

Beyond Big Dreams:

How will new national visions and long-term plans improve the lives of the poor and vulnerable in West Africa?

Introduction

National long-term planning appears to have come full circle in many countries across the West African region; from its highest point during the waves of national independence in the 1960s and 70s, to its lowest when Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) were installed in many African countries during the early 1980s and now back to a plethora of National Visioning and Long-Term planning institutions across the continent.

Ironically the impetus for this has come from the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), which were introduced to encourage recovery from the failures of SAPs, and required that countries present medium-term plans for poverty reduction. These initiatives were further strengthened by the emergence of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that forced countries to take a 25-year horizon in tackling development challenges. PRSPs and MDGs required that grassroots organisations and local communities were consulted when drawing up the plans.

This showed a marked difference from the top-down strategies previously used. Long-term planning is now gaining popularity again across the region. Almost all countries now have long-term visions, and others have developed special purpose institutions to drive those visions.

This Issue will explore how long-term visioning is evolving across the region, trends in participatory planning and institutional mechanisms being used to drive long-term trends. How do we see the future of poverty within the context of long-term planning in the region?

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Editorial

It has been said that “*failing to plan is like planning to fail*” and this has also been suggested as an explanation for the poor economic growth of many African countries since independence. However, recent insights may well add new wisdom to this lesson. For the economic failure of many African states over the last few decades happened not because they simply did not plan, but mostly because they failed to make those plans resilient enough to withstand future shocks or to take into account the present realities of the challenges they were facing at that time.

Additionally, lessons from the failures of the big dreams espoused during the 1960s – 1970s, were not absorbed early enough, and therefore more mistakes were made during the strident implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). The sudden shift from long-term planning to short-term programs caused further problems down the line. In the end, if we are to have meaningful transformation in ways that reduce the impact of poverty on the lives of vulnerable people, we cannot do without long-term plans and a national vision of what a successful national economy will yield. The roots of poverty are deep and uprooting them requires long-term and concerted efforts along various fronts (as shown by the MDG model). Long-term plans have the best chance of focusing such efforts and also making the best use of limited resources. The importance of national planning is getting more deeply embedded in the thinking of policymakers across the region, as is evident in the recent proliferation of long-term plans (and visions).

However, as countries begin to elaborate on these long-term visions and start to develop medium-term plans for implementation, there is a real danger that mere planning alone could become the core activity that consumes the energy of many African policy makers. Even the grassroots organisations are showing signs of fatigue from the recurrent consultations that they are called to participate in. Evidence on the ground shows that several plans are still being made 3 years into the planning cycle, yet most medium-term plans are supposed to last

for just 4-6 years. Therefore, if half of the time is being spent making plans, when does the time for action begin?

National visions for many countries are also being revised, as the time horizons change, shifting forwards, from 2020 to 2030 and even 2040. There is now a real danger of ‘*paralysis by planning*’ as the UNDP Country Director for Ghana puts it. Renewed efforts are needed to move governments in the region to the next level; to move from a desire for plans towards the political will to push plans through. Political expediency at the moment militates against this due to the political economy and political cycles that encourage short-term outlook. As a result, annual plans (budgets) take centre stage and long-term planning takes a back seat when it comes to action.

Providing the necessary infrastructure, capacity and resources to execute plans is a way to effectively reflect increasing political will. However, planning institutions must start learning how to absorb such risks better and ring-fence their long-term plans against the vagaries of day-to-day politics. The true value of developing long-term plans probably lies more in the social capital which accrues when genuine partnerships with grassroots organisations and community leaders are built in the process of developing and executing national vision plans. This comes from careful stakeholder engagement during the critical phases of any long-term programmes derived from such plans.

In the end, the goal of strengthening planning institutions is not just to realise national vision but actually to go further and strengthen the underlying social compact which holds the society and countries together. People must begin to see the value of good governance and stewardship of national resources. This is the place where civil society, the private sector and development partners need to put or expend more effort, to build the bridge between the elites and local communities, in order to ensure that development resources are being targeted in ways that keep the needs of the poor and vulnerable at the center of each national vision.



Long-Term Visions and Plans for Transformation: Emerging Trends

Africa is experiencing a wave of planning fervour with many countries developing vision documents and also creating institutional structures to carry out those visions. This is not the first time such enthusiasm has taken over African government. Indeed, immediately after independence many countries confidently developed plans that had medium to long-term time horizons. The desire to effect deep-seated changes in their economies and societies, in particular to industrialize and to "achieve the commanding heights of the economy" as Kwame Nkrumah put it, was the philosophy behind many of the plans. An important plank on which many of these plans were built was Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI). Ghana was the exemplar of this era, with Kwame Nkrumah launching massive infrastructure and industrialization projects.

Whilst there are notable achievements of these efforts as seen in projects like the Akosombo Volta Dam and Tema Port in Ghana, most of the lofty goals of these post-independence plans were not realized.

Far from it, as the ambitions which were fuelled by high commodity prices and favourable debt markets turned out to be the undoing of many countries, that were subsequently weighed down by debts in the wake of the two oil crises of 1973 and 1979. The subsequent inflationary period that engulfed the world eventually caused the collapse of key commodity prices.

Apart from the drying up of resources, the development programmes were also plagued with capacity problems including bureaucratic and institutional weaknesses. By the 1980's the development agenda had more or less stalled. The situation was dire enough for Africa to seek assistance from the World Bank and IMF, which in turn imposed Structural Adjustments Programs (SAPs) as a pre-condition for rescue packages. This precipitated the rapid jettisoning of long term planning in favour of short-term macro-economic stabilization programs. Greater emphasis was therefore placed on markets as the means of directing investment as opposed to working towards implementation of long term government plans.

A return to development planning occurred after the realization that Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) did not deliver the economic benefits which they promised and indeed, had very adverse effects on the lives of the poor and vulnerable in many African countries. The transition from SAPs back to long-term planning came in the form of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). These required that countries perform a detailed diagnosis of the causes of poverty and develop national medium to long-term

goals to promote poverty reduction. The papers were also reinforced by broader Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to which all the countries signed. Since MDGs are 15-year goals, long-term thinking had slipped back into the centre of government decision-making with much fanfare.

Governments have since embraced this long-term thinking since the successors to PRSPs are now national visions with long term development plans, the most common realisation timeframe being the year 2020. A few examples of various long-term plans across the region is provided in the table

Table 1: Overview of National Visions and Long-Term Plans across West Africa

Country	Name of Vision	Description
Nigeria	Vision 2020	Objective: To become one of the world's top 20 economies by 2020 Targets: Per capita income of at least \$4,000; GDP of at least \$900 billion
Liberia	Liberia Rising (Vision 2030)	Objective: Achieve middle income status by 2030 Targets: Per capita GNI between US\$2000 – 3000; Average annual growth rate of 12% - 15%
Benin	Benin 2025: Alafia	Objective: To be in the limelight, well governed, united and peaceful with prosperous and competitive economy Targets: GDP per capita CFA 250,000 (US\$ 400); Growth, 15% p.a
Senegal	National Strategy for Sustainable development Strategy (NSDS)	Objective: to maintain economic growth with an acceleration of the development process. Targets: To increase growth rate to 7% per annum.
Sierra Leone	Vision 2035	Objective: Middle income country by 2035 Targets: Per capita GDP of \$5,000; GDP of \$55 billion (from current \$2 billion); Growth rate of 14% per annum
Gambia	Vision 2020	Objective: Transform The Gambia into a dynamic middle income country Targets: Industrial sector contribution of between 25-30 per cent of GDP by the year 2020; Accessibility of education to 90 per cent of the school-age population
Cote d'Ivoire	Vision 2040	Objectives: Making Côte d'Ivoire an industrialized and economic power in the sub-region Targets: The improvement of the living standard of the population; this is to increase individual and collective Capacities; Exploit at lower cost the available resources.
Burkina Faso	National Prospective Study 2025	Objective: Create a strong, prosperous and united democratic country. Targets: No explicit target established though there are target for medium term plans derived from the vision

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Mali	National Prospective Study 2025	Objective: To combine wisdom of authenticity and dynamism to make a prosperous powerful and modern nation Targets: No explicit target established
Ghana	Vision 2020 Vision 2015	Vision 2020 aims to make Ghana a middle-income strategy and a first medium term development plan “Vision 2020: The First Step” was launched. Vision 2020 was later shelved when a new government came to power in 2000 and later replaced by Ghana national Long term Plan (2008-2015). The change of government in 2009 saw the abandonment of this long term plan
Guinea Bissau	Vision 2025	Objectives: (1) well-governed country, where peace reigns and where the separation of powers leads to the exercise of governance in a transparent way; (2) A country that is economically strong and well integrated in its sub-region with a population growth rate that is sustainable and consistent with economic growth; (3) A country where social inequality and poverty are reduced to tolerable levels thanks to an improved system of redistribution of income and of the fruits of economic growth
Togo	Development 2025	There is mention of development 2025 vision by a Togolese minister in a paper presented at an infrastructure forum. However details of the vision are scanty
Niger	Vision 2035 Strategy Paper for Sustainable and Inclusive Growth	Still on-going and will be ready in June 2012
ECOWAS	Vision 2025	Objective: creation of a region-wide space for people to transact business and live in dignity and peace under the rule of law and good governance

Most visions are built on a number of pillars and these invariably tend to be an economic pillar to address economic targets, a social pillar to address social aspirations and a political/governance pillar to address governance and institutional objectives. Some also have environmental pillars to address sustainable management of natural resources. The visions are therefore fairly holistic. The common means of achieving these visions is through 5-year medium development plans. For some countries some of the medium-term plans have been the PRSPs designed to address MDG targets.

Changing Perception on Transformation

Long-term planning has always been about the development of economies and subsequent uplifting of people lives. This narrative of transformation, however, changed between the first phase of post-independence long-term planning and the current phase. At

independence, import substitution industrialization (ISI) was the key phrase for transformation and efforts were directed toward developing industries to substitute imports. The state was also seen as the driver of these transformation efforts so State-Owned Enterprises were the main vehicles for transformation.

In the current era, rising to middle-income status is what many countries are striving for. This is a broader expression of the poverty reduction goal, as this is seen as the natural progression after poverty reduction goals are met. Achieving middle-income status is seen as resulting from a series of coordinated public and private sector investments that boost human and physical capital. For example, the Nigeria Vision 2020 states that one of its broad objectives is to make efficient use of human and natural resources to achieve rapid economic growth.

It is clear that to effectively tackle the economic situation in Africa it is not enough to just focus on the desirable ends of reducing poverty and expanding access to basic needs in health and education as promoted by the MDGs. Africa must master the means to attain these objectives and much more for itself. It must master the policies, institutions and technologies to promote sustained high growth and structural transformation, which are two mutually reinforcing processes.

Growth without structural transformation—growth induced by commodity price increases, static efficiency gains from better allocation of resources arising from economic liberalization, new discoveries of natural resources, or increases in foreign financial assistance—is not sustainable. The upgrading of scientific and technological capabilities (including accessing, adapting, and mastering foreign technologies) implied by transformation enhance the capability of the economy to continually innovate and grow, to seek solutions to new economic problems, and to respond effectively to market signals, particularly from external markets.

Diversification, another key aspect of transformation, broadens the base of production to increase the shares of manufacturing and knowledge-based services, thereby reducing economic volatility and providing greater scope for increasing returns and learning-by-doing, which enhance the chances for further technological advance. It also means focused efforts, including greater application of science and technology, to increase productivity in agriculture in order to raise the incomes of the bulk of the population that still depends on the sector, to increase food security, and to raise the sector's contribution to overall economic transformation in terms of financial, human and material resources as the industrialization experiences of several countries have shown.

But economic transformation requires investments and entails economic and social dislocations that require resources. High growth helps generate the increased public and private savings necessary to finance these requirements. In view of the mutually reinforcing nature of economic growth and structural transformation,

economic transformation, a term that combines these inseparable objectives, is now recognised as an emerging focus of economic policy in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Challenges and Prospects to Long Term Planning

The fervour of developing visions has not been matched by actual commitment to realising the objectives. Long-term planning has currently received mostly lip service in the region, mainly due to recurrent challenges in the political economy. The short-term nature of electoral cycles militates against long-term thinking by political actors. Political action is geared towards winning the next election and this posture in many cases is in conflict with long-term programs. Furthermore, the partisan nature of politics makes it necessary to denigrate and sometimes outrightly reject long-term plans crafted by one party when a new party comes into government. For instance, successive change-over of governments (party in power) in Ghana has seen long-term plans prepared by previous regimes abandoned by the incoming regimes. The Ghana Vision 2020 and Ghana Long Term plan (2008-2015) were both cast aside by incoming parties who saw them as being progeny of their opponents, rather than a national vision belonging to the country as a whole. This discontinuity poses a major challenge in the implementation of planning.

Nigeria has tried to address this challenge by enacting a law that compels all state and federal governments and agencies to ensure continuity of existing plans. The National Development Planning and Project Continuity Bill 2010 makes development planning compulsory for all tiers of government. This will ensure that development policies become independent of the federal government in power. The other key challenge to long-term planning is the continuation of allocated funding for the plans. Short-term issues tend to dominate budget discussions and are therefore better funded. More worrying perhaps, is the fact that for many countries a large part of development budget funding is through donor support and this can be very volatile.

Developing the proper institutional structures to drive the planning agenda is also a key challenge. Some countries have special purpose planning institutions to run the medium and long-term plans; others use the sector ministries in charge of finance and some have special ministries for planning. In many cases these institutions tend to have weak governance structures, often they are underfunded and have inadequate technical skills and human resources to drive those plans. For such institutions to become more effective they need to have stronger leadership, with the prerequisite status and respect in the political economy, along with the kind of expertise that is recognized by their peers.

The greatest challenge to long-term planning will continue to be commitment from national leaders, which at times seems to be dictated by the current 'fad' in development thinking.

It is therefore no surprise that all countries in the region seem to have very similar vision documents using similar messages. Additionally, many of these plans are not well funded and lack the institutional structures to make them work effectively. Even where institutions are mandated by the constitution, as is the case in Ghana, the political leadership has always invariably ended up undermining the institutions mostly by depriving them of funds.

The full implementation of these long-term visions may prove difficult. Some countries have started to revise the horizon moving it further into the future. For instance, Sierra Leone's vision 2025 has shifted into Vision 2030, while Cote d'Ivoire's Vision 2025 has been changed to Vision 2040.

Impact on the poor

As the PRSPs have formed the backdrop upon which these visions have been crafted,

there is a strong emphasis on social issues especially poverty, education and health. Growth and equity are central themes in all the visions. Most documents aim to be pro-poor and this is good for the future of poverty in the region.

These documents are entrenching pro-poor perspective and language amongst policy makers and this is bound to have a long-term impacts on how policy makers think. So, even if the current fascination with vision documents wanes in the future, at least pro-poor perspectives will remain in formulating whatever plans will be in vogue.

There has also been greater emphasis on participatory planning due to the PRSP roots of the plans.. General awareness has been created and thus grassroots structures and capacity for participatory planning have been built. This means that as long as these structures are in place into the future, the poor will have access to the means to make their voices heard..

Potential Interventions

As governments embark on implementing their national visions they need substantial support to develop the necessary institutions and laws, in addition to funding mechanisms that will sustain these plans in the long-term and insulate them from the whims of politicians. They will also need to develop the necessary capacity and capability to roll out the plans. One way to do this is to benchmark the various visions and supporting infrastructure to implement them with those of countries like Malaysia, Korea, India, and Singapore that have been very successful in realizing long-term visions. This could help inform what needs to be done to improve them.

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“There is some disillusionment with short-medium term plans.”

Interview with UNDP Country Director for Ghana.

The editorial team spoke to Dr. K.K Kamalunddeen, UNDP Country Director for Ghana on the trend towards long-term planning. The UNDP currently supports development planning institutions in a number of countries in the region

Q: What is driving governments to promote long term planning and visioning?

A: Essentially, there is some disillusionment with short-medium term plans; their capacity to deliver sustainable poverty reduction and transformation. And this is because both practitioners and political leaders are beginning to realize that development does not happen over the short-run but the long run. Development interventions don't come to full fruition until after many years. Short to medium term plans are needed but to succeed they will have to be embedded in something that has a longer time horizon as the experience of very successful countries like Singapore, Malaysia and China show. These countries used 20 – 25 year longer-term plans, broken into a series of 4-5 years medium term plans. That consistency

enables you to focus beyond the immediate future. I think this is compelling. This is why the UNDP currently supports long term planning in a number of countries in the region.

Q: How should short and long term planning complement each other to drive transformation and poverty eradication?

A: Consider this example. If you are really concerned about the future of the children you put in school today, you will have to think not just about the quality of education they need today but the economy of the future that will accommodate them 16 years down the road when they will be mature for the labour market. Governments really have to take their thinking into the future in order to be able to connect these two ends. The same principle applies to virtually all aspects of development. The UNDPs

support for long term planning began with the MDGs, which have been positive in helping encourage more long-term thinking about poverty. And so our support to countries pursuing long-term visions is an extension of that philosophy.

Q: So how do you see the post-MDGs world after 2015? Given that many of the long term plans coming up focused on economic transformation, do you think they are pro-poor enough and will they adequately address the poverty concerns that will remain if the MDGs wind down?

A: I think there are important discussions taking place over whether there should be a post MDG agenda. There is a view that if the MDGs are not extended beyond 2015, the kind of poverty focus that it has brought to the millennium development agenda might be lost.

I think the long-term plans have the relevant emphasis on poverty. And that is partly because the MDGs and the PRSPs have helped to institutionalize pro-poor thinking in the planning process. Even if the MDGs are not extended beyond 2015, I am confident that many of these plans do capture many of the essential issues, which the MDGs were concerned about. But this may not be enough, because the MDGs were more than just a plan, it was a movement. If we lose that movement, I cannot be certain that the mere emphasis of the long-term plans of poverty issues will yield the same results, which the MDGs movement is helping to yield.

Q: Do you see a role for the private sector in long-term planning process?

A: Absolutely. The private sector is as important as the public sector. An economy that is aspiring towards transformation and really wants to run on all its engines cannot do so without the private sector. But it is important that we think beyond the narrow definition of the private sector. The bulk of the private sector is within the informal sector of

the economy. No amount of private sector participation in planning will be enough unless planners and governments emphasize the informal sector. Otherwise we leave the bulk of private sector outside the planning framework. There should be interventions to draw the informal sector into the planning framework. It will be good for the fight against poverty.

Q: What are the principal capacity constraints confronting planning institutions? Can you say that the trends in institutional quality are improving? How do you see the future?

A: I am unable to comment on the trends of improvement. What most countries have in good supply is the desire to change; nonetheless the will to change is more important. Political will is one capacity that most countries have been in short supply. If governments can muster the will to let the planning machinery run and give it technical and political independence and full resourcing, great improvements will take place.



Capturing Community Voices:

How participatory are the region's long-term planning processes and procedures?

The process of preparing Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) that required grassroots consultation has seen a rise in the involvement of a wider range of stakeholders in the planning process. The participatory approach is now permeating to other spheres of planning. In Benin for example, the citizens use participatory planning for community health projects.

The increasing trend towards developing visions has further energized participatory planning. Because they are more of an expression of the kind of society people want rather than a technical planning document, long term visions by

their very nature do energize participatory planning - grassroots contribution is much richer and tends to be better engaged in developing visions than in developing more technical planning documents such as PRSPs and annual budgets.

Currently Liberia is conducting an extensive and highly popular grassroots consultation on *Liberia Rising* (Vision 2030). President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, underscoring the central role participatory planning is taking, is leading this exercise.

Governments in the sub-region are now identifying the various stakeholders and integrating the priorities of

different interest groups within local communities, urban areas, private sector, government at central and decentralized levels in long term decision making. This trend in participatory planning is also being accompanied by greater involvement in monitoring of development plans by communities.

In the Gambia, community scorecards are used for the health and education sectors; in Ghana participatory planning is used to track the expenditure in the District Assemblies Common Fund and in Senegal it is used in tracking spending on HIV/AIDS in the communities and comparing findings with the national health accounts.

Looking ahead

The real impact of the grassroots in the production and implementation of development plans is yet to be felt and the models being deployed need to be improved to encourage and sustain the momentum towards greater participation. Key challenges that need to be addressed include:

- The power relations between government and local communities. In most of these countries, participatory planning is being sought without any meaningful reforms. Government officials are still seen as “suit and tie” people who occasionally come down to the community level to do consultation and are perceived as out of touch (based on interviews with grassroots group in Ghana, see box for details).
- Early involvement of local communities in the planning process. Some grassroots complain that they are consulted when much work has already been done and they feel they are more or less there to approve already well-formed ideas. Participation will be enhanced if adequate information is made available to key stakeholders early in the planning process and feedback channels enhanced.
- Limited involvement of the rank and file in the community. Participation at grassroots tends to really be participation by grassroots leadership and opinion leaders. Most ordinary citizens are usually unaware of the planning activities taking place. One can never be sure whether opinion leaders are representative enough.

Potential Interventions

More needs to be done to develop appropriate communication methods to breach the barrier between technocrats and grassroots. Some potential avenues for intervention include:

- Training in Development Communication

Planning officers should be trained in development communication. This should include both verbal and non-verbal communication. There is need to stress that perceptions created by garment choices can be barriers and thus community-appropriate dressing should be used.

- Simplifying Technical Documents

Greater efforts should also be made in translating and breaking down technical documents to local languages and also ensuring that they are not too overwhelming in volume and content. Planning institutions need to bring in creative artists and other communicators to help with this.

A Grassroots Focused Index for Africa?

A Grassroots Focused Index (GFI), which measures the extent to which the grassroots are considered in the formulation and implementation of development policies has been proposed. The key dimensions captured by the index include: responsiveness, empowerment, political governance, equity, resource flows, participatory budgeting, capacity to influence, control of development process and grassroots responsibility.

In a pilot testing of the index Nigeria scored higher than South Africa and Cameroon (the other countries in the pilot). While this result cannot be generalized as representative for the regions of respective countries it is an indicator that grassroots participation is strong in parts of the region.

Reference:

<http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/The%20Grassroots%20Focused%20Index%20v13.pdf>

With high mobile penetration rates in the sub region it is possible to increase the scope of participation to include the grassroots. The World Bank Institute's ICT4 Gov team model under which citizens are invited to participatory budgeting assemblies through geo-targeted SMS messages is one way to get to the real grassroots (see box 2).

The Grassroots Focused Index (GFI) provides

a useful tool for development actors and countries in the region to assess the level of involvement of the grassroots along the various dimensions that GFI captures. Support in rolling out this tool to cover all the countries in the region (and the rest of Africa) could go a long way to help improve quality of citizen engagement in planning and implementation

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What do Grassroots Communities think about Ghana's Planning System?



A Special Report from the field.

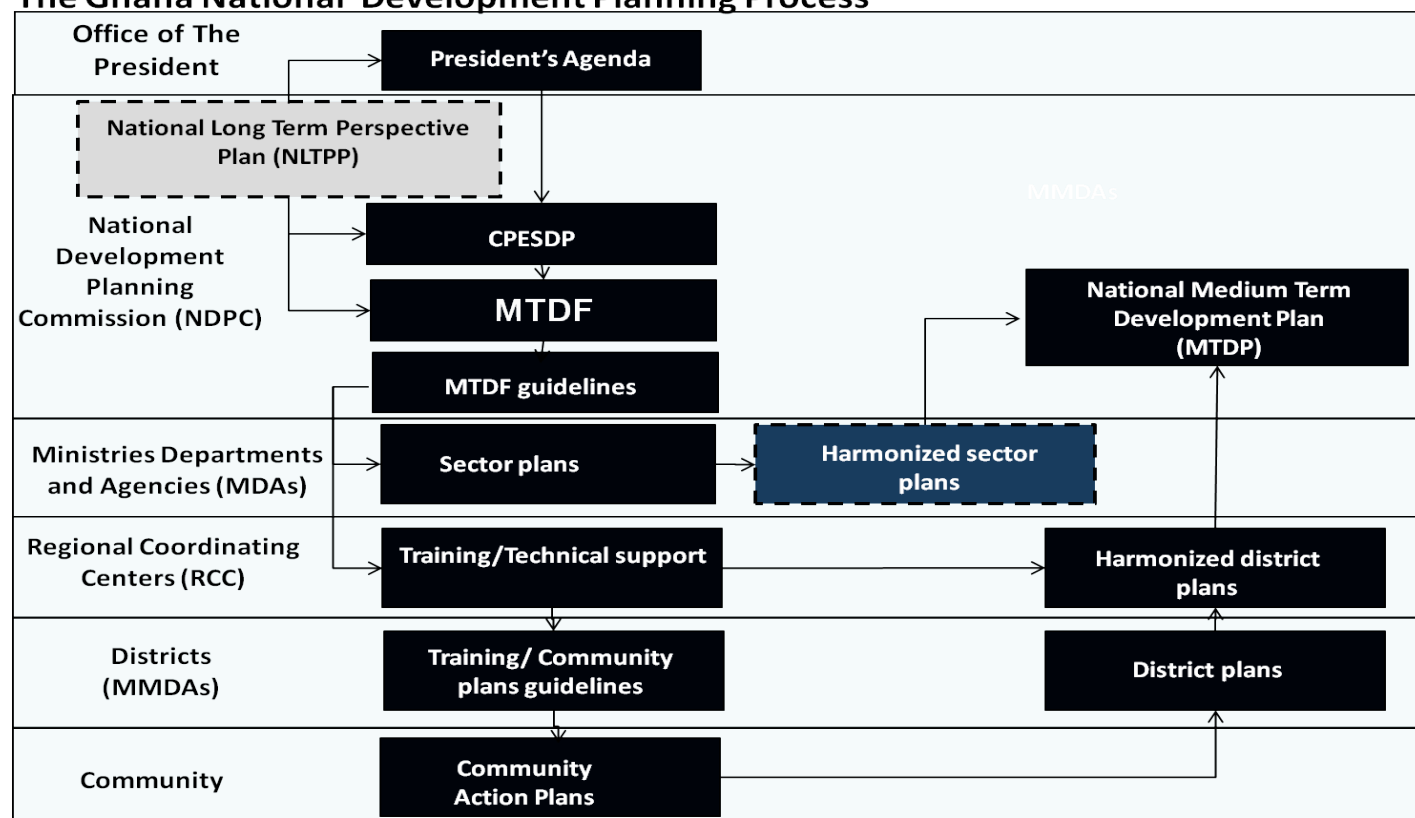
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Ghana has had a long experience with participatory planning and the 1992 constitution entrenched decentralized planning. The experience of Ghana is therefore useful in understanding the challenges of this approach.

Ghana's decentralized planning emphasizes grassroots participation in developing national plans using a top-down bottom -up process. The National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) develops the general planning framework and guidelines which are then sent to districts.

The plan guidelines are further broken down (and also translated to local languages) to community-level guidelines so that grassroots-level participants can develop their plans. Plans developed at the unit level are then aggregated to constitute district plans, further aggregated to regional plans and then consolidated to make the national development plan (see Figure 1 on the next page).

Figure 1:
The Ghana National Development Planning Process



NLTPP: National Long Term Perspective Plan; CPESDP: Coordinated Programmed for Economic and Social Development Policies ; MTDF/P: Medium Development Framework/Plan ;TA: Technical Assistance

While in essence and in terms of content the plan that emerges is grassroots-driven, the broader parameters are actually defined through a national consultative process. To better ascertain how this process works, the West Africa Trends team visited Koforidua in the Eastern region of Ghana to interact with District Planning Officers from the region and a local grassroots organization. The team also visited the Madina market in Greater Accra region to meet market women who also participate in grassroots planning.

Planners' Viewpoint

District Plan Officers are the key interface between the national planning institutions and the grassroots. They play key roles in translating planning guidelines for grassroots participants and facilitating grassroots inputs coordination through a consultation exercise. In coordinating participatory planning District Plan Officer face a number of challenges.

These include:

Limited Resources: They do not have enough resources (personnel and funds) to do extensive grassroots participation. As a result, they tend to focus on a few grassroots representatives. Selection is by identifiable groups and their executives are invited to the meetings. In larger communities, the opinion leaders are invited. Examples of these groups include organized groups at the grassroots including women through their market queens, taxi and transport unions etc. Key to this problem is the challenge of fiscal decentralization that has been absent.

Lack of Data: There is a serious lack of data to support planning at the grassroots level.

- **Lack of understanding of government's financial limitations:** local people do not understand that governments have resource limitations. This poor perception makes it difficult to prioritize. Also there is apathy among communities because of unfulfilled promises, especially in urban areas where social mobilization is difficult. Furthermore, because of social and cultural perceptions, women and the physically challenged are mostly excluded from the participatory process.
- **Narrow understanding of development.** The perception that development is essentially the provision of physical infrastructure implies less attention to social empowerment and human development issues in plans at a local level.
- **Poor Implementation.** In most cases the plans are not fully followed and communities are not informed on implementation. Also, they are marginally involved in the monitoring process.

Grassroots Viewpoint

L to r) Julius Gatune (Newsletter Coordinator) and colleagues outside Ghana Transporters Union (GPTRU). Koforidua.



View 1: Ghana Transporters Union (GPTRU)
The GPTRU felt strongly that that grassroots participation has not been adequate. The number of issues raised included:

- **Late involvement of stakeholders in the planning process.** Stakeholders are invited into the process late and their inputs are not fully captured in plans.
- **Decisions already taken.** A feeling that the decision has already been made in the city and they are being used as rubber stamps. They tend to feature more in implementation rather than at input stage.
- **The Principal Agent Syndrome.** "Suit and Tie" people tend to dominate debates and influence the outcome.
- **Voluminous documents that are hard to read.** Planners do not do a good job of explaining budget constraints and thus the perception at grassroots is that the government has all the money.
- **Limited Interaction of authorities with the grassroots.** Planning authority are generally too distant and does not interact adequately with people at the grassroots, leaving them largely unaware of the national planning authority. Planners tend to have more trust in professionals than in ordinary individuals.

View 2: Madina Market Queen.

Market queens are central to life in Ghana due to the power and respect they command. They regulate local markets and are the key contact between government and market people. While market sellers can be either male or female, the leader of a market is always a woman. She is affectionately called the 'market queen' to portray the respect and power she has. She is a powerful community leader recognized by government and commands respect at the community level. The market queen is assisted by smaller queens who represent each product sold in the market. So a typical market will have a pepper queen, a tomato queen, a yam queen etc. The queens form the body that regulates market activity. They thus form a veritable grassroots community that is consulted in the planning process. In conversation with the Madina Queen on participatory planning the following observations were made:

- The market women are consulted regularly and they have a representative at the district assembly who represents their issues and also reports back on what transpires at the district assembly.
- They have a communication loop with the urban council where they voice their concerns on government policies whenever they see the need.

Profile of Madina Market Queen:



(L to r) Market lady, Julius Gatune (Newsletter Coordinator) & Market Queen - Esi Sowude "Daavi JJ"

Esi Sowude alias Daavi JJ is a 65 year old trader in maize, gari, rice and beans at the Madina market in Accra. As one of the 3 founding members of the market, she has been the Madina market queen for 35 years and supervises over 24 other item queens. As the leader of the second biggest market in Accra with over 10,000 traders, she represents the group at meetings with government and other informal associations. Esi Sowude is married with 5 children, 18 grandchildren, and 10 great grandchildren.

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