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## **Traditional Institutions and Agenda Setting: The Case of the Adoption of the Ghana Education Trust Fund (*Pp.90-103*)**

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### **Abstract**

*This study applies agenda setting theory mostly used to examine policy making in western countries to understand educational policymaking in Ghana. It draws on a case study on the role of the Asante Traditional Council and rulers in the adoption of the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GETFund), a program that allows the public to participate in the financing of education. The study finds that the outside initiation model, consolidation, pluralist concept of policymaking, and the policy streams metaphor help to explain agenda setting for the adoption of the GETFund program. In particular, it argues that the enstoolment of Otumfuo Osei Tutu II and his activism in championing the idea of a public participation program in financing education was an intervening event that opened the window for a proposal centering on that idea to gain agenda entrance and the passage of*

*the GETFund bill by the Parliament of Ghana in 2000. Broadly, the study helps to understand the role of traditional institutions and rulers in public policy making in Ghana.*

### **Introduction**

Agenda setting denotes how policy problems attract the attention of policymakers (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2009). Some studies in the U.S. apply agenda setting to examine policy making on issues like the pesticides (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993), financial sector regulation (Worsham, 1997), privatization in the UK (Zahariadis, 1999), and tobacco control in the U.S. and Canada (Studlar, 2002). Few studies have also applied agenda setting to examine policy making in Africa (Frennhoff, 2005; Kalu, 2004). However, these studies focused on the role of western countries in setting agenda for African countries, with little to no attention paid to the role of other relevant stakeholders, such as traditional institutions and rulers. Indeed in some African countries traditional institutions and authorities are very important in understanding the policy process. In Ghana, for instance, traditional institutions and authorities have made significant contributions to the adoption of educational policies. By way of contributing to the literature on policy making in Africa, this article examines the role of traditional authorities in agenda setting in Ghana. Specifically, the study looks at the role of traditional institutions in setting the agenda for the adoption of the national education trust fund to address the problem of financing education.

It draws on case studies on the role played by the Asante Traditional Council and the Asantehenes - Otumfuo Opoku Ware II and Otumfuo Osei Tutu II - in setting agenda for the adoption and subsequent passage of the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GETFund) bill in 2000 to assist in the funding of education. The objectives of the paper are two-fold. Firstly, to contextualize the agenda setting theory mostly applied to policy making in advanced industrialized countries to Ghana. Secondly, to show how traditional institutions and leaders continue to influence policy making even after the emergence of the *modern state*. Methodologically, it uses mostly a review of secondary research materials and interviews to draw conclusions.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Agenda setting is one theory that has been extensively discussed in the public policy literature. The initial classification of the policy process into seven stages - intelligence, promotion, prescription, invocation, application, termination, and appraisal - by Lasswell (1951), has seen several analysis and

revisions by other scholars. For instance, Anderson (2006:3) and Adolino and Blake (2007:9) have a five-stage classification as: problem identification/emergence and agenda setting, formulation, adoption, implementation, and evaluation. The general contention among scholars is that the need for a policy to address a public issue facilitates agenda setting. To Anderson (2006:83), an issue assumes the status of policy problem when the public consider the issue within the responsibility of the government to solve. He argues that agenda setting is the process of getting public problem to the consideration of the government for redress. Anderson (2006:84) also refers to problem identification and agenda setting as the most political and democratic stage of the policy process because of the high level of participation. The success of activities at this stage of the policy process is determined by actors' better organizational skills, level of resources, and their access to the policy makers (Cobb and Elder, 1972). The two main types of agenda are the formal or institutional agenda and the systemic or public agenda (Adolino and Blake, 2007; Kingdon 1995).

Moreover, Anderson (2006:87-88) argues that the issues in the media or other areas of public communication being debated by the public, for which they want a public policy solution is the systemic or public agenda. Alternatively, the issues on the legislative, executive, and judicial agendas, which have been selected for possible consideration, are the institutional, formal or governmental agenda. Anderson (2006) further maintains that not every issue on the institutional agenda attains the status of public policy. He differentiates between the institutional agenda and a decisional agenda, arguing that the decisional agenda contains the salient issues that policy makers have committed themselves to addressing. He identifies the process through which issues move from the systemic agenda unto the institutional agenda as agenda entrance.

Cobb et, al. (1976:127-128) identify the inside initiation, outside initiation, or mobilization as the process through which issues can gain agenda entrance. They indicate that the inside initiation involves situations whereby policy players like government officials try to place issues on the formal agenda without soliciting the support of the public whereas in the outside initiation, interest groups try to move an issue on the public or systemic agenda into the institutional agenda. They contend that the mobilization occurs when policy makers try to move an issue on the formal agenda onto the public agenda to seek support for the issue during implementation as it occurred in Thatcher's privatization process in U.K. and Bush's sweeping social security reforms in

2005 in the U.S. Besides, consolidation, which is the attempt of the government to raise an issue already in the systemic agenda unto the decisional agenda for consideration is another process. Bill Clinton's tobacco policy in the 1990s in which the administration tried to elevate the tobacco issue already salient on the systemic agenda unto the institutional agenda is an example (Adolino and Blake, 2007).

Kingdon (1995) uses his 'policy streams metaphor' to explain how issues gain agenda entrance. He identifies the three streams of the agenda entrance as problem, policy, and politics, arguing that the problem is the concern that policy players both inside and outside government want to be addressed. The policy stream is the preferable ideas and solutions put forward by policy entrepreneurs towards solving a problem. Policy entrepreneurs are primarily individuals willing to invest personal resources and time to pursue specific policy changes in their countries (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2009). Kingdon identifies the politics as the intervening event that normally influences the adoption of a new policy, like the coming into office of a new administration or government, new members of parliament, changes in the policy mood, and pressure groups campaign, which normally bring about the adoption of new public policies.

Kingdon (1995) further notes that the preferred problems and solutions or ideas to prospective problems orchestrated by policy entrepreneurs float and bubble around in the policy environment in a survival of the fittest scenario during which some gets discarded and others survive. He claims that occasionally all three independently streams converge and create a window of opportunity for the policy players to push their problems, and the policy entrepreneurs to push their pet solutions and ideas, thus moving the issue onto the decisional agenda and causes changes in the policy process. The policy streams metaphor uses the garbage can model of analysis in which all three streams occur independently and float around within the policy environment simultaneously.

### **Post-Independence Governance and Educational Policies**

The provision of education in most countries in sub-Saharan Africa has remained the preserve of the national governments since the colonial period (Atuahene, 2006), and Ghana is not an exception. In Ghana the post-independence elites who took over the mantle of governance continued on the path of their colonial master by maintaining state control and financing of education at all levels. Sandbrook and Oelbaum (1997:610-611) have noted

that the post-independence government of the first elected President, Kwame Nkrumah, adopted a socialist system of governance in 1957 that controlled the larger part of the public sector, including the provision of education at all levels. The public sector was perceived as the engine of growth for the Ghanaian economy and education, especially at the tertiary level, was considered the means of producing the needed personnel to take over the administration of the economy (Senya, 1998).

Education was also considered the machinery for social and economic development, and public funding of education was seen as the means to ensure equal access to education for all classes of society, as well as providing the required human capital for the overall development of the country. However, the state was not in a position to provide the required funding after some time. For instance, Apusigah (2002:4) has noted that the budget deficit was 6.3% of the GDP in 1982 with a huge national debt of US \$ 2903 million. Owusu-Ansah (2003: 57) contends that the budgetary allocation to the educational sector by the government fell from 6.4% of the GDP in 1976 to 1.0 percent in 1983.

These problems led to massive deterioration of educational facilities that became incentives for massive exodus of qualified teachers and other personnel of the education service. In addition to the economic decline and hardships, corruption, nepotism, cronyism, and neo-patrimonialism, which started with the Nkrumah government, was sustained by the subsequent republican governments and military regimes. Faced with such deteriorated economic situation, and weakened institutions of government and accountability, the Rawlings military regime, which came to power in 1981, opted for financial assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to revive the economy in the 1980s.

The first phase of the Bretton Woods institutions' Economic Recovery Program (ERP) was in 1983. The ERP was aimed at restoring the economy to growth through the adoption of market-based economic policies and programs to address the weaknesses of the economy. The reform agenda, which in later phases became known as the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), was based on a neo-liberal ideology that focused on market-oriented strategies for reviving the economies of the developing countries (Colgan, 2002). The intervention programs compelled the government to decrease budgetary allocations toward the provision of public education and health

because of the conditionalities attached to loans from these multilateral agencies.

In most sub-Saharan African countries, the implication of the budget cuts for the education sector was that the user fees absorbed by governments was shifted to consumers of education (Banya and Elu, 2001). The outcome of such policy actions were a number of school drop outs, deteriorated educational facilities and a drastic drop in the quality and standard of education (Penrose, 1998). Therefore, the need for an alternative means of funding education became imperative to halt the fallen standard of education and the deterioration of educational facilities in the country.

In addition, the reform agenda of the SAPs generated several reforms in all sectors of the economy in a measure to promote cost-effectiveness (Girdwood, 1999). In the education sector, a major educational reform was undertaken in 1987 that gave the University authorities in the country the power to mobilize extra funding to supplement the meager budgetary allocation of the government. In response, the authorities of the tertiary institutions introduced a cost-sharing of funding tertiary education that required students to pay academic user fees and their accommodation (Atuahene, 2006). Nevertheless, the introduction of cost-sharing in a country with a greater percentage of poor people who could rarely live on a dollar a day resulted in a situation whereby there were severe inequalities in access to tertiary education. This largely made tertiary education the preserve of the socially privileged. As a result, the poor children mostly from the rural areas were forced into the streets (Penrose, 1998). The concern for a public policy solution to the educational mess became high among the public, especially the poor who were the majority in the society.

Several stakeholders submitted proposals and ideas to Parliament for solving the educational problem. Among the proposals were the privatization of the financing of tertiary education and public participation through establishment of a trust fund to supplement government budgetary allocations (Harsch, 2000). Atuahene (2006:4) notes that eventually, a proposal submitted by the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS) was adopted and passed into law by the Parliament of Ghana in the form of the GETFund (GETFund Act 581) in August, 2000 to provide financial assistance to the bright but poor students to have access to tertiary education and also to assist the schools with the provision of educational amenities and facilities.

### **Traditional Institutions and the Provision of Education**

Traditional institutions are the local institutions built on customs and traditions of many societies in Africa. The institutions are ruled by chiefs, Kings, and elders mostly based on hereditary tiers and they play important roles in the socio-economic development of these societies. Prior to the era of colonial rule, traditional institutions were the major machinery of governance providing for the social, economic and political needs of many communities in Africa. The Asanteman Council has been involved in education for quite a while. The activism of the Asanteman Council and rulers in championing education stems from the core belief of the Asantes, which is equally shared by many people of African descent, that education is a panacea to all forms of freedom and human development (Busia, 1968). The Asantes also believes that the provision of the socio-economic and cultural development of the individual is the responsibility of the entire community (Kwadwo, 2002).

This belief has made the Asanteman Council and rulers' pacesetters in community participation in funding education for the good of society (Owusu-Kwarteng, 2005). The Council led by the Asantehene Otumfuo Agyeman Prempeh II established a scholarship scheme known as the Asanteman Scholarship Scheme that offered assistance to eligible Asantes to pursue education as far back as 1930s (Kwadwo, 1994). The scholarship scheme, which was officially outlawed in the name of national unity by the post independence government of Kwame Nkrumah, was emulated by the government through the establishment of the Ghana Scholarship Secretariat and Cocoa Marketing Board scholarship schemes to provide scholarships that will benefit the entire people instead of a particular ethnic group (Adu Boahen, 1975).

Owusu-Kwarteng (2005) maintains that traditional institutions still exert enormous influence in the lives and socio-economic situations of many communities in Ghana. He further argues that the influence and the important role of the traditional institutions have resulted in their official recognition in the 1992 Constitution (Article 270-276). These institutions, which are the embodiments of the cultural and moral values of Ghanaians, continue to play important role in the social, economic, and political activities of modern Ghana.

The role of the Asanteman Council regarding financing of education and development in general has not been compromised in today's policy deliberations. For example, the Council led by the King, Otumfuo Opoku

Ware II, in 1995 rekindled the Asante spirit of community participation in funding education during his jubilee anniversary celebration. The Asantehene established the Otumfuo Opoku Ware II Jubilee Foundation using the proceeds from the 25 years anniversary as seed money and called on the citizens of Asante to contribute to the Foundation to financially assist needy but bright students to attend school without constraints. The call came at period when majority of Ghanaians were concerned about the deteriorating standard of education and the cost of financing education was also unbearable for many people, especially the poor.

The idea of a program that allows the community to participate in the funding of education was also championed by his successor Otumfuo Osei Tutu II who became the new ruler in April 1999 (Owusu-Ansah 2003). Otumfuo Osei Tutu II established a sister fund, the Otumfuo Education Fund, with the sole aim of assisting bright but poor students in Ghana to have access to education including tertiary education depending on the availability of funds (Otumfuo Osei Tutu II 2000). The Fund was also to assist educational institutions with the provision of infrastructure and incentives to motivate teachers in the discharge of their duties. He openly called on other traditional rulers and leaders to establish similar programs to cater for the education needs of their traditional areas. The Education Fund was funded through the voluntary donations of the individuals, groups and corporations (Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, 2000).

### **Agenda Setting and Ghana Education Trust Fund**

A common view mostly espoused by policy scholars and political scientists is that influential policy entrepreneurs demonstrate leadership by influencing policy makers to adopt their key priorities into law. Following from such an argument, the paper presents Asanteman Council and the rulers of the Asante Kingdom, Asantehene Otumfuo Osei Tutu II and Otumfuo Opoku Ware II, as key agenda setters in the educational policy of Ghana. This account is supported by the pluralists' conception of decision making in which policy making powers is not confined to only governmental officials but distributed among various institutions and actors within a society (Bachrach and Baratz 1962). The outside initiation model, which focuses on the agenda setting abilities of actors outside of government for certain issues by pushing it unto the formal agenda, is also drawn upon to build the argument (Cobb et al. 1976).

In that regard, the paper identifies the fact the Asante Traditional Council and its rulers are not official members of the ruling government of Ghana. Otumfuo (the Asantehene) enjoys a unique media recognition and coverage largely due to the history of the Asante and the many chiefs that owe allegiance to him. Like a president or chief executive of a country, Otumfuo normally uses speeches during important events like his address during enstoolment, festive occasions, and anniversary celebrations to outline his priorities. The King's speeches enjoy high media coverage and are also extensively debated among a section of the public. Therefore, the King is able to influence the attention of policy makers, the media, and the public with issues considered priority to him and the Asante Traditional Council. In the case of adopting the public funding of education program which culminated in the passage of the Ghana Education Trust, Otumfuo Opoku Ware II and Otumfuo Osei Tutu II used their speeches to outline their priorities.

During the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the ascension to power in 1995, Otumfuo Opoku Ware II called on the public, traditional rulers, and policy makers to support the financing of public education as a way of addressing the deteriorating education standard. He used the proceeds of his jubilee celebration to set up the Otumfuo Opoku Ware II Jubilee Foundation, a program that allows the public to take part in the financing of education. The core objectives of the Foundation were to offer financial assistance to children and educational institutions to address the fallen education standard. Otumfuo Osei Tutu II also used the address during his enstoolment in April 1999 to categorically declare the improvement of education as a core priority of his reign. In subsequent addresses to the Asante Traditional Council and the National House of Chiefs as well as on important ceremonies and meetings with the officials of government (including former President Rawlings), Otumfuo Osei Tutu II called on all stakeholders to establish programs that will enable the public to contribute to the funding of education to complement the government's efforts.

Otumfuo Osei Tutu II personally established the Otumfuo Education Fund to cater for the educational and infrastructural needs of the needy but bright students and deprived educational institutions, respectively. The main sources of revenue for financing the activities of the Fund were the voluntary contributions by individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions. In his speeches, the King called on the government and other traditional areas to adopt a similar program as means of contributing to the funding of education.

He even used his first meeting with the President of the World Bank to call on the Bank to support programs aimed at assisting the funding of education in Ghana (Interview with staff at Manhyia Palace, Kumasi). This ultimately resulted in the establishment of a World Bank grant program known as *Promoting Partnership with Traditional Authorities*, the first of its kind in sub-Saharan Africa (Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, 2004). The Bank gave a grant to the King and the Asante Traditional Council through the program to cater for the education, health and safe drinking needs for the Asante Kingdom and certain deprived areas in the northern sector of Ghana.

The pronouncements and speeches by Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, in which he outlined his priorities for the establishment of a program that will enable the public to assist in the funding of education, became the front page stories of the newspapers and a core debate of the media houses. Ultimately, the two Kings set the agenda for the development of a program that will allow the public to participate in the financing of education for the media, policy makers, and the public. This gave birth to the Ghana Education Trust, a bill passed by the Parliament of Ghana to establish a program aimed at addressing the problem of financing education and providing facilities to educational institutions in the country. The Fund, which is funded by 2.5% Value Added Tax (VAT) levy on goods and services purchased by the public, came into being with the adoption and passage of the GETFund Act 581 in August 25, 2000 (GETFund Bill 581). The publicity enjoyed and support accorded by the public to the King's idea enabled a proposal built on that concept submitted by NUGS to gain agenda entrance.

Other sources of funds according to the bill include gifts, grants, and donations to the Fund, returns from investment made by the Fund, and budgetary allocations to the Fund. The concept of the Trust Fund was to enable the public to support the government of Ghana in the provision of education to Ghanaians especially the poor who could not afford the cost of education. As indicated above, the demand for public policy solution to address the funding of education in Ghana, especially at the tertiary level was high on the systemic agenda in the latter part of the 1990s. Through demonstrations and riots, students of public universities petitioned Parliament to abolish the introduction of user fees. This heightened discussions of educational financing in the media and among the public calling for a public policy solution to the problem.

Several pet ideas and proposals were developed by stakeholders and policy entrepreneurs to solve the problem of fallen standard and deterioration of educational facilities in Ghana. Policy players also came up with different interpretation of the problem, with some identifying it as excessive government intrusion in the administration of education resulting in inefficiency. Others attributed the problem to inadequate financial resources for administration of the education institutions, and yet others saw it as the problem of lack of seriousness of students and educators. These problems and ideas for solution bubbled around the policy community throughout the 1990s.

The Asantehene's continuous call on the traditional rulers and political leaders to establish similar programs aimed at addressing the educational needs of the needy in the society also played an influential role in the adoption of the GETFund. In addition, the Otumfuo Education Fund offered scholarship assistance of 18,000 Ghana cedis to 600 students in the three major universities of Ghana at the beginning of the Fund (Otumfuo Education Fund 2003). The assistance was hailed by the public including policymakers. This support and several others in the past also received significant media coverage in both the electronic and print media largely because it was offered at time when there were discussions about payment of the user fees. Moreover, this was a time when a number of tertiary students demonstrated against the payment of user fees. Therefore, not only did the NUGS proposal benefit from Otumfuo's activities, it also made the work of the Parliamentarians who were grappling with different ideas to addressing the educational problem easy by adopting a similar proposal that already had high public support.

The objective of the GETFund was similar to that of the Otumfuo Education Fund, in that both sought to involve the public in the financing of education. The implementation of the GETFund also benefitted from the ideas of the Otumfuo Education Fund because an active board member of the Otumfuo Education Fund, Mr. F.A.M. Banahene, was appointed as the administrator of the GETFund. In addition, two board members of the Otumfuo Education Fund –Mr. I. K.Gyasi and Professor Florence A. Dolphyne served as board members of the GETFund.

### **Conclusions**

The prior analysis indicates that agenda setting and agenda entrance are somewhat applicable to the policy process in Ghana. This is clearly shown by

how the leadership of the two Asante Kings spurred the adoption of the GETFund. While previous studies on agenda setting in Africa have concluded that advanced industrialized countries are mostly the key actors in agenda setting in Africa, this article has proven that there are relevant actors who play crucial roles in the setting of agenda in some African countries and their activities need to be made available to the public policy, development and political science literature. Therefore, this paper fills the lacuna in the literature by providing information on other actors who play active roles in agenda setting for public policies in sub-Saharan Africa. It provides understanding of the role played by traditional rulers and institutions in the policy process.

More specifically, the paper finds that the outside initiation model, consolidation, pluralist's concept of decision making, and policy stream approach can be used to explain the adoption of a program that allows the public to participate in the financing of education that was adopted in Ghana. It argues that the enstoolment of Otumfuo Osei Tutu II in 1999 and his active championing of programs to ensure community participation in the funding of education, as well as his leadership in the establishment of the Otumfuo Education Fund a year before the passage of the GETFund bill set the media and policy agenda for the establishment of the GETFund. It was also an intervening event that created a window of opportunity for the proposal of NUGS built on the same idea to gain agenda entrance. The paper further argues that the publicity and the public support that Otumfuo the Asantehene received for his idea and advocacy for such a program made it easy for policy makers to adopt a proposal on that line of thinking and passed it into a national bill in the form of the GETFund.

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