

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FUND (SDF)
COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH REPORT ON THE 2ND AND 3RD CALL FOR PROPOSALS
December 2013

Summary of the Call #2 strategy and outcomes: The outreach strategy for the 2nd Call for proposals proved to be effective in mobilising stakeholders to appreciate SDF and consequently apply to SDF for support, where necessary. The outcomes of the 2nd Call outreach programme, which is the number and quality of grant applications the PSU received, is evidence of a successful strategy which targeted directly and indirectly, specific and general stakeholder community in TVET, Science, Technology and Research, Hospitality and Tourism, ICT and Building and Construction among others. The strategy included the following:

Interface engagement with selected key institutions and economic units across the country, mass awareness campaigns at the national level using print and electronic mediums, regional level informational sessions targeting small and micro enterprises, expert interviews on SDF using national media networks and regional media in various languages, cluster meetings with science, technology and research institutions. These strategies were complimented with the engagement of intermediaries across the country, to support prospective applicants in proposal development.

Targets and outcomes

Call 2 targeted 400 applications with an expected 100 approvals amounting to GHC 20 Million. The outcomes was an increased quantity of applications (from 195 in Call #1 to 428 in Call #2.) and a corresponding improvement in the quality of proposals submitted leading to the award of 79 grants, from an initial 6 grants during Call 1. The final 79 approved proposals under Call #2 are provisionally worth 24 Million, which exceeds the target.. This is an indication that Call # 2 strategy, from all angles, was very successful.

Lessons

Even though successful, the outreach strategy had several challenges which has provided good lessons for the Communications and Outreach team and therefore requires urgent attention of the SDF Manager. These include the inequitable role of intermediaries, varying stakeholder perspectives on SDF's key concepts and the seemingly amorphous and irrelevant skills training requests from trade associations at the district, regional and national levels and the significant number of failed proposals with prospective concepts.

The limited numbers of intermediaries in underserved regions occasioned an inequitable implementation of the outreach strategy in the informal sector. A cardinal presumption of the mass outreach and informational sessions for the informal sector is the availability of intermediaries to provide technical support in the development of proposals. This, in view of the quite sophisticated and cumbersome SDF application process, bearing in mind the illiteracy rates in the Upper East, Upper West and Western Region specifically, and in general, rural Ghana, the role of intermediaries has become a non-negotiable one for the informal sector applicants.

The limited availability of intermediaries in the Northern (2), Upper East(3) Upper West (1) and Western (2) compared to Ashanti, Greater Accra and Volta, affected to a large extent, the number of applications submitted from such underserved regions. This evidenced in the number of applications from Upper East (10), Upper West (10), Western (13), compared to Ashanti (37)Greater Accra (241) and Eastern (37). A

further analysis of the applications from underserved regions indicate that, the average number of proposals from each district in the Upper East, Upper West and Western regions was below 0.7, which suggests that, there were no proposals from 30% of the districts and only 1 proposal per district, from the remaining 70% of districts in the three most underserved regions. It is worthy of note that, whereas Eastern and Central region had equally low numbers of intermediaries (1 and 2 respectively), their proximity to Accra made it easy for applicants from the two regions to access the services of intermediaries in the Greater Accra region.

Recommendations: It is factual that, the number of Consultants in the underserved regions are few. Where there was any, they were located only in the regional capitals, limiting access by applicants located in remote districts. The Communications and Outreach team recommends the following two alternatives:

- a. The PSU should re-advertise request for intermediaries in underserved regions.
- b. The PSU should re-open negotiations with the National Board for Small Scale Industries, to explore the possibility of engaging district Business Advisory Centres of the NBSSI in the underserved regions to provide intermediary services on SDF.
- a. In lieu of the above, selected NGOs in underserved areas should be engaged to serve as SDF informational centres in the respective districts in underserved regions. Information on SDF could be obtained from such established district level NGOs, who will also act as intermediaries during Calls for proposal. Notable NGOs whose interest in skills and sustainable livelihood, make them prospective to partner SDF include Action AID, PLAN Ghana and World Vision.
- b. Incoherent applications from district membership of national Trade Associations (TAs): Over 30 different TAs submitted applications under Call #2. These comprised groups in the Beauty and Cosmetics, Carpentry and Joinery, Metal and Fabrication, Automotive, Consumer Electronics, Plumbing, Poultry and Livestock, Hospitality and Tourism, Building and Construction, Fashion Designing among others. There were varying skills training requests from the various district, regional and even national associations which brought into question, the relevance and need for such skills in the vocations in question. In view of these, it was necessary to engage TAs to develop their own Training Plans within which all districts may apply for support from SDF or any other partner.
- c. Out of the number of applications that failed either at evaluation or at the Committee , there were quite a significant chunk (about 60) that had good concepts that only required repackaging for resubmitting

Refocusing the communication strategy: The strategy under Call #2 focused on increasing public and stakeholder appreciation of SDF, its focus and objectives and how to apply. The evaluation of Call #2 proposals suggested that about 50% of applications failed as a result of limited or no understanding of the demand-driven concept of SDF.

There is need to diversify the communication strategy to encompass stakeholders appreciation of the demand-driven concept of SDF, the SDF position on equipment purchase as a requirement for skills and technology proposals, the SDF distinction between equipment, tools and technology, as well as the

'emerging' SDF position on pre-employment training and post equipment installation training for staff in the formal private sector window (window 1).

The Call #3 outreach strategy

Objectives

- a. To deepen public and stakeholder appreciation of key SDF Concepts
- b. To inform the general and stakeholder community about the SDF 3rd Call for proposals
- c. To provide technical support to prospective applicants to submit quality proposals
- d. To provide visibility to SDF and grantee sub-projects

Communication strategy : The SDF communication strategy adopted for the period, and in line with the SDF strategic communications policy, was aimed at:

- a. Registering brand 'SDF' into the minds of the public and stakeholder community by making SDF a household name.
- b. Deepening the public and stakeholder community's understanding of the fact that, SDF provides funding for skills and technology development, and is not a training provider.
- c. Enhancing stakeholder acceptance of SDF's position on equipment purchase, as part of skills and technology development proposals.
- d. Improved stakeholder understanding of the 'demand driven' nature of SDF
- e. Increased stakeholder appreciation of new SDF application procedures and guidelines

The outreach strategy also focused on:

- a. Enhanced information sharing on new SDF application process, requirements
- b. Increased direct engagement with district level stakeholders on SDF
- c. Increased engagement with Science, Technology and Research institutions on SDF Windows 3 & 4
- d. Enhanced capacity of Trade Associations to access SDF funding at all levels (District, regional, national)
- e. Providing technical support to selected unsuccessful Call #2 applicants

Communications and Outreach activities

Activities under objective 1: To deepen public and stakeholder appreciation of key SDF concepts

- a. Organised TV interviews on SDF
- b. Organised a sponsored TV programme (Akan Drama) on SDF
- c. Held individual meetings with failed Call #2 applicants to explain 'misconceived' SDF concepts
- d. Organised 9 regional level outreach workshops for 800 prospective applicants from the districts

Activities under component 2: To inform the general and stakeholder community about the SDF 3rd Call for proposals

- a. Organised 9 regional level and 2 national level radio discussions local dialects
- b. Published over 60 full page slots print adverts on SDF Call #3 and the contacts of intermediaries in the most circulated newspapers
- c. Organised an information session for 40 Science, Technology and Research Institutions
- d. Held one-on-one meetings with selected formal private sector industries across the SDF sectors
- e. Produced and aired 230 audio and audio visual adverts 190 on SDF Call #3 in English and Akan on major media platforms

Activities under objective 3: To provide technical support to prospective applicants to submit quality proposals

- a. Held 3 zonal meetings (*Accra, Kumasi, Tamale*) with selected unsuccessful Call #2 applicants to review and re-submit proposals under the 3rd Call.
- b. Organised Training Needs Assessment workshops for 20 Trade Associations to develop training plans within which their regional and district membership may submit SDF proposals.

Activities under objective 4: To provide visibility to SDF and SDF funded projects

- a. Strengthened the SDF media network nationwide
- b. Provided consistent coverage to SDF activities & sub-projects using 12 major media platforms
- c. Published newspaper articles on key SDF sector issues

Challenges

Lack of a clear understanding of “SDF’s position” on equipment, innovative technology and the demand driven concepts, on the part of applicants who did not have the opportunity of attending SDF outreach workshops.

The need to strengthen SDF application feedback mechanisms to inspire and sustain confidence in SDF’s grant making process remains a non-negotiable option, moving forward. This is not so easy, bearing in mind the large volume (about 60%) of informal sector applications without reliable and consistent e-mail address or postal addresses. The use of a text based response system is an option to be considered for that sector, while e- mails could be maintained for the formal sector applicants.

