Received: 16 March 2022 | Accepted: 20 June 2022

DOI: 10.1111/dpr.12656

ARTICLE

WILEY

Why national development experts are not included in development policy-making and practice: The case of Ghana

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Funding information

Dean's Research Fund at the University of South Wales, University of South Wales

Summary

Motivation: This article contributes to the debate around understanding whether and how the identity of aid workers (e.g. nationality, race, etc.) can contribute to inequality within various aid relationships. As "decolonizing development" is often employed either as a slogan or genuine goal, it is imperative that the politics of exclusion among/within development experts is critically scrutinized.

Purpose: This article explores the processes of and the motivations behind how national development experts (NDEs) are frequently excluded in development policy-making and practice in Ghana.

Methods and approach: This article relies on qualitative research methods and draws from semi-structured interviews conducted in two phases in 2017 and 2018 in Ghana. We focus on the narratives of the NDEs in Ghana who are perceived to be well placed to elucidate different mechanics of exclusionary processes and practice.

Findings: International development experts (IDEs) are able to set agendas and exercise development decision-making power as their governments or organizations provide funding for many development projects. This allows IDEs to influence development policies and practices in a way that eventually excludes the NDEs from development policy-making in Ghana. We also reveal internal competition and power relations between NDEs and local actors (i.e. bureaucrats and politicians) can also exclude the NDEs from development policy-making processes, a feature that is non-existent in current scholarship.

Policy implications: The exclusion of NDEs from national development decision-making processes undermines efforts to promote national ownership. It is important to adopt a holistic approach that does not just focus on one particular aspect (e.g. power inequality among different actors) of exclusionary practice in international development but also looks into local political-cultural settings as well as possible internal competition for resources.

KEYWORDS

development expertise, exclusion, Ghana, international development experts (IDEs), national development experts (NDEs), power relations

1 | INTRODUCTION

This article explores the processes of how national development experts (NDEs) are frequently excluded in development policy-making and practice in Ghana.[1] To understand this, we focus on the narratives of the NDEs in Ghana who are perceived to be well placed in elucidating different mechanics of such exclusionary processes and practice. At a time when "decolonizing development" is often invoked either as a slogan or genuine goal, it is imperative that the politics of exclusion among/within development experts is critically scrutinized since international development and the aid architecture are deeply hierarchical (Langdon, 2013; Patel, 2020) including diverse stakeholders with different interests and power (Tortajada, 2016). Broadly speaking, differences in the ability to deploy power and interests in the design and delivery of development raise the question of "whose development" should be promoted (Crewe & Harrison, 1998; Scott, 1990) and who should be included in the process. Evidently, the practice of development generally includes the actors who are deemed to be best placed to achieve desired goals and objectives set by the donors and governments (de Haan, 2009; Mawdsley, 2014). Consequently, these actors might feel that they possess an inherent right to lead the development process by providing rationales for intervention, based on a particular deployment of information and moral argument (Lemke, 2001; Li, 2007; Marriage, 2006). Clearly, the processes of international development exclude different actors who could be less powerful, whose voices are not as strong as the actors who are included, or even who might be identified as "non-essential" for the implementation of development projects while casting them as incorrigible and undesirable (Scott-Villiers, 2011).

This article aims to explore how some of these practices can help understand the politics of exclusion within/among the development experts with a particular emphasis on their nationality. We take Ghana as a case study and believe that insights from Ghana relating to the exclusion of NDEs in national development processes may apply to other low-, lower-middle and upper-middle income countries where the contributions of NDEs to national development are less recognized or invisible. The main argument of this article is that the processes of excluding the NDEs should be understood through a combination of factors. There is inherent power inequality in Ghana's aid sector (perhaps also true for other low-, lower-middle and upper-middle income countries) due to the financial prowess of donor countries that create a conducive atmosphere for the IDEs to occupy superior roles within the aid sector. IDEs enjoy a privileged position despite potentially possessing similar expertise and perhaps lack contextual knowledge than their Ghanaian counterparts. Such privilege often gives the IDEs an upper hand in setting and implementing the agendas for development policies in Ghana. This not only consolidates existing power imbalances within aid relationships in Ghana but also excludes the NDEs from making a significant contribution to their own country's development. Such observation augments some of the existing works that focus on the disparities between western experts and local experts (see Kumi & Kamruzzaman, 2021; Sou, 2022; Sundberg, 2019a). However, this article takes the debate further by delineating the role of politicians and internal competition that can also exclude/sideline the NDEs from Ghana's development policy-making. Politicians in Ghana tend to use development projects/success to serve their political and perhaps other material goals as developed further in Sections 4 and 5 below (see also Abdulai, 2017; Abdulai & Hulme, 2015). The primacy of the politicians and their clientele bureaucrats within a neo-patrimonial political culture along with their preference for the IDEs can further dissociate the NDEs from the development policy-making process. To this end, understanding the factors that account for the lack of recognition, power dynamics, and subsequent exclusion of NDEs in development processes is particularly useful and has policy implications for other low-, lower-middle and upper-middle income countries.

This article, therefore, contributes to the emerging literature on development expertise in two ways. First, we show how Ghana's dependence on external donor funding reinforces unequal power relationships between local aid

[1]In contrast to the broader category of "International" Development Experts (IDEs) who predominantly come from Western donor countries and work for various projects in aid recipient counties, in this article we use Kamruzzaman's (2017) categorization of National Development Experts (NDEs) who possess similar skills, knowledge, experience, and expertise to IDEs but are the citizens of low-, lower-middle and upper-middle income countries working in/for their own countries. For a conceptual discussion on the NDEs see Kamruzzaman (2017, 2021) and for NDEs' roles and motivation in Ghana's development sector, see Kumi and Kamruzzaman (2021).

workers (i.e. NDEs) and IDEs which in turn leads to the exclusion of the former in the development policy-making processes and practice. The exclusion of NDEs limits their potential contributions to national development and undermines efforts to promote national ownership, which is a key principle of aid effectiveness. Second, by focusing on the perspectives of NDEs, we demonstrate that the exclusion of NDEs in national development processes is in part a result of competition and unequal power dynamics between politicians and NDEs. Our findings, therefore, highlight the primacy of the power and interests of politicians and its unintended consequences for national development.

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on development experts in the context of international development. This is followed by a discussion of the research methodology and the context of Ghana as a case study in Section 3. Section 4 presents the research findings drawing on the empirical evidence collected from NDEs in Ghana. In Section 5 we discuss the research findings and provides some concluding remarks by highlighting the implications of the findings for development policy and practice.

2 | DEVELOPMENT EXPERTS IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Over the years, development experts have become key actors in the aid sector. These experts have spearheaded development efforts mostly through the adoption of scientific and technocratic approaches (Easterly, 2013). To this end, development experts have played key roles in the design, formulation, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of development policies and interventions in most low-, lower-middle and upper-middle income countries (White, 2020; Koch, 2020).

Historically, development has been framed in terms of technical knowledge and informed by a positivist perspective where decision-making mostly involves professionals or technocrats with specific knowledge. For this reason, many development interventions in low-, lower-middle and upper-middle income countries are based on international experts' perspectives rather than local knowledge (Escobar, 1995). In fact, as the existing literature highlights, western knowledge is considered superior to local knowledge (Koch, 2020; Sou, 2021), especially as adopted by international organizations and western governments supporting development interventions in many low-, lower-middle and upper-middle income countries (Wilson, 2006).

Over the years, as part of the technocratic approach to development, international development experts (IDEs) have been recognized as actors proliferating technical knowledge and techniques through their involvement in development interventions (White, 2020). In doing so, they "technicalize" development and policy problems by offering technical and specialist services as brokers and translators (Lewis & Mosse, 2006), and negotiating development processes between donors and their recipients (Kamruzzaman, 2017). Similarly, Li (2007) considers development experts as specialists who can turn socioeconomic and political issues into technical problems. Turner (2013, p. 17) rightly insists that "expertise is treated as a kind of possession which privileges its possessors with powers that the people cannot successfully control, and cannot acquire or share in."

However, the increasing reliance on development experts within the aid sector has also raised concerns about neglect of the knowledge and perspectives of the "locals" in development policy design, implementation, and evaluation (Chambers, 1997; Watene & Yap, 2015). Arguably, the "locals" given their contextual understandings and knowledge can make significant contributions to how development problems ought to be addressed. Indeed, as Watene and Yap (2015) argue, local experts (whom we broadly consider as NDEs) are able to provide different perspectives which can make an important contribution to the shared understanding of development.

At this stage, it might be useful to clearly state that we do not mean that people born in low-, lower-middle and upper-middle income countries, including Ghana, always possess better knowledge than foreign experts (i.e. IDEs). We recognize that using such a blanket binary approach is not helpful. To illustrate, recent works by Peters (2020) and Sundberg (2019b) show, in the contexts of Angola and Tanzania respectively, that in-country development professionals may have a similar type of knowledge due to their education and training (often in western universities) and class background (largely from affluent or elite backgrounds). Kamruzzaman (2013) describes them as a "comprador class" who pursue self-interest and other benefits by "parroting" the donors' language. Whether this is a performative

action (aimed at the donors to get into their good books) is perhaps a larger issue, but certainly allows us to distance ourselves from making the indiscriminate suggestion that people born in a specific country may possess deeper local knowledge than outsiders/foreigners. Nevertheless, we want to emphasize that the hierarchical nature of international development identifies the national staff as beneficiaries of development interventions rather than professionals who enjoy less professional authority than their foreign colleagues (Peters, 2020; Sou, 2021; Sundberg, 2019a). Even if we hypothetically assume that many IDEs may possess better local knowledge than the NDEs, the overwhelming experience indicates that in-country development professionals' knowledge is believed to be "less credible" (Koch, 2020, p. 483). This in turn creates unequal power relationships which are manifested, for example, in privileging western expertise and knowledge over local knowledge (Kothari, 2006; Pailey, 2020; Sou, 2021). As Kumi and Kamruzzaman (2021, p. 1171) argue, the deliberate exclusion of non-western expertise and knowledge in development scholarship stems in part from the colour-blind and racialized nature of development, whereby non-western knowledge is considered secondary. Similar concerns about the racialized nature of development and lack of recognition for non-western perspectives have been highlighted elsewhere in the development literature (see, for example, Pailey, 2020; White, 2002; Koch, 2020).

Moreover, the literature on development experts focuses almost exclusively on western middle-class experts (i.e. IDEs) in terms of their roles and motivations (Lewis & Mosse, 2006; White, 2015), differential salaries (Carr et al., 2010; McWha, 2011), class and perceived superiority (Ong & Combinido, 2018; Pailey, 2020; Peters, 2016), and their personal relationships (Eyben, 2006). Notwithstanding, recent years have witnessed the emergence of a body of knowledge that documents the southern experiences and perspectives (e.g. Sou, 2021; Sundberg, 2019b). While such a trend is useful, they fail to fully capture the range of actors described by Kamruzzaman (2017) as NDEs, which are likely to include national consultants, former diplomats, bureaucrats, and civil servants who work in the aid sector. Thus, while NDEs are significant actors playing different roles in the development of their countries, little is known about their behaviours, roles, motivations, agency, and room for manoeuvre (see Kamruzzaman, 2017; Kumi & Kamruzzaman, 2021; Sou, 2021 for exceptions).

Within the emerging literature on local development professionals/NDEs, there is also a tendency to present them as a homogenous group with shared experiences and perspectives, ignoring their differences, internal power dynamics, and the micropolitics associated with their engagements in the development space given that NDEs occupy different and multiple layers of hierarchies. For example, there are institutional hierarchies or bureaucratic structures among NDEs, such as civil servants, that also shape their choices and sense of identity in their daily engagements. These hierarchies are associated with authority, power, and responsibilities, which create avenues for reinforcing power relationships (Agyekum, 2021). Indeed, Williams and Yecalo-Tecle (2020) highlight the presence of hostility on the part of supervisors towards lower- and middle-level civil servants in the Ghanaian civil service mainly because of their hierarchical positions. This also affects the extent to which lower-level civil servants are able to suggest ideas or contribute to policy discussions. Clearly, supervisors exercise power over their subordinates by undermining their voices, which indicates elements of unequal power relationships among the NDEs. However, this does not suggest that the NDEs on the lower rungs are not able to exercise their agency and room for manoeuvre (Brass et al., 2020; Sou, 2021).

In addition, NDEs' priorities and interests shape their engagements with other stakeholders including donors, politicians, and beneficiaries of development interventions. The political settlement literature highlights how stakeholders such as career civil servants and politicians promote their interests in the development process through competitive clientelism (Abdulai, 2017, 2021). However, while some NDEs in public offices may act as decision-makers, their actions can be shaped in part by politicians who engage in the political process of resource distribution (Brass et al., 2020). Thus, the politicization of policy knowledge in dealings between NDEs and politicians can lead to those perceived to be political enemies of politicians being excluded from the decision-making processes (Abdulai, 2017).

As discussed in this section, it is worth noting that the existing literature on development experts has focused principally on their motivations, roles, epistemic injustice, racialization, and power struggles (Carr et al., 2010; Koch, 2020; Kumi & Kamruzzaman, 2021; McWha, 2011; Peters, 2016; Pailey, 2020). These studies have, however,

not sought to understand the factors and processes that lead to the exclusion of NDEs from development policy processes. This is a significant gap that affects efforts aimed at promoting local ownership and the localization of development aid. NDEs are important actors in promoting national development and therefore any attempt to exclude them from meaningfully participating in the development of their country has significant implications for development policy and practice. Next, we discuss our research methodology and the context within which the study is situated.

3 | RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THE GHANAIAN CONTEXT

This article relies on qualitative research methodology. This choice was informed by the need for an in-depth understanding of the NDEs in terms of their involvement in the design and implementation of development policies and the power dynamics associated with it. The article draws insight from 25 semi-structured interviews conducted in two phases between July and September 2017, and September and December 2018. Phases one and two involved 10 and 15 interviews respectively with NDEs, including the local (Ghanaian) staff of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), donor agencies, think tanks, development consultants, academics, and government officials involved in aid-related projects/programmes at the Ministries, Agencies, and District Assemblies.[2] The interviewees were purposively selected because of their active roles in the formulation, implementation, and monitoring of development policies in the country. More importantly, their roles and responsibilities involved engaging with politicians and development partners (e.g., had experience of working with IDEs).

We interviewed NDEs who had different roles across junior, mid-management, and senior levels such as executive directors, managers, project coordinators, and field officers. Based on the previous research experience of one of the authors, access to the interviewees was obtained through personal contacts and other key informants in the Ghanaian development sector. Moreover, snowballing sampling technique was also employed in accessing potentially hard to reach interviewees, such as senior government officials and donor representatives.

All interviews were conducted in the Greater Accra (i.e. Accra), Ashanti (i.e. Kumasi), Central (i.e. Cape Coast) and Northern (i.e. Tamale) regions. In particular, 22 interviews were conducted in Accra and focused on local staff of NGOs and donor agencies, development consultants, academics, and government officials while three interviews were conducted in Kumasi, Cape Coast, and Tamale (with two academics and one development consultant). The discussions focused on the interviewees' professional journeys, their motivations and roles in development, experiences, and relationships with IDEs as well as power dynamics between and among politicians and NDEs. These also sought to obtain the perspectives of interviewees on how they use their agency in subverting (or conforming with) the power dynamics in their engagements with IDEs and politicians. We acknowledge that some might find the views presented in this article to be less than entirely objective as NDEs elucidate their own roles in a given context. However, we have maintained that this article mainly draws on the perceptions of the NDEs (in Ghana) whose account is largely absent in the existing scholarship. While we are aware of researchers' and respondents' positionality in terms of how these may impact research ethics and objectivity (Holmes, 2021), we consider such views to be coming from interlocutors who are well placed to shed important lights on the subject matter (Mathijssen et al., 2021). The NDEs' testimonies provided insights into understanding the politics of exclusion among development experts in formulating and implementing national development policies.

All interviews were conducted in English using face-to-face interactions during work and off-work hours of the interviewees. The interviewees chose the location; hence the interviews took place in private and public

[2]It is useful to mention that we do not think these categories to be homogenous as we are aware that different actors may wear multiple hats (for example, an academic might work as a development consultant but not all academics are development consultants; similarly, an accountant working in an (I)NGO may be working with no interest in any development agenda per se). This is also the case for the government officials, where a government may employ a range of officials but not all of their roles involve promoting socioeconomic development, broadly speaking. We approached and interviewed government officials who have been involved in aid and development-related roles.

settings such as offices, cafes, and restaurants. All interviews were recorded with the informed consent of the interviewees. These were later transcribed and analysed in NVivo 12 using thematic analyses. In doing so, primary and secondary codes were developed and indexing was used in identifying patterns and emergent themes in the data. The thematic analysis was iterative and reflexive (Braun & Clarke, 2019). We followed the ethical guidelines of the Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA) in conducting this study, including data collection and data analysis. As such, to ensure interviewees' anonymity and confidentiality, no names are included in presenting emprical evidence in this article. We have only included the occupation of the respondents and the dates of interviews.

Ghana serves as an interesting case for understanding the politics of exclusion among development experts because NDEs in Ghana claimed to have played significant roles in the country's national development (Abraham, 2019). The country's political system is characterized by neo-patrimonial practices, clientelist political settlement, and winner-takes-all attitudes that often attribute more agenda-setting power to politicians and the ruling elites affiliated to political parties than to development experts. In particular, the interests of politicians and the ruling elites determine and influence decision-making on resource allocation and prioritizing agendas for national development (Abdulai & Hulme, 2015). Moreover, there is a dominance of executive powers which in turn leads to the appointment of political affiliates in high offices who often sideline the NDEs, technocrats, and career bureaucrats (Abdulai, 2017; Gatune et al., 2021).

Additionally, Ghanaian politicians tend to value the expertise of IDEs more on development issues than that of national experts. For instance, in the area of social protection programmes, donors' interests and ideas—together with domestic politics—often influence the design and implementation of such programmes. As Abdulai (2021) highlights in the case of the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme that was led and designed by the foreign experts at the request of the Government of Ghana, over and above the knowledge and experience of Ghanaian experts. Similar incidences of foreign experts influencing development policies in Ghana are well documented (see Brown, 2017; Woll, 2008) although there are suggestions that the foreign experts often look down on or disdain the expertise of the locals (Kumi & Kamruzzaman, 2021; Mvulirwenande et al., 2019). As such, the next section incorporates the views of Ghanaian NDEs in detailing what causes and perpetuates their exclusion.

4 | KEY FINDINGS

This section presents empirical evidence collected in this study. Two themes in Ghana's development policy practices seem to underpin the processes of NDEs' exclusion: (1) the power dynamics between the IDEs and NDEs; and (2) the internal political structure in Ghana and competition among the NDEs. We elaborate on each theme below.

4.1 | Power dynamics between IDEs and NDEs

Our respondents explained that since the IDEs have access to and control over resources (i.e. aid money), the involvement of NDEs in development decision-making has been largely ignored and often non-existent. We discern that IDEs prefer to work with people or consultants either from their countries of origin or from other donor countries rather than collaborating with Ghanaian NDEs with similar or greater experience and expertise. This is because the IDEs and their governments provide the resources needed for development, hence are able to control and set the decision-making agenda as explained by one respondent in September 2017:

> You [as an NDE] always have to ask for permission from the expat [IDE] because your budget has to be approved by the expat in the country office. The use of control is too strong. The reasons they

> usually give is because of trust issues, they want to be sure that the money given will be used for their intended purposes.

The respondents saw it as being a case of "he who pays the piper calls the tune," highlighting the fact that decision-making power is heavily skewed in favour of the IDEs. For example, some respondents indicated that, because IDEs represent the group that provides funding for various development projects in Ghana, certain positions were reserved for them, often without any question or challenge. This happens despite some NDEs having equal qualifications and experience to the IDEs. The power inequality is structured and practised in a way that puts the IDEs in control of setting the agendas for development as well as their engagement with NDEs. For example, on 27 September 2018, one NGO employee explained:

> Decision-making is often much skewed. Professionally, you can make your input but as to how you can influence the decision-making process mostly depends on where you are coming from, and how much resources you are bringing to the table. It is like who pays, calls the piper. If you are not the one resourcing whatever is being done, the level of your influence will not be as strong as the one initiating and bringing resources.

Another respondent working for a bilateral donor agency added:

> We have about 15 programmes in the country [but] I don't think we have more than two local [Ghanaian] Programme Managers. It is clear that because the funding comes from them, the position is reserved for the Europeans. Even when the advert is done, it is clearly stated that you must have experience in European understanding [….] I wasn't born in Europe and the point is that issue you are addressing is not even in Europe, it is in Africa [Ghana], so why should I have a European background, understanding, and knowledge to run a programme in Africa [Ghana]?

For many respondents, power asymmetry is a default feature of international development and is widespread in Ghana no matter how different development initiatives are being labelled (e.g., bottom-up, localization, empowerment, etc.). The power imbalances between the IDEs and the NDEs were a well-known issue and donors' ability to offer financial resources was deemed to be the main driver behind this. For the NDEs in Ghana, the landscape and practices of development are reminiscent of where one party (the donors/IDEs) is there with money looking for locals to promote/implement their ideas of development. Whereas the other party (the government, national NGOs, and the NDEs) is there to work for the former group. Understandably, the party with resources have the greater power that is often formalized through bilateral or other agreements (as a condition to offering aid) with which the local partners or NDEs can rarely disagree. As an NGO employee explained on 28 September 2018:

> Well, they [IDEs] come with the projects. Let me give you an example of learning-based education projects. The idea for such projects is to boost literacy and numeracy and promote the use of the local language. Local people are the experts in using the local language as a medium of instruction. But we have people from outside [IDEs] coming to work with the local experts and they are our superiors. That is the way the projects have been designed. If you look at the money being offered, I don't think our government will say to use our local consultants. If you say I don't want foreign consultants for this and that reasons, you lose all the money. So, we just accept the foreign consultants and work with them.

The statements above indicates that the contracting of consultants is also tied to resource dependency and its associated funding arrangements where the resource provider has the power to appoint or hire consultants in aid-recipient countries with no input from the NDEs. Thus, resource provision influences the relationship between NDEs and

IDEs (further evidence can also be found in the discussion in Section 5 below). For this reason, the prevalence of the power dynamics is not dependent on what constitutes expertise or who knows the local context better. According to some respondents, NDEs have longstanding lived experiences with excellent oral ability that are more relatable to the experience of the target groups/intended beneficiaries than the foreign experts. For many local actors, this might feel that the ideas and expertise of IDEs may not be a good fit for the local contexts but there is a fear of expressing such a view. Such fear could be an outcome of power relations that cannot be ignored, as explained by a member of staff of a donor agency in July 2017:

> The power relations are due to a preconceived mindset which suggests that we [the NDEs] do not have their level of experience. So, sometimes they [the IDEs] would want to use their experience and downplay anything you suggest to them. They sometimes think that they have been in the field for a longer time which makes them more competent than us. So, because of that, even though you may not like the tactic they are using to downplay you, you can't ignore their decision. It's a difficult situation we find ourselves in.

Another respondent, an NGO employee, in September 2018 iterated how the perceived fear of the IDEs fuelled unequal power relations by saying:

> I would say [what stops us from disagreeing] is fear because sometimes we are not very confident that we can change or challenge the status quo. So, to me, it is fear, lack of confidence, and not being able to challenge them [IDEs] on what is right.

While some respondents spoke about fear due to the lack of confidence (perhaps, resulting from colonial legacies, see below for more details) others linked this back to the funding mechanism of development programmes. The following statement from an economic analyst at the Bank of Ghana in October 2018 emphasizes that, although the NDEs may have the required qualification to lead development programmes at the country level, they have to endure the impact of power imbalance due to financing (in)ability, and for him, this is a marker of the dependency syndrome.

> Definitely, if we can generate enough resources to support our economy, then we do not have to experience such power and control [...]. Most of our policies, such as the National Health Insurance Scheme [NHIS], Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty, etc., are being funded by them [donors]. So, we already see them [donors] in the picture because of the funding role they play. But, if we were able to generate enough, we can empower our people. For the knowledge, we can easily compete because of our experience here [....]. We are not able to generate enough resources for our economy, so we rely on them and that has been the dependency syndrome.

The idea of such dependency syndrome resonated with other respondents who felt that this created opportunities for IDEs to downplay and look down on local knowledge and expertise, as expressed by one local staff of a multilateral donor agency on 14 October 2017:

> There are some of them [IDEs] who would downplay anything African, so the effect is that there is no indigenous incorporation into our development work. So, we end up adopting their practices and standards against homebred ideas and recommendations that suit our context. Some of them will outright reject anything you suggest in a subtle form by looking down on your work just because you're a Ghanaian and s/he is from abroad.

The sense of superiority of IDEs was also linked to colonial legacies that make Ghanaians perceive "western ideas as a better option," as stated by one respondent. Past colonial experience may have created a sense of inferiority in the minds of Ghanaians because "even the Government of Ghana relies a lot on foreign experts because they actually

believe that anything Western is better [....] We do have a serious problem; we need to decolonize our minds," as a development consultant put it in September 2018. It was emphasized that a colonial mentality led some senior government officials or bureaucrats, though the IDEs might have similar experience and qualifications as the NDEs, to accord the more respect and preference because of their foreign identity. For instance, one government official responsible for development planning remarked in September 2018: "The country [Ghana] doesn't seem to be interested in using its people to achieve certain key assignments. We tend to rely more on the foreigners."

Many respondents, therefore, expressed that, in their engagements with IDEs, they occupied the lower rungs although they performed most of the work on the ground while the IDEs often possess little or limited understanding of the Ghanaian context. IDEs' ability to deploy the latest development technical jargon that match donors' agenda/expectations also seem to serve to exert or maintain power and control over the NDEs, as an NGO employee described in September 2017:

> Oh, the foreign experts are in charge, they are always in charge. On a scale of 10, they would get 8 or 9 in terms of the decision-making process. You see, terms like monitoring, and value for money are being used sometimes to control national experts. From my experience, I wouldn't want to say that we are in control.

The empirical evidence presented in this section delineates how financial, structural, and linguistic capitals establish and reinforce power relations that exclude the NDEs from development policy/making in Ghana. However, it is important to mention that the existence of power dynamics is not only limited to IDE–NDE relations, but power disparities can also exist between and among NDEs. Below, we present our findings of the power relations between politicians and NDEs in detailing how the latter is often excluded in development policy/making and implementation processes.

4.2 | Internal political structure, competition, and power dynamics between politicians and NDEs

While it is evident that the views of the NDEs are frequently downplayed by IDEs through their perceived superior knowledge, as well as through the supply, access, and control of development financing, we also found that Ghana's national politics, competition, and power dynamics between politicians and NDEs have also made a substantial contribution to the process of how NDEs are being excluded from the national-level development policy-making.

According to many respondents, politicians, and bureaucrats in Ghana are more powerful than NDEs.[3] The NDEs we interviewed explained that their ability to translate development policies into actual implementation depended largely on the bureaucrats and politicians. With regards to the bureaucrats, it was explained that they had a lot of control in the design and implementation of national development policies. For instance, in December 2018 a development consultant gave some insights into how public sector bureaucrats controlled national development policies in Ghana by stating that:

> The recommendations we have in the consultancy reports are for a Ministry or a local government entity. But as to whether they make use of the recommendations, we have no control over it. So that limits the work I do as an expert [consultant] trying to shape policies. If the bureaucrats and politicians don't take up the issues, nothing changes.

[3]Although we have interviewed some government officials, it should be emphasized that we carefully selected respondents who have been involved in aid- and development-related roles. Meaning that statement like this should not be taken as suggesting that all bureaucrats are part of the wider group of the NDEs, and neither are all politicians linked to NDEs. While some government officials/bureaucrats involved in developmental roles may have some power, this statement refer to a wider set of bureaucrats largely not involved in aid distribution or other development-related roles.

Some respondents further highlighted that although the bureaucrats have some level of influence over the design and implementation of national development policies, they are mostly controlled by the politicians. For this reason, politicians in Ghana were perceived to have more control over national development policies than the NDEs. In Ghana, it is the norm that politicians decide the fate of development trajectory as many respondents insisted that "politicians will always have their way." For instance, in October 2018, speaking about the extent of the involvement of NDEs in development policy formulation, a development consultant argued:

> Most of the time, these are politicians who want to make a decision and your suggestion as an NDE should not be dictating to them [...]. For example, like the Free Senior High School policy, how many professional development experts have you seen making contributions to the policy discussions? We often leave it to the politicians, and the politicians then do what they like because they want to win votes in the elections.

This statement suggests that the recognition of NDEs' role in influencing national development policies is minimal as politicians tend to claim any success from development programmes, thus serving their political objectives and ambitions, as explained by a lecturer in August 2017:

> In Ghana, the politicians are more powerful than the policy-makers or development experts. Politicians decide the fate of the development of the country. In the context of the government sector, for instance, one's role, employment status, etc. are determined by the executives who are there with political vision and interests.

Another respondent employed by the Bank of Ghana stated in October 2018:

> Shaping the agenda for national development is for the politicians, and the politicians do what they like. The politicians will always have their way because they want to achieve something through these activities.

The above statements suggest that the design and implementation of national development policies and programmes are not free from political considerations. At this stage, we must restate that the process of development at the national level is not straightforward. There are multiple actors actively involved in ensuring that their interests are being served through numerous and often creative strategies and actions. It is also true that the NDEs are not a homogenous group, either. There are differences in terms of social, academic, and class backgrounds. To elaborate, a senior government official insisted that there are different hierarchies among the NDEs based on seniority, levels of achievement, years of experience, connection, network, and political affiliations. For instance, when asked in September 2018 how seniority and years of experience influenced their level of involvement and participation in decision-making, a government official responded by saying:

> I think in calling the shots, I certainly won't call the shots. My boss will call the shots; I only have the opportunity to make input into the decision. They are the key people for the decision and then if the President calls for accountability, I will not be there, my boss will be there. At my level, I may make an input but if it has to do with a political decision, I wouldn't be in those meetings.

At times, these differences can be subtle, unspoken, informal, and quite implicit, though in some contexts these can be explicit as well. The NDEs in Ghana are aware of such distinctions, and these are present in their professional involvements. According to many respondents, this can have two broader effects. First, the NDEs might offer themselves as an (often cheaper) alternative to the IDEs. Some NDEs might offer a high level of experience and knowledge while they might also have useful access to diverse socio-political networks (both local and international). Hiring an

international consultant could cost a project a significant amount of money. For some, instead of hiring an international expert for a shorter time, recruiting NDEs could, therefore, be more beneficial to the project, as explained by a member of staff of a multilateral donor agency on 19 August 2017:

> The rise of the NDEs can substitute the work of international experts. An international expert will charge a huge amount of money, and the organization might pay that because of the consultants' perceived expertise and the recognition they have garnered for themselves. However, that will be a short-term involvement, with the same money, a national expert can work for a longer time and do a lot of good.

Second, NDEs could also corroborate with others and abuse some of the existing loopholes in the aid sector. It was suggested that growing the number of NDEs is not the only way to offer an alternative to the international experts, but it also means that they will be competing against each other. For example, a senior official of a UN organization suggested that NDEs are increasingly not working in one particular place; they can take on multiple different roles at the same time. So, in other words, this creates a competition among themselves that can also be used to support the abuse of the aid system. Such is not common parlance but can happen in collaboration with some government officials, or with other officials in donor organizations. Often the outcome could be negative. While some influential actors (politicians, bureaucrats, and the NDEs themselves) might benefit from this, respondents maintained that in the long run, this ultimately affects the poor people, for whom development programmes are built and implemented. The following quotations explain this further, the first is from a development consultant in September 2018:

> Now this donor-funded project that is being implemented by the government; you realize that most of the benefits do not really get to the people even though the projects are aimed at helping poor people. It is rather the government officials who benefit. That is why the poverty levels are still high.

An NGO member of staff had previously said in October 2017:

> In the past some development workers especially those working with NGOs received a substantial amount of funding which was misappropriated sometimes in connection with workers at donor offices. These funds were not used for the main purpose of supporting the poor.

These statements highlight how the self-seeking interests of some NDEs often affect national-level development. It was mentioned that NDEs in Ghana are sometimes excluded from development policy-making processes because of their lack of vibrancy, also attributed in part to their self-seeking interests and the politicization of national development policies. For instance, many NDEs working for think tanks and research institutes were accused, in the words of an academic in July 2018, of "wading into political issues and personalizing issues which makes all their talks not to mean anything." (Some NDEs argued that for many of their colleagues, their purpose of existence was "based on the income they were looking for," as a development consultant put it in December 2018, rather than influencing development policies which benefit the poor.)

For other respondents, the politicization of national development policies has meant that the ability of some NDEs to contribute meaningfully to discussions on national development remains limited, which has negatively affected their overall influence within the Ghanaian policy space, as a government official explained in November 2017:

> Government policies in Ghana are more political in nature. So even if you know that you can contribute meaningfully to policy discussions, you want to play safe because you don't want to be branded or affiliated with a political party. Most of us do not really want to be linked/tagged with any particular political circle.

The quotation above highlights how the politicization of development policies undermines the involvement of NDEs in national development. As mentioned earlier, the political nature of policy-making creates opportunities for politicians who are at the higher end of the power hierarchy to call the shots in setting the policy agenda. In so doing, they can assert their control over NDEs, especially those in the public service, through political interference in recruitment and promotion. Nevertheless, some NDEs exercise agency by resisting and subverting such political control in their relationship with politicians as stated by an NGO employee in October 2017:

> We have room for manoeuvre when we work with the politicians. You see, NDEs are the key players in the development of the country. The manoeuvring is usually done through the implementation of projects in terms of budget preparations, the undertaking of surveys, etc.

This section reveals a picture in which the NDEs demonstrate a very high level of agency with a greater awareness of the aid sector that can be used for more than one purpose (either pursuing their own interests or blindly supporting a donor agenda). This clearly shows how the NDEs tread carefully alongside the politicians and donors. We found this to be a balanced and measured approach to engaging in development in the context of Ghana. We observed that the respondents have been well aware of their status in contrast to the positionalities of different actors. There has been a feeling that NDEs are well placed to negotiate assorted aspects of development without angering the politicians and donors because, as a development consultant put it in November 2017, it would be unwise to "bite the hands which feed you."

5 | DISCUSSION

This article examines what accounts for the exclusion of NDEs in development policy-making processes in Ghana. Drawing on empirical evidence from Ghana, our findings suggest that the attitude of the IDEs towards the NDEs is deeply embedded in the inequality of aid relationships. As development initiatives are intended to target the poor and other vulnerable groups, all experts should ideally be accountable to them. However, the experts (mostly the IDEs) do not seem to commit "mistakes" in the eyes of the donors and are generally mindful of administrative compliance, again towards the donors and not the intended beneficiaries, governments of aid-recipient countries, or their supposed peers (i.e., the NDEs) who are often treated as subordinates by the IDEs, as described in September 2018 by a member of staff of a donor agency:

> at the end of the day, s/he [the IDE] signs. If I have to go to the field, s/he signs, if I have to change a programme design, s/he signs [.....] So, s/he [the IDE] has to take his time not to make any mistake in the eyes of donors. So, if anyone suggests that we have a low absorptive capacity that is not true. If you research to know why Ghana has a low absorptive capacity, you will find that it is largely due to foreign donor administrative issues.

Our findings on the institutional reproduction of hierarchical inequalities between NDEs and IDEs are a reflection of the dominant narrative in the literature, which indicates that IDEs enjoy extra benefits and occupy top positions in the aid industry compared to local staff with equivalent skills or responsibility (Peters, 2016; Sundberg, 2019b). The inequities in the relationship between IDEs and NDEs result in part from the dependency of the latter on the former for resources. According to Pfeffer and Salancik (2003), distribution of power and high exertion of control can emerge when there is resource dependence. Dependency creates power among groups/individuals. As we have shown in this article, funding arrangements are directly linked to the recruitment strategies employed by donors where IDEs occupy higher positions compared to their NDE counterparts which in turn leads to unequal power relations. The

landscape of development, due to the funding mechanism, is almost entirely favourable towards the actors who give money and/or people coming from that side. In most cases, the option is to cohere with the donors and the process is well-known but subtle, and certainly not frequently spoken about, as was again explained by a donor agency member of staff in July 2017:

> The donor is always smart and the tactic they use is that sometimes they give you the options they have so that you get to know the effects and it proves to be difficult not to abide by their rules. I was in [a donor agency] when we were told that if we don't do what the donors want, the money given to us will be moved from Ghana to other countries. What would you do? You will go the way of the donor because they have already shown you the available options for their money.

It is also important to mention that, while recognizing that donors set the agenda in terms of development policies, NDEs are not without agency. Indeed, our findings point to the fact that NDEs use their agency to contest and deal with the terms of aid and their relationship with IDEs. We have shown how the self-seeking interests of NDEs influence national development (at times negatively) in the context of Ghana. Our findings on the agency of NDEs resonate with existing studies that highlight how local aid actors exert their agency in negotiating, shaping, and driving their engagements with donors (see, for example, Mohan & Lambert, 2013; Sou, 2021). As documented by Sou (2021), senior civil servants in Antigua and Barbuda subverted the hierarchies in their engagements with donors by drawing on their experiences and understanding of the local context and engagements in subtle forms of resistance in their partnerships with foreign consultants. These include disagreement and dismissal of consultants and confrontational arguments which in turn disrupts hierarchies between NDEs and IDEs.

Notwithstanding the agency of the NDEs, we have clearly evidenced that since IDEs and their governments provide the financial resources, it creates opportunities for the IDEs to hold leadership positions. Such practice enables IDEs to supervise the NDEs who may have greater experience, qualifications, and better contextual knowledge. However, as Sundberg (2019b) highlights, local desk officers in Tanzania despite their contextual knowledge were often considered less competent and their professional opinions were valued less by their foreign counterparts. Our empirical evidence clearly demonstrates how funding arrangements or resource dependency influence recruitment decisions. For instance, many respondents shared experiences of mentoring foreign interns who had become their superiors at the workplace mainly because of their nationality or identity as foreigners as explained in October 2018 by a member of staff of a bilateral donor agency:

> They come here for six to eight months to have an internship. That gives them the African experience. So, when there is a vacancy and the advert says, one must have both African and European experience, they can show that they have both. Even though it was only six to eight months' internship, it gives him/her some leverage [….] When you mentor a foreign intern in Ghana, the next thing that could happen is that you might get an email where s/he informs you that s/he has been appointed as the Director of Programmes. S/he has just got around six months' experience from Ghana under your mentorship but then fast-tracked to a senior position, and you [the NDE] will remain here in Ghana at your level for a long time.

Another respondent working for an international NGO added on 30 October 2018:

> There are a number of them [the IDEs] we have worked with and they come to learn from us [as interns]. But immediately they leave, they get bigger positions […] There have been several positions within my organization but they have been limited to only to the Americans because that is their organization.

The above resonates with the observations of Shutt (2006) and Fassin (2007) about power inequities between foreign staff and local staff where the foreign staff, mostly white, tend to occupy the leadership positions. As Ong and Combinido (2018) describe among Filipino workers employed by international aid agencies, local aid workers are often positioned as "second-class citizens" or what Peters (2016) calls the "savage slots" when they engage with foreign staff. Our empirical evidence, therefore, shows that while some NDEs may have long years of experience and better understanding of the local contexts, they still occupy the lower positions and could therefore be treated as subordinates by their counterparts, IDEs. Such disparity is also manifested in gaps in the remuneration packages, access to information and job mobility (Carr et al., 2010; McWha, 2011; Sundberg, 2019b). When NDEs are treated in this way, the implication is that it has the potential of affecting their performance because their career progression may be threatened by the expatriates who act as a glass ceiling (Syed et al., 2014). In addition, it may result in a lack of trust and feelings of hostility between IDEs and the NDEs (Toh & DeNisi, 2005).

The Ghana case further highlights that power inequities in aid-land are not only limited to IDE–NDE relationships but also between and among NDEs and local actors especially politicians which in turn leads to the exclusion of the former in the design and implementation of development policies and programmes. In the case of Ghana, NDEs, despite their knowledge and experience, are often not in charge of the policy-making decisions, rather it is the politicians that mostly decide the fate of the country's development. In speaking about how politicians are in direct control of Ghana's development policies, a development consultant explained: "In Ghana, because of our democratic system, the power is always with the politicians rather than development experts when it comes to policy-making in the country."

This is clearly an evidence of unequal power relations which are not restricted only to IDE–NDE relations. This is manifested in the actions of some powerful bureaucrats and politicians who tend to sideline the local experts as part of the efforts to promote their self-seeking interests. In fact, in Ghana, processes of development are not devoid of politics, power relations, and elites' interests (Abdulai, 2017). Our findings complement the literature on the primacy of politics and power relations in shaping the design and implementation of development policies in Ghana (see Abdulai & Hulme, 2015). This is also not to suggest that NDEs are not involved at all in the formulation and implementation of development policies. Rather, in addition to unequal power relationships between the IDEs and NDEs, we highlight their limited roles as a result of their exclusion by politicians who often want to further their interests through national development. This was also attributed to the lack of a clear national development vision, which presents an opportunity for politicians to further their self-seeking interests as an economic analyst explained in October 2018:

> Development policies in Ghana is not working because as a nation, we have not clearly defined our development goals or vision. So, when we leave it to the politicians, they will do what they want in order to get votes during elections.

The ability of politicians to assert their authority over NDEs also stems in part from the politicization of development by the ruling elites in Ghana (Mohammed, 2021). The Ghanaian state is highly politicized, which in turn has implications for whether the NDEs can participate meaningfully in the development of the country. The political system of the country is characterized by competitive clientelism (Abdulai & Hulme, 2015; Mohammed, 2021). As the findings from this study suggest, many NDEs when expressing their views on national issues are wary of being tagged politically because of its implications for example, on career and their reputation. Some interviewees, such as this member of staff of a donor agency, commented in September 2017 that this is because of the ability of politicians to control NDEs, especially those working for think tanks:

> You see no individual will go and do press conference but these think tanks are doing it on every national development issue. So that also exposes some think tanks. Most of these think tanks are

> sponsored by political parties and politicians, so they have an interest to begin with. They can also be neutral when they are self-funded but that is not the case here in Ghana. So, neutrality with think tanks is challenging in Ghana because of the interests of politicians. Their neutrality ends when someone [politicians] supports them.

In addition, some interviewees expressed the view that politicians' control over the NDEs also relates to their ability to replace NDEs with certain positions in government agencies with "party people" as highlighted by a development consultant who maintained that: "your ability to work as an NDE in government agencies depends on the political party that is in power." As Appiah and Abdulai (2017) highlight, when there is the transition of power in Ghana, NDEs—including public servants who are perceived as "political enemies"—are often removed or transferred to undesirable/unfavourable locations. More importantly, the winner-takes-all politics in Ghana means that NDEs not aligned with the ruling government are often sidelined from national development and decision-making processes, as highlighted in the following quotations. The first is from an NGO employee in October 2018, "if you're an expert and you know you can contribute meaningfully to the policy discussions, but because you're not affiliated to the political party in power, it will definitely limit you in some way." A development consultant underlined this further, also in October 2018:

> Because of the nature of the Ghanaian political system, NDEs cannot really express themselves or advocate very well on national development issues. Once you express a view that is against the government, the opposition parties will just take it and go and make noise about it.

Our empirical evidence suggests that important policy actors, including the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) and technocrats, are often sidelined. This is due in part to the parallel governance and policy systems that tend to focus on achieving manifesto promises and the priorities of the ruling party. For instance, recent years have seen the establishment of units such as Economic Management Teams (EMTs) by ruling governments that provide technical inputs and policy directives for governments on matters of the economy and national development in general. For this reason, policy-making in Ghana is influenced largely by neo-patrimonial practices and clientelist political settlement which negatively disrupts and fragments national development policies, making "the EMT more influential in Cabinet decision making than NDPC" (Gatune et al., 2021, p. 5). This has also limited the influence of NDEs on national development issues.

6 | CONCLUSION

This article focuses on how power dynamics between the IDEs and NDEs, and internal political structure and competition between NDEs and politicians, lead to NDEs' exclusion from national development policy-making in Ghana. The way that power inequalities between the IDEs and NDEs, as evidenced in this article, eventually exclude the latter, complements and adds new insights to the existing knowledge relating to various relationships around aid. Evidently, those who supply and control resources have leverage over those who rely on them. As the empirical findings clearly demonstrate, IDEs working with NDEs in Ghana are able to exercise agenda-setting and development decision-making powers mainly because their governments or organizations provide funding for many development projects in Ghana. This allows the IDEs to influence development policies and practices. The notion of development expertise seems, it could be argued, to be attributed exclusively to foreigners.

In addition to highlighting the power differentials as one of the main reasons for NDEs' exclusion in Ghana's development policy-making, it is also important to mention that the existing literature on local aid workers (Sou, 2021; Sundberg, 2019a) focuses exclusively on their engagements with foreign expatriates. Furthermore,

some literature highlights the racialization of expertise and salary differentials (Carr et al., 2010; Kothari, 2006; Pailey, 2020; White, 2002). The empirical evidence presented in this article both augments the literature and adds new insights about internal dynamics, such as competition and power relations between NDEs and local actors (including bureaucrats and politicians), that are scarcely addressed in current scholarship. However, as our findings clearly manifest, NDEs are not a homogenous group, hence there are also internal dynamics fuelled in part by the perceived superiority of politicians in their relationships with NDEs. The distribution of power and the interests of the ruling elites (particularly politicians) are crucial for understanding why NDEs are often undermined and excluded from the policy-making processes. In fact, the formulation and implementation of development policies in Ghana have largely been undertaken exclusively by politicians, with little input from local or domestic non-state actors including development experts (Ohemeng, 2005). NDEs' exclusion from national development undermines efforts to promote national ownership because absence of NDEs' perspectives can make development policies limited with contextual understanding of development issues in the country. The exclusion of NDEs also creates opportunities for the politicization of national development policies, undermining inclusivity and policy continuity, and making the abandonment of development policies likely when there is a change in government. We argue that the politicization of the national development agenda negatively affects the ability of the country to design and implement long-term development policies and strategies. While acknowledging that the findings in this article have offered some important, yet largely unexplored, perspectives on the processes that lead to the exclusion of NDEs from development policy-making and practice, it would not be prudent to claim that these are common to all aid-recipient countries based on a single-country case study.

While some of the extant scholarship highlights inequalities and power disparities among IDEs and NDEs and suggests that NDEs' knowledge is seen as less reliable (Koch, 2020), leading to their being given "inferior desk-based roles" in local country offices (Sundberg, 2019a) and being tasked with less important undertakings (Kothari, 2006) as well as receiving significantly lower remuneration (McWha, 2011), we feel that future research should seek to undertake comparative studies to provide an understanding into the underlying factors and processes accounting for the exclusion of NDEs in national development in other contexts. A comparative perspective on NDEs could inform efforts to deepen the scholarship relating to these important yet almost invisible development actors. As part of efforts to expand the emerging literature on NDEs, future research could usefully examine how NDEs use their agency and room for manoeuvring to subvert control and cope with unequal power relations with politicians and IDEs. This will also help to provide insights into the political economy of development assistance and the micropolitics of knowledge generation in international development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Victor Essel for his support in the conducting of the fieldwork in Ghana. We are also grateful to the respondents for their participation in this research.

FUNDING INFORMATION

This work was supported by the University of South Wales, United Kingdom, under the Dean's Research Fund.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data available on request from the authors: The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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How to cite this article: Kamruzzaman, P., & Kumi, E. (2023). Why national development experts are not included in development policy-making and practice: The case of Ghana. *Development Policy Review*, *41*, e12656. https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12656