



POLICYBRIEF

MANIFESTOS AND THE SEARCH FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

BACKGROUND

Globally, countries that subscribe to democracy have their aspirants and political parties publish manifestos which present their stance on different policy issues aimed at winning citizens' votes during national and regional level elections.

These manifestos stimulate more reflective debates over a nation's future and prospects. Manifestos may also allow for policy-based campaigns which may enable voters to make constructive choices during elections. Some researchers (Furlong and Cartmel, 2011; Hooghe and Dassonneville, 2013) have argued more specifically that when it comes to the decision to vote, people vote when they feel that there is an issue at stake that concerns them. Thus, the issues that parties focus on in their elections campaigns matter because they convey to voters what the party will do about them, and ideally, voters choose who to vote for based on which party they believe would best address the issues that matter to them the most.

However, it has been argued that most research and political conversations have often focused on the contents of manifestos. But we know much less about how parties produce manifestos and the roles manifestos play in campaigns and accountable governance. So, the key question here is, how do citizens demand accountability by using political party manifestos as a benchmark?

PENPLUSBYTES WEBINAR SERIES-A FIRST STEP TO APPROACHING THE ISSUES

This special edition of the Webinar series was linked specifically to an ongoing five year 'Metogu' (keeping the pressure on) project. The 7th, 8th and 9th webinars extensively engaged with relevant stakeholders drawn from academia, foreign-based agencies promoting accountability, political party executives as well as the general public on issues around the design and implementations of political party manifestos. More than 1500 people participated in the discussions from across the country on multiple digital channels.

The outcome of these stakeholder conversations highlighted interesting issues that are worth the time and critical attention of the government, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), donor agencies, as well as individuals who have interest in equity in elections and accountable governance.

The first discussion Elections 2020: Developing manifestos, the role of citizens and political parties had as lead discussants, Professor Atsu Ayee, Lecturer at the Department of Political Science of the University of Ghana who has extensively researched into manifestos, Renee Kentelberg, an International Governance Advisor with Strengthening Action Against Corruption (STAAC), Joe Hindovei Pemagbi, Sierra Leone Country Officer with Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA).

The second Elections 2020: Do Manifestos Matter? also brought on board Prof. Ransford Edward Van Gyampo a senior Lecturer at the Department of Political Science of the University of Ghana who has extensively researched into manifestos, Mr. Kyeretwei Opoku a lawyer and the Coordinator for Organizing for Ghana and a member of the NDC manifesto committee and Mr. Richard Asante Yeboah, a Deputy Director of Communications with the NPP and also the Government's Spokesperson on infrastructure.

While the third discussion, premised on the earlier two discussions on manifestos was titled, Elections 2020: Manifestos and the Search for Accountability. This, also had a representative from academia Dr. Seidu Alidu, a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Political Science of the University of Ghana, political party reps Richard Nyamar, a Deputy Director of Communications, NPP and Joyce Bawah Mogtari, Lawyer and a Spokesperson for the former president of Ghana H.E. John Dramani Mahama. All the panellists dealt with the issues from their perspectives and also based on their political ideologies.

KEY ISSUES/CONCERNS

1

MANIFESTOS ARE OFTEN POLITICAL-PARTY-INTEREST CENTRED MARKETING TOOLS

Manifestos are marketing tools, how they are used would determine whether or not a political party will win an election and therefore, manifestos should focus on what will benefit the citizens and not what will champion the selfish interests of political parties when voted into office.

2

1992 CONSTITUTION

The 1992 constitution's Article 36, Clause 5 is problematic. It does not enforce the development of a national blueprint, which means that manifestos do not have a national identity. This will subsequently lead to under development as governments are changed during elections..

3

CSOs/MEDIA AND THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

There are lots of pretence in the anti-corruption fight among the political elite. However, corruption is a multi-dimensional monster that should not be politicised. Certainly, if we wish to fight it, then the laws must be enforced despite which political party is in power.

4

MANIFESTOS-SOCIAL CONTRACTS

Manifestos should be seen as social contracts where citizens have a say. The voices of all and sundry should be reflected in the manifesto and political parties should be held accountable for the promises made in manifestos. Similarly, CSOs and the media are urged to continue their efforts towards continuous demand for accountability from politicians

5

REALISTIC/ACHEIVABLE POLICIES

Political parties should focus on three clear key policies they can implement within their four-year mandate when they win elections rather than making a plethora of unrealistic promises. Achievable policies will augur well for Ghana's democracy and inclusive development.

KEY ISSUES/CONCERNS

6

TIMEOUS RELEASE OF MANIFESTOS TO INFORM ELECTORATES' CHOICES

What works for political parties may not work for citizens. Thus, manifestos should be released early enough for citizens to be aware of what they contain so that they can make informed choices at the polls and hold elected candidates accountable. It is unacceptable for political parties to launch their manifestos too close to elections as this does not allow for any meaningful discourse around their aspirations for the people they want to serve.

7

PEER REVIEW OF MANIFESTOS BY CITIZENS

Political parties' manifestos should be subjected to peer reviews by citizens before they are released or published, by so doing citizens can assess what is feasible or otherwise and also input their expectations.

8

ENHANCING EDUCATIONAL LEVELS TO DEMAND ACCOUNTABILITY

We need to improve our level of education as a country. Literacy is important for every Ghanaian to enable all to demand accountability. Citizens must be able to read, understand and probe issues captured in political party manifestos.

9

ACCESSIBLE/RELIABLE INFORMATION ON WHAT IS FEASIBLE

The Ministry of Finance should make information available on what is realistic to achieve by governments with available funds and resources. This will mean citizens have a fair idea how much it will cost to implement promises made in manifestos.

10

FOCUS ON VOTER-NEEDS

Political parties should focus on the needs of voters and tailor messages that suit those needs rather than concentrate on the timeous release of manifestos. Looking out for what the people need is as important as publishing the manifesto on time. It is also recommended that manifestos are made accessible to citizens in various formats (audio-visual, braille etc.) and in various local Ghanaian languages.



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CONCLUSIONS

Policy-makers must take action now to ensure that manifestos are vital documents that inform citizens' choices and accelerate their demand for accountability. A system should be institutionalized to ensure for instance, Policy Action 6 (Peer Review of Manifestos by Citizens) and 8 (Focus on Voter-Needs) are adhered to by all political parties contesting in elections in Ghana. Thus, manifestos must be seen as contributory factors to the success or failure of political parties during elections; they must be seen as tools for accountability in a democratic governance and above all, must be considered as realistic policy documents that serve the greater good.

ABOUT PENPLUSBYTES



Penplusbytes is a not-for-profit organization driving change through innovations in four key areas: using new digital technologies to enable good governance and accountability, investigating new media which drive innovations, enhancing oversight for effective utilisation of mining, oil and gas revenue and conducting research to improve health and environmental outcomes.

For further information, contact us on:

E-mail: info@penplusbytes.org

Subscribe to our mailing list by sending an e-mail to: members@penplusbytes.org

Facebook: Penplusbytes

Twitter/Instagram: @penplusbytes

Tel: +233 (0) 302 922620/1, +233 (0) 302 798995

Mobile/WhatsApp: +233 (0) 24 1995737

Location: No. 1 Ostwe Close, Ako-Adjei, Osu, Accra-Ghana