



ACODE Fostering a collaborative platform for dialogue

With its State of the Nation platform, the *Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment* (ACODE) created an important forum for bipartisan policy discussions in Uganda.

**HON. IRENE MULONI,
MINISTER,
MINISTRY OF
ENERGY AND
MINERAL
DEVELOPMENT,
RECENTLY
RECOGNIZED
ACODE FOR
"THE ADVOCACY
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SECTOR."**

SETTING THE SCENE —Over the past ten years, Ugandan think tanks and civil service organizations have increased both the scope and the intensity of their engagement in national public policy and governance issues. In terms of scope, these organizations are more engaged in macro-level discourse on issues ranging from poverty eradication planning and public expenditure to democracy and governance. With regard to intensity, they have evolved into a new force helping to define, shape, and influence policy in an unprecedented way. To realize their full potential, however, they need to keep up with Uganda's rapidly evolving policy advocacy landscape. The country is undergoing many transformations related to policymaking, including increased citizen engagement, a higher demand for accountability among leaders, and a shift away from traditional policy-making institutions.

As the first Ugandan policy think tank to pursue evidence-based policy advocacy, the Advocates

Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE) helped to shape the policy advocacy landscape in Eastern and Southern Africa. Over the last 10 years, the organization has established a track record as convener and facilitator of multi-stakeholder dialogues on contemporary, emerging, and sometimes controversial national, regional, and international public policy issues. Despite this, until recently, ACODE was unable to access the funds it required to keep up with the evolutions in Ugandan policymaking. Fortunately, core funding support from the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) made it possible for the organization to develop an effective and timely policy outreach initiative.

WHAT ACODE DID —With its TTI funds, ACODE created the State of the Nation platform as a collaborative national policy forum to promote dialogue on contemporary public policy and governance issues in Uganda. For the first time, the platform brings together individual leaders and professionals in the public and private sectors, civil society, the media and other interest groups



into a policy discourse on such critical issues as budget policy, oil governance, regional security, public service delivery, and electoral reforms. It draws from a TED Conference format and a Doha Debates model to incorporate formal debates, Q & A sessions, panel presentations, and personal storytelling. The State of the Nation platform includes a local level segment that puts national policy debates into the local context and a student segment for nurturing and encouraging a new generation of young leaders, as well as broadcasts, podcasts and a network linked to electronic media.

Oil governance has featured prominently on the policy stage in recent years, and ACODE helped to inform the policy and legislative agenda in this sector. Attracting commercial interests has been an essential issue in Uganda since the 2006 discovery of oil reserves, and government policies for licensed companies are aimed at continued explorations. Today more than 2.5 billion barrels of oil have been discovered and investments to date exceed US\$1 billion in this highly important

sector. The National Oil and Gas Policy is the key document for its development, and by bringing stakeholders together ACODE hopes to influence its evolution. For its 25th session on the State of the Nation platform in 2011, ACODE facilitated an exchange of ideas among stakeholders on the future development of the petroleum sector, including a presentation by the Minister of Energy and Mineral Development.

THE OUTCOME —Two years later, in July 2013, ACODE held its 42nd monthly session of the State of the Nation platform. The State of the Nation platform today is perhaps the only policy forum to host high profile policy makers and politicians from across the political divide in Uganda and the East African Community. The platform has evolved into Uganda's recognized forum for bipartisan policy discussions, building bridges between its members and senior level policy makers and political leaders, and is one of the few structured fora in the country where research and empirical evidence matter.

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For more information on the Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment visit www.acode-u.org

TTI's Stories of Influence Series

This series, produced by TTI, shares stories about the impact Southern think tanks have on policy initiatives. All the think tanks featured in this series are supported by the [Think Tank Initiative](http://www.thinktankinitiative.org), a multi-donor program dedicated to strengthening the capacity of independent policy research organizations in the developing world. At www.thinktankinitiative.org, you can find profiles on the organizations in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia supported by the program, as well as publications, working papers, and general information about TTI.