work on the health reform was not answering important questions about health issues, services, and how government is empowered to address public health challenges. Upon receiving James' findings, Dr Kargbo assigned James the task of addressing gaps in the law to meet current health needs. To inform the work, James and a colleague consulted widely in the Ministry. They asked questions such as: "What do you see as issues in the health sector, and what are issues people recognise but that the law is not addressing in an effective way?"

After James completed the review, Dr Kargbo brought the information to the Chief Medical Officer. Responsibility for the project was then delegated to the Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Dr Sarian Kamara, to lead the reform process and team around it. The combined efforts of Dr Kargbo, James, and their wider team led to endorsement and support from the MoHS, and crucially, an altered process for drafting the reform. Support for these efforts now exists on a number of levels: Dr Kargbo's team initiated the process, leadership in the MoHS is helping to drive the reform, and external support through the World Bank and other development partners is helping it progress.

In addition to identifying and rectifying a lack of focus on medical topics such as communicable diseases, systems gaps are being addressed in the bill. Specifically, the bill is reforming ethics approval for research projects, strengthening how public health units are approved, and instituting protections for patient confidentiality.

While these are long term changes that need to be addressed through multiple fora for implementation, the legislation will establish important steps to address these health systems gaps.

James's role in helping reform legislation to better meet healthcare needs has been recognised by Dr SAS Kargbo, who noted that: "I would describe the Fellowship as being a very good initiative that has gone to help particularly my Directorate. . . The presence of the Fellow has made it easy for us and his contributions have been acclaimed by most of the other directors within the ministry."

When James discusses his Fellowship experience, he highlights trust, collaboration, and communication with his boss and those within the MoHS as crucial to their successful work. That the partnership between the Fellowship and the MoHS is built upon the needs

of the MoHS is another important factor: James is seen as serving the interests of the government to drive initiatives and change forward for the people of Sierra Leone. The working relationships and trust that James established with his colleagues have enabled him to become an effective energiser for change within the MoHS. Most recently, James was given the opportunity to work alongside the Clinton Health Access Initiative to draft a summary of key health activities that the new government should focus on in the short and long term. This piece of work, along with others that James and his colleagues are involved with, could have far-reaching health impacts for Sierra Leone.

CASE 2:

Developing education legislation in Ghana

The ‘Legislative Agenda for the Ministry of Education for 2018’ establishes priorities for education reform in Ghana and aims to address industry needs, decrease unemployment, and increase education access for all. Oxford Policy Fellow, Lauren MacLeod, and her supervisor, Mr Jonathan Odartey, are working to make these legislative changes a reality.

When Lauren arrived as a Legal Advisor at the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Ghana in November 2017, Mr Odartey, the Head of Legal at the MoE and the Ministry's only lawyer, assigned her to work on the Legislative Agenda for the MoE for 2018. The Legislative Agenda introduces reforms within the education system – most significantly, the transformation of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector in Ghana.

At present, unemployment is high in Ghana and young people are reluctant to enter TVET training institutions, especially if university education is an option. The reforms will encourage entrance into TVET institutions, with the aim of reducing unemployment. With greater input from industries, these efforts are expected to reduce the need for retraining, ensure that training is up to industry standards, and increase awareness of what the qualifications



mean. The new legislation will realign all TVET institutions, which are currently under 19 different ministries, to be under the MoE. This realignment will promote effective management, coordination, and cohesion in training institutions, and ensure one set of standards and qualifications. Other areas of focus include reforming the management of tertiary education, converting institutes and colleges into universities, and strengthening regulations for professionals, as well as establishing a university in each region of the country.

These reforms come at a crucial moment for the relatively new government in Ghana. As Mr Odartey says: “Everyone is in support and this is long overdue. Everyone thinks there is a need for it. . . this is the way forward.” Reducing unemployment, improving technical training, education management, and increasing educational access were all identified

as issues to address. However, despite support for the overall reform, the MoE lacked capacity to draft the necessary legislation. Mr Odartey has said that having Lauren work on the reform with him has not only provided much needed capacity but has also been key to producing research and detail-oriented work that is driving buy in from policymakers.

Lauren was responsible for drafting all documentation. The Legislative Agenda is an extensive undertaking with 23 different proposed bills; Lauren supported this process by conducting research, and drafting Cabinet Memoranda and legislation. To get the reforms passed, they are first presented as Cabinet Memoranda and then sent to the Attorney General for comment. After Lauren prepared the Cabinet Memoranda, Mr Odartey also asked her to produce legislative drafting instructions for submission

to the Attorney General’s office. Both Lauren and Mr Odartey credit open and productive communication with driving their team of two forward to successfully produce this major legislative reform.

Mr Odartey explained that Lauren’s work ability, diligence, and research capacities were a productive fit both for the needs of the MoE and the legislation. A number of the reforms have been successfully approved and a number are imminently going to be heard in the Cabinet. As Lauren explains, “The reforms should increase equitable access to, and participation in, quality education through the removal of physical and financial barriers to access, improve the quality of teaching and learning, and improve the management of education service delivery at all levels.” Lauren has played a major role in bringing these reforms to life and played a role in legislative reform throughout her Fellowship.

CASE 3:

Protecting a fragile ecosystem in Ethiopia

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MEFCC) in Ethiopia is currently producing the first concrete legal basis for the protection of wetlands in Ethiopia. Oxford Policy Fellow, Joanna Venkov, is drafting this primary legislation under the direction of Dr Ayele.

With the new legislation, the MEFCC seeks to protect wetlands from being drained and converted, thus ensuring their use for essential functions such as drinking water, flood damage reduction, and agriculture. As Dr Ayele, the Director General for Policy, Law, and Standards at MEFCC says, “MEFCC has the mandate for the protection of the environment and that includes wetlands, but until now we did not have legislation to protect this important natural resource. The legislation on wetlands will prohibit some damaging activities which have degraded many wetlands in Ethiopia.”

Protecting and preserving wetlands serves a range of important functions. They are important for flood defence during times of unpredictable weather patterns. Wetlands can also lower the risk of drought, help prevent mudslides, maintain topsoil, and protect the integrity of the surrounding land. Additionally, wetlands are carbon sinks, and are in fact more effective as such than forests. Each of these environmental protections are important for the preservation of ecosystems and also for the health and wellbeing of people and communities in Ethiopia.

The wetland legislation was established as a MEFCC priority before Joanna’s arrival, and Dr Ayele believed this project would be a good fit for Joanna because of her previous experience with legal drafting as a civil servant in the British government. This clear need provided a strong vision for Joanna’s Fellowship and a solid foundation to build trust and deliver support to Dr Ayele and his team.

To support efforts to create a legislative mandate for wetland protection, Joanna drafted the first piece of legislation, and Dr Ayele placed trust in her to complete

the drafting process largely on her own. She researched legislative treatment of wetlands and protected areas in other countries as part of wider research on international best practice in this area. To ensure the legislation was rooted in the Ethiopian context, she tailored the draft to the context of domestic legislation, ensuring that it did not contradict existing legislation. Dr Ayele spoke of the important contribution her research played to the drafting process, commending her "...robust previous experience in the area of legal matters and legal drafting."

A key impact of this legislation is that it will empower the ME FCC to create and classify an inventory of wetlands to identify those that need protecting and give it a budget to carry out this work. In addition to drafting the legislation, Joanna is generating resources and tools supporting best practices, not only for how to draft legislation for wetland protection, but also for the protection of other natural resources in the country.

Joanna and Dr Ayele made the legislation forward-thinking by aligning it with the Convention on Wetlands, also called the Ramsar Convention. The Ramsar Convention is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands and their resources. While Ethiopia has not yet signed the Ramsar Convention, Joanna ensured that the domestic legislation uses the same definitions so that if Ethiopia becomes a signatory, there is already a workable framework within the country. In Ethiopia, there is a tendency to start with legislation first and move to policy later. Passing the wetland legislation may

therefore pave the way towards Ethiopia joining the Ramsar Convention. Already the discussion of the wetland legislation with a wide range of stakeholders has strengthened debate around ratification of the Ramsar Convention, and a study of the Convention's impact has been commissioned by the Ministry.

Prior to ratification, the draft legislation will go through rounds of internal and external consultation in line with standard ME FCC processes. To aid this process, Joanna consulted her boss and legal and policy colleagues, and well as members of the wider ME FCC. The law and policy team, as well as the biodiversity and forestry team were invited to comment on the summary of the legislation's key provisions and will subsequently comment on the completed draft. Two external consultations were carried out with ministries, NGOs, and academics with wetland experience. The second external feedback process involved 60 attendees offering feedback on the draft. After feedback and revisions, there are several steps for the document to pass through: it will go to the Attorney General, the Council of Ministers, and then to the Prime Minister's office.

The working environment fostered by Dr Ayele is one of openness, collaboration, and support. The team comes together around the issue at hand; they discuss and reach an answer together. As Joanna describes, in this collaborative environment, "Dr Ayele is passionate about cross-team work... no one owns something [alone], everyone owns something and can step in for feedback."

In addition to contributing to the ME FCC's work through this legislation, Joanna has contributed to mutual learning within the team. She has

sought insights from her law and policy colleagues, learned from those working on the policy side of an issue, and in turn she has been able to introduce new types of processes and legislative drafting techniques. Through working with colleagues and providing feedback on legislation (especially using her wetland draft as an example), she is having a real impact on the legal drafting process in the ME FCC.

Joanna's work is important not only in terms of the environmental impact that the legislation will have on conservation and sustainable use of the wetlands, but also for building institutional capacity within the ME FCC. As Joanna states: "The expected impact of the legislation is that it will empower federal government, regional government, NGO and local community actors to implement measures to protect, preserve, conserve, and sustainably use wetlands." When the draft passes, Ethiopia will be one of only a few countries that has specific wetlands legislation.

Conclusions and lessons

The MSCs above provide encouraging and insightful examples of successful embedded support to reform processes in low- and middle-income country contexts. Each of these cases are unique in many ways, and a variety of contextual factors helped make the initiatives a success. In each case, Fellows played an important role in making change possible. Despite the contextual particularity, a number of common factors that facilitate change and effective partnership working emerged across the MSCs. These factors are summarised below.

Respond to a need: The MSCs above all demonstrate the importance of a partnership programme supporting reform interventions that respond to a genuine need in government and/or society. Responding to a clear need – or problem – makes it easier to secure and mobilise high level political support, build coalitions for change, and provide a clear motivation for the hiring team to use support effectively. If the partner institution does not themselves deem a certain type of support necessary, it is unlikely the partnership will be successful, even if they acquiesce to accepting the support.

Develop a trusting relationship: Reform initiatives can often be sensitive, and require openness and collaboration across a ministry and government more widely to succeed. Trusting relationships facilitate this, and should

be a key priority for any programme aiming to build partnerships to support change. A precondition for success in each of the MSCs was that the Fellow had established good and trusting relationships with their supervisor and colleagues, and often that a supervisor was able to instil a culture of openness, collaboration, and mutual learning around the change process within their team.

Consultation and multi-level

support: Another recurrent feature of these MSCs is that they all involved extensive processes of formal and informal consultation. Fellows did not work in isolation, but worked under the guidance of their supervisor and in collaboration with a wider team of colleagues. Furthermore, support for the interventions was secured at various levels of government, spanning senior political and administrative levels as well as the technical layer of government. This helped secure momentum for the reform processes and to co-opt or secure a buffer against potential obstacles.

Flexibility and professional

versatility: Each Fellow performed a range of different roles in the MSCs described above. Change processes are complex and bring up a range of different challenges as they unfold. A programme focused on leveraging partnerships to support change should make sure to focus on versatility when

they recruit and manage prospective advisors. Oxford Policy Fellows are well positioned to take on this type of role given their mix of legal expertise, professional and problem-solving skills, and behavioural characteristics ('soft skills'). Fellows' willingness to remain flexible, to adjust behaviour to changing circumstances and to undertake new tasks as they arise, made them important drivers of change in each of the MSCs discussed above.

In addition to these guiding principles of good partnership working, it is important to bear in mind that success is not the result of a formula, and that change initiatives should always have solid rooting in the context within which they unfold. In the Oxford Policy Fellowship, we remain committed to continued learning about what makes positive and sustainable change possible, and the contextual factors that allow for it to take place.

Annex: Method – using the Most Significant Change methodology

This paper has utilised the MSC research methodology. The technique is a qualitative form of participatory monitoring and evaluation based on the collection and systematic selection of stories of change from development activities (Serrat 2009). The approach is deemed participatory because it involves stakeholders in the processes of deciding the kinds of change to be recorded and analysing the data.¹

The method serves as a form of monitoring because it provides information to help manage the programme, and contributes to evaluation and learning because it provides data on impact and outcomes that help assess the performance of the programme (Davies & Dart 2005). The MSC methodology can inform improvements in project implementation by helping to highlight effective routes to impact and the success factors underpinning these (Serrat 2009).

Generally, the MSC process involves the collection of significant change stories produced from the field level.² Staff and stakeholders first subjectively identify a number of impacts that a given project has had. Then, those same stakeholders document the changes that took place for each named impact. Once collected, stakeholders then select which of the impact stories represent the *most* significant change.

MSCs involve a story approach; central questions about change and impact are often in the form of stories of who did what, when, and why the event was important (Dart 1999). Unlike monitoring techniques that focus on outputs, MSC methods focus on monitoring intermediate outcomes and impact (Davies & Dart 2005). This type of approach is helpful when there are programmes with diverse and complex outcomes with multiple stakeholder groups. The approach helps capture

the best success stories, unexpected outcomes, and lessons learned (Serrat 2009).

The Fellowship's MSC process

The MSCs in this paper are based on both written responses and interviews conducted with Fellows and their supervisors. To ensure that we identified the MSC Stories, there were multiple rounds of data collection with purposive sampling that allowed for a larger sample group from which the final MSCs were selected. The steps taken, and methods utilised, are expanded upon in the following section.

It is crucial to note that before being interviewed, the Fellows and government officials were asked if they felt comfortable with interview documentation, either through notes or audio recording. Interviewees could specify at any time if they did not want certain information reflected in formal write-ups and were also given the opportunity to comment on MSCs after they were initially drafted.

To begin data collection, ten Fellows were contacted via email with a series of questions to answer through written response. The ten were selected based on how long they had been in their postings, with the assumption that those who have not had much time in their postings will not yet be able to report on impact. The questions focused on project impact and the Fellows' roles within projects. Each submission (story of change) received, was analysed to assess the impact of the project, most significant change present, and the Fellow's role within the project.

Following this original round of data collection, a smaller sample (five) of Fellows was invited to elaborate on their experiences in semi-structured interviews. These interviews were designed to

allow for deeper analysis of emerging categories and themes that appeared in Story of Change written responses. Questions for the interviews were based on the original information provided and interviews lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours. Fellows elaborated on the projects they worked on, were asked about other projects, their role within their respective ministries, and relationships with their co-workers.

After an initial analysis of their interview data and establishing areas of impact as well as one focus project of significant change, Fellows were asked to nominate a colleague or supervisor to also be interviewed. Government officials were involved to document and reflect their perceptions of the Fellow's work within the ministry, as well as to ensure triangulation of the data on the impact achieved. Based on the interviews with Fellows and supervisors, three cases were selected as MSCs for this paper. These three MSCs were chosen by programme staff who synthesised the Fellows' stories and supervisor feedback. The final three MSCs were chosen based on the impact of Fellow's work, their role within their team and the overall ministry, and the potential impact of the projects Fellows were contributing to.

¹ It is important to note that there are a number of shortcomings to the MSC methodology and its application in this instance. Change at the impact level can take a long time to materialise, and there is a risk that a prematurely initiated MSC study will overlook or misinterpret change processes underway. While a valid concern, the Fellowship team has found that by conducting an MSC exercise, the programme is able to at least illustrate the trajectory of its contributions to impact in what is a complex space. In the context of accountability and programme performance management, having some handle on how Fellows are engaging and the kinds of results they are seeing is important, though not sufficient. Similarly, there are constraints when it comes to government involvement in the MSC process, as government managers involved with the Fellowship have limited time, and work in high-pressure environments. This means that the level of government engagement in the MSCs varied from interviews or written feedback, to engagement through Fellows or other colleagues. Lastly, the MSC methodology is susceptible to selection bias because it focuses on positive cases (i.e. instances where change has happened). A focus on positive cases is an integral part of the MSC method, but it means that one cannot rule out the possibility that factors identified as crucial for success were not also present in instances where success did not materialise. Future learning pieces in the Fellowship might address this weakness by contrasting factors in positive cases with those in less successful ones.

² The MSC methodology was first developed by Rick Davies to meet some of the challenges associated with monitoring and evaluating a complex participatory rural development programme in Bangladesh (Davies 1996). MSC is an emerging technique, and many adaptations and modifications of the method have been made to fit the monitoring and evaluation needs of different types of projects (Davies & Dart 2005).

The Oxford Policy Fellowship supports governments in overcoming the unique issues they face, by providing them with demand-led technical assistance.

We source high performing early-career advisors to work within current government systems and processes for two years so that their work contributes to ongoing policymaking, rather than creating parallel structures for getting things done.

By providing governments with key support that they themselves have defined and requested, we deliver sustainable and locally-owned development impact. We also host a network of government practitioners working at the interface of law and public policy, promoting a culture of knowledge sharing and learning across governments and the wider community.

The programme has three key objectives:

- To provide governments with outstanding early-career advisors, where there is a need for additional capacity.
- To create a network of law and policy practitioners across governments.
- To foster a culture of learning through our innovative monitoring and evaluation framework.

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For more information about the Oxford Policy Fellowship, please visit: policyfellowship.org or contact us at info@policyfellowship.org