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Women in Policy Series: Social Policy in Colombia and Improving Education in Ghana

To mark the occasion of International Women's Day, IPA presents the first of three posts this week interviewing female policymakers we've worked with in different countries around the world. They told us about their experiences working in government and promoting a culture of evidence-based policymaking within their institutions, how the COVID-19 pandemic changed their work, and what long-term impacts they hope to achieve in the sectors in which they work.

Olga Lucia Romero, Director of Monitoring and Evaluation, Department of National Planning, Colombia

As head of the DNP's Monitoring and Evaluation Division, Olga works to promote evidence-based decision-making within DNP and other agencies to support policy implementation, including ensuring that the government evaluates its programs to discern their impact. The DNP is responsible for translating Colombia's national and international commitments—for example, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Peace Accord, and the National Development Plan—into actionable and measurable policies. She's developed her niche in monitoring and evaluation and has dedicated her career to understanding program impacts and improving decision-making processes within government.



When did you know that you were interested in working in the public sector? What project have you been most proud of in your career?

I knew from a young age that I wanted to dedicate myself to improving Colombian society, and I've approached this mission from both the private and public sectors.

The initiative I'm most proud of was coordinating the long-term evaluation of one of Colombia's cornerstone conditional cash transfers, *Familias en Accion*, ten years after its launch. *Familias* emerged in 2000 as one policy response to rising levels of poverty in tandem with declines in school attendance and food security among lower-income households, with the purpose of encouraging poorer families to improve health and nutrition practices, and school attendance. The evaluation took me to several rural areas across the country to document beneficiaries' experiences, and this evaluation informed further improvements to the program. The experience affirmed for me the importance of centering beneficiaries' experiences that don't always get captured in statistics to inform an agency's approach to program design and implementation. Today, *Familias* is a critical part of Colombia's social assistance system, and impact evaluations have played a large role for the government in informing the continuity and design of the program. *Familias* reaches more than 2 million families and has been a key lifeline for, especially vulnerable families during the pandemic.

How do you work to promote evidence and evaluation within your work at DNP? How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your work?

My experience with the evaluation and implementation of social assistance programs has been especially critical for my work at DNP and helping to shape the government's emergency social assistance response to COVID-19. My team has been reviewing or advising on several ongoing IPA initiatives during the pandemic, including the RECOVR survey, an evaluation on the VAT Compensation emergency cash transfer, and an evaluation on the Solidarity Income cash transfer. We have been analyzing the insights from these studies to inform government policies during the pandemic and identify areas for further policy improvement and scale.

In general, a large part of my role at DNP is dedicated to collaborating with other government agencies to promote an understanding of the importance of evaluations and instill a culture of evidence-based decision-making. However, this isn't always easy or straightforward; sometimes colleagues consider evaluations to be audits and they may be apprehensive about undertaking a program evaluation. When this happens, I've found that training sessions and other capacity-building tools have helped to address common misconceptions and build the foundations for data-driven decisions.

What are you working on nowadays?

As Colombia works to implement its ambitious economic reactivation and sustainable growth strategy, DNP's role in effectively coordinating among the government's many ministries

takes on even greater importance. Ensuring that the population is vaccinated, that students continue learning, and that businesses can thrive, among many priorities, demands an approach that is data-driven and evidence-based. With this strategy in place, I am excited to collaborate with my planning counterparts in other ministries to equip them with the technical capacity and evidence for implementing the policy priorities that the National Council for Social and Economic Policy has outlined for Colombia's economic recovery and growth.

***Dr. Haggar Hilda Ampadu, Inspector General of Schools/Executive Director,
National Schools Inspectorate Authority, Ghana***

Dr. Haggar Hilda Ampadu directs the National Schools Inspectorate Authority. In this capacity, she is responsible for creating, institutionalizing, and overseeing the establishment, registration, licensing, inspections, and assessments of Ghana's all public and private pre-tertiary schools in Ghana. Upon assuming her role as the Inspector General of Schools/Executive Director, she has worked to create streamlined processes, with an emphasis on digitization, standard operating procedures development, policy development, and implementation.



What motivated you to go into the public sector?

Over the course of my career, I've worked across 36 African countries to develop and strengthen health systems. This was mainly in the domain of medicine safety for the World Health Organization (WHO), which required me to understand quality control, supply chains, and other systems and processes. Through this work, I realized that there were insufficient documentation processes and effective systems approaches in many organizational operations, mainly across Africa. This realization is what motivated me to work in policymaking and implementation, and now I work to promote integrity and transparency in Ghana's education sector.

My goal in creating and institutionalizing policies and processes within the National Schools Inspectorate Authority (NaSIA) is for schools to be fully aware of our mandate, processes, and requirements, per the Education Regulatory Bodies Act, 2020 (Act 1023) and operate their schools within the remit of the law. We also want our stakeholders and the general public to know that we operate in a spirit of transparency. For instance, our School Inspection Reports, a list of Registered Schools, and aspects of the new law, among others, are published on [our website](#) for ease of verification. With the integrity of these processes and data-driven decisions, we can better ensure that we are supporting our learners—who are our essential stakeholders.

How has your work changed because of the pandemic over the last year? What has been the biggest challenge for you and for the National Schools Inspectorate Authority?

The pandemic has seriously affected our school Inspections. We recognized the need for the continuation of teaching and learning in this time of crisis, we were thus inspired to conduct virtual school inspections. In addition, in partnership with the UNICEF-Ghana office, we developed and published the National E-learning Standards and accompanying guidelines for pre-tertiary schools in April 2020 in response to COVID-19 and school closures. This has been a key resource for schools nationwide over the course of the pandemic.

In addition to adapting to the crisis, we still need to keep up with our planned operations. For example, prior to a collaboration with UNICEF in the 2019-2020 academic year, we did not have specific inspection tools for assessing the quality of learning in kindergartens. In partnership with the UNICEF-Ghana office, we have now developed kindergarten inspection tools that will be deployed in the next inspection term during the 2021 academic year.

How have you promoted evidence-based policymaking within the National Schools Inspectorate Authority, and what are some challenges in doing so?

One of my main goals is to continually identify areas that can be improved for better organizational capacity and effectiveness. For example, the National Schools Inspectorate Authority previously had a series of ad-hoc processes for inspections and audits to assess the

quality of education for learners. In June 2019, with technical assistance from IPA and DFID-Ghana in the form of four personnel forming a part of our core digitization team, we digitized the inspection approach and this significantly streamlined data collection processes. As a result of this digitization, data to support policy decisions is collected at the school level and received in real-time by headquarters in Accra for reporting and analysis. This approach better ensures that each inspection report is based on objective evidence, and thus limits subjectivity and opportunities for bias.

Prior to my joining NaSIA, there were also limited policies guiding the organization's work. In my role as Executive Director, I am championing the development of key policies to support our mandate in my bid to ensure that all our processes are well documented and published. I've worked to develop the School Establishment and Inspection Policy (SEaIP), School Licensing Policy (SLiP), Safeguarding Policy, and School-Based Assessment Policy. The SEaIP and SLiP, developed with financial support from the UNESCO-Ghana office and the Education Partnership Group-UK respectively, started in June 2020. They are now near completion and have gone through various Technical Working Group meetings and stakeholder reviews and are awaiting approval, including at the Ministerial level. Each policy is also accompanied by specific guidelines to aid its implementation and operationalization.

All that being said, the push to create more effective and efficient processes to make decision-making more data-driven is still a big challenge for us. Inadequate resources, in terms of financial resources, equipment, staff time, and capacity building to give a few examples, is the biggest challenge that we face. However, digitizing many of our inspection processes has enabled us to work within these constraints. For example, by adopting a statistical sampling approach for selecting schools for inspection, we have increased the number of schools inspected from about 50 to now 2,341 per academic year—this is a huge win for us. More importantly, with this approach and the expanded sampling we have, we can confidently extrapolate the results across all schools in Ghana. We've also focused on reducing manual and human efforts in our operations. For instance, school registration and payment processes at NaSIA are now automated and done online, which allows us to more efficiently track these processes and assess support for schools regardless of their location in the country.

I am committed to continuing to improve the quality of the work of the Inspectorate Authority by institutionalizing data-driven processes and decisions.

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