

Annex H Focus Group Findings

Introduction

FGDs constituted one of the key activities undertaken under fieldwork/data collection phase by the Evaluation in Ghana during the period 2-19 June 2014. The rationale for the FGD approach was an attempt to assemble under one roof a selected number of persons with related advocacy experience to share their opinions, insights and experience and to afford the Evaluation the opportunity to learn lessons at first hand. The immediate objective of the FGDs was to be able to tease out answers to the relevant questions within the Evaluation Matrix especially on the efficiency and effectiveness of the BUSAC interventions.

As part of the preparation processes for conducting the FGD, the Evaluation developed five questions that sought to solicit information on the environment for doing business in Ghana over the last 3-4 years, the responsiveness of the decision-makers to concerns of the private sector, the effectiveness of the advocacy processes and the programme focus in the event of BUSAC III and whether any general improvements in the business environment (BE) could be the result of BUSAC interventions or other influence come into play. The key questions agreed on were as follows:

- Has it become easier to do business as a business operator during the last 3-4 years? If “yes”, do indicate if the improvement in the BE has anything to do with BUSAC interventions. If “no”, could BUSAC have done anything to improve the BE.
- As private operators, have Government officials become more responsive to your concerns over the last 3-4 years? If “yes”, explain.
- What parts of the BUSAC advocacy processes do you consider to be the most difficult? Do justify your assertion.
- If there is going to be a next phase of BUSAC, is there anything that BUSAC III should do differently from what has been done under Phases I and II?
- Do you think that the general changes in the BE have been the result of BUSAC interventions or there are other influences? Discuss your responses.

Three FGDs were organised in Tamale, Accra and Kumasi. Each FGD comprised 15-20 participants, lasted for between two and three hours. The participants were generally selected among grantees, decision-makers, service providers and monitors and other collaborating agencies.

It is important to put the topic of the BE in the appropriate context. The Government of Ghana with support from development partners and under the auspices of MoTI, implemented PSDS I between 2005 and 2010. This was a comprehensive package of BE Reforms across 18 MMDAs aimed at making it easier for the private sector to do business in Ghana, using the DB Indicators as benchmark. This was a national level programme of little direct relevance to district level issues funded by BUSAC.

Focus group discussions in Tamale – 11 June 2014

The group was made up of BSPs, duty bearers, grantees, one monitor and other stakeholders and collaborators. The summary of responses to the key questions are provided below.

Has it become easier to be a private business operator in the Northern Ghana in the last 3-4 years?

Most participants said yes. From the reasons adduced for their verdict, it became clear that most of the participants particularly the grantees saw the reliefs sought under their particular advocacy actions to mean the overall changes in the business environment. The improvements mainly affected their immediate community environment and at best at the district level. These included improved access to markets, better work space storage facilities, improved road network and provision of irrigation facilities that boosted agriculture production and distribution. For most traders, their involvement in fee fixing and levies by the District Assemblies that ensured that arbitrary fees and some cases double taxation were not levied was seen as a positive step in improving their bottom line. Increased registration of informal business resulting from the encouragement by District Assemblies was a sign of an improved BE. Air travel to north had significantly improved with four airlines operating close to 5-6 flights daily to Tamale. The decongestion of the Tamale central market has improved trade and the on-going reconstruction of the central market would provide improved facilities and 24-hr surveillance on the market by the fire service had virtually erased the threat of fire in the market. It was confirmed that Tamale central market was the only city market that has so far not been in flames.

The establishment of Rural Enterprise Projects (REPs) and Business Advisory Centres (BACs) in each District to promote and develop business activities.

There was general acceptance that the establishment of an Registrar General Department office and commercial court in Tamale to bring business registration and commercial justice to their doorstep, the improvement in air travel, establishment of client service units in MDAs to improve public private sector engagements could not be attributed to BUSAC interventions but through interventions under PSDS I (except the air travel).

Those who said “no” cited the load shedding exercise mainly. But even here the situation was relatively better compared to other cities. Tamale had only four hours a week without power and at a given time that would allow both business and private users of power to plan better.

Have government officials become more responsive to private sector concerns in the last 3-4 years

There is the general belief among the private sector operatives that the lack of effective rapport between public servants and the private sector has often frustrated the efforts of private operators thereby stalling business growth and development. It was to improve the public private dialogue that under PSDS I, customer service units (CSUs) were established and client charters were established within MDAs to facilitate this dialogue. This question was to assess whether over the period there has been some improvement. The responses received were mixed. In the pursuit of their individual advocacy actions, it was noted that initial engagements with duty bearers went well however the dialogue stage was quite challenging with some delays encountered due to difficulty in making appointments and keeping to appointments on the part of decision makers but thereafter good.

It was argued that there was the need to gauge and pitch the dialogue process appropriately particularly as the lead duty bearers mainly political heads, it was advised that to the extent possible the Municipal and District Coordinators should be involved in meetings. At these levels it would be necessary to keep the District/Municipal Coordinators in the loop even as discussions continued at the highest levels of the local authority. The setting up of the BACs to take up business issues at the District levels has improved engagement with MSEs and the setting up of MSE Promotion and Development Committees by the Assembly with representation from the private sector and the setting up of CSUs and complaint centres by the Assemblies have improved the public/private sector relationship.

What was the most difficult stages of the advocacy processes?

The essence here is to be able to obtain a sense of the whole advocacy process (Training, stakeholder workshops, dialogue, post dialogue, implementation), with a view to assessing the efficiency and effectiveness and identify areas that could be improved upon. The most difficult parts were found to include getting duty bearers to sign MoUs (changes and transfers of government officials (lead persons) delay process. Concerns were expressed about the number of meetings that take place and frequent postponement of scheduled meetings at the instance of the duty bearers during the dialogue processes and follow-ups. Challenges with getting the right level of representation from duty bearers at the stakeholders' workshop and difficulties in organising dialogue meetings. Duty bearers cited the low capacity of most rural associations, coupled with the perceived political coloration of the association by the duty bearers could prolong the process and could eventually lead to collapse of the whole action.

Inadequate funding from Assemblies causes delays in implementation of advocacy actions.

What should BUSAC III do differently from BUSAC II?

Members indicated that going forward the formation of coalitions of associations, district and regional networks to provide stronger voices and improve chances of being heard and the establishment of stronger linkages with national associations to ensure voices are heard on national issues especially where actions require sustained pressure. Capacity building and business skills training programmes for members took centre stage. Need for BUSAC to coordinate and establish networking committees of duty bearers around specific advocacy actions to facilitate improve delivery. BUSAC to work with BACs, build their capacity to support the Assemblies' work at the community level in MSE promotion and development. BSPs as part of their initial work to conduct complete health check of the associations and identify the gaps in support to the associations.

FGD in Accra – 13 June 2014 at Alisa Hotel

Has it become easier to do business as a business operator in Accra in the last 3-4 years?

Almost all participants showed by hand that there has been some improvement in BE. Like Tamale participants indicated mainly the changes that have resulted from their particular advocacy actions to the neglect of the general environment for doing business.

Food flies challenge in the mango industry was dealt with through better pest control. Margins of LPG dealers increased following an advocacy action for the reduction in taxes in the product. The action was done in collaboration with PEF. Law passed to sanitize private medical laboratory operations has increased membership, has resulted in peer review and improved the industry as a whole. Readiness of the Law Commission to provide support to deal with all hanging laws from the advocacy actions to ensure speedy implementation and access to the benefits of the actions was confirmed.

As private sector operators, have government officials become more responsive to private sector concerns in the last 3-4 years?

Improvement areas included the fact that there appears to be more constructive engagement between the private and the public sector officials. The face and language of engagement with duty bearers have changed from being confrontational to one of collaboration.

Law Commission has confirmed its readiness to provide support to deal with all hanging laws from the advocacy actions to ensure speedy implementation and access to the benefits of the actions.

Discuss the most difficult part(s) of the advocacy process?

The areas mentioned include Stakeholder meetings and dialogue. Difficulty in getting the right representation from duty bearers. Follow-up – getting laws through, the parliamentary process and the sitting times and also obtaining Presidential assent have always delayed due to lack of adequate knowledge of Parliamentary processes, cycles etc. Another challenge area was getting public officials to sign their portion of MoUs.

If there is going to be a BUSAC III, what should be done differently from BUSAC II?

There was general consensus that a next phase of the project was desirable but more of what is currently being done was needed to provide support to up and coming associations which are weak. BUSAC desk to be established in relevant MDAs to speed up the process e.g. Follow up of hanging laws. This had been recommended previously but no action was taken by BUSAC management. The need to pursue actions that are of national strategic importance to impact on the general environment for doing business was stressed. BUSAC to consider providing advice on linkages to the next level, for the benefit of private sector operators, including exploiting synergies within the SPSD II, other on-going programmes and provide support in drafting laws to PSOs.

A simpler application process with less bureaucracy (only one that is familiar with the very early version of BUSAC only) was recommended. This had the potential to enhance ownership.

Support and linkages to financial and technical resources to take advantage of successful advocacy were considered critical to improve the financial sustainability of the Associations. More association leadership training and assistance to create networks among associations, more experience-sharing among grantees, more help to general capacity building of the association, more focus on follow-up stage, help to facilitate that various stakeholders, including duty bearers, become better at joining forces to tackle issues of common concern, e.g. bush fires.

FGD in Kumasi – 16 June 2014 at the Golden Tulip Hotel

General business environment

One (a woman) found it had improved while six saw no difference. The citrus producers argued that there is poor demand for their products, while the women group (fish mongers) stated that the market has improved marginally. SMIDO found that it has become more complicated and more difficult to register an enterprise due to corruption. Especially the revenue authorities are a problem. Even though the RGD has a fully-fledged office in Kumasi, this has been reduced to just a point for collection of applications due to the fact that the WAN installed under PSDS I has been demobilised to make way for the e-governance project which is yet to be completed. The envisaged benefits from the decentralisation of the RGD operations have thus been compromised. This situation has therefore resulted in the re-emergence of middle-men.

As regards their individual businesses the participants found the situation is worse than before due the irregular power supply, the cost of power, and difficulties of getting a loan and the cost of borrowing money.

Ease of accessing government officials

One reported this has become easier, others saw no change. However, it seems as if the engagement with duty bearers has improved but actual implementation is weak – and worse than before due to no money in the government coffers.

Most difficult step of advocacy process

The most difficult part of the process was the engagement with duty bearers. There is the usual excuse of being too busy. The matter of the tendency of the part of Chiefs to expect money, which the PSOs cannot afford was a matter of concern; dialogue phase takes very long time and duty bearers reluctant to sign binding MoU.

Next phase

There was consensus that PSOs at local level should join forces at regional level; grants should be bigger; reduced paper work. Also current system is good, but there is the tendency to repeat what others have done. This makes it imperative for BUSAC to take the issue of transfer of lessons learned more seriously to avoid repetition of same mistakes are repeated. There was a call for more networking among associations to fight for common goals. Also key was the need for sharing of research results and what it takes to address a problem. Service provider should be better at guiding on solutions and research should be more comprehensive and give more attention to solutions. In general the research was found to be useful.