Building State Capability Through Impact Evaluation in Ghana

By assisting Ghana's government to reflect on their capacity building efforts, DIME changed the way officials are trained and the wider environment in which they work

BRIEF HIGHLIGHTS

☆ At the frontline of international development are public officials across the world. What can we do to support and strengthen these individuals, teams and organisations as they tackle the daily challenges of development?

☆ **Measure the public service:** DIME has worked with Ghana's Office of the Head of the Civil Service to paint a detailed picture of the Ghanaian public administration using novel micro-data. This has helped the Head of Service identify and respond to the **service's** strengths and weaknesses.

☆ **Strengthen training:** DIME helped design and deploy new training curricula aimed at strengthening the effectiveness of public service in Ghana. The intervention led to increased productivity, stronger public service culture, and better adherence to government procedures by public officials.

☆ **Build analytical capacity:** Building on the results of its impact evaluation, DIME is now supporting the Office of the Head of Service to undertake its own analysis of the civil service. By generating its own analytics, Ghana is strengthening its state from within.

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Context and program summary

Using evidence to inform policymaking is based on the idea that policymakers should adopt a more rational, rigorous, and systematic approach to inform the policy process. Policy decisions are better informed when supported by available data and rational analysis. Such an approach is at the heart of DIME's work.

When evidence is used to improve the quality of the public administration itself, it allows agencies to improve how government functions in general. Accurate information on government capabilities can substantiate needed reforms. Evidence on the institutional environment of public institutions allows leaders to respond to the environment in which policy choices are made. DIME and the Governance Practice jointly manage the World Bank's 'Bureaucracy Lab' whose mission is to make the reform of government itself more evidence-based.

An example of DIME and the Lab's work is its collaboration with the Ghanaian Office of the Head of Civil Service (OHCS). The work broadly aimed to support OHCS improve its knowledge on the effectiveness of government reforms, ultimately based on rigorous impact evaluation. The Ghana program supported the OHCS in multiple ways. It created the basis of a data collection system, where administrative data on productivity has been successfully integrated with personnel surveys on bottlenecks to service delivery. The evidence generated through this system showed which areas were in need of reform and supported the design and implementation of specific interventions to address them. One area that this initial data-development phase highlighted as in need of reform was in building the capacity of public servants. The in-house training was restructured by introducing a new training curriculum on productivity; experimentally integrated within the existing service training system.

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OHCS now has it's own Bureaucracy Lab, which is forging ahead with the same methods of measurement and evaluation championed by DIME. This is the story of how DIME's partnership with Ghana's Government went from baseline diagnosis to technology transfer.

Baseline diagnostic as the first engagement

Together with the University of Oxford and University College London, DIME partnered with the OHCS to conduct a baseline diagnostic on the state of the Ghanaian Civil Service in 2015. It surveyed 3,000 civil servants across 47 central ministries, departments, and agencies. The goals were to understand the perspectives of public officials, and the systems and organizations in which they worked. Figure 1 shows how much management quality varies across organizations in Ghana's civil service (indicated by the distribution of the solid dots), as well as within those organizations across divisions (the hollow dots stacked vertically around each organizational dot). At the same time, officials were invited to identify organizational bottlenecks to enhancing their productivity and what constrained their ability to making better-informed policy decisions

The survey was complemented with an assessment of the quality of government work. The team audited more than 7,000 quarterly and annual progress reports across the service. Digitalizing the records of 3,628 public projects, the collected data provided a detailed picture of the status-quo of the Civil Service. The data revealed four interesting facts: (i) the Ghanaian civil service is characterized by substantial heterogeneity in productivity across and within organizations; (ii) the quality of management across and within organizations explains much of the variation in productivity[1]; (iii) civil servants demonstrated a clear knowledge of the constraints they face in resolving institutional problems, showing a disconnection between identifying problems and practical knowledge of how to tackle them; and, (iv) public officials were not satisfied with the currently provided training programs. The baseline analysis led to briefings for every agency head, a broad action plan for the OHCS, and an academic paper on the findings.[2]

Echoing these research findings, the OHCS took immediate actions, such as improving senior officials' performance agreements and reforming the accountability structures for the most senior managers.

The Impact Evaluation Research

A significant remaining question for the OHCS was how to improve public service training so as to empower officials to lead reform. The baseline diagnostic had indicated both capacity gaps and a desire for skills upgrading. What options were there for improving Ghana's Civil Service training model? The Bureaucracy Lab team collaborated with Ghana's Civil Service Training Centre (CSTC) and a consultancy firm to design, introduce, and evaluate a new package of trainings, dubbed the Training for Productivity (TFP) initiative.

The new sessions used exercises to improve public officials' ability to implement best practices in their daily work. For example, officials worked with other trainees to identify problems within their home divisions and talk about the constraints they faced as a barrier to
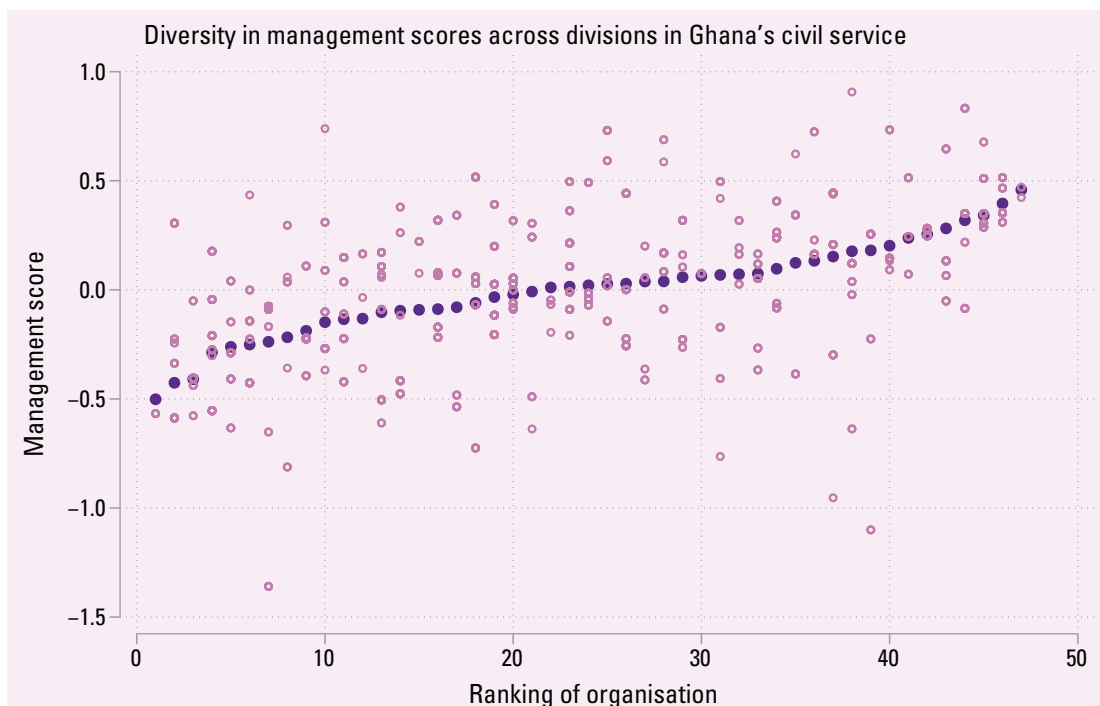

Figure 1. Variation in management scores across organizations (solid dots) and within those divisions (hollow dots)

reform. To resolve these barriers, participants came up with 'action plans' and role-played different team members to assess their potential responses to reform ideas.

The new curriculum was included in individual in-service training throughout 2017, randomizing whether civil servants received the new or the standard training curriculum. To test whether teams had to be trained together for reforms to actually take, the research team randomly chose officials attending the standard and new productivity sessions to participate in a follow-up training session together with their teams. The team training was designed with the same principles as the individual training, allowing an evaluation of the mode of delivery.

The results of the impact evaluation showed that the new training module worked as intended, but only in the individual-training arm. Learning from the individual training persisted, and increased the quality of teams' working environment and readiness to accept new ideas.[3] Figure 3 illustrates the magnitude of impacts the training had on team culture, indicating the power of individual leadership in shaping team practices.

The evaluation used an innovative new approach to measuring the quality of government process, dubbed 'process productivity'. Being exposed to the training module led to an increase of 0.2 standard deviations in the quality of procedure with which government files were processed. Exposure to the training also increased the likelihood that team tasks were fully completed by 11 percentage points—a large effect magnitude, given that the average completion rate is just 15 percentage points.

Impact Evaluation as Training

Following these research findings, the CSTC has modified and extended its curriculum to incorporate the new training modules. The study findings led OHCS to shelve plans they'd had for doing more team-based training. This was a nice example of a negative finding guiding policy.

However, the TFP project aimed to be more than a simple research exercise. The project also aimed to increase the capacity of the civil servants we worked with. This ranged from the CSTC trainers, providing them with more applied and less theoretical training teaching techniques, to staff of OHCS, who worked to define and develop new measures of public sector productivity.

Interviews conducted by the International Growth Centre confirmed that the TFP project had been useful in increasing the confidence of CSTC and its trainers to innovate their training curriculum and had changed the way OHCS assessed its civil service. Similarly on measurement, the project created an opportunity to set up a monitoring system for CSTC training, digitalizing information on daily attendance records, entry and exit tests of participation, and evaluations of trainers per session. The
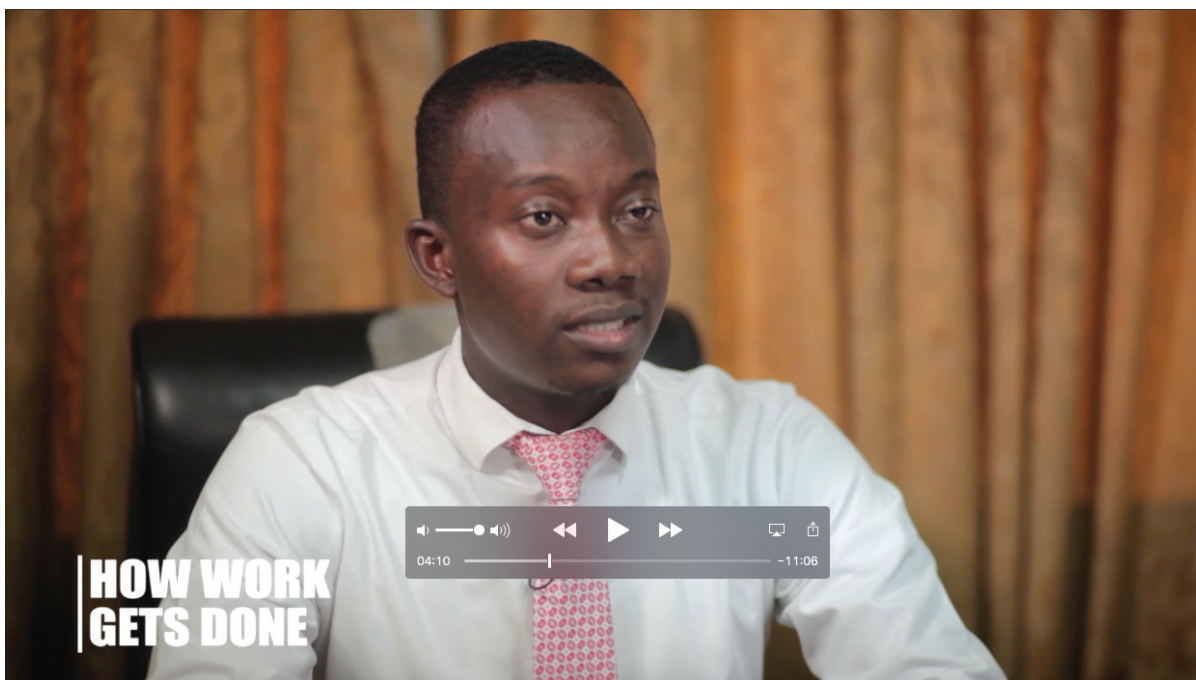
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Figure 2. Still from TFP motivational film that documented successes of public servants in reforming their team

new monitoring system provided a comprehensive picture of each trainee's experience and effort in their CSTC course, showing in practice how the CSTC could better monitor their work. Beyond CSTC, it introduced OHCS to using empirical methods to evaluate its agencies and teams. In response to the project and DIME's ongoing support, the OHCS has now setup their own Bureaucracy Lab.

Conclusion: An Effective Union Between Research and Policy Reforms

DIME's Bureaucracy Lab Ghana program showcases how data and impact analysis can be integrated within civil service reform efforts. The OHCS and other service organizations we worked with have used the survey results to improve the content, modalities, and procedures of their work to fulfill their mandate. Moreover, the OHCS have continued to develop their data collection systems over the years of collaboration. The TFP impact evaluation has provided continuous capacity building support to make these efforts sustainable.

The success of the Ghana experience can be associated with three key factors: (i) the development of a long-term collaboration based on professionalism and reciprocal trust; (ii) the capacity of going beyond a research exercise with a proactive response of OHCS in incorporating the findings; and (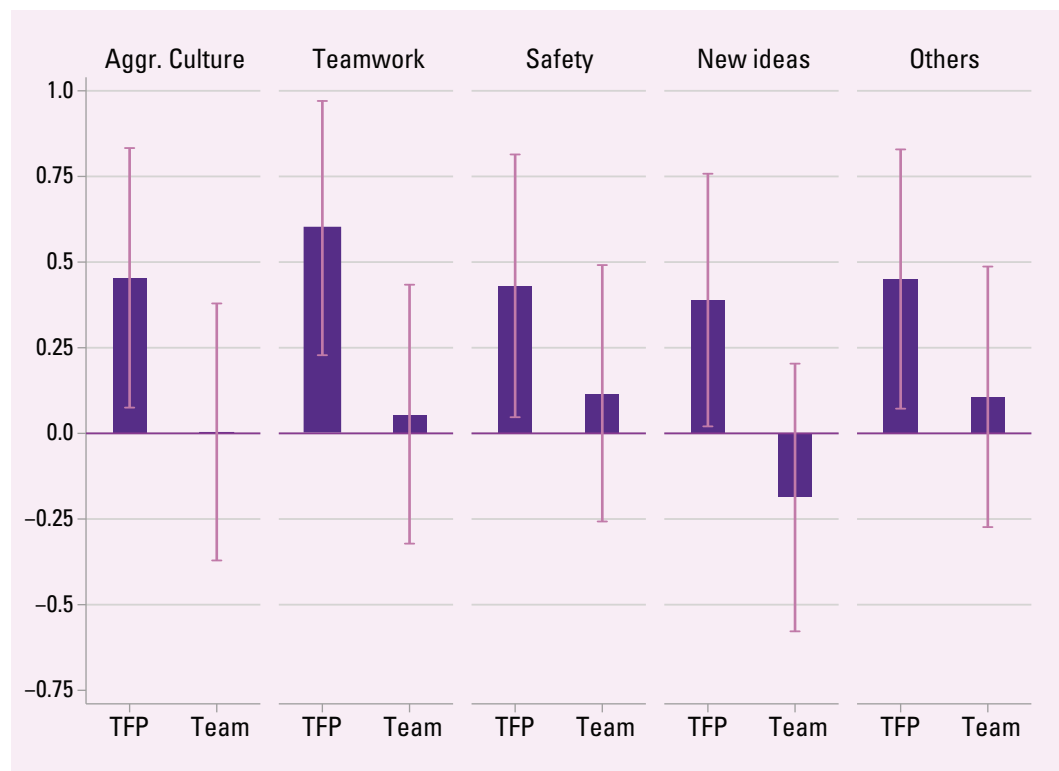iii) the continuous support that DIME and the Bureaucracy Lab provides to the OHCS to keep the momentum of their efforts sustainable.

Figure 3. Individual and team training impact on culture aggregated and selected sub-indices

ENDNOTES

[1] World Bank, 2019. "Science for Impact. Better Evidence for Better Decisions. The DIME Experience." Washington, DC: World Bank.

[2] https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/335361537384686708/management-and-bureaucratic-effectiveness-evidence-from-the-ghanaian-civil-service

[3] The overall organizational culture index increased by 0.454 standard deviations. This aggregate improvement is driven by similarly large increases in the sub-indices of teamwork climate, performance climate, fostering new ideas, and relative performance.