

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **An advocacy coalition approach to water policy change in Ghana: A look at belief systems and policy oriented learning**

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The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) was developed by Sabatier and Jenkins Smith in 1993 to explain and predict policy change. Bloomquist and other scholars have referred to the ACF as one of the most promising theoretical frameworks for studying the policy process. The ACF has been applied widely to policy change in a plethora of substantive policy areas in the United States, as well as in Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia. However, the ACF has not yet been applied to explain the policy process in Africa. Thus, to test the robustness of the framework, this research applies the ACF to explain water politics and the water policy process in Ghana. This research specifically looks at the belief systems and policy oriented learning in water policy change in Ghana. Using a combination of survey methodology and key interviews, the research tests two hypotheses of the ACF; i) Coalition members are more likely to interact with actors they perceive as sharing their beliefs than actors who do not share their beliefs; ii) Policy oriented learning is likely when there is the presence of a professionalized forum than when there is not. The findings show that the ACF offers a good explanation of the water policy process in Ghana.

**Key words:** Advocacy coalition framework, water politics, Ghana.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In 2000, as part of the urban water sector restructuring program, the Government of Ghana (GOG) entered into a 20 year lease contract with Azurix Corporation, a subsidiary of the defunct Enron Corporation to supply urban water in Ghana. After intense opposition from civil society groups (Amenga-Etego and Grusky, 2005) and an alleged bribery scandal involving parties to the contract, (Financial Times, 2002) the contract fell through. The World Bank, which was backing a loan facility to the GOG to facilitate the lease agreement backed out of the deal. After the contract fell through, discussions on securing a partner for a private sector participation in the urban water sector had to begin all over again. Then in 2006, GOG on behalf of the Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL) entered into a 5 year management contract with Vitens Rand Water Services BV of Netherlands and South Africa and their subsidiary in Ghana.

This paper looks at the nature of communication between stakeholders in the policy networks in the water policy sector in Ghana. Applying Weible's (2005) method, this paper uses the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) to explain the extent to which stakeholders with similar

and dissimilar beliefs communicate among themselves and also how new information contributes to policy learning between stakeholders in the water subsystem in Ghana.

The ACF was developed by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993). The ACF was developed to overcome the difficulties of the stages heuristic as well as expand on Hecló's (1978) issue networks as a theoretical explanation to changes in public policy. As a policy framework for explaining policy change, the ACF has been around for a long time and it has been widely applied by scholars to explain policy change mainly in the United States and in Canada. In the United States, the ACF has been applied to policy change in areas such as water politics in Denver (Ellison, 1998), forestry policy in Colorado (Butnett and Davis, 2002), offshore oil policy (Freudenburg and Gramling, 2002) and coastal management policy (Leschine and Sharma, 2003).

In Canada, ACF application include forestry policy (Hoberg, 1998) and climate change (Litflin, 2000). Other applications of the ACF are forest certification policy in Sweden (Elliot and Schlaepfer, 2001) and environmental politics in England (Jordan and O'Riordan, 1999) Schol-

ars have referred to the ACF as one of the most promising theoretical frameworks for studying the policy process (Schlager and Bloomquist, 1996; John, 2003) However, despite its wide application, the ACF has not yet been applied to explain policy change in Africa. To test the robustness of the framework as a tool for explaining policy change, this research applies the ACF to explain water policy process in Ghana.

This paper starts with a brief overview of the ACF and describes water policy making in Ghana. The paper then analyses data that explore how the dominant coalitions in the water subsystem communicate with each other. The analyses continue with a study of how the presence of new information in the subsystem affects the positions of the coalitions. The discussion and conclusion sections make the claim that the ACF under certain conditions can be applied to explain policy change in Ghana.

## OVERVIEW OF THE ADVOCACY COALITION FRAMEWORK

Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993) developed the ACF as a theoretical framework to analyze intense conflict in the policy making process. The ACF argues that within the policy subsystem, - which is defined as groups of formal and informal actors who are actively involved in a substantive policy (Sabatier, 1987) – actors form alliances/coalitions around core beliefs and secondary beliefs and compete with each other as to what the outcome of a substantive policy should be. These actors may include bureaucratic agencies, legislators, journalists, researchers, civil society groups as well as a host of other informal organizations within the state. Thus, policy outcomes reflect the competition between coalitions within the policy subsystem.

Within the policy subsystem, the ACF distinguishes the belief systems of coalitions. To this end, coalitions may have core beliefs, near core beliefs and secondary beliefs. According to the ACF, secondary beliefs comprises strategies, decision making systems and important information streams which are used to realize the policy core beliefs. The policy core beliefs are normative beliefs that tend to reflect the fundamental or philosophical beliefs of a group. Thus, core beliefs are usually seen as the principal attraction for coalition formation and tend to serve as one of the principal factors that holds the coalition together. Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999) argue therefore that coalition members will likely make modifications to their secondary belief systems to enhance realizing the core beliefs, but hardly do coalition members accept modifications to their core belief system. Because core beliefs serve as the fundamental bond for coalition formation, changes to the core beliefs may serve the demise of the coalition.

The ACF presumes that as rational members of coalitions who are bonded by a shared sense of core be-

liefs, individual members are more likely to share a special relationship with each other. The special bond shared by members with the same beliefs serves as a unifying force for the group. On the other hand, there is a general sense of mistrust between members belonging to opposing coalitions. Thus, according to Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, within an advocacy coalition, members are more likely to depend on each other for trusted information in the realization of their core beliefs than members of an opposing coalition. In realizing secondary belief systems, members are also more likely to rely on each other for coordination and assessing best strategies that will translate into their preferred government programs. This study therefore tests one of the principal assumptions of the ACF as it applies to water policy process in Ghana.

H<sub>1</sub>: Coalition members are more likely to interact with actors they perceive as sharing their beliefs than actors who do not share their beliefs.

The dependent variable of the ACF is policy change and Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith argue that policy change is not simply the result of competition among coalitions within the subsystem. Policy oriented learning among and within advocacy coalitions is also critical to ensuring policy change (Sabatier, 1998; Jenkins-Smith, 1990). According to Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999), "Policy-oriented learning refers to relatively enduring alterations of thought behavioral intentions, which result from experience and/or new information and which are concerned with the attainment or revision of policy objectives.... The [ACF] assumes that such learning is instrumental, that is, that members of various coalitions seek to better understand the world in order to further their policy objectives. ... coalition members will resist information suggesting their policy core beliefs may be invalid and/or unattainable, and they will use formal policy analyses primarily to buttress and elaborate those beliefs or attack their opponents' [view]"

Thus, in the view of the ACF, policy change occurs through a combination of group interests and new information (Lertzman et al., 1996). This scenario to policy change has not been the case in pre-democratic Ghana and for the most part other undemocratic countries in Africa. Policy change has often taken place with unilateral decrees and pronouncements from governments. In other instances, policy change has been effected through the barrel of the gun when people perceiving no way of influencing policy used unconstitutional means to get rid of the government in power (Clapham, 1996; Shraeder, 2004).

The ACF draws a distinction between policy-oriented learning that takes place within advocacy coalitions from policy oriented learning that takes place across coalitions. According to the authors of the framework, policy oriented learning that takes place within helps coalitions

to effectively organize to achieve their goals and is therefore more common. Policy oriented learning across belief systems may have the effect of causing coalitions to modify their core beliefs and are more unlikely. The authors of the framework acknowledge that policy-oriented learning is one of the main ingredients to policy change as their effect may lead to changes in belief systems. Changes to the core belief system or aspects thereof are usually the results of “perturbation in noncognitive factors external to the subsystem” (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999).

This presupposes that the surest avenue to change the policy core is through “some shock originating outside the subsystem that substantially alters the distribution of political resources or the views of coalitions within the subsystem” (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999) Since coalitions are generally distrustful of one another, learning across belief systems takes place when the source of information is trusted, as from a recognized professional forum and the information is based on very solid empirical evidence. This study tests another one of the principal assumptions of the ACF as it applies to water policy process in Ghana.

H<sub>2</sub>: Policy oriented learning is likely when there is the presence of a professionalized forum than when there is not.

### **Urban Water Policy in Ghana.**

With erratic urban water supply and seasonal acute water shortages throughout the country, GOG through various World Bank projects has sought to reform the urban water sector. The lead policy to overcome the problems in the government owned and operated water sector is through private sector participation (PSP). (Hall et al., 2002; Amenga-Etego and Grusky, 2005). The push for PSP in urban water delivery is based on the neo-liberal market ideology which advocates that the private sector holds the key to infusing the system with technical know-how, efficient management systems and injection of much needed private capital for infrastructure development (Vickers and Yarrow, 1991; Gortner, 1997; Chong and Rama, 2002; Bakker, 2003). In this direction, GOG in 2000 entered into a 20 year lease agreement with Azurix Corporation, a subsidiary of Enron Corporation to operate urban water systems in Ghana (Amenga-Etego and Grusky, 2005).

Right from the onset of the reforms, skepticism of civil society groups about the rationale for the PSP had been clear (ISODEC, 2001 Civil society groups complained that the act of separating the management of the profitable urban water networks from the relatively unprofitable rural water supply as part of the reforms amounted to “cherry picking” (Amenga-Etego and Grusky, 2005). As part of the policy of PSP, urban water

supply will qualify for PSP support while rural water supply will remain under the management of districts and local governments.

Civil society groups disagreed with the decision of scrapping the policy of cross subsidization where the relatively high income customers in urban centers subsidized the water supply of the relatively low income customers in rural areas. Civil society groups were also apprehensive of the possibility of mass retrenchment from the government run utility company as well as increased water tariffs once the private company took over the management of urban water systems. Additional concerns were about the capacity of GOG to properly regulate the private company as well the ability of government agencies to provide enough incentives for the private company to improve services in the many poor and disadvantaged urban neighborhoods. These concerns were born out of similar adverse issues emanating from private intervention in the water sector in other developing countries (Bayliss, 2002; Lobina and Hall, 2003; Olivera and Lewis, 2004). In the midst of these concerns, when Suez and Vivendi, the two losing private companies alleged that Azurix had advanced a \$5 million bribe to GOG officials to win the contract, (Financial Times, 2002) opposition to the contract grew and civil society groups went overdrive with their advocacy against water privatization.

With the mounting problems confronting the lease agreement, the World Bank withdrew the loan to GOG for the PSP contract. With no credible source of funding for the contract, GOG eventually abrogated the 20 year lease agreement with Azurix. The process of finding solutions to the water supply problems began all over again. The GOG and those who supported the PSP policy responded to its opponents with threats, intimidation and name calling to advance their policy. Then in 2006, GOG entered into a 5 year management contract with Vitens Rand Water Services BV of Netherlands and South Africa and their subsidiary in Ghana, Aqua VitRa Limited operating under the joint name of Aqua Vitens Rand Limited (AVRL).

The water policy subsystem in Ghana is similar in many ways to other policy systems in terms on the intense conflicts as to what policy should be adopted to address the water supply problems confronting urban dwellers. This subsystem offers a good case study to examine the level of interaction and coordination within coalitions and across coalitions in the water sector in Ghana. It also offers a good laboratory to investigate the extent to which learning can take place when the source of information is outside the coalitions.

### **DATA COLLECTION**

The data collection for this research took place mainly in December 2007 and January 2008 after all the necessary institutional review board approval for research involving human subjects had

**Table 1.** Coalitions in the Water Subsystem.

| Support PSP                  | Against PSP                |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Government Agencies (N = 13) | Trade Union Groups (N = 5) |
| Consultants/Research (N = 3) | Religious groups (1)       |
| Regulatory Agencies (N = 4)  | Civil society groups (14)  |

been obtained. This research used a combination of primary data acquired through a series of anonymous interview of key personnel and secondary data acquired through content analysis of relevant official documents (Halcrow Report, 1995; Berger, 1999; Ministry of Works and Housing, 1998; IFFM, 2002; PURC, 2005 a, b, c), and key information provided at the website of key institutions. Officials interviewed were from GWCL, Public Utility and Regulatory Commission (PURC), Ministry of Housing and Water Works, Accra Metropolitan Authority, Grassroots Africa and Water Tanker Association. Individual interviewees were selected based on their official position in their organization. The researcher explored organizational charts and identified interviewees based on their position in the organization and their work responsibilities. To this, the research made sure to select subjects whose work schedule directly involved water supply management or regulation. In organizations where organizational charts were either nonexistent or not helpful, a snowball sampling technique was used to identify possible interviewees.

## DATA ANALYSES

The first concern was to systematically identify the urban water subsystem in Ghana. Beyond the obvious public institutions that deal with water supply, there are other private and public institutions that have a substantial programmatic interest in water supply. In this regard, existing studies on urban water supply in Ghana provided valuable information about a slew of public and informal institutions with programmatic and budgetary interest in the water sector (Amenga-Etego, 2001; IFFM, 2002; Amenga-Etego and Grusky, 2005; Whitfield, 2006). Once these institutions were identified, the researcher looked at the specific programmatic interests of these institutions from various government documents and institutional websites to determine which institutions to include in the study.

Institutions that were selected as being part of the subsystem had to pass at least one of two tests. The institution had to either spend a substantial part of its budget on urban water supply issues or undertake research into water supply issues. The other criterion is the institution must represent urban communalities with limited access to water supply. These criteria were used to ensure that only institutions with direct interest in urban water supply were included in the subsystem. To be sure that important urban water institutions were not overlooked, the list of institutions identified was made available to well known policy entrepreneurs in the water supply sector from time to time.

Through this process, the researcher identified 41 diff-

erent public and private organizations with direct programmatic and budgetary interest in urban water supply. To ensure easy and comprehensible analyses, the institutions were grouped into 6 distinct categories, namely, Government Agencies, Consultants and Researchers, Regulatory Agencies, Trade Union Groups, Religious Groups and Civil Society groups. These 6 categories of institutions were further divided into two groups based on their respective positions in the water policy debates, with one group representing the coalition that favors private sector participation in the urban water sector and the other group representing the coalition that is against private sector participation in the urban water sector (Table 1).

Government agencies mostly reflect the policies of the government of the day. With the presidency wielding the power of appointment and dismissal and operating with a weak parliament (Gyimah-Boadi, 1996) that is unable to exert any real influence on the agenda of agencies, government agencies invariably follow the programmatic agenda of the presidency to the letter. Since private sector participation in the water sector has been the policy of successive governments since the latter part of the 1990s, it is not surprising therefore that government agencies favor PSP in water supply. In addition, a number of government documents and research in water supply in Ghana show the position of government agencies as favoring PSP in the water sector (Berger, 1999; Grusky, 2001; Gross, 2003; PURC, 2005a; GPRS II, 2006). Documents and information provided by the water supply regulatory agencies depict their position as favoring PSP in urban water supply. (PURC, 2005a, c)

Consultant and research groups are often the clients of government agencies. Government agencies engage the services of these consultants and researchers to produce research and field studies to support their policy goals. Civil society and other private groups that make up the anti PSP coalition often lack the needed resources to contract the services of researchers and consultants to provide research information to support their policy positions (Ainuson and Tandoh-Offin, 2009).

The Trade Union Groups (TUG) perceives a potential adverse effect on their members in the event of a PSP participation in the water sector. Previous privatization and divestiture of state owned enterprises have been accompanied by mass retrenchment of labor. In other instances, the work benefits of labor have been varied to their disadvantage during private takeover of state owned

enterprises (Davies, 1991; Amenga-Etego and Grusky, 2005). The groups in the anti PSP coalition represent low income residents in the various urban centers in Ghana. Earlier bouts of PSPs in Africa have included increase in water tariffs (Lobina and Hall, 2003).

However, there is ample evidence that the average annual income residents in disadvantaged urban communities is less than \$450 and at current prices, residents are spending substantial parts of their income on water supply alone (Christian Aid Ghana, undated; ISODEC, 2001). Civil society groups oppose PSP in water supply first, based on the potential for increases in water tariffs and second, based on the fact that PSP in water amounts to putting in the hands of private-for profit companies vital national assets.

Policy positions of members within each coalition are very homogeneous and well harmonized. Stakeholders in the anti PSP coalition interviewed almost in unionism professed their opposition to PSP in the water sector and assigned about the same reasons for their positions. Stakeholders in the PSP coalition also assigned similar reasons in expressing their support for PSP in the water sector. Officials interviewed at the Ghana Water Company Limited and the Public Utility and Regulatory Commission, two stakeholders in the PSP coalition, declared their unflinching support for PSP policy. In the case of the coalition against PSP, member organizations in this coalition have joined resources to establish the Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation (CONIWAS). One of the important goals of CONIWAS is opposition to water privatization. Homogeneity in the beliefs and positions of these stakeholders offer a sound basis for identifying advocacy coalitions (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999; Weible, 2005).

Baumann and Boland (1998) succinctly summarizes the core belief of the PSP coalition as to the nature of water. The PSP coalition believes that "water is no different from any other economic good: It is no more a necessity than food, clothing, or housing, all of which obey the normal laws of economics". Thus, the private sector should be engaged to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in the urban water sector. To the PSP coalition, if consumers want efficiency in the water supply, then they must be prepared to pay realistic prices for the services (World Bank, 1998; WSRS, 2002). In contrast, anti PSP coalition see water as public good that must not be treated as a private commodity to be bought, sold and traded for profit. They perceive access to water as a fundamental human right and therefore, a collective responsibility of society to at least provide basic water needs to even those who cannot afford to pay for water (Amenga-Etego and Grusky, 2005; ISODEC, 2001).

Member of the anti PSP coalition sees the World Bank sponsored PSP in water supply as clash of the "culture that sees water as sacred and treats its provision as a duty for the preservation of life and another that sees water as a commodity and its ownership and trade as

fundamental corporate rights (Amenga-Etego, 2001), [To the anti PSP coalition], the culture of commodification is at war with diverse cultures of sharing, or receiving and giving water as a free gift" (Shiva, 2002). To the anti PSP coalition, "To privatize water is like handing down death sentences to the majority of the urban and rural poor in Ghana because they cannot afford to pay the economic rent for such services. The right to water is a fundamental, God-given right to all people that dwell on this earth" (Christian Aid, 2000).

The PSP coalition perceives inadequacy in water supply as a resource problem. To them, rapid population growth, especially urban population growth has put the financial commitment needed to ensure adequate water supply beyond the reach of the government.

(According to United Nations, in Ghana, the proportion of total population living in urban areas increased from 26% in 1965 to 46.3% in 2005 and it is projected to increase to 58% within the next 20 years). The resource needed in the water sector becomes enormous when one considers the other pressing needs vying for public attention. Apart from problems in the water sector, only 45 - 47% of citizens have access to grid electricity (ISSER, 2005) and basic healthcare continues to be beyond the reach of many. Thus, issues confronting the citizenry are many, but the resources needed to tackle these issues are limited. To this coalition, sourcing private sector investment in the water sector to aid rehabilitation and expansion of existing water infrastructure will ensure speedy access to water supply in urban areas. In 2005, WaterAid Ghana estimated that \$85 million in annual investment in the water sector is needed to reach the Millennium Development Goal of 85% urban water coverage by 2015. However, current spending averages only \$17 million annually.

To the anti PSP coalition, the problems in the water sector have been occasioned by prolonged government mismanagement of the water system. (GWSC, the parent company of GWCL was for a considerable period of time kept under the dictates of politicians. It operated at a time when there was no independent regulatory institution to monitor its activities. Public policy objectives of GWSC were to a large extent geared towards satisfying political ends instead of strengthening the corporation to efficiently and effectively supply water).

Thus, though they agree in principle that there is the need for fundamental changes in the management of water system, they believe that government should set up independent public agencies that will use private sector principles to operate the water system. To them, water systems are so important to national security that it should not be given out to any profit minded private company. Public the water sector.

The uneasiness within the anti PSP coalition is compounded by the fact that private investors that have expressed interest in the water sector in Ghana are big multinational companies three of which have annual reve-

nues in excess of the annual revenue of the government of Ghana. There are therefore concerns of the ability of the government to wield any authority over the operations of the private companies especially in the face of weak and under-resourced regulatory institutions. Also, other PSP projects on the continent of Africa have received bad reviews when it comes to provision of water to low income consumers and adherence to terms of contract (Lobina and Hall, 2003).

The relationship between these two coalitions has been hostile since the later part of the 1990s when push for PSP intensified and this hostility showed no sign of abating at the beginning of the negotiations for the 20 year lease agreement between GOG and Azurix. Civil society groups especially, described the whole agreement process as being shrouded in secrecy with GOG volunteering very little information about the details of the agreement. Though, GOG claimed wide consultation of civil society groups, evidence points to the fact that only a handful of meetings were held to discuss the PSP proposals and in these meetings important stakeholders in the sector were completely left out (WSRS, 2002, IFFM, 2002). As one interviewee puts it, these meetings were just informational with no real attempt from GOG to solicit the views of important industry players. Stakeholders of both coalitions interviewed expressed distrust for each other as to the ability to do the right thing for the water sector.

Anti PSP members have referred to PSP members as being corrupt and only interested in the kick backs they will likely receive in the event of a PSP agreement in water. There seemed to be some credence to this accusation when it was reported that AZURIX Corporation had allegedly paid \$5 million in bribes to enable it win the bid to manage the water system (Financial Times, 2002). Between 2000 and 2005, there were a number of public demonstrations, press releases and grass root advocacy against the PSP policy (Amenga- Etego and Grusky, 2005). Faced with strong criticisms and opposition, the GOG have come to see the anti PSP coalition as a nuisance and an impediment to the development of the water sector. In various radio and newspaper announcements and advertisements, the National Coalition Against Water Privatization (NCAP) and the Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC), two integral groups of the anti PSP coalition were described as being unpatriotic and unchristian (IFFM, 2002).

It is against this background of differences in policy and a heightened state of mistrust that the researcher sought to test the level of coordination between the members of the two coalitions. The researcher invited stakeholders in these coalitions to name the organizations that they go to or are likely to go to for advice on water supply issues. The ACF predicts that stakeholders within each coalition will coordinate and rely on each other as sources of trusted information other than members in the opposing

coalition because of the common core beliefs that bonds them together as a coalition. Thus, to substantiate the predictions of the framework, we will expect coalition member to cite each other as their source or likely source of advice.

As depicted from Table 3, the two coalitions significantly relied on each other for advice or saw members within their respective coalitions as likely sources of advice. The PSP coalition members relied heavily on each other for trusted source of information. From the subtotal 1 column in table 3, PSP coalition members reported relying on stakeholders within their coalition, on average, 76% of the time as trusted source of information. The subtotal 1 column shows a relatively less reliance of the PSP coalition on stakeholders within the anti PSP coalition for trusted source of information. As depicted from the subtotal 2 column, the anti PSP coalition also relied substantially on each other for trusted source of information. From table 3, the anti PSP coalition reported that averagely they relied on stakeholders within their coalition 70% of time for trusted source of information. And they relied less on stakeholders within the PSP coalition for trusted source of information.

## POLICY LEARNING

The abrogation of the 20 year leasehold agreement did not end the problems in the urban water system. There were still a sizeable number of urban dwellers who were left without adequate water supply. In 2001, urban water coverage was still around 55% with significant coverage shortfalls in disadvantaged urban communities. Acute perennial shortages in urban water supply guaranteed that the urban water policy will still be in a flux as stakeholders strived to find the best policy to change the status quo. The ACF posit that policy change through policy oriented learning is a function of, among other things, individual learning and attitudinal changes. To this end, learning within and among coalitions which have the effect of modifying the belief systems help bring about policy change.

The critical issue for the anti PSP coalition, especially civil society groups is the need to ensure that urban dwellers, especially the poor and disadvantaged are provided with access to water. To the anti PSP coalition, access to water is among the basic rights of the citizen and the inability to access this basic right is unacceptable (ISODEC, 2001; Amenga-Etego and Grusky, 2005). The PSP coalition shares the same sentiments and importance that the anti PSP places on water supply to citizens. To the PSP coalition, adequate water supply is inextricably linked to the alleviation of poverty and attraction of investment for the overall improvement in the economy (GPRS, 2003; GPRS II, 2006).

However, government's spending in the water sector is



woefully inadequate to sustain any long term investments in water infrastructure. In the 2002 government of Ghana Budget for instance, 21% of funds were allocated to poverty reduction under the GPRS program. Only 1% of the poverty reduction budget or 0.2% of total spending was allocated to the water and sanitation sector (WaterAid Ghana, 2008). With both domestic and international research pointing to the fact that the government of Ghana does not have the necessary revenue flow and technical knowledge to rehabilitate and expand water facilities, anti PSP coalition members were forced to re-examine their stance. If they stood any chance of realizing their belief system of portable water to all citizens, then they had to rearrange their strategies.

GOG is also under obligation to improve infrastructure development in the country and thereby position the country for economic growth. With water supply prominently becoming a political and election issue, the PSP coalition had to also re-access its stand and rather directly engage other stakeholders to begin moving forward on a viable policy to solve the water shortage problems (Whitfield, 2006).

In 2006, Ghana Water Company Limited entered into a five year management contract with Vitens Rand Water Services BV of Netherlands and its subsidiary in Ghana, Aqua VitRa Limited operating under the joint name of Aqua Vitens Rand Limited (AVRL). A significant precursor to the management contract was the work of an International Fact Finding Mission (IFFM) on the PSP proposal in Ghana. This international fact finding mission was at the instance of some prominent policy brokers within Ghana (IFFM, 2002). Having witnessed the stalemate and rising tensions between the coalitions, some prominent religious leaders as well as industry leaders proposed a fact finding mission made up of renowned international and local experts to undertake an objective study of the proposed policies within the water sector and then offer suggestions as to the way forward.

Among others, the mission concluded that the aggressive cost recovery measures which forms part of the PSP proposal will reduce water access by low income consumers. Lifeline tariffs which guarantees minimal quantity of water to low income dwellers at low rates were not part of the contractual obligations of the proposed private operator. In view of the aggressive cost recovery measures, it is foreseeable that lifeline water tariff policy may be severely curtailed. Existing policy did not include any measures aimed at regulating the predatory operations of small scale water providers who mainly operate in middle and low income neighborhoods. Thus, looking at the totality of the existing PSP arrangement, especially pertaining to investment priorities and the absence of performance targets related to poverty, no specific measures seemed to have been made to ensure access to water to the lower tier of the middle income group and low income communities.

The mission also came to the realization that resources

needed to transform the water sector were enormous and beyond the funding capabilities of the GOG. An honest dialogue between the GOG and civil society groups as well as other stakeholders in the sector as to funding alternatives was therefore needed earnestly. To this end, the mission chastised the deplorable communication between the stakeholders in the water sector, especially the unwillingness of the GOG to invite to the table stakeholders in the private sector.

The work of the fact finding mission served as a significant learning point for the coalitions in the water sector subsystem. The mission helped to ease tensions and bridged the ideological gap between the coalitions. The anti PSP coalition seemed to have modified their position as a result of the cautious optimism with which they greeted the 2006 management contract. The adoption of the management contract also represents a change in the position of the PSP coalitions because the management contract represents a less intrusive policy into the water sector as opposed to their earlier position of a leasehold agreement.

The management agreement indicated a significant change in urban water policy. The main components of the management contract illustrate significant changes in the belief systems of the coalitions within the water policy subsystem. First, the management contract as adopted by the GOG is a less intrusive intervention in the water sector as opposed to the relatively more intrusive lease agreement. In the 2006 plan, GOG signed a 5 year agreement which offers flexibility to make changes to the water management system in a shorter period of time as opposed to a 20 year agreement in 2000. In addition, the PSP coalition seemed to have shifted from its position of favoring a purely private operator. Companies that were shortlisted for the PSP experiment in 2000 were the three private companies of Biwater, a British water supply company, Suez, a French water supply company and Azurix a United States water supply company. In contrast, AVRL, the company managing the urban water supply is an amalgamation of two semi autonomous public institutions, Rand Water Company of South Africa and Vitens Company of Netherlands.

In the management contract, lifeline tariff policies were made contractual subject to changes by the PURC. Spending priorities under the contract also reflected the needs of low income consumers. The principle of cost recovery was to be balanced with affordability. Under the contract, the water manager was contractually obligated to expand water services to low income consumers and ensure that prices were broadly affordable. The contract also provided performance incentives to the manager once agreed performance targets were exceeded. Selected workers of GWCL were also to be trained by the manager on the proper management and administration of water systems.

The work of the fact finding mission seemed to have served as a significant learning experience for the

**Table 2.** Belief Systems of Coalitions.

|                          | PSP Coalition  | Anti PSP Coalition  |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Core Beliefs</b>      |  |   |
| Nature of Water          | Water is an economic good                                    | Water is a public good                                    |
| Cost of water            | Consumers should bear the cost of water                      | Consumers have an inalienable right of water for survival |
| <b>Near Core Beliefs</b> |  |   |
| Problems Identification  | Inadequate capital resources and relevant technical know how | Corruption and mismanagement within the public sector     |
| Role of Government       | Regulator  | Public distribution to ensure the greatest redistribution |
| Policy Option            | PSP investment   | Public adoption of private sector management principles   |
| <b>Secondary Beliefs</b> |  |   |
| Benefits of PSP          | PSP will ensure a wider coverage of water supply             | PSP will favor high income areas                          |
| Environmental Concerns   | Government will ensure regulation                            | profit motive will trump environmental concerns           |

coalition members. As the ACF predicts, learning is likely to occur when the source of learning is from a respected professionalized body or forum. An evaluation of the fact finding mission will be instructive in this direction. The work of the mission took place in 2002 and members of the mission were accomplished professionals in their respective disciplines. The 14 member body comprised highly educated professionals representing policy experts, economists, lawyers, professors and engineers. Their work was based on a broad consultation of stakeholders in Ghana and abroad (Box 1).

In Ghana, the mission members consulted all the major stakeholders in both coalitions in addition to community site visits. In Washington DC, members of the analytical forum consulted with development partners and financiers of water projects in Ghana such as officials of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, United States Department of Treasury, United States Agency for International Development and legislative representatives of some members of United States House budget committee.

These findings corroborate the assertion of the ACF that learning is likely when the information is from a highly respected body of professionals. In this case, the broad representation as well as the broad consultation of the analytical forum made their findings more acceptable to the coalitions.

## DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the existence of two dominant and distinct coalitions in the water policy subsystem in Ghana. Though these coalitions both seek the same end – ensuring adequate water supply- the means to achieve this end is very different evident by the wide chasm in their belief systems (Table 2). The first coalition, the PSP

coalition, represents the policy of the government and is mainly made up of agencies within the national government, regulatory agencies and researchers. The second coalition, the anti PSP coalition comprises civil society groups which serve as the backbone for the coalition, trade union groups and religious groups.

In Table 3, the results depicts that stakeholders within the water policy subsystem tend to rely on each other for trusted source of information. In the case of the water policy subsystem in Ghana, this was not strange at all especially judging from the level of mistrust between stakeholders in different coalitions. The anti PSP coalition disagrees fundamentally with the whole unbundling process which gave rise to the consideration of PSP as a policy option in the water sector. To the anti PSP coalition, the unbundling process was a “cherry picking” exercise aimed at delivering the profitable urban water network to profit motivated private firms and then leaving the relatively unprofitable rural network to the ‘inefficient’ government system (Amenga-Etego and Grusky, 2005).

As the ACF postulates, coalition members seem to rely heavily on each other for trusted source of information. The subtotals in Table 1 shows that the PSP coalition members cited each other more as a source for trusted information than members of the other coalition. This holds true for the anti PSP coalition too (Table 3). In fact, with the anti PSP coalition, coordination is very crucial to their survival as well as their effectiveness. The members of the anti PSP coalition are mainly private nongovernmental organizations with very little resources. They are mainly young organizations whose existences lie within the last 10 years operating in a system where the political establishment views them as a nuisance and not as partners for development. Thus, their survival depends on pulling resources together, coalition building and sharing best practices among each other.



**Table 3.** Organizations/Likely Organizations to Contact for Advice (%).

| Organizational Affiliation | PSP COALITION |       |       |                | ANTI PSP COALITION |       |       |                |       |
|----------------------------|---------------|-------|-------|----------------|--------------------|-------|-------|----------------|-------|
|                            | Govt          | C/R   | RA    | Sub<br>Total 1 | TUG                | RG    | CS    | Sub<br>Total 2 | Other |
| Government Agencies (Govt) | 34.78         | 17.39 | 22.83 | 75.00          | 5.43               | x     | 8.70  | 14.13          | 10.87 |
| Consultants/Research (C/R) | 33.33         | 23.81 | 14.29 | 71.43          | x                  | x     | 9.52  | 9.52           | 19.05 |
| Regulatory Agencies (RA)   | 30.30         | 42.42 | 9.09  | 81.82          | x                  | x     | 9.09  | 9.09           | 9.09  |
| Trade Union Groups (TUG)   | 9.09          | 13.64 | 13.64 | 36.36          | 27.27              | 4.55  | 22.73 | 54.55          | 9.09  |
| Religious Groups (RG)      | 12.5          | x     | x     | 12.50          | x                  | 50    | 37.5  | 87.50          | x     |
| Civil Society (CS)         | 9.90          | 5.94  | 6.93  | 22.77          | 21.78              | 11.88 | 35.64 | 69.31          | 7.92  |

However, it must be noted that there were instances albeit in smaller numbers where stakeholders in the coalitions cited other stakeholders in an opposing coalition as source of trusted information. For instance, within the water sector, government agencies usually have a technical superiority in gathering and acquiring important industry data. Thus, irrespective of difference in belief systems, anti PSP coalition members must rely on government agencies for such information. In fact in the interviews, stakeholders in the anti PSP coalition complained of government agencies unwillingness to provide them with information.

Thus, anti PSP coalition members may have relied even more on government agencies than depicted in table 3 if information flow had been forthcoming. It must be noted however that during interviews, some anti PSP stakeholders explained that they were careful on the extent to which information from government sources were relied on. This was because they felt a lot of the information from the government was generated by government agencies to support prevailing government policies. This level of cross interaction between stakeholders in opposing coalitions is not necessarily a deviation from the ACF. The thesis support the ACF view for as long as the level of coordination among stakeholders within the same coalition is substantially more than the level of coordination between stakeholders in opposing coalitions.

In the case of the PSP coalition, government policy ultimately affect the citizenry and despite the level of mistrust, there need to be some level of coordination between the government agencies and civil society groups, for instance, to ensure the implementation of well targeted policies. Also, some level of coordination between the PSP coalition which is predominantly made up of government and quasi government agencies and organizations in the private sector ensure legitimacy of policies adopted.

The PSP coalition is a closer nit network and relies on each other more than the anti PSP coalition. This is not surprising in this case judging from the fact that the PSP coalition is made up of predominately government and quasi government agencies. The persuasive tools of the

executive branch of government make it relatively easier to ensure conformity with strategies and beliefs within this coalition. In the anti PSP coalition, there is no such central authority with enough resources to ensure agreement with strategies and beliefs. Even though anti PSP coalition members have cooperated on joint policy positions, there have been some disagreements as to strategies within the coalition. For instance, when Rudolf Amenga-Etego was singled out for the 2004 Goldman Environmental Prize with a cash award of \$150,000, it had a polarizing effect on the coalition as some stakeholders questioned the strategies of others as being aimed at achieving personal recognitions.

Stakeholders in both coalitions mentioned other institutions that were not identified in the water policy subsystem as sources of trusted information. The majority of these institutions were foreign based organizations such as public governmental institutions like the international development agencies of Canada, Denmark and the United States. International private institutions that were mentioned include CARE International, Ford Foundation and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation. The activities of many stakeholders in the coalitions, especially civil society groups are funded by these international organizations. It is therefore not surprising that some stakeholders mentioned them as sources of trusted information. It will be interesting to know the extent to which these external organizations actually influence the decision making process of stakeholder organizations in the water policy subsystem especially because of their financial support. Even though there was clear indication of influence by these external agencies, the extent of influence of these external organizations was however beyond the scope of this research.

It is interesting to note that the ACF does not provide for international institutions being part of the subsystem of a domestic policy. Looking at the literature on ACF, the researcher did not come across any research where international institutions were treated at part of the subsystem of a domestic policy. Instances where international institutions were regarded as part of a subsystem involved applying the ACF to explain changes

in transnational policy (Farquharson, 2003). The absence of international institutions as part of a subsystem for domestic policy is perhaps due to the fact that majority of the application of the ACF has been to explain policy change in developed countries. In fact, authors of the ACF state that the framework was developed mainly to apply to policy change in OECD countries. It is trite learning that international institutions rarely have any direct influence on the domestic policy in developed countries. However, in developing countries, because of strong reliance on international aid from the Bretton Woods institutions as well as other International nongovernmental agencies, it is conceivable for such institutions to be part of the subsystem in a domestic policy.

With the policy oriented learning, the 2006 five year management contract marked a significant shift in water policy in Ghana. Both coalitions seemed to have altered their positions they adopted in the wake of the failed 20 year lease agreement. The work of the fact finding mission played a brokering role which toned down the rhetoric from both coalitions. Government agencies were more inclined to listen to the concerns of the civil society groups and made concessions in the 2006 management contract. Stakeholders in the anti PSP coalition have now earned a seat at the table with various government agencies to discuss water policy issues. In fact there is now an open and continuing dialogue between stakeholders in both coalitions. For instance, at the September 2009 performance review of AVRL, stakeholders within the anti PSP coalition were invited to participate in the process. As a result of the open dialogue, anti PSP coalition members are also beginning to realize that a sustainable operation of water systems would have to include some upward adjustment of water tariffs.

The nature of the mission was very instrumental in helping stakeholders in both coalitions to internalize its findings. As the ACF notes, coalition members are likely to engage in policy learning when the information is from a well respected professional forum (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999). The authors of the framework argue further that the findings of such a forum will be more acceptable if the work of the forum is scientific and the process adopted in arriving at the conclusions are deemed broadly to be fair. The 2002 mission was put together by group of well respected religious leaders and opinion leaders who are widely deemed neutral in the policy arena. Thus, the fairness of the mission was in no doubt. The fair nature of the work of the mission was also reflected in the broad consultations that informed their final report. First, members of the mission consulted with representatives of international institutions that serve as the source of finance for major changes in the water sector in Ghana (IFFM, 2002).

To this end, members of the mission among others consulted with representatives at the World Bank, IMF

and the United States Treasury Department (Box 1). Members of the mission took part in a public forum organized by the Friends of the Earth in Washington DC to listen to the concerns of environmental activists about the little regard given to the environment by international water companies operating in developing countries. Second, in Ghana, members of the mission consulted with the major stakeholders in the water system representing both coalitions. At its meeting with members of parliament for instance, the mission gave audience to parliamentarians representing both the majority as well as the minority political parties.

Members of the mission also undertook field trips to selected low income neighborhoods to learn firsthand the plight of low income consumers as well as solicit their views on the proposed changes in water policy. The expertise of the members of the mission as well as their broad consultations with all major stakeholders within the water subsystem contributed to the broad appeal it report received. Compromises made by both coalitions as reflected in the 2006 management contract mirrors the report of the mission. Thus, the changes made by the coalitions to its belief systems as a result of the work of the mission support the position of the ACF that policy oriented learning is likely when there is the presence of a professional forum which enjoys broad appeal.

## Conclusion

The changes to the water policy in Ghana were as a result of new information that was brought to the water policy subsystem. The new information served as an altering tool to the positions of the dominant coalitions and eventually led to a policy change. Using the ACF, the water policy making process provides an important insight into understanding the relationship between the two main coalitions. As predicted by the ACF, stakeholders who are actively involved in a substantive policy tend to aggregate into at least two opposing coalitions based on belief systems. Once aggregated into opposing coalitions, coalition members tend to trust each other more for trusted information about the substantive policy area than their opponents.

It is also interesting that the anti PSP coalition which is made up primarily of civil society groups with little resources were able to influence government policy in a continent that has very weak civil society and a heavy handed government with very little tolerance for opposing views (Clapham, 1996; Schraeder, 2004). The water policy change which was a result of civil discourse of coalitions albeit heated at times is good for a continent that has been used to policy change through the barrel of the gun or some other unconstitutional means. The relationships in water policy subsystem shows that anyone disinterested in a policy can join a coalition and work to influence public policy through civil engagement.

**Box 1.** International Fact Finding Mission on Water Reform in Ghana – August 2002.

| Expertise of the members                 | Total number of members - 14                         |
|--|--|
| PhD Degrees – 5                          | Policy Experts - 7                                   |
| Engineers – 3                            | Representatives from International Organization – 2  |
| Legal Experts – 2                        | Member of British Parliament – 1                     |
| Economists – 1                           |  |
| Consultations Within Ghana               | Consultations Outside Ghana                          |
| Members of Parliament                    | British Department for International Development     |
| Ministry of Works and Housing            | US Department of Treasury, Office of African Affairs |
| Water Sector Restructuring Secretariat   | U.S. Agency for International Development            |
| Public Utilities & Regulatory Commission | Allison Friedrich, L.A Rep. Dennis Kucinich          |
| Ghana Water Company                      | Josh P. Nassar, L.A Rep. Jan Schakowsky Sabine       |
| Community Water & Sanitation Agency      | Sabine Philippe, L.A. Rep. Maxine Waters             |
| Organization of African Trade Union      | Jonathan Newton, L.A. Rep. Conyers                   |
| Christian Council of Ghana               | Lynne Preston, L.A. Rep. Millender-McDonald          |
| ISODEC Executive Council                 | Pepper Santalucia, House Budget Committee            |
| Civil Society Organizations              | The World Bank                                       |
| Association of Consultants               | International Monetary Fund                          |
| Trade Union Groups                       | Public Forum, Friends of the Earth                   |
| Environmental Groups                     |  |
| Environmental Groups                     |  |
| Peri-Urban Communities                   |  |
| Student Representative Council           |  |

It must be noted however that education may serve as a barrier to group activity in Ghana (Ainuson and Tandoh-Offin, 2009). Comprehension of critical policy issues help people in deciding what side of the policy debate they want to join (Cigler and Loomis, 2002). The high illiteracy rate in Ghana may prevent many people from joining groups.

Though the authors of the framework argued that the ACF was developed to explain policy change in OECD countries, it has been quite robust in explaining policy change in Ghana. The ACF as a theoretical framework can be employed to explain policy change in any African country for as long as there is a real public commitment to the rule of law that will allow coalitions to operate without any hindrance from government or opposing camps. It must be noted however that any systematic study of coalitions or policy making in Africa must take into consideration the influence of the Bretton Woods institutions. Because of the dependence of African economies on the Bretton Woods institutions, it is not uncommon to find the foot prints of these institutions on domestic policies in Africa. It will be interesting to see the application of the ACF to explain the relationship between coalitions or policy change in other African democracies.

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