

*The Changing Face of Policy Development in a Democratic
Developmental State: The Role of Think Tanks and Policy Advocacy in
Ghana*

Frank Ohemeng, PhD
Department of Political Science
Concordia University
Canada
frank.ohemeng@concordia.ca
ohemenfl@gmail.com

Kenneth Parku, M.A
Wisconsin International University College
Ghana
kennethparku@gmail.com

Emelia Amoako Asiedu, PhD
University of Ghana,
Ghana
adadz@yahoo.com

&

Theresa Obuobisa-Darko, PhD
Methodist University College
Ghana
tobuobisa@yahoo.co.uk

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Introduction

The movement in Ghana since the early 1990s from an authoritarian environment to a democratic one has seen the rise of civil society groups jostling for space in the policy development process and in governance (Abdulai and Quantson, 2009; Antwi-Boasiako, 2019; Hughes, 2005). One such group that seems to have become an essential part of the policy making process is think tanks (Abraham, 2019; Ayee, 2000; Ohemeng, 2005; 2015). Currently, there are more than 30 organizations identifying themselves as think tanks, and they can be found in almost every policy sphere (Abraham, 2019; Ohemeng, 2015). They have thus become major players in policy development, as they continue to help political authorities shape policies for development.

In addition, most of these institutions classify themselves as “advocacy institutions or organizations.” Their mission statements usually call them policy advocates, advocating for policy changes in the Ghanaian environment. Unfortunately, few or none of the studies on them and how they may be influencing public policies (Abraham, 2019; Ayee, 2000; Ohemeng, 2005; 2015) have determined how well they are accomplishing this goal.

Focusing on the policy advocacy literature, then, this paper examines why and how think tanks continue to help influence national development. We ask these simple but important questions: how are think tanks shaping, and how have they already shaped, the way policies are developed in Ghana through policy advocacy? In other words, how have these institutions become the northern light in policy development in that country? What are the challenges confronting them in this pursuit? What does their future look like? How are these institutions using advocacy as a tool for policy development?

We attempt to answer these questions through a qualitative case study perspective. Using this approach, we believe, will ensure that we understand the nature of policy advocacy, and the

various tools these organizations are using to influence the policy making process, as well as the impact they may be having on policy development. In this case, we may be able to examine whether these advocacy tools reflect the reality in the developed world, and especially in pluralistic societies.

It is argued that think tanks see advocacy as more effective than traditional research and more persuasive than formal dialoguing in changing fundamental public policies. In using advocacy, they are able to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the general public, especially with the “politicization” of these institutions in the political environment. In addition, they believe that advocacy will help with the mobilization of the citizenry for policy change, as recently exemplified in the passing of the Right to Information bill. This was a bill that was first developed in the late 1990s with help from a significant number of these organizations. Unfortunately, it was passed only after these institutions developed a network with other civil society organizations and took to the streets with demonstrations. Think tanks, heeding this example, believe that using “advocacy strategies” may be one of the most effective ways to change policies, in addition to traditional research and policy dialogue.

Care, however, needs to be exercised in the use of advocacy by these institutions (Shepherd, 2013). Abelson (2017) has noted that advocacy can be a two-edged sword for think tanks. To him, advocating for certain position(s) of policy or policies may lead to casting aspersions on such organizations' neutrality and the rigorousness of their policy research. He therefore calls for a balanced approach by these institutions in their attempts to influence, although he recognizes that this balancing act may be a serious challenge to them. On this, he wrote that the challenge “think tanks face is striking a balance between research and advocacy – a balance that

affords them the credibility and respectability they require to speak with authority, and the access they need to exercise influence over public opinion and public policy” (25).

We are interested in this subject because of the limited number of studies on these institutions and why they engage in policy advocacy. At the same time, as argued by Rasmussen et al. (2018), research linking public policy to advocacy is sparse, despite the rise in recent decades of studies of advocacy and the influence on public policy by non-profit organizations, with scholars more optimistic about the possibility of measuring influence, and encouraging empirical research in the area (142) (see also, Lu, 2018). Furthermore, according to Gen and Wright (2018), although policy advocacy is an increasingly important function for many nonprofit organizations, scholars have failed to examine these advocacy activities on theoretical grounds (298). Prior to Gen and Wright’s assertion, Almog-Bar and Schmid (2013), in a review of the literature on nonprofit policy advocacy, noted that “strikingly, there are very few studies that have examined the advocacy activities of [nonprofit human service organizations] in relation to policy-making processes that use public policy-making theories or building on knowledge from policy studies” (27). This is in spite of the fact that “policy advocacy is widely regarded as an eminent feature of nonprofit organizations’ activities, allowing them to engage and represent their constituencies; give voice to diverse views and demands, promote economic, and social justice; contribute to a more vital, active civil society, and strengthen democracy and equality of opportunity” (Almog-Bar and Schmid, 2013: 12). At the same time, according to Lu (2018), “despite significant advancement, the existing empirical evidence remains inconclusive as to what factors shape nonprofit advocacy engagement decisions and to what extent,” (178) and this is worse with non-profit research institutions like think tanks, which nevertheless conduct and commission high-quality research, and yield insights vital to the policy making process (Shepherd, 2013).

While a number of scholars have studied advocacy in nonprofit organizations, these studies have been limited to what is generally described as human services organizations; *i.e.*, organizations that provide human services, such as social care, to disadvantaged children and youth, the needy elderly, the mentally ill and developmentally disabled, and disadvantaged adults (Child and Grønbjerg, 2007; Donaldson, 2007; 2008; Goldkind, 2014; Hasenfeld, 2009). These activities include child care, counseling, job training, child protection, foster care, residential treatment, home care, rehabilitation, and transitional housing (Smith 2018: 370; see Hasenfeld and Garrow, 2012). In some cases the studies have broadly included social movement organizations and other interest groups (Andrews and Edwards, 2004). Thus, this study contributes to the issue of policy advocacy in non-profit organizations, but with specific reference to think tanks, which are non-profit organizations but have been neglected in the literature. Furthermore, as noted by McGann (2019), “think tanks are not necessarily passive research organizations. In fact, some have taken quite an active role when it comes to lobbying for or articulating and implementing policy in distinct areas. They are contractors, trainers, and media outlets” (7). Unfortunately, McGann, who may be considered the modern-day father of think tank studies, ignored the use of advocacy as a policy instrument to achieve their objectives. It is, therefore, our hope to examine the benefits to these organizations, and NGOs in general, of their policy advocacy efforts, something that some scholars believe is entirely missing from the academic literature.

The paper is organized as follows. Immediately after this introductory section is a discussion, based on the extant literature, of the nature of policy advocacy. This is necessary because in the literature policy advocacy has sometimes been equated with the political activities of non-profit organizations (Fyall and Allard, 2017; Reid, 2006; Schmid et al. 2008). What follows this section is a brief look at think tanks in general. We then move to discussing the methodology used in the study, and follow this up with another brief discussion of the emergence of think tanks

in Ghana, the general landscape of these institutions in the country, and their quest to occupy the policy space and influence public policy. We then turn our attention to the why and how, and the impact of the use of advocacy as an instrument for policy making and policy change by these institutions, focusing specifically on the data collected from the field. The last section concludes the paper with some suggestions for future research.

Policy Advocacy: A Review of the Literature

According to Gen and Wright (2013), “while the academic literature on specific forms of policy advocacy is easily identifiable (e.g., lobbying, media work, campaigning, etc.), the broader concept has escaped critical attention.” What this means is that despite the use of term [*not only in the academic literature*], defining the concept has become problematic. We first delineate what policy and advocacy are.

The term advocacy is applied to a number of issues, with consequent fuzziness of meaning (Reid, 2001). There are many different forms of it, as well as different categories of people who describe their activities as “advocacy” (Oring, 2004). Rai-Atkins et al. (2002) say that “people from all cultures, classes and ethnic backgrounds practice advocacy with and for their children, friends, elders and relatives” (3). In some cases, the term is thus used broadly to describe the influence of groups in shaping social and political outcomes in government and society. In law and regulation, it refers to types of reportable activities, although regulatory agencies may differ in their use of it.

Reid (2001) says that advocacy is something that we recognize when we see it, but that lacks definition. To Reid (2001), it “is a word that is up for grabs in public discourse, research, and policy. Journalists, activists, academics, lawyers, government officials, classifiers, nonprofit

managers, and others use the word differently in their professions” (1). In view of this, she further wrote, “there is no agreement on which activities constitute advocacy, and no one source gives a full account of the many kinds of activities and strategies groups used to leverage influence in the policy process” (2).

According to the oxforddictionaries.com, the word “advocacy” is derived from the Medieval Latin word ‘advocatia,’ which is an abstract noun from Latin “advocat-,” a stem of “advocare” which refers to a “call, summon, invite.” In old French, the word is “avocacie”, which denotes the “profession of an avocat”. Thus, in this medieval sense, the word was used to refer to “the act of pleading for, supporting, or recommending.” Proschan (2004) says that “a glance at the etymology of the words reminds us, in turn, of its close kinship with "vocation": an advocate is someone who "summoned or called to another... One called in, or liable to be called upon, to defend or speak for” (see also Almog-Bar and H. Schmid, 2013).

Advocacy is the process of speaking out about issues of concern in order to exert some influence aimed at pursuing effective outcomes directly affecting people’s lives (Cohen et al. 2001). According to Piccinini (2010), “in its general meaning of a mix of persuasive communication and targeted actions aiming at ‘pleading the cause of’, ‘acting on behalf of’ and ‘speaking out for or in support of others’, advocacy is designed to change policies, positions and actions on a specific issue or cause on behalf of the voiceless.” Advocacy as a style of communicating is also accepted by Rai-Atkins et al. (2002), who say that it is “a form of speaking out against discrimination and inequality” (3). Reid (2001) has described advocacy as “a wide range of individual and collective expression or action on a cause, idea, or policy. It may also refer to specific activities or organizations. Sometimes a distinction is made between advocacy on behalf of others and grassroots advocacy or civic and political participation. The word is often modified

to describe the venue for political action.” Thus, advocacy is generally “the effort to influence public policy through education and engagement of lawmakers, as well as other concerned stakeholders, with interests in certain policy outcomes.”

In this paper, we will adopt the definition of advocacy provided by Macindoe (2011), who says that it is “an attempt by individuals, groups, or formal organizations to effect social or political change concerning a particular issue” (225). We prefer this definition because it is broad, and recognizes the role of individuals and organizations (both formal and informal). Since we are talking about think tanks, which are formal organizations, we believe that the definition is very much appropriate in this context.

With advocacy defined, we now turn our attention to policy advocacy. Before this, let’s look briefly at what a policy is. There are as many definitions of [public] policy in the literature as there are of advocacy. However, while these definitions share some characteristics, they also differ in many respects (Birkland, 2016; Howlett et al. 2009). Birkland (2016) says that “a policy as a statement by government—at whatever level, in whatever form—of what it intends to do about a public problem.” This seems close to Dye’s classic definition of public policy, which says it is “whatever government decides to do and not to do”. This statement(s) can be found in the “constitution, statutes, regulation, case law (that is, court decisions), agency or leadership decisions, or even in changes in the behavior of government officials at all levels” (Birkland, 2016). Similarly, Garrison et al. (2017) say that “[public] policy is the constellation of laws, regulations, and mandates that a government establishes to meet the needs of its citizens, usually through a political process.” From these definitions, one can infer that any time scholars use the word policy, they are referring to public policy or a statement by a government. We follow the same tradition in this paper, and thus accept Dye’s definition, stated earlier, as our

conceptualization of [public] policy, because it explains government's action or inaction on a particular issue that may be facing the public.

Policy advocacy likewise does not easily lend itself to an acceptable definition. The definitional quagmire has resulted from the fact that in a number of cases, policy advocacy is used synonymously with other types of advocacy adventures, such as client, or case, and political advocacies, although there are differences between these types (Abelson, 2017; Litzelfelner and Petr, 1997). As explained by Mosley (2013), policy advocacy is advocacy that is directed at changing policies or regulations that affect practice or group well-being, and is distinct from case or client advocacy, which is advocacy on behalf of families and individuals (1). Below, we will review a few of the definitions used in the literature.

A number of scholars have provided a broader definition of the concept. For example, Ezell (2001) defines policy advocacy as comprising “purposive efforts to change specific existing or proposed policies or practices on behalf of or with a specific client or group of clients” (23), while Jenkins (1987) similarly says that policy advocacy is “any attempt to influence the decisions of any institutional elite on behalf of a collective interest” (297). Gen and Wright (2013) say that policy advocacy is “intentional activities initiated by the public to affect the policy making process.” Policy advocacy can be referred to organized initiatives that seek to change official policy or legislation, or the manner in which these regulations are applied. It is about the speaking for, representing the interests of, or defending the rights of a general category of people, or the general public. It can also be seen as the deliberate process of informing and influencing decision-makers in support of evidence-based policy change and policy implementation, including resource mobilization. Here again, we will borrow the definition provided by Pekkanen and Smith (2014), which says that policy advocacy is “the attempt to influence public policy, either directly or

indirectly” (3). Our preference for this definition stems from the perspective that think tanks attempt to both directly and indirectly influence public policies, with their ultimate targets being policymakers of the state, which may be different from other non-profit organizations.

Despite the inability of scholars to agree on an acceptable definition of policy advocacy, according to Gen and Wright (2013), some defining characteristics emerge from the various definitions in the extant literature.¹ The first characteristic, according to the authors, is that policy advocacy is initiated by citizens, acting individually or as a collective, often represented by nonprofit organizations (Reid, 2006). The citizens represented may have relatively little power in society, or may be unable to represent their own interests (Jansson, 2010). This “bottom up” approach initiated by citizen stakeholders is in stark contrast to the “top-down” public participation activities initiated by government bodies, including familiar outreach tools, such as public hearings, citizen surveys, citizen juries, etc. (McLaverty, 2011).

Second, according to Gen and Wright (2013), is that the method of policy advocacy involves a deliberate process of influencing decision makers or a social or civic agenda in order to build political will around action. Quoting from Hopkins (1992), these include: programmatic (or issue) advocacy, when an organization takes a position on a public policy that affects their work; legislative advocacy, or lobbying of legislators; political campaign activity to support or oppose political candidates; demonstrations, rallying public support around an issue or policy; boycotts, to encourage or discourage business with a targeted entity; and litigation, or using legal action to advance a cause. They further added grassroots advocacy.

Finally, according to them, the aim of advocacy is to ultimately change policy or the policy making process, generally by making it more accessible and transparent to the public; this latter

¹This section is drawn from the work of Gen and Wright (2013). These authors have neatly summarized the defining characteristics of the concept, as well as the benefits of policy advocacy.

goal has been called “participatory advocacy”, rather than policy advocacy. This idea of policy change has been thoroughly discussed in the literature as the ultimate objective of any advocacy work, including that of social movements. In terms of policy change, the goal may be to adopt, modify, or reject certain policy options (Moore, 2011).

What Think Tanks Are in the Policymaking Environment

The extant literature uses the terms think tanks and policy institutes interchangeably (Abraham, 2019; McGann, 2019; Plehwe, 2015; Stone, 2015). Throughout this paper, for clarity we will use think tanks. A variety of definitions continue to be produced by scholars interested in the study of these institutions and their influence in the policy making process (Abelson, 2017; Abelson and Brooks, 2017; McGann, 2014; Stone, 2015), again making it difficult to define them precisely (Denham and Garnett, 1998).

Rich (2004) defines think tanks as “independent, non-interest based, non-profit organizations that produce and principally rely on expertise and ideas to obtain support and influence the policy-making process.” McGann (2012) says that “think tanks are public policy research, analysis and engagement institutions that generate policy-oriented research, analysis and advice on domestic and international issues that enable policymakers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy issues.” On the other hand, Abelson and Brooks (2017) say that think tanks are “organizations that carry out research and analysis of policy issues, whose primary function is to influence the ways those issues are thought about, and that produce policy advice and recommendations”. The International Development Research Centre (2013) defined a think tank as “an organization that engages in research and advocacy on public policy issues.” Stones (2015) says think tanks are “policy research centers engaged in policy analysis and

advocacy that is directed toward government but also undertaken for international organizations, the business and nonprofit sectors.”

A caveat about most, if not all, of these definitions is that while they attempt to emphasize the “research” and “influence” parts of the activities of these institutions in the policy making process, they ignore the “policy advocacy” part; which, we believe, has become an essential element of what these institutions do. We thus believe that the definitions fall short of fully describing such institutions. Consequently, we will attempt to broadly define them, drawing on extant attempts. In this paper our definition of think tanks is that they are institutions that undertake research and policy analysis in the hope of influencing public policy development through policy dialogue and policy [political] advocacy, with their specific targets being policy makers at both the national and local levels in a particular environment. We add the instruments used by these institutions because we believe that doing so helps distinguish them from other organizations, such as NGOs, that may only be interested in caring for the vulnerable in society, as discussed earlier, as well as lobbying organizations and individuals, who are all interested in influencing public policies but through different sets of instruments.

Characteristics of Think Tanks

In her study of think tanks Ladi (2011) identified four common characteristics. First is the policy focus. The objective of these organizations, first and foremost, is to bring knowledge and policy making together by informing and, if possible, influencing the policy process that generates policy advice on domestic and international issues, enabling policymakers to make informed decisions, and bridging the gap between the government and the public at large. To Ladi, therefore,

think tanks conduct and recycle research that aims to solve policy problems, and not solely to advance the theoretical debate.

The second characteristic is public purpose, which refers to the reason for the existence of think tanks. Most think tanks claim that they conduct research to inform the public and the government on how to improve public policy. Their rhetoric often claims that their work is for the common good and to educate the public (Ladi, 2011). In fact, it is this common good that has made a number of them adopt “advocacy” as an instrument to influence public policy. This public purpose has enabled some of these organizations to extend their reach beyond the political arena. As cogently explained by Stone (2015),

Outside the political sphere and state sector, think tanks have cultivated other audiences. Students and academics in colleges and universities regularly use think tank publications. Foundation officials, business executives, bureaucrats from various international organizations, university researchers, journalists, and, for want of a better term, the ‘educated public’ are often engaged by think tank pursuits...Indeed, think tanks have become more accessible to a wider range of publics via blogs, YouTube, and other media...As they do so, think tanks provide an organizational link and communication bridge between their different audiences. They connect disparate groups by providing a forum for the exchange of views, by translating academic or scientific research into policy-relevant ‘sound bites,’ and by spreading policy lessons internationally.

Third, the expertise and professionalism of their research staffs are the key intellectual resources of think tanks, and a way of legitimizing their findings (Ladi, 2011). According to Peezt (2017), a characteristic of such organizations is the need to be perceived or portrayed as ‘expert’, so permanent persuaders seek to provide expert opinion on policy matters in an attempt to influence these others. Drawing on this expertise and professionalism, they are able to influence policy development, especially at the agenda setting stage. According to Rich (2004), “expertise is understood to play active ...roles in each stage of the policy process. During agenda setting, expertise is useful as a warning to policy makers of impending problems and as guidance

to decision makers on how to revise policy. Expertise, at this point, can “alter people to the extent [that] a given situation affects their interests or values” (108).

The fourth characteristic, according to Ladi, is that the key activities of think tanks are usually research analysis and advice, which come in the form of publications, conferences, seminars, and workshops. As noted by Peezt (2017), “a common, but not universal, characteristic of permanent persuaders is that they produce ‘reports’: documents that purport to have investigated an issue, often using quantitative methods, and that reach some conclusion with implicit or explicit policy implications.” The essence of undertaking research is that it “can have the purpose of informing late agenda-setting moments, when interest among policy makers is building and ideas are being translated into legislative language... In this form, studies provide general insight on how social, political, or economic problems might be addressed by policy makers” (Rich, 2005: 153). In addition, it has been noted that “for researchers interested in policy impact, ‘do nothing’ is not an option”; hence, the goal of research is to contribute to policy outcomes (Stone et al., 2001). The research of these organizations focuses on agenda setting, position papers, agenda reinforcing reports, and policy development programs (Wells, 2012). Thus, through research, these organizations generate ideas or information for the purpose of persuading others of a particular view of the world or a particular policy approach (Peezt, 2017:246).

Research Design and Methods of Data Collection

This paper adopts a qualitative approach to help answer the research questions. The use of the qualitative approach was appropriate, as it helped to ascertain from interviewees a first-hand understanding of how think tanks are using advocacy as a policy instrument to influence policy making in Ghana. The qualitative approach to research, according to Creswell (2009), is one in

which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on participatory perspectives. Here, the researcher collects data by observing participants' behaviours or through stories collected in interviews to determine the individual's personal experience. The in-depth interview, which is a significant way of acquiring relevant information for qualitative research, was used to collect the necessary information. The interview, according to Babbie (2005), is a "data-collection encounter in which one person (an interviewer) asks questions of another (a respondent)." It is basically a conversation in which the interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation, and pursues specific topics raised by the respondent (Barbbie and Benequisto, 2009).

To identify the interviewees, purposive and snowball sampling were employed. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where the researcher selects units to be sampled based on their knowledge and professional judgment (Creswell, 2013). It was used because the research seeks to focus on particular characteristics of the population of interest. According to Wegner (2010), snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling where the researcher begins by identifying an individual perceived to be an appropriate respondent, and the respondent is then asked to identify another potential respondent. Snowball sampling was also employed due to the difficulty of identifying the think tanks; identified ones thus assisted in identifying others.

We used these approaches for two main reasons. First, whereas in the developed world it is easy to obtain a list of such institutions from their revenue agencies, in Ghana this is not the case. There is no registry identifying these institutions. Hence, they are mixed with other civil society organizations that, although they undertake research for their activities, are not classified as think tanks. Second, and in relation to the above, there has been a mushrooming of organizations that call themselves think tanks -- but that, in a strict sense, and based on our definition, are not. Hence, purposive sampling helped to identify institutions that fall under the general category of

think tanks as the bases for such assessment. Snowball sampling also helped us identify some of these institutions, since they meet for policy dialoguing, as well as, in some situations, creating a network for a particular policy course: such as the recent mobilization of think tanks and other civil society organizations in fighting for the passing of the Right to Information bill.

In doing so, we followed the works of Abraham (2019) and Ohemeng (2015), as well as using McGann's (2014) Think Tank Global Index to identify them. We then identified 30 such institutions for interview, all based in Accra, the capital. Letters requesting interviews were sent to the executive directors, who then recommended officials for interview. The interviews are ongoing; so far, we have conducted 15, which have been used in this paper. Fortunately, we are yet to reach saturation, as new information continues to come out of each interview. Hence, it is our objective to continue as much as possible until we get to a point where the information becomes repetitive: or, as scholars have described it, the saturation point (Guest et al. 2006; Saunders et al. 2018). Respondents were executive, country, or research directors. The interviews take about 30 to 60 minutes, and are conducted in the premises of the institutions.

In the interview we took the narrative approach, focusing on what happened and on the meaning the individual makes of it. The narrative approach is a traditional form of communication, and has the same dual focus (Leong and Tan, 2013). We used it for a number of reasons. First, since this is the first study to examine the use of "advocacy" by think tanks, we want to understand the meaning and the essence of the approach from the interviewees' perspectives, or what have been described as the "participants' self-generated meanings" (Esin et al. 2013). Second, by using this approach interviewees are able to draw more from examples to enable us to ascertain the approach's efficacy and how it might have impacted the policy making process, as compared with traditional policy research and dialogue in these institutions.

Participants are asked to explain how think tanks continue to influence policies, and how they affect policy making for national development through the use of policy advocacy.² Officials interviewed so far have been willing to share their stories, and through this approach valuable data have been obtained. In addition, we have been able to obtain information on sensitive issues, including those that would have been difficult to grasp through normal questions and answers, or through quantitative questionnaires (Aarikka-Stenroos, 2010). The downside to this approach is, however, the degree of vigilance required to focus on what has been said or is being said, so that if the interviewee deviates completely from the focus of the research, or is repeating what has already been said several times, we can bring them back. This has happened with some of the interviews. The interviews have been transcribed, and are ready to be used for the discussion and analysis section of the paper.

A Brief History of the Emergence of Think Tanks in Ghana

In this section we will offer a brief analysis of the emergence of think tanks in Ghana. The discussion is not exhaustive, because the literature on these organizations in Ghana has done a good intellectual exercise on them and we believe that there is no need to repeat or explain it. An important point, though, is that think tanks, especially the private sector ones, are a recent phenomenon in Ghana. They continue to grow exponentially as a result of the influence of external forces, including the United Nations Foundations, International Development Agencies, and other institutions. Another important point is that these private organizations emerged with the move from authoritarian dictatorship to democratic governance in the early 1990s. Prior to this, such institutes had only existed as state institutions, with some, if not all, attached to a state university

²See Appendix A for the list of questions being asked

or institution (Abraham, 2019; Ohemeng, 2005; 2015). It was within this general environment that private think tanks emerged, and have continued their growth and importance in the policy space in the country.

The first private think tank in the country is the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), under the leadership of Dr. Charles Mensah. The IEA was established to “strengthen democracy and, promote economic analysis and growth through policy recommendations, while also promoting democratic views among citizens” (Abraham, 2019: 9). Since then there has been a steady rise of these institutions and the demise of others. Thus, it is difficult to pinpoint how many currently exist and operate in Ghana.³ As mentioned, there is no registry.

Some of these institutions have nevertheless contributed immensely to public policy and governance in general. For instance, in his study of institutions, Ohemeng (2005) shows the greater influence of these organizations in shaping the direction of administrative reforms in Ghana since the early 1990s. He wrote:

...Essentially, these organisations serve as catalysts to supplement the government’s effort in developing appropriate policies and institutions, as well as educating the populace on public policies essential for the promotion of good governance and ‘marketisation’ in Ghana. In some cases, they serve as local or domestic policy entrepreneurs by initiating policies, which have been adopted by government (455).

In another study to examine the influence of these organizations on the policy making process, Ohemeng (2015) explained how some of them continue to affect the outcome of government policies in a number of fields, such as the democratic process and governance, economic policies and management, community development, and advocacy. He showed how these institutions were influential in the development and implementation of Ghana’s first transitional bill, after the chaotic transfer of power between the then National Democratic Congress government and the

³Abraham (2019); McGann (2016); and Ohemeng, (2005; 2015), have all provided different figures for these organizations operating in the country

incoming New Patriotic Party government, as well as the controversial National Reconciliation Bill, as part of their efforts to ensure good governance in the country.

In the economic policy area, most of these institutions continue to devote much of their resources to ensuring that the government develops policies that will enhance the overall economic development of the country. Consequently, they continue to publish papers on the state of the economy on various topics, including issues relating to the extractive sector and budgetary analysis. In most of these areas, they have become the main domestic policy entrepreneurs that facilitate setting up the policy agenda (Kpessa, 2011).

Another area in which these institutions continue to play prominent roles is that of citizen participation, enhancing participatory governance at both the local and national levels. In a recent study of these institutions, Abraham (2019) noted how these institutions “have been part of the paradigmatic shift from traditional representative decision making to participatory governance.” According to him, although their successes are not at their peak, they are visible, and the progress is evident in some areas, such as the national Economic Fora, Social Security and National Insurance Trust and tier-two pension investigations, as well as a host of others. In all, the author notes,

The grassroots involvement of citizens through the activities of policy think tanks has led to the incorporation of the nonprofit sector into the policy making process. This is an improvement in the political system that existed from the pre-colonial, colonial and early part of the post-colonial, period. Apart from the colonial regime, the various authoritarian regimes from 1957 on, governed with the practice of reducing and excluding the private sector, civil society, trade unions, etc. from the policy making process. Through their activities, citizens are now largely aware of governmental decisions. There is a movement from passive citizenry to participative citizenry.

Assessing the Use and Impact of Advocacy in the Policy Development

In this section our objective is to utilize the data collected so far to examine the importance of think tanks in the policy making process and their use of advocacy to achieve their objectives.

In short, this section tries to answer the research questioned posed in the introductory section of the paper.

On the question of how think tanks are shaping the way policies are developed in Ghana through policy advocacy, our interviewees expressed profound effect in gaining the government's attention through such activities. On the use of advocacy and why think tanks see it as a major instrument, one interviewee explained how the organization specifically used this approach to draw government's attention to developing policies and channelling funds toward providing social services for the poor, especially in the rural areas. The interviewee commented,

[Y]ou can generate the ideas. You can talk about it, you can share information, but if you don't make the extra effort to share with government, nobody comes to take it, and this is what is happening in the developing countries. It's not the same as the advanced countries. So, for us, it's not just about generating the data or information, but it's about strategizing to influence to make sure that our voice is heard, and this includes serious advocacy and activism.

Another interviewee explained that

We got into budget analysis and budget advocacy and to mobilize citizens, especially those from poor communities, to engage in the discussion of the national budget. From here, we went into what we call the budget tracking and expenditure tracking. We also got into revenue mobilization and policies around revenue in terms of how we could support government to mobilize adequate revenue to finance development in a very pro-poor manner to affect poor communities.

Another interviewee explained how the organization is using advocacy as a complementary instrument in the fight against corruption, as part of their good governance mission. The interviewee was of the view that since corruption has so far proven difficult to defeat, taking to advocacy and ensuring that people really understand the negative effect of corruption on development was deemed the best way. The interviewee noted,

One of the things, which is part of advocacy, is using the media influence, and in collaboration with other organizations such as CDD-Ghana, Ghana Integrity Initiative, the Multimedia Group and have developed a show called "Corruption Watch," which airs on the Joy FM Super morning show. We are trying to bring change to the issue of corruption and the abuse of public trust through this platform. Here, we take a case, investigate, and we put the results out there for everyone to see. A good example was

the purchase of helicopters. The government had indicated the cost of 12m dollars for each helicopter. However, our investigations showed the cost should not be more than 9m. Because we backed our claims with research, the purchase was reviewed, [and] a new agreement with value for money was achieved.

There is also the belief that advocacy, in addition to other instruments, has now brought government closer to the people in a number of ways. In fact, as discussed by Abraham (2019), participatory governance has now become a “norm” in Ghana through the efforts of policy institute. This participatory governance began with the political liberalization beginning in the early 1990s, and the opening up of the policy space, which think tanks have continued to help citizens to occupy. On this an interviewee remarked:

The constitution talks about the rights of citizens to participate in decision making. This participation requires the state to create policy spaces that would enable citizens to participate. The state must and will continue to create the conditions for such participation. With this space, think tanks and other civil society organization have developed policy advocacy networks, and are using the spaces to open up avenues for policy changes, as well as citizen participation.

An official from one think tank explained how advocacy, which they described as “practicalizing an issue”, has helped government to understand public issues better. The interviewee commented,

One reason why we have been able to make the impact on public policy is that whatever position we take on a policy has been informed by things we have actually “practicalized.” We bring to the table what we call “superior knowledge.” We do a lot of brainstorming, researching, and analysis. We sit around the table and speak to issues at a level of knowledge equal to, or superior to, those of the policy makers, so much so that gradually people have been co-opted into policy making processes to help government.

On the co-opting of some personnel from think tanks to help government in the policy development process, one interviewee was candid enough to say the following:

I come from...but I chair the Ghana Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative at the Ministry of Finance. I co-chair the Open Governance Partnership Initiative hosted by the Public Sector Reform Secretariat. I chair the Public Interest and Accountability Committee, and there are others in other positions as well. For example, Kwame formerly of ... is the deputy minister in charge of petroleum at the Energy Ministry. Francis, former head of ... is a deputy Attorney General. Thomas from ... is now the

deputy interior minister and a parliamentarian. Similarly, Rudolph, also from ... is a member of parliament. There are many think tanks and other CSO leaders who have eventually found their way into government.⁴

To the interviewee, the recognition of these personnel came from research and policy dialogue, as well as the kind of advocacy activities they embarked upon over the years gaining traction in the various policy fields. The interviewee believes that these personnel can help government in the development of public policy, and effectively interact with the citizens through their knowledge of their policy fields, as well as their advocacy work, and their ability to explain the government's policies to people.

An interviewee also showed the importance of advocacy work for, and its influence on, policies. To them, while research and policy dialogue are important, complementing these tools with advocacy has gone a long way to changing perceptions about certain policies among government and citizens. They illustrated this point with the Affirmative Action Policy Bill developed by the NDC, as well as how political parties have included affirmative action in their manifestoes. The interviewee explained that "...the advocacy for affirmative action by some of these organizations has gone on with a whole lot of people, and this has led to a whole generational shift about the perception of affirmative action in Ghana". Another interviewee explained the importance of advocacy and activism in the policy making process in Ghana this way:

...[i]f you agree with me, one problem in Ghana is that our policy makers have made up their minds on issues, and unless you are prepared to fight them in the media and on the streets, they may not change their minds. We are not activists, we are advocates. We want to sit with you, show you our evidence, etc. This is about how much we can do. As to whether it will be taken into consideration, that is another issue for further discussion.

An important result of the advocacy activities of think tanks in Ghana is the development of a policy advocacy network or coalition. An old Akan adage is that it is easy to break the stick

⁴We are using pseudonyms here. We have omitted the names of organizations these individuals used to work.

of a broom, but difficult to break a whole bunch of them. In a number of policy areas individual think tanks have found it difficult to enforce or enhance policy change. “It is important for them to bind themselves together for a just cause,” exclaimed an interviewee. One policy area where this network has helped is the development and the passing of the Right to Information (RTI) Act (Avle and Adunbi, 2015; Ohemeng, 2015).

Ghana has had a checkered history when it comes to RTI, which cannot be entirely covered here. The first draft of the RTI bill in 1996 was the brainchild of the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA). It was inspired by the refusal of the Bank of Ghana (BoG) to give the IEA information on interest rates, inflation rates, and national debt for “national security reasons”. The IEA felt that the “national security reasons” were unreasonable, especially since the BoG continued to provide such information to international bodies like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, while denying it to its own citizens. The first draft of the bill was developed in 1999 after various stakeholder discussions. Since, then various amendments have continued to be made. Unfortunately, the bill was not presented to Parliament until 2010; nine years later it finally passed.

It was this delay that led to the formation of the policy network called the Ghana RTI Coalition. According to an informant, interested organizations believed that without a concerted effort from all organizations interested in freedom of information, the bill would never see the light of day. The network’s activities, including street demonstrations, radio discussions, fora, and a host of others “forced” Parliament to finally pass the RTI bill in March of this year, after being stuck in Parliament for over 20 years. Since 2012 the coalition has continued to present a petition demanding to know why an FOI law has not been passed since 2002, when the government first considered it (Avle and Adunbi, 2015). Recent marches and demonstrations, including the

declaration of “Red Fridays” in 2018, forced Parliament to finally pass the bill, which was recently assented to by the president.

Challenges to Think Tanks in Using Advocacy for Policy Development

Scholars who have studied think tanks in Ghana and other developing countries have unearthed a plethora of challenges facing these institutions in these countries. Here again, using the data obtained through interviews, we will examine these challenges from the perspective of our interviews. The most critical of these challenges are financing and capacity. There is no need for us to repeat these challenges. However, we did ask questions relating to challenges in using advocacy as a tool for policy change and policy development, and our interviewees identified capacity as one of the critical challenges they face.

To most of our interviewees, while financial issues continue to be a major stumbling block to their activities, it is the capacity issue that is most pressing. It must be said, however, that to these organizations the financial and capacity issues are like Siamese twins: they go together in every aspect of the institution’s life. Some interviewees emphasized that if the organizations had the human capacity, they could utilize the limited financial resources at their disposal to policy development through research and policy dialogue well.

At the same time, informants agreed that it is the capacity challenge that has pushed some of them to engage other think tanks and CSO for their advocacy activities, and that has ultimately led to the formation of the policy advocacy network. An interviewee explained this well.

For us, we were all trained in different fields, economists, etc., but we all come together to do advocacy and you know that requires a different set of skills. So, on that score, I will say there’s minimal capacity here. Going forward perhaps what we need is to focus more on the strengthening of our advocacy capacity, including getting an advocacy plan. I was recently discussing this with my colleagues, and they kept saying but we have a communication plan, and I said no, communication is different from advocacy,

communication is an advocacy tool. This kind of thinking shows some capacity gaps in the organizations, which need to be well addressed.

On the financial side and its relations to capacity, an interviewee explained:

[n]obody pays for advocacy. Our work is largely donor funded, and the funding issue goes to the core of our sustainability. Last year, we lost four staff members who had gotten better paying jobs elsewhere. People are passionate about the job. They want to make a difference; they want to influence policy, but everything comes down to the personal economy. If your pocket is not good, then you lose passion. This makes things a bit difficult for us. There are some things that we want to do, which we may push to work, but because we don't have money, we cannot do it. There are studies that we have lined up that we want to do, but because we have not got funding, we are still sitting on them. So, funding is a key challenge for us. Sometimes when the issue is very "important," we sacrifice some other things to get it done.

Another interviewee commented:

If we didn't have challenges, the job would be fun. The first of course is money or resources. There is always the challenge of funding. Ideas are great. You have an idea to change something, but that idea will have to be paid for. We are funded by donors, but as you know, they also have their objectives, what they are looking for and what they can fund and then you also have your ideas that you think are great for the country. So, where the interest of a funder and the interest of the organization are not aligned, funding becomes a big issue. Unfortunately, in Ghana, the CSO sector is not well developed to enable the state to provide grants for certain activities, compared to that of the developed world, such as the US.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to examine the use and impact of policy advocacy by think tanks in Ghana as a tool for changing public policies. We focused on think tanks because, as the literature has shown, they have become major policy actors not only in Ghana, but in other developing countries. Their work continues to be recognized worldwide as a worthy attempt at enhancing policies for good governance and dealing with difficult problems in these countries.

In spite of this, studies of these institutions have only looked their strategies, such as research and policy dialogue (there are various forms of policy dialogue that these institutions use to gain the attention of policy makers), to the neglect of policy advocacy, which these institutions

have identified as one of their missions. This neglect has thus left a void in the literature, which we have attempted to fill with this paper.

Using a qualitative approach and interviews from some purposively selected organisations in Accra, we have been able to explain why these organizations are not focusing more on policy advocacy. As discussed in the paper, these institutions believe that policy advocacy with activism offers a better way of gaining more attention from policy makers, as exemplified by the recent passing of the RTI bill in Ghana. They are thus now combining it with the traditional approaches of research and policy dialogue. So far, our discussions with officials of these institutions show that the instrument is very important and effective in the policy making process because of the politics in policy making. They identified some of the advantages of using this approach. Unfortunately, the picture is not completely rosy, and these officials also pointed out challenges. Nevertheless, policy advocacy is now integral to instruments used by these organizations in the policy making process. It has helped them develop a policy network to fight for policy changes in Ghana, and it seems these efforts are bearing much fruit, expanding not only policy choices made by policy makers, but also the policy space for others to effectively participate in.

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Appendix A

1. How have think tanks shaped, and how are they shaping, the way policies are developed in Ghana?
2. How have think tanks used advocacy as a strategy to influence policy development in Ghana?
3. What challenges confront them, as they endeavour to change policy making through advocacy?
4. How does the future look for think tanks in policy development in Ghana?