

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Learning Synthesis 2016-2017



**STAR
Ghana**

Strengthening Transparency,
Accountability and Responsiveness



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF DENMARK

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Gender Equality and
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Learning Synthesis
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Background

Strengthening Transparency, Accountability and Responsiveness in Ghana (STAR-Ghana) is a voice and empowerment programme that supports civil society to strengthen the accountability and responsiveness of the State to citizens' issues. The programme is in its second phase of implementation, the first having ended in April 2015. The Phase 2 builds upon the results and learning from Phase 1 to achieve a step-change in the way citizens are supported to address underlying constraints to democratic governance, and inclusive and sustainable development.

STAR-Ghana set out to put Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) at the heart of the programme. To achieve this, the programme developed a robust and comprehensive strategy. The GESI strategy seeks to define an approach that ensures equal opportunities for women, girls, men, and boys, a level playing field for all social groups, and core values and practices within STAR-Ghana. The aim is to imprint GESI into the institution's 'DNA', and into its role as a convenor, coordinator, and catalyst of civil society (the 3C's approach).

To meet this objective, the GESI strategy looks '*inward*' at what is happening within the institution as well as '*outward*' to its programmes and partnerships. The strategy sets out STAR-Ghana's ambition to apply a gender and social justice framework to its institutional process, carry out GESI analysis in all programmes within an adaptive programming framework, and support the achievement of specific GESI results. It aims to develop an institution and workplace that embraces gender equality and social inclusion; support programmes and grant partners to consider gender equality and social inclusion in their design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL); and facilitate collective action and movement building in respect to GESI.

As STAR-Ghana is coming to the end of its first year of implementation, this is an opportune moment to reflect¹ on what has been learned so far in strategy implementation. This is in keeping with STAR-Ghana's learning approach², which recognises that lessons drawing on action and peer learning can provide the basis for reflection and prioritisation that shape and inform future actions. Insights informing this report come from the Social Development Direct (SDDirect) team, the GESI work stream, other Programme Management Team (PMT) members, grant partners (GPs) and other valued stakeholders, including the GESI consultants who are GP accompaniers and members of the GESI Technical Advisory Group (GTAG).

This synthesis report captures successes and challenges by focusing on what STAR-Ghana set out to do and reflects on what has worked well and why. Additionally, it sheds light on what has changed and what we have learned from it.

The report considers the following:

- What has been learned about integrating GESI into STAR-Ghana, and specifically into each strategic element of the GESI strategy?
- What is different to before?
- What have we learned, including about what has worked?
- What issues and obstacles were encountered and how was “fail fast” (testing, getting fast feedback and rapidly adapting) managed in overcoming them; and finally
- How has the programme changed or continued to change based on GESI analysis?

¹ The GESI work unit, comprising a GESI and Capacity Building Manager and Officer, supported by GESI Advisors at Social Development Direct (SDDirect), has gathered findings that a) emerged out of a recent GESI scan, b) were highlighted in discussions with the project management team (PMT), steering committee (SC) and the GESI technical advisory group (GTAG), and c) shared in STAR-Ghana documentation, such as the quarterly and six-monthly reports. This process, combining stakeholder and practitioner feedback with documentation and evidence from implementation, was used to assemble a concise and accessible analysis of key GESI lessons learned thus far. The original draft report was produced in October 2017; this provides an update which incorporates the conclusions and recommendation that emerged from the November 2017 Strategic Learning Event. The event, which was held in Accra, engaged all stakeholders – the PMT, Consortium members, Steering Committee members, Finance committee members, service providers (e.g. accompaniers and consultants) and Strategic Partners.

² Detailed in the Community of Learning and Practice framework and strategy document.

At the outset of the implementation of Phase 2, lessons from the first phase were drawn out and strategies to build on the strengths and address the gaps were drafted. Overall, Phase 1 was regarded as weak on GESI in terms of the depth and coordination of efforts. STAR-Ghana, in Phase 2, has rectified this in several ways, and put in place the foundations for the programme to advance its GESI agenda.

As the learning synthesis is integral to STAR-Ghana's continued learning, including through its Communities of Practice and Learning (CoPL) platform, this report will be updated annually.

2.0 What has worked well?

STAR-Ghana has strengthened its commitment to GESI through adopting an integrated three-pronged approach. Taken together, they mark a considerable shift from the “light touch” approach to GESI taken in Phase 1.

The three prongs of the GESI strategy are highlighted in the diagram and detailed below.



2.1. Robust and Ambitious GESI Strategy

The revised GESI strategy has worked well in providing a considered and focused course for the GESI work unit to pursue. The strategy builds on the lessons and experiences of the first phase of STAR-Ghana, and is informed by a scoping study, consultation with key stakeholders and verification by GTAG. During this process, STAR-Ghana recognised the need to comprehensively mainstream GESI at the organisational and programme levels for an inward and outward looking GESI orientation as well as to add movement building as a standalone GESI objective. This is integral to Execution so has positioned GESI as a fundamental aspect of STAR-Ghana GESI compliance across all strategies, policy, processes, and programs.

STAR-Ghana also recognised a bias towards gender equality which it set out to address. There are now explicit references to social inclusion in the strategy, as well as two distinct strategic objectives that address collective action and

movement-building for both gender equality and for social inclusion (Strategic Areas 3 and 4). Additionally, STAR-Ghana has established a recruitment policy that ensures diverse and representative hiring including people with disabilities, giving it a stronger focus on social inclusion. The key learning is that strategy development, based on the understanding of the context and an adaptive programming approach, results in a robust strategy – one that is focused and comprehensive.

2.2. Investment in GESI Expertise

STAR-Ghana has increased its investment in GESI in this second phase by: recruiting two full-time and highly qualified technical staff; investing in a specialist GESI-focused consortium partner (SDDirect); putting in place a seven-person GTAG made up of experts from civil society and government in Ghana; and investing in a diverse range of partnerships. There are around 35 strategic and grants partners carrying out standalone GESI projects, in addition to the other mainstream grants partners. These investments have sent a clear message about the commitment to GESI within the programme, and have ensured timely support to, and engagement with, national and local stakeholders. In addition, this investment provides STAR-Ghana with access to national and international best practice and a diversity of relevant specialisations for timely and sustained support to the GESI work unit, the PMT more broadly and to the grant partners. The key learning is that the ambition to put GESI at the centre of STAR-Ghana is unlikely to happen spontaneously - it must be backed up and driven by a clearly defined strategy, a commitment from STAR-Ghana's leadership and an investment in technical expertise.

A strong team ensures that support can be provided to the PMT, as required, and the momentum of activities can be sustained because the resources are in place to respond.

An addition learning is that while a robust GESI strategy can lead to impact and influence on how an organisation works internally and externally, it can come at a cost: money and time delays in grant and fund processing. This highlights the opportunity to demonstrate the return on investment (ROI) impact of improved equality and inclusion, - substantiating and justifying STAR-Ghana's approach to value for money. Demonstrating ROI is a strategic way to catalyse change and ensure GESI remains on the agenda of the new independent entity (NIE).

2.3. Dedicated GESI Call

This has worked well because the GESI call, the first major call after the inception phase election call, ensured that national and local GESI organisations would be able to access, participate in and benefit from STAR-Ghana. The result is that STAR-Ghana has 15 strategic, and 20 small/innovative partners that are GESI organisations. A key lesson is that commitment should be practical and visible. The GESI call is manifestation of serious intent as approximately 28.1% of the total planned grant expenditure has been committed here.

3. STAR-Ghana Lessons on Strategic Approaches to GESI

Lessons learnt about STAR-Ghana's GESI strategy are summarised in the Figure 1, and then expanded on below.

Summary of Lessons

- To enable STAR-Ghana notice issues raised at the grassroots level, it has been important to complement the mainstream grant calls with a standalone GESI call.
- To level the playing field between larger and more established CSOs, it has been essential to set up a two-tier grants system with specific actions to address the bias.
- The relationship between STAR-Ghana 'accompaniers' and grant recipients is fundamental for meaningful capacity strengthening, without making partners feeling micromanaged by STAR-Ghana.
- To build horizontal and vertical links between strategic and grants partners, creating communities of practice and learning (CoPL) is an effective approach to partnerships and stronger collaboration between organisations.
- To ensure responsibility for GESI across STAR-Ghana, expectations of each work unit must be made clear.
- PMT staff need to be supported/trained to ensure the basic skills necessary for consistent and adequate levels of GESI analysis across the programme
- Strategies such as embedded thematic GESI PEAs are required to counter the trend of conventional PEAs ignoring power and social analysis.
- The grants manual needs to set clear standards for GESI mainstreaming including analysis.
- To ensure that there are no missed opportunities for GESI mainstreaming, standardising protocols are required to set out processes for collaboration.
- Grantees need more support to reduce the focus just on access to participation and benefit.

3.1. Strategic Area 1 – Organisational/Institutional Development

3.1.1. STAR-Ghana leadership support for GESI reflected in PMT enthusiasm and commitment.

Christian Aid's recruitment of a senior leadership team strongly committed to GESI is a critical strength. They devoted much of 2017 – year one of implementation - to GESI specific calls. This included a dual track approach to grant-making: strategic partners, and small or 'innovation' partners. This ensured that local-level organisations gained from STAR-Ghana. The approach was strengthened by a commitment to using GESI accompaniers, indicating investment in capacity and quality even when these efforts resulted in programming delays. The 2017 GESI scan survey revealed that leadership commitment to GESI has been generated within STAR-Ghana, which is reflected in widespread enthusiasm for GESI across the PMT. This is a critical precondition for placing GESI at the heart of STAR-Ghana and for making GESI "everybody's business".

The learning is that leadership will, and commitment is not enough, and that responsibility for integrating GESI into programmes needs to be clearly spelt out. Although the STAR-Ghana team is collectively responsible for implementing the GESI strategy, there is weak formal accountability and uneven ownership across work units. This is in part due to the lack of job descriptions and performance assessments tracking PMT performance against GESI responsiveness. The recent GESI scan found that STAR-Ghana work units have not all equally engaged with and understood the GESI Strategy. This indicates that the strategy has not been sufficiently and clearly conveyed to the individual work units. The programme has now recognised the importance of integrating GESI into job descriptions and performance assessments to generate collective accountability. Further actions to address these issues include synthesising the GESI strategy into a one-page document, which highlights the responsibilities of each work unit, and increased engagement with Christian Aid on refreshing job descriptions and performance assessment criteria.

3.1.2. Traditional Political Economy Analyses (PEAs) Marginalises Gender and Social Scrutiny

STAR-Ghana set out to use a PEA approach that would inform adaptive programming. The key message is that the foundational PEA report did not

adequately consider issues of power related to gender and social groupings. STAR-Ghana was quick to recognise this gap and is currently drafting a Terms of Reference (ToR) for a GESI-embedded PEA. It will be integrated into the broader PEA process and the programme's learning orientation, ensuring that GESI is at the heart of these STAR-Ghana strategies for effective and adaptive programming.

The GESI PEA process will explore and identify key factors that impact on GESI – including political, institutional (rules and norms), social and cultural, beliefs and values, and historical and geographic factors. The objective is to develop a clearer picture of how GESI dynamics operate in Ghanaian politics and society and to use this knowledge to design and adapt programmes and grants. Stakeholder and power analyses, using tools provided by Christian Aid, will generate a more

Embedding GESI into all internal aspects of the institution is central to making STAR-Ghana an organisation and workplace where there are equal power relations between men and women, and where relationships between men, women and other social groups are mutually empowering. STAR-Ghana has therefore adopted a gender and social justice lens as part of its organisational development strategy. After a year of implementation, the programme has learnt a few important lessons.

distinct portrayal of who holds power and how it is used, to identify strategic actors to target and points of entry to pursue.

3.1.3. Investment in GESI expertise required to match investment in PMT for minimum GESI capacity

STAR-Ghana has invested in GESI expertise by recruiting a GESI work unit, putting in place an advisory group, and including SDDirect as technical advisors in the programme consortium. Nonetheless, there is a further need for investment to build a minimum level of awareness and skills of the PMT. The recent GESI scan showed that PMT staff are still grappling with social inclusion', both conceptually and as a reality in Ghana, and with identifying appropriate programme responses to gender inequality and social exclusion. The principal learning is that, despite integrating social inclusion into GESI strategy, more concerted action is needed to address this capacity gap. The PEA will help to build capacity in this area, through engaging the PMT

(including MEL) and grant partners by generating information from their project experiences and assisting them to apply it.

3.1.4. GESI audits important for self-reflection and adaptive programming

The August 2017 GESI scan – a self-assessment exercise for the PMT, the GTAG and Steering Committee (SC) members - was a timely and important benchmarking exercise worth celebrating. By taking stock of GESI strategy implementation, the scan shed light on where refinements could strengthen operations. This included the identification of ‘fail fasts’, such as the need to develop measurable indicators for what “GESI at the heart of STAR-Ghana” and “transformation” look like in real terms. The pivotal message is that the self-assessment approach needs to be matched with other methods, such as a robust desk study for more factual findings and gathering of perceptions of external stakeholders (partners, donors and other CSOs not funded by STAR-Ghana) to triangulate and validate findings.

3.2. Strategic Area 2 – Mainstreaming Programmes

3.2.1. STAR-Ghana’s significant efforts at mainstreaming GESI within grants call

STAR-Ghana has mainstreamed GESI into the grants call in several ways. First, scoping studies and consultations with a variety of groups, including women’s rights organisations (WROs) and social inclusion (SI) groups at national and sub-national levels, have helped to identify the key issues around GESI that should be addressed by the call. This has meant that STAR-Ghana calls are framed by its constituents and the local context. Second, projects that receive funding are required to demonstrate GESI analysis, gender data disaggregation and segmentation based on other forms of vulnerabilities. And third, projects are required to show their readiness to build partnerships with other organisations and movements for the uptake of interventions.

Finding innovative means of targeting smaller grant partners, including through the award of smaller grant amounts and a higher level of capacity building support, has been challenging. In the GESI small grants call, there was an extended period of holding information sessions in all 10 regions; and, like the Phase 1 calls, application processes were posted on District Assembly notice boards. However, this did not result in an increased number of local

organisations applying, nor did it reduce the increased fiduciary risk posed by the limited financial management capacity of many smaller grantees.

The lesson is that the two-tier GESI grant has not resulted in a GESI partnership mix that truly represents and is led by SI groups (such as informal associations of traditional queen mothers, community youth groups, trade association of persons such as ‘Kaya yes’, street hawkers, domestic workers etc). Many of the small grant partners are drawn from formal CSOs who work at the sub-national level. This has several implications for STAR-Ghana.

3.2.2. Mainstreaming protocols ensure GESI integration opportunities

Because of the August 2017 GESI scan, efforts are in place, to develop mainstreaming protocols that ensure different work units are fully engaged with the GESI work unit from the early stages of the project cycle. The mainstreaming protocol will need to be realistic in respect of the capacity of the GESI work stream, given their additional responsibilities around capacity building. Protocols will need to focus on what are non-negotiable priorities, rather than on ‘nice-to-haves’. Additionally, production of a GESI manual for PMT staff – a recommendation from the GESI scan, could also assist in highlighting GESI mainstreaming approaches to the PMT, thereby taking some pressure off the GESI work unit.

STAR-Ghana continues to recognise the importance of GESI mainstreaming in all programmes. Mainstreaming efforts have drawn on and refreshed what was done in STAR-Ghana 1, but further includes integrating GESI considerations into new guidelines relevant to STAR-Ghana’s 3 C’s programme approach. Although it is too early to assess how well STAR-Ghana is going in this area, several lessons have been realised.

3.2.3. Grant partners require guidance to move from issues of access to consequential participation and engagement

The primary takeaway is that the GESI work unit needs to clarify with the PMT and GPs that GESI sensitivity is a minimum standard, but not enough to achieve the final goal. For example, an evaluation of the election grants

found that although demonstrating GESI sensitivity and awareness was featured in the call advertisements, guidelines, and application forms, not all GP activities paid sufficient attention to GESI in their activities to promote higher levels of responsiveness – such as empowerment and transformation. There were several examples relating to improved representation and access for women and marginalised groups, but little evidence of improving the quality of engagement around the electoral process. There is the need to develop a corrective strategy, as STAR-Ghana puts out the anti-corruption and decentralisation and local governance calls. A starting point is to raise awareness in GP orientation sessions of a spectrum of GESI responsiveness through the presentation of GESI markers. This together with other tools found in the GESI tool kit (currently under production) can be used by accompaniers in the co-production of projects and ongoing support to GPs, and monitoring of projects.

3.2.4. STAR-Ghana projects currently focus more on gender equality than on social inclusion

The learning is that there is room to correct this gender equality (GE) bias by drawing on 3C's & L. STAR-Ghana can catalyse on the 'leave no one behind' focus of the Social Development Goals (SDGs), which is increasingly accepted by CSOs in Ghana. It can also mobilise its convening role to create platforms to advance these conversations. Finally, the programme and projects can borrow from what others (for example, Christian Aid, Action Aid and Oxfam) are doing to fast track a stronger social inclusion focus.

3.2.5. Social inclusion focusses to be mindful of “Least Harm” principle

Reflection by PMT and GPs sheds light on the need to better understand the drivers and experiences of discrimination; to exercise caution around the risks of isolation and rejection associated with exposing marginalised people; and to be cognisant of the time required to bring about shifts in mind-set. A key learning is that the existence of a less repressive regime in Ghana does not always mean that Ghanaians are ready for huge shifts in attitudes around deeply sensitive issues. For example, the issue of sexual orientation is highly sensitive, and care is therefore needed in addressing the issue of exclusion of gay and transgendered individuals. Indeed, these sensitivities exist even with the GESI family at STAR-Ghana, where some members do not view sexual exclusion as a priority and are keen to remain focused on achieving GESI 'bread and butter' issues, before addressing questions of sexual orientation.

3.2.6. Building partnerships with state institutions to strengthen responsiveness to Civil Society

STAR-Ghana has acknowledged that addressing both the ‘supply’ and ‘demand’ side is required to achieve substantial, systemic advances in gender equality and social inclusion. While STAR-Ghana does not support state actors as part of its mainstreaming strategy outside of its parliamentary work stream, it does have the flexibility to provide support to state institutions in line with its strategies for change. This flexibility has enabled the programme to explore partnerships with key state institutions that have different and reinforcing roles relating to GESI. STAR-Ghana’s support to Parliament is heavily driven by GESI considerations. The identification of ‘influencers’, both within and outside of these committees has been recognized as one entry point, in addition to action plans to integrate GESI into the parliamentary work stream. Support includes the current production of two GESI guidance notes – one illustrating best practice innovations in working with Parliaments and the second, focusing more narrowly on budgeting as a critical mainstreaming tool at national level. The principle gained is that state actors also require technical support to strengthen their capacity to fulfil their constitutional and statutory mandates from a GESI perspective, and to respond appropriately to demands from civil society on their policies and practices. There is a chance to fast track developments here as STAR-Ghana’s support can tap into and build on past support and strategies used in Ghana, including an existing gender training manual and experience with gender budgeting.

3.3. Strategic Areas 3 and 4 - Collective Action and Movement-Building

3.3.1. Focusing on the promotion of unity among different social groups; and Collective action and movement building among civil society organisations and citizenry

Areas 3 and 4 spotlights the promotion of unity and collective action among different social groups or causes. Phase 2 builds on the earlier phase by recognising that giving targeted attention to issues related to GESI as a ‘stand-alone’ programme is an effective way of generating specific results in increased accountability for assets, rights, and service delivery, giving voice to excluded groups, and to shift the rules of the game generally. It is too early in implementation to comment on results at this stage, except to extract that the cluster model for grant partners has created a foundation for relationship and trust building that is critical for collaboration, collective action and nurturing communities of practice and learning.

3.3.2. Strengthening engagement alongside People with Disabilities (PWD)

Finding effective ways to amplify the voices of duty bearers who inform policy amongst PWDs is an ongoing challenge. Reflection between the GPs suggests that a strategy informed by an understanding of human rights and support for mass CSO engagement, including support to beneficiary-led organisations such as youth for youth issues, PWD-led CSOs working on PWD issues, would provide a powerful basis from which to advocate for state accountability.

3.3.3. STAR-Ghana's catalysing role important in gender equality and social inclusion

A key finding is that GESI activism and linking advocacy to government efforts is important to catalyse change, but it is not sufficient in isolation. STAR-Ghana's catalyst role is crucial to improve equality and inclusion in Ghana and needs to be deliberately activated in innovative ways. For example, PMT and GP reflections suggest that the programme needs to signal ways to catalyse the power of private sector organisations to change social policy, for example, using tax breaks to incentivise change. It also needs to be creative in tackling resistance to GESI within certain people and organisations. This points to the need for making a clear case for the benefits of GESI beyond simply a way to access funding.

3.3.4. STAR-Ghana two-tier grant system to differentiate capacity between grant partners

STAR Ghana has addressed the differing capacity and influences of larger and more established CSOs and the smaller ones, by use of a differentiated strategy based on a two-tier grant system for strategic partners and smaller grant partners at district or local level. While the programme works with the small grant partners and the strategic partners in different ways - in terms of the size and period of the grants, and types of accompanier or capacity building support -there is no preferential treatment. The key lesson is that the structure of grants and the support for them needs to be customised to level the playing field for the different types of partnerships to engage all levels of GESI groups.

1.3.5. Importance of relationship between STAR-Ghana ‘accompaniers’ and grant recipients

Using national consultants as accompaniers is an innovative approach. Ghana held several meetings with prospective strategic grantees to ensure proposals were technically and programmatically viable, as well as sufficiently GESI-focused. This support proved critical, particularly for organisations inexperienced in applying for donor funds or in GESI focused partnerships. In addition, the accompanier model has allowed partners to cluster into thematic groups; this approach facilitates peer learning critical to an embedded PEA approach, partner coordination, and for STAR-Ghana to make connections by drawing out the collective impact of grant support. Building on this will be important to advance STAR-Ghana’s 3C’s and L approach.

The strategy of grant writing with partners serves to move STAR-Ghana away from its traditional role of grant-making and towards a position of delivering on its convening, catalysing, and coordinating role of CS actions towards transformational change. The accompaniment of proposal writing has opened organizations to participatory programming on GESI and has laid a foundation for incentivising joined up actions. Nevertheless, co-creation through accompaniment has partly contributed to the delays in the start of projects. The insight from this is that to use the accompanier approach for other calls, there ought to be strict adherence to timelines.

3.3.6. Creating communities of practice and learning (CoPL) to link strategic partners and small grants partners

One of the aims of the GESI call was to encourage collaboration between grantees to increase their collective capacity to exert vertical influence. However, consultations with partners in Tamale and Takoradi highlighted several barriers. For example, smaller CSOs struggle to compete with larger organisations for funding. Organisations led by marginalised groups – particularly those with disabilities – often lack the confidence to engage beyond their immediate context and/or established spheres of activity. It was also noted that the distrust created by actual or perceived competition between grantees can undermine efforts to promote collaboration. The critical takeaway for STAR-Ghana is the need to find more innovative ways of incentivising linkages between different levels of organisations and drawing out the benefits and value added for all parties.

3.3.7. Creating communities of practice and learning around GESI themes aids collective action

The co-creation of strategic proposals between grantees, the GESI technical team and accompaniers created an opportunity for stimulating joint analyses and design of collective actions, responses, and interventions around GESI. Despite the difficulty partners experienced in coming up with spaces for collective actions (not always their preferred way of working), the process of trying to do so highlighted that the coordination of partners efforts will indeed be critical to achieving the systemic changes flagged in the GESI call.

4. Moving forward

This synthesis report concludes with six principal reflections drawn from the November 2017 Strategic Learning Event (SLE). They shed light on opportunities for STAR-Ghana going forward.

- Live up to the responsibility of putting GESI words and commitments into action: Make the integration, impact, and benefits of GESI clear and visible to others. Communicate and share approaches to, and achievements around, GESI as part of the STAR-Ghana branding
- Seize the many opportunities that exist to advance GESI further: Make maximum use of the STAR-Ghana platforms to increase awareness, catalyse action, facilitate movement building and advocate for the implementation of existing government plans and policies. Focus on leveraging partnerships with state institutions and strengthening their responsiveness to civil society demands.
- Test approaches to catalysing and spotlighting advances in social inclusion: Seize the space provided by the programme to pilot test innovative ways to effectively address social norms that perpetuate exclusion.
- Systematically capture and document GESI lessons: Generate a better understanding of what works to track improvements and adapt programmes and projects.
- Tap into the momentum of citizen action and advocacy: Harness the enthusiasm and power of key stakeholder groups- such as the young and the middle classes who are revealing themselves to be key agents of citizen driven change and advocacy in Ghana.

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