Implications of the Advisory Role for Science Academies: Critical Choices
“Academies of science have an important role to play ...”

“There is clear evidence that progress can be achieved in low income countries; however, many African countries are yet not fully exploiting existing scientific knowledge. National academies of science have an important role to play by sharing the best knowledge and engaging decision makers more actively by translating evidence-based science into appropriate policies.”

Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations
Greeting Attendees at ASADI V, Accra, Ghana, November 2009
Some Sources of Scientific Advice to Policymakers: The Policy Space

- The Media
- The Internet
- Personal study
- Personal Contacts
- Lobbyists
- Government Scientists
- Government Panels
- Universities
- Foreign Consultants
- Foreign Governments
- International Bodies such as WHO

Photo: http://static.howstuffworks.com/gif/who-assembly.jpg
Many Sources of Scientific Advice to Policymakers Create a Noisy and Competitive Policy Space

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Photo: www.arktimes.com/blogs/shale/2008/12
Some Sources of Scientific Advice to Policymakers: Can a Science Academy Provide Something Unique?

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- International Bodies such as WHO
- National Science Academies
The **Comparative Advantage** of National Science Academies In Africa: Value Added

- Trusted, home grown, objective, independent, authoritative source
- Apolitical, not motivated by profit
- Convening power to mobilize the best scientific minds from across the nation and the world
- Can help foster innovation through multidisciplinary, multisectoral discourse
- Transparent and open to public input
- Features scientifically rigorous peer reviewed analyses of evidence and the consensus of diverse experts
- An independent, credible “second opinion” in the face of politically charged issues
- A “Supreme Court” for science

Photo: L. Augustine
Who are the Customers for Advice?

- The National Government
- Donor Governments
- Other Donors
- Academia
- The Professions
- Industry
- Civil Society Organizations
- General Public
- Cabinet Ministries
- Media
- The Legislature
- The Inter-governmental Community
Is an Advisory Role Sustainable?

- Is there demand for advice?
- Is the advisory role inherently controversial?
- Is there enough steady work and income to retain a trained staff?
- Are staff sufficiently expert to carry out a range of studies?
- Is the business model affordable?
- Is there sufficient expertise and engagement among the membership to be a uniquely qualified advisor on a broad range of matters?
Advisory Product Considerations

• Does independent advice matter in your country?
• Can you take on controversial issues?
• Who are the customers? Government or the public?
• Can you provide advice that deviates from the “party line”?
• What do your customers need? Fast and low cost or slower with extensive analysis and higher cost?
• What can customers afford?
• What meeting formats should be offered?
• What should be the formats for published products?
• What are the characteristics of the “academy brand”?
• Protecting the “academy brand”
Convening (Forum or Workshop-type) Activities

- Brings together in a neutral setting representatives of academia, government, industry, and others for ongoing discussions to illuminate critical issues and potential solutions consistent with the society’s priorities, values, and resources.
Convening
(Forum or Workshop-type) Activities

• Is not intended to issue conclusions and recommendations in the name of the academy because the procedure is not necessarily independent of sponsors and government and is not necessarily free of biases and conflicts of interest.
Consensus Activities

• Policy studies or other formal advisory activities carried out in a unique way to explore in depth an issue of importance to the country and its government. Studies offer evidence-based guidance to national decision makers concerned with science and technology.

• Is intended to issue conclusions and recommendations in the name of the academy because the procedure is independent of sponsors and government and is managed to minimize biases and conflicts of interest.
Advisory Role Implications for Academy Leadership

- Active leaders vs. honorific leaders
- Term lengths
- Time Commitment
  - Outreach
  - Administration
  - Staff supervision – know the staff role
  - Project development and statement of task formulation
  - Negotiations
  - Internal policy development
  - Financial management
  - Quality assurance
- Need for business acumen – contracting, accounting, human resource management
- Need for membership mobilization
- Moral courage
Advisory Role Implications for Academy Membership and other Scientists

- **Time Commitment**
  - Service on planning committees
  - Service on governance committees
  - Service on advisory committees
  - Outreach

- **Commitment to serve without compensation**

- **Composition of membership**
  - Size to carry out minimal program – degree of exclusivity
  - Age distribution and limits
  - Gender
  - Ethnic and geographic mix - credibility
  - Diaspora and foreign associates
  - Disciplinary composition – fields of science and humanities
  - Drawn from Academia, Government, Business, Foundations

- **Moral courage**
Advisory Role Implications for Staff

- Need for staff with solid technical qualifications
  - Executive Director with business skills
  - Supervisory Skills
  - Organizational skills
  - Diplomatic skills
  - Scientific research skills
  - Oral and written communications skills
  - Editing skills
  - Marketing and fundraising skills
- Training (by who?)
- The challenge of “soft money” for staff recruitment and retention