



# COMMUNICATION

## GOOD PRACTICE NOTE 10

# Designing Communication Campaigns for Energy Subsidy Reform

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This is the tenth in the series of 10 good practice notes under the Energy Sector Reform Assessment Framework (ESRAF), an initiative of the Energy Sector Management Assistance Program (ESMAP) of the World Bank. ESRAF proposes a guide to analyzing energy subsidies, the impacts of subsidies and their reforms, and the political context for reform in developing countries.

This paper was written through a collaborative process led by Heather Worley, Senior Strategy and Operations Officer, Energy and Extractives Global Practice, World Bank; Sara Bryan Pasquier, Senior Operations Consultant, Energy and Extractives Global Practice, World Bank; and Ezgi Canpolat, Anthropologist Consultant, World Bank. The authors' experiences working closely with colleagues in a number of countries to raise citizens' awareness and acceptance about the need for energy subsidy reform have informed this good practice note. During the preparation of this good practice note, the authors benefited particularly from collaboration with Paul Mitchell, Consultant; Jayakrishnan Nair and Manish Soni from PwC in India; Damon Vis-Dunbar, Tom Moerenhout, and Kieran Clarke from the Global Subsidies Initiative (GSI) in Switzerland; and Munqith Dagher, IIACSS. Other colleagues within the World Bank Group have also contributed insights, including Sophia Georgieva, Social Development Specialist.

The *Guidebook to Fuel Subsidy Reform for Policy Makers in Southeast Asia* (GSI and IISD 2013), written by GSI and the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), provides an important foundation for any discussion on communicating for energy subsidy reform, and this good practice note refers to that guidebook frequently.

The 2014 World Bank paper titled *Transitional Policies to Assist the Poor While Phasing Out Inefficient Fossil Fuel Subsidies* was also essential to this work.

Recent analysis on communication campaigns in India, led by the Energy and Extractives Global Practice and South Asia Region of the World Bank, titled *Communication Research on Energy Efficiency in India: A Communication Needs Assessment and Stakeholder Mapping* (Worley and others 2016), also informed this note.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

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<b>ESMAP</b>	Energy Sector Management Assistance Program
<b>GDP</b>	gross domestic product
<b>GSI</b>	Global Subsidies Initiative
<b>IISD</b>	International Institute for Sustainable Development
<b>IDI</b>	in-depth interview

# INTRODUCTION

## 1. PURPOSE

**Public information campaigns can mobilize political support for reforms and help overcome vested interests. ...The public should be informed about the drawbacks of existing subsidies and the benefits of reform.**

*IMF 2008*

Energy subsidy reform is not a goal in itself, but rather a means of achieving lasting economic and social progress. Communicating with the public and other key stakeholders about the benefits of reform and the drawbacks of existing subsidies helps build support and acceptance. It can also increase trust and understanding of the political decisions that underpin the reform. International experience shows that communicating before, during, and after subsidy reform is essential to ensuring the smooth rollout of a well-planned and executed energy subsidy reform program (GSI and IISD 2013).

Some governments undertaking energy subsidy reform programs either ignore communication with stakeholders or take a top-down approach that fails to recognize stakeholder views and concerns. This happens for many reasons, including lack of understanding about the powerful role communication plays in a successful energy subsidy reform program and the absence of capacity within a government to undertake communication activities.

Other governments begin communicating with the public only after a decision to reform subsidies has been taken. Communication about the benefits of and need for reform should begin early in the reform process, ideally in parallel with a public awareness campaign to build trust and improve the image of the energy sector.

This note is intended for use by governments and aims to (a) advocate for the importance of communicating with citizens proactively about energy subsidy reform and (b) guide practitioners through some of the important elements of an evidence-based and effective communication campaign, including timing, stakeholder consultation, opinion research, messages, messengers, media, and evaluation. This note should be used in combination with other tools, including capacity building workshops and tailored advice from experienced communication professionals.

As described in Guidance Note 1, many forms of subsidies have little effect on energy prices. For example, tax expenditures may increase



the profits retained by energy producers and result in large fiscal losses but may have no impact on end-user prices in a deregulated oil market. Because tax expenditures are seldom reported or subject to scrutiny by legislators, they frequently attract little or no attention from the public and policy makers. By contrast, those subsidies that lower prices paid by consumers—and the reform of which is likely to raise prices—are much more politicized,

making political economy analysis as well as effective communication on the rationale for reform essential. Subsidies that keep energy prices artificially low also create distortions with ripple effects throughout the economy and arguably represent the most serious form of energy subsidies. As such, while this note is applicable to all forms of subsidies, it focuses primarily on energy price subsidies for consumers.

## 2. THE CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN A SUCCESSFUL ENERGY SUBSIDY REFORM PROGRAM

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Phasing out energy price subsidies (see note 1, Identifying and Quantifying Energy Subsidies, for definition) can be politically difficult, although a number of countries have done so without major disruptions thanks in part to building support and acceptance for reform among a variety of stakeholders (see note 9, Assessing the Political Economy of Energy Subsidies to Support Policy Reform Operations). How did they do it?

A 2013 IMF study indicated that among 22 countries pursuing energy subsidy reforms, putting in place a well-planned and executed communication campaign was an important factor in the successful implementation of reforms (Clements and others 2013). This is because energy subsidy reform requires consensus, support, and changes in behavior. All of these can be achieved through a communication campaign that consults a range of stakeholders about their concerns and perceptions and proactively addresses these concerns with targeted messages.

Communication campaigns are one of the essential tools that governments can use to explain the need for and benefits of reform and to demonstrate the intent to protect the public against negative impacts.

In order to be effective at communicating, a government needs to be seen by the public as credible and trustworthy. When mistrust is an issue, it can be very difficult to inform and persuade citizens. Similarly, when messages are delivered in one direction—from a government to the people without an opportunity for interaction—it is also difficult to lead an effective communication campaign. Failure to consult stakeholders and gain their support has stalled and sometimes reversed much-needed reforms in many countries. In several countries, increases in electricity tariffs or fuel prices have led to public protests and ultimately resignations of governments.

Box 1 shares examples of how communication campaigns contribute to public acceptance of energy subsidy reforms.



**BOX 1: COMPONENTS OF A COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN**

In this note, a *communication campaign* (also known as a communication strategy or plan) is a strategic effort to

- **Use outreach and two-way dialogue with citizens** to demonstrate that energy subsidy reforms are necessary and beneficial, and that social protection mechanisms will help alleviate the impacts of reform on poor and vulnerable households;
- **Consult with citizens and stakeholders** to understand concerns and perceptions about the energy sector and planned reforms;
- **Coordinate within the government on outreach to citizens** to ensure buy-in and a consistent approach to communication across ministries, agencies and government-owned energy industries; and
- **Communicate consistently and with evidence-based messages** to build understanding and support for reforms, and to minimize negative perceptions and potential social impacts.

### 3. IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN

Communication campaigns implemented in support of energy subsidy reform can take many forms. However, certain common elements and proven practices transcend country borders and political contexts. Broadly speaking, practitioners interested in designing and implementing communication campaigns should:

- 1 | Determine the objectives, timeline, budget, and governance for the communication campaign;
- 2 | Map key stakeholders and consider their level of interest and influence (see also note 9 on political economy);
- 3 | Conduct opinion research to understand stakeholder views and perceptions (see also note 4 on qualitative analysis tools);
- 4 | Create and pretest compelling messages that address stakeholders' commonly held views and build awareness of the scope of the consumer price subsidies and their influence on the economy;

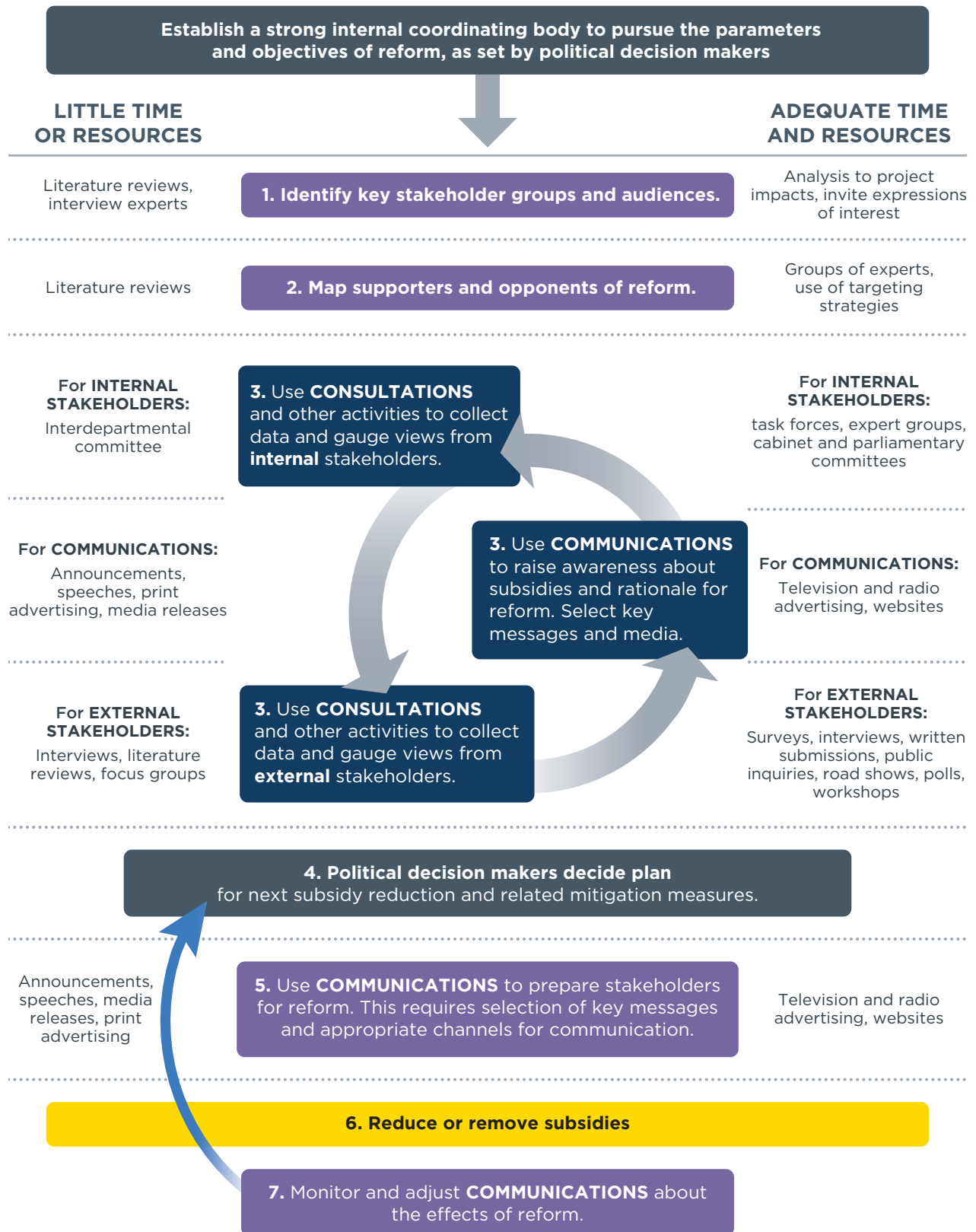
- 5 | Assign credible messengers and spokespeople;
- 6 | Identify the best channels for communicating messages to different stakeholders and encouraging two-way dialogue; and
- 7 | Set measurable goals to track the communication campaign's effectiveness.

In addition, it is important to ask the following questions when planning a communication effort:

- Is information about the price subsidies accessible to the public, including the magnitude of price gaps, how prices are set, who benefits, and the scale of diversion to unintended beneficiaries, if any?
- Are all forms of communication being exploited?



**FIGURE 1: How to Sequence a Successful Communication Campaign**



Source: GSI and IISD 2013.

- Is consideration being given to a Web-based national conversation, giving many people an opportunity to be heard?
- Are all segments of society being reached, including those who are illiterate or who do not have access to the Internet or TV?
- Is electronic communication being complemented by face-to-face stakeholder meetings?

### I. DETERMINE THE OBJECTIVE, TIMELINE, BUDGET, AND GOVERNANCE FOR THE COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN

#### Objective

The objective of a communication campaign is simply to inform citizens about the necessity and benefits of a reform. In addition to building public support for and understanding, a communication campaign’s objective is also to inform citizens about the process of reform, the available social protection resources, and

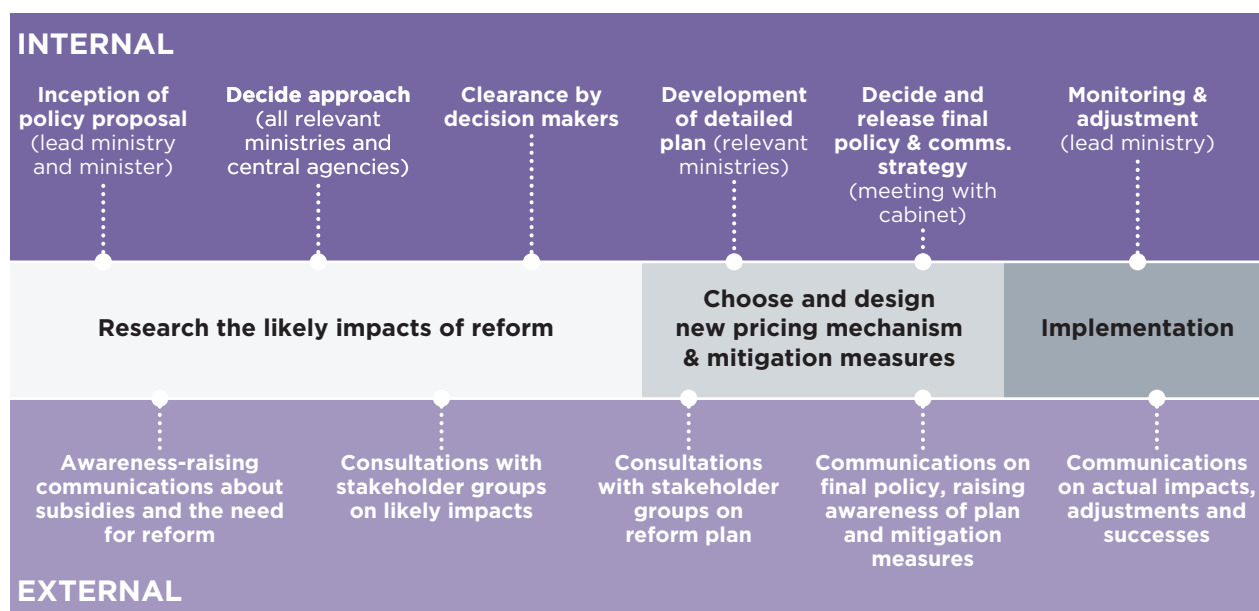
where they can go for more information. In order to determine specific objectives, it is important to understand the target audience based on their level of interest and influence in the potential reform. A credible, transparent, and fact-based campaign can also serve other purposes, including increasing trust in the government and policies, improving the level of coordination across agencies, and demonstrating the progress a country is making with improving the energy sector and the benefits this will bring to the population.

#### Timeline

A communication campaign should be integrated throughout the planning, development, and implementation stages of energy subsidy reform. The focus should initially be on internal consultation in order to create a coalition for reform among politicians and administrative services (GSI and IISD 2013) (see also note 9 on political economy). External communication (that is, communication with stakeholders outside



**FIGURE 2: Timeline for Internal and External Communication**



Source: GSI and IISD 2013.

the government) can also begin at the early stages of subsidy reform planning, raising awareness about the negative impacts of consumer price subsidies and the need for change and communicating guiding principles of the reform process, such as the need to design reforms so that they maximize public benefit and, if appropriate in the specific country, minimize impacts on the poor. Later, external communication will shift to gathering opinion research and soliciting input into draft reform strategies. In parallel, internal (within-government) communication should seek to ensure consistent messages and approaches from across the government. Communication to external and internal parties should continue as prices increase and even after reforms are in place. Communication campaigns are a dynamic process that should continually take in feedback from citizens and that can span periods of months to years. It is important to develop a realistic timeline for a campaign's specific objectives and resources.

### **Governance**

The entity in charge of communication campaigns varies by country and context. In some countries, it can be the prime minister's office, and in others, the ministry of energy, the regulator, or a state-owned energy enterprise. It is generally more effective to have one government organization responsible for implementing a communication campaign, not several sharing accountability, although some countries decide to involve multiple stakeholders in order to show joint ownership and commitment to the reform. In each of these cases, a dedicated campaign manager is essential for maintaining the focus on results, staying abreast of public and political shifts that require dynamic messaging, and monitoring progress.

Whoever is leading the communication campaign should be well integrated into the subsidy reform process and ideally be a champion and seasoned practitioner of proactive, evidence-based communication.

## **II. MAP KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND CONSIDER THEIR LEVEL OF INTEREST AND INFLUENCE**

An important goal of communication campaigns is to build support and reduce opposition. Communication campaigns must determine which stakeholders (a) are impacted by and interested in the reform and (b) have influence over whether the reform will succeed (see also the note 9 on political economy).

Stakeholders can be internal, for example, within government ministries and agencies, or external within the broader public and civil society. Outreach to both internal and external stakeholders must be part of a communication campaign.

**Internal stakeholders:** Communication campaigns should establish strong coordination among government actors to ensure consistency and credibility. Competing messages to the public from various parts of the government will be self-defeating. An internal dialogue that starts at the beginning of the process to raise awareness of the need for change and continues afterward to ensure a consistent approach to external stakeholders and to finalize policies is more likely to build and retain broad support (GSI and IISD 2013).

International experience demonstrates that one of the major weaknesses in government communication is a lack of coordination. Mixed messages create unnecessary confusion and erode the public's confidence in the

government's ability to manage reforms effectively. Consistency across the government is as critical in the implementation of a communication campaign as the messaging.

A variety of mechanisms can be used to consult internal stakeholders, and each country context is unique. A number of mechanisms were presented by GSI and IISD (2013) and are reproduced in table 1.

**TABLE 1: Mechanisms for Internal Consultation on Subsidy Reform**

Mechanism	Key features	Strengths	Weaknesses
<b>Cabinet subcommittee</b>	Involves all key ministers May be led by head of government	Ensures political-level participation Decisions unlikely to need higher level of approval	Needs to be supported by consultation and advisory support at the bureaucratic level
<b>Parliamentary committee</b>	Key ministers mobilize coalitions or champions within parliament	Identify and address concerns of parliament members that could block passage of necessary legislation	Usually only relevant once reform proposal is near-final
<b>Task force</b>	Seconds officers from relevant departments and agencies Limited lifespan to develop and implement reform May be hosted by a central agency	Dedicated resources from all relevant agencies Provides central point for relations with internal and external stakeholders	Conflict can arise between task force and home departments
<b>Interdepartmental committee</b>	All relevant agencies represented Meets regularly or on ad hoc basis	Involves all relevant agencies	May achieve little beyond awareness-raising among officials Must feed into process for decision-making
<b>Expert group</b>	Experts could be within or outside government, but must have backing of lead ministers	Creates some distance between political leaders and reform plans	Leaders may not take advice if it comes from nongovernment experts

**External stakeholders:** Communication campaigns should also speak to the stakeholders who stand to gain or lose from subsidy reform, and the parties who represent and align with these stakeholders.

Once stakeholders are identified, it is important to map to what degree stakeholders are impacted by, interested in, or able to influence subsidy reform (figure 3).

How subsidy reform impacts each stakeholder group depends on many factors, including the following:

- How much stakeholders benefit from current policies;
- How stakeholders will be impacted after reform; and
- How stakeholders will be affected after mitigation measures are implemented (see note 9 on political economy).

By analyzing stakeholders' interest and influence in a stakeholder mapping process, the communication practitioner can understand better where support for or resistance to reform is likely to be strongest.



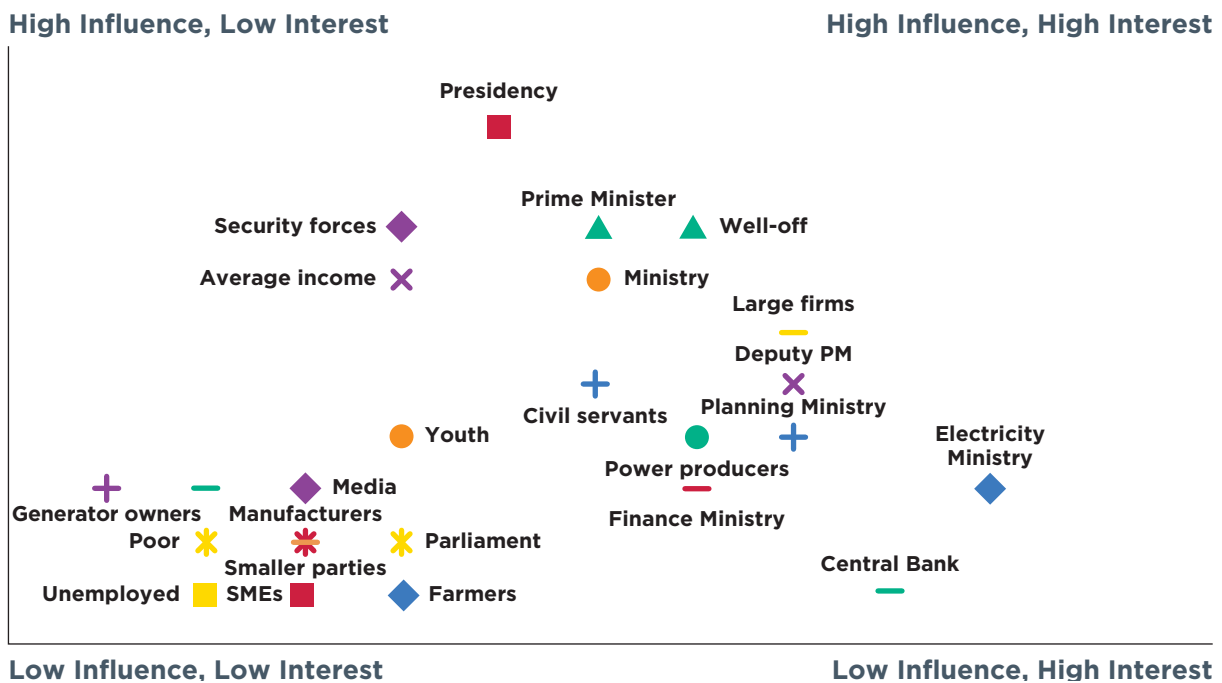
- Level of Interest is assessed by how likely a stakeholder is to welcome the prospect of energy price subsidy reform, owing to both material and ideological factors. Experience has shown in several countries that some stakeholders may react based less on the issue itself than on the potential it offers to mobilize in pursuit of other goals.
- Level of Influence is a concept that includes political influence, access to means of mass communication, financial resources, perceived credibility, propensity to engage in political protest, and numbers.

Communication campaigns should consider carefully which stakeholders to target, given limited resources and the reality that some groups will be deeply opposed to reforms and no amount of communication will persuade them and some groups will be fully supportive so resources should not be spent

on communicating to them. Communication campaigns often aim to build coalitions to facilitate reforms and to convince neutral or undecided stakeholders about the benefits of reform (figure 3).

When mapping stakeholders, it is important to consider gender sensitivity and make plans for reaching women audiences, especially where household energy is affected by the subsidy reform. In most circumstances, women are the main users and procurers of energy (that is, collecting fuels or ensuring continuous access to liquefied petroleum) and primarily responsible for performing household chores, but they are not often considered in a map of interest and influence. Women are often disproportionately impacted by lack of access to energy sources, unreliable and low-quality energy services, and increasing energy costs. They may not have voice in their community and could be overlooked in an opinion research

**FIGURE 3: Mapping Stakeholders by Level of Interest and Influence in Tariff Subsidy Reform in the Power Sector**



Source: Excerpt from an internal World Bank report (2017).

exercise to inform the campaign. Women's views on energy issues, however, are critical.

Mechanisms to cope with increasing energy costs (for example, by reducing energy use and cutting spending on food, health, and other necessary household expenses) have greater impact on women, since they are more likely to sacrifice their needs first. Although women rely heavily on energy to fulfill household chores, they might not participate equally in decision-making on the procurement of energy sources or appliances (World Bank 2015). Therefore, women are receptive to messages about the positive impacts of subsidy reforms, such as improving energy service quality and reliability, and about the accompanying social protection measures to mitigate the negative impacts on vulnerable households. Women can also be activated as agents of change to alter informal and inefficient energy use habits and to encourage behavior change toward energy efficiency, which in many country contexts is a complementary and empowering message to accompany information about subsidy reforms.

### III. CONDUCT OPINION RESEARCH TO UNDERSTAND STAKEHOLDER VIEWS AND PERCEPTIONS

There are different ways to consult and communicate with internal and **external stakeholders**. For external stakeholders, understanding the public's knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of the energy sector, subsidies, and existing social safety mechanisms is crucial to designing effective communication campaigns.

Communication research (also known as opinion research) can use qualitative and quantitative methods to explore stakeholder opinions and attitudes (see table 2). It can

also help to monitor public opinion and identify potential risks that might affect the successful implementation of the reforms. While policy makers often feel they understand the prevailing public opinion or perceptions, evidence gained from research can validate these assessments or uncover previously unrecognized nuances (see note 3 on quantitative impacts on households, note 4 on qualitative research tools, and note 9 on political economy). Qualitative and quantitative research can gather information to help

- Identify the target audience's perceptions, underlying motives, and beliefs that shape citizen attitudes toward subsidy delivery, reform activities, and service delivery;
- Identify the coping mechanisms currently being used to deal with unintended consequences of price subsidies, such as fuel shortages and high prices on the black markets, and opinions about potential improvements in energy service delivery as a result of subsidy reform;
- Understand what consumers might perceive as acceptable in a reform program, including whether an expansion or improvement of social safety net programs is necessary;
- Find gaps in knowledge and popular misconceptions about reforms;
- Expose barriers to behavior and attitude change that need to be addressed;
- Identify channels through which consumers get information, sources they trust, and the different ways consumers receive or process information to determine effective ways of reaching them; and
- Determine which messages will best motivate change.



**TABLE 2: Types of Research Methods to Ensure an Evidence-Based Communication Campaign**

Method	Description
<b>In-depth interviews</b>	Qualitative interviews with individuals, usually at the household decision-making level if one or more energy prices they face will be raised. Interviews can be structured with formal written guidance or with semi-structured guidance that allows issues that come up to be pursued. They can also be unstructured, but organized around specific topics. Interviews provide in-depth views of the most influential people and groups related to an issue. Generally 12-15 in-depth interviews can be sufficient to begin a communication planning process.
<b>Focus groups</b>	Semi-structured qualitative discussions with small groups (generally 6-12 participants). Focus groups are generally used to inform a larger public opinion poll. They seek to obtain broad views on an issue. They can also be used with in-depth interviews to inform reform programs as they progress. Focus group discussions can also be used before rolling out a campaign to “pretest” campaign messages with a small group of people before airing messages on mass media.
<b>Public opinion survey</b>	Uses a structured survey questionnaire and is conducted face-to-face or by phone. Public opinion surveys should be conducted with a statistically relevant percentage of the population. They provide specific empirical information that should be used to inform campaign messages. They are useful when considering broad reforms that might affect the entire population. Surveys provide the greatest depth of information that can be disaggregated in many ways.
<b>Online and written consultation</b>	Usually involves either a Web page with information that people can respond to or a structured and facilitated online discussion. These formats have limitations in that only literate people with good Internet access can participate, but they are a way to quickly reach large audiences. When choosing online communication as a channel, it is important to plan for hosting and curating the online conversation, including determining how to check comments before they are posted and how to respond quickly to negative comments or misperceptions that are being disseminated through a comments section.
<b>Public meetings</b>	Open for all or by invitation. Public meetings take place at any level (for example, the community, regional, or national level). Large groups make it difficult to give everyone a voice, so expert facilitation is needed. Public meetings can function like large focus groups.
<b>Workshop</b>	Gathering a group of people in a structured format for a specific agenda.
<b>Public inquiries or regulatory processes</b>	May be required by regulators in some cases. Public inquiries are a formal process that can involve calling for submissions of interest, holding hearings, inviting written submissions, and issuing recommendations for comment.

To consult the views of **internal stakeholders** and to coordinate a common approach to messaging around subsidy reforms, a range of bodies can be formed, which were outlined in table 1.

The type of energy subsidy reform under consideration will affect which stakeholders are engaged and communicated with. Energy subsidy reforms can be broad (many forms

of energy, or affecting all consumers) or targeted (a particular form of energy, or specific consumer categories). While only one communication campaign is needed for a reform program, stakeholders will likely be impacted by reforms differently and will require tailored messages.



#### IV. CREATE COMPELLING MESSAGES THAT ADDRESS STAKEHOLDERS' COMMONLY HELD VIEWS AND BUILD AWARENESS OF THE SCOPE OF THE SUBSIDIES AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE ECONOMY

Once the key stakeholders are targeted and research has been conducted to understand their opinions and attitudes, it is time to craft messages to build support for reform. Messages can change attitudes because they stimulate thought, evoke emotions, and mesh with citizens' motivations and needs. When designing messages, it is important to consider their structure, content, and appeal. Messages should demonstrate how stakeholders will benefit from reform in clear, compelling ways, based on country-specific public opinion research, and what compensation mechanisms may be available to the vulnerable.

Local context and contemporary political trends must be considered when creating compelling messages. All communication campaigns require a tailored approach. Industry principles should be applied, but tailoring the messages to reflect country specifics will make the difference between an effective communication campaign and a pro forma exercise in mass-media messaging. It is therefore suggested that governments engage seasoned, professional communicators in the planning and implementation of in-country communication campaigns.

##### What makes a SUCCEsSful message? (Adapted from Heath and Heath 2007)

- **Simplicity:** Finding the core of the idea to communicate, which involves discarding a lot of important ideas to find the most important one.
- **Unexpected:** Messages that grab attention tend to resonate more with people.
- **Concrete:** If stakeholders are being asked to do something, such as conserve energy, specific advice about what they can do to conserve energy is more effective than general calls for conservation. Clarity and consistency in messaging are as important as the messages themselves.
- **Credibility:** A message must be trustworthy, evidence-based, and framed in a way that is easily believed. One way to do this is to focus on sharing objective facts. For example, campaigns should communicate to consumers that what they pay is only a part of the full cost of energy. Those who receive subsidized energy are often not aware that the government subsidizes their consumption. A critical message to convey to the public is the connection between poor service delivery and flawed subsidy programs. Further, how resources are going to be reallocated to compensate vulnerable customers also needs to be communicated.
- **Emotion:** A communication campaign should design messages that have an emotional appeal. Governments tend to lose the battle over subsidy reform programs not just because they have poor messages, but through the very way they conceive and describe the reform from the beginning. Governments often use technical or process-related language instead of language that relates to people on an emotional level.
- **Story:** Messages that tell a story are more easily remembered and more effective at influencing stakeholders. Stories ideally emphasize the potential positive impacts of reform. Some positive impacts might include improved energy service and access; strengthened social safety nets for vulnerable



groups; increased resources for health, education, or infrastructure spending; the positive impacts on a country's economic growth; the potential environmental and associated health benefits; and the country's debt reduction.

## V. ASSIGN CREDIBLE MESSENGERS AND SPOKESPEOPLE

There is an adage in the communication industry that says, "It's not what you say, it's what your audience hears." *Source credibility* is a term used to describe a communicator's positive characteristics that affect the audience's acceptance of a message. The choice of spokesperson is one of the most consequential decisions a campaign manager can make. Once evidence-based campaign messages have been established, it is important to convey them through a credible source. During the initial public opinion research questions can be added in the in-depth interviews, survey, and focus group discussions to determine who in the country or community is trusted and respected for putting the needs of the country first.

In addition to being trusted and generally liked by the target audience, the messenger should be able to get and keep the attention of the audience by appealing to their emotions and feelings. Strong public speaking skills and a willingness to interact frequently in meaningful ways with citizens are essential. The messenger should speak the audience's language and not be viewed as overly political when making statements about the energy subsidy reforms.

Once a spokesperson is assigned, an investment should be made in his or her ability to deliver the campaign's messages fluently and effectively to the public. Depending on the

spokesperson's experience speaking to large groups of citizens or on TV or radio, on-camera media training may be required to assess the spokesperson's comfort level and public speaking effectiveness before implementing a large-scale communication campaign.

## VI. IDENTIFY THE BEST CHANNELS FOR COMMUNICATING MESSAGES TO DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS AND ENCOURAGING TWO-WAY DIALOGUE

In many countries, radio or television are still the public's preferred channels for information. In some countries, SMS/text messages and social media are reaching mass audiences and should be integrated into a campaign's plans. In every country there is no substitute for face-to-face interactions with people. Village meetings, town halls, and consultations can be very effective. Opinion research can help identify the most used and trusted source of information for each target stakeholder, such as the following options: television, radio, social media channels, and print media.

**Television** is a trusted source of information in many countries that can reach broad audiences. Public service announcements, commercials, alerts that appear at the bottom of the screen, and televised speeches and debates can very effectively bring the messages of the campaign to the general public.

For other audiences, **radio** is the most effective channel for communication. It reaches those who may not have access to television. In countries with many different dialects and languages, there are often radio channels or shows that can reach large audiences in each of the country's languages.

**Social media channels** are an increasingly powerful tool for getting out messages, but their content must be kept up to date to maintain credibility. The use of Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other Internet-based platforms is increasing rapidly, not only by youth, but by adults as well. If social media is used, an editorial calendar for planning content should be developed to ensure that messages are posted routinely and do not become stale. Social media messages should tie in with the core message of the communication campaign. Other good practices include posting images that reinforce the campaign messages; testing messages and images before launching the campaign to see which get better responses; measuring impact by tracking followers, likes, repostings and comments; and building a community of followers by inviting and encouraging people to join.

**Print media**, including billboards, newspapers, fact sheets, pamphlets, and trade publications can also be an effective way of targeting messages to specific groups.

In all countries, substantive and credible messages, messengers, and channels of communication are more effective than superficial slogans. One-way broadcasting from the government to citizens is rarely effective, but interacting and offering opportunities for two-way dialogue through multiple channels is effective in building understanding and acceptance of reforms. A campaign should develop platforms for engaging with stakeholder groups to increase trust and mutual accountability. Meaningful two-way dialogue allows citizens to talk about key service delivery problems (such as unreliable and low-quality service), raise their grievances related to energy sector governance, and interact with decision

makers directly. It is important to organize consultations in ways that promote candor and allow participants sufficient time to review and digest the information being shared for consultation (for example, consultation on the tariff-setting methodology for a utility will need to present the methodology in an easy-to-understand way if the conversation is going to be well informed). Participatory platforms increase consumer awareness about reforms while allowing service providers to receive consumer feedback on service provision. These mechanisms could be particularly useful in countries where utility tariffs are subsidized, commercial losses and nonpayment are prevalent, and an important component of raising more revenue to reduce the revenue-cost gap is to reduce commercial and collection losses.

## VII. SET MEASURABLE GOALS TO TRACK THE COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN'S EFFECTIVENESS

Before launching the communication campaign, it is important to establish metrics to determine whether it is successful and determine what happened or did not happen as a result of your campaign. To measure this, indicators should be identified and data collected throughout the campaign. These indicators could include the number of visits to your website after a campaign TV commercial directs viewers to log on for more information; reposts or likes of your social media messages; the number of citizens applying for social assistance if that is a component of the information campaign; and changes in public perception of subsidy reform as a result of the campaign, as measured through follow-up surveys after the campaign concludes. This last indicator can be monitored through online, telephone, or house-to-house opinion polls or surveys. Polls and surveys



can track exposure to messages and measure messages influence on views.

The purpose of establishing measurable goals is not only to demonstrate success, but also to determine whether there was a return on investment in communication. With good metrics, a campaign will be able to determine which outreach activity was most effective and which audiences were most receptive. This will help inform a second phase of a campaign by indicating which activities and channels to emphasize for the most impact.

### Example of Engaging Citizens and Raising Public Awareness to Support Energy Subsidy Reform: Natural Gas Pricing Reform in Ukraine



For years, natural gas consumers in Ukraine paid prices that were far below gas import prices, incurring large losses for the utility. By 2015, energy price subsidies accounted for about 5 percent of Ukraine's gross domestic product (GDP). Faced with the need to reform price subsidies for natural gas, the Government

of Ukraine engaged a World Bank team for a technical assistance program. Public opinion research and a series of focus groups were conducted across the country. An awareness campaign was designed and implemented to reach citizens with compelling, evidence-based messaging about the need to reform gas price subsidies and the government's efforts to mitigate the impacts of price increases on poor households. The awareness campaign also focused on energy efficiency measures that could help citizens cope with higher prices and improvements to the national social assistance programs. Citizen feedback was used to design compelling messages for the awareness campaign, improve consumer knowledge, and influence public debate about reforms. The impact of Ukraine's citizen engagement efforts was far reaching: enrollment in assistance programs increased significantly, households adopted energy efficiency measures, and the government committed itself to continuing the reform process.

Through a comprehensive technical assistance program financed by the Energy Sector Management Assistance Program (ESMAP), the World Bank provided multisector expertise to address the full complexity of reforms (for example, poverty, social protection, and communication specialists, in addition to energy and macro-fiscal experts). One aspect of the work involved hands-on support to a citizen engagement and public awareness campaign to (a) understand the perceptions and attitudes of citizens and (b) design messages that would help build public understanding about the tariff increases. The technical assistance identified and supported the process of raising citizens' understanding of Ukraine's energy consumption, its lack of sustainability, and

potential solutions—including the need for energy efficiency measures to be adopted by Ukrainian citizens.

### Engaging Citizens to Assess Needs and Attitudes

In winter 2014–15, a survey was conducted of citizens across the country on energy issues. Forty focus group discussions on crucial energy issues were held before and after the heating season in 20 cities to develop an understanding of citizens' knowledge and attitudes, the impact of tariffs on household budgets, and their experience with social assistance programs. Questions were asked about whether citizens had seen a previous communication campaign on energy issues and their views on its effectiveness. In addition to these focus groups, a quantitative survey was conducted among 2,000 Ukrainians.

The findings indicated that citizens were shocked by the first, dramatic round of gas tariff increases and saw few ways to reduce their consumption. Of survey respondents, 69% viewed the increases as unjustified and did not consider them connected to larger energy reforms or the betterment of Ukraine. Respondents were also largely unaware of the assistance program that was being made available to them. The majority felt uninformed and they were keen to obtain more information, preferably through television and the Internet.

Although the government had understood the importance of informing the public, according to the results of this beneficiary feedback, the 2014 campaign to raise awareness about new tariffs and the social assistance programs had not been very effective. The existing communication campaign—which used billboards publicizing the government

hotline number to access social assistance and delivering specific energy efficiency messages (such as “Building conservation measures” or “Turn down your boiler”), print brochures, and advertisements painted on buildings—was not reaching enough people.

In December 2014, the findings of the beneficiary feedback survey were presented to a group of 18 government agencies to prompt a discussion about messaging and strategy. Support for brainstorming sessions was provided to identify how the government's communication strategy could be reoriented to better explain the need for energy reforms and raise awareness of the social assistance programs, as well as how to encourage more collaboration across government agencies for consistent communication. The World Bank team worked with the Cabinet of Ministers Public Affairs team to analyze the existing communication campaign and plan for a new wave of communication in 2015.

### Distilling the Message and Retargeting Communication

Using the findings of the beneficiary feedback survey and focus groups, a revised campaign with more tailored messages was launched in order to raise citizens' understanding that tariff increases were inevitable and to increase enrollment in the Housing and Utilities Subsidy Program. Messages about the wastefulness of Ukraine's energy price subsidies were reinforced and social protection specialists on the World Bank's Social Safety Nets Modernization Project team helped design an awareness campaign based on the concept of “social balance,” promoting the idea of balance between the society and the economy.

The messages that were formulated based on citizen feedback were used to produce TV



commercials, print brochures, and social media products used by the Cabinet of Ministers and distributed in municipal buildings and the public transport system. In order to reach more citizens—and in response to the survey findings that newspapers were still one of the most important channels for information—the World Bank sponsored outreach activities with journalists in 2015 and 2016. More than 500 journalists were trained across Ukraine in 15 sessions led by regional press clubs. Journalists were provided up-to-date information and had the opportunity to interact with technical experts from the Energy and Social Protection Ministries. Media monitoring after the events showed that in regions where media training was conducted, the quality of reporting on energy reforms improved.

An advertising agency developed a TV commercial that highlighted the waste of energy subsidies, discussed ways citizens could pursue energy efficiency measures at the household level, and explained the improvements being made to the social assistance programs to help people deal with the tariffs. The commercial's messages were designed with the Cabinet of Ministers and the World Bank team, and reflected the findings of the original citizen feedback survey and focus groups. The commercial broadcast the government's hotline number for applying for social assistance or get more information.

The television commercial was aired 400 times per week on 19 channels across Ukraine in the spring of 2016. At the same time, the process for enrolling applicants in the social assistance programs was being simplified and welfare officers were being trained in the new procedures under a separate World Bank project. After eight months, enrollment in the Housing and Utilities Subsidy Program

increased from 1.25 million to 5.5 million households.

### Lessons Learned in Ukraine

**A high level of government commitment is need for consistent communication about energy subsidy reform.** The government sets the pace of the reforms and determines the level of ownership of the awareness campaign. Those outside the government offering assistance need to be prepared to work at the government's pace and occasionally reassure the government that a diligent, evidence-based communication campaign can help shape public perceptions of reforms.

**Understanding citizens' perceptions of reforms is critical.** Designing outreach campaigns without fully understanding the opinions and awareness levels of citizens can be counterproductive. It is worth investing the time to assess citizens' knowledge, perceptions, and concerns. Messages can then be tailored to better address critical concerns and fill the gaps in citizens' knowledge and understanding of complex reforms.

**Prioritize channels that citizens already use and trust.** The survey and focus group discussions checked the government's assumptions about the best channels to use for reaching citizens. Given that resources are inevitably limited, a successful communication campaign should rely heavily on popular, trusted channels rather than create new channels for a specific campaign. Asking the target audience where they go for trusted information is an important first step to a campaign.

**Energy subsidy reform is a long and dynamic process.** To monitor the effectiveness of the citizen engagement effort, a second round of technical assistance conducted another

national survey, which analyzed how citizens coped during the 2015–16 heating season and again asked whether citizens had seen previous communication efforts by the government. The feedback showed improvements in awareness levels and understanding of the

rationale for reform, but also that there were still information gaps that needed to be addressed. In the second round of national communication conducted in the winter of 2016–2017, feedback from citizens was sought to give them a voice in the reform process.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

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Public reactions to subsidy reform programs are highly contextual and dynamic. Creating an informed and supportive public that understands the rationale for reform greatly improves the chances of success. International experience has shown that well-planned and consistent communication is critical to the success of sustainable energy subsidy reforms.

Communication is an investment and should be planned and implemented by experienced professionals before and during the stages of reform. By assessing risks and public sentiment

early, informing the public in accessible ways, and explaining the mitigation measures to protect poor and vulnerable households, public understanding and eventually goodwill can be built for a reform process. Communication campaigns must be flexible to accommodate shifting political, social, and cultural aspects of reform, but a well-planned, appropriate communication strategy based on empirical research will greatly enhance the effectiveness of any subsidy reform program.



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# Energy Subsidy Reform Assessment Framework

## LIST OF GOOD PRACTICE NOTES

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- NOTE 1** Identifying and Quantifying Energy Subsidies
- NOTE 2** Assessing the Fiscal Cost of Subsidies and Fiscal Impact of Reform
- NOTE 3** Analyzing the Incidence of Consumer Price Subsidies and the Impact of Reform on Households – Quantitative Analysis
- NOTE 4** Incidence of Price Subsidies on Households, and Distributional Impact of Reform – Qualitative Methods
- NOTE 5** Assessing the readiness of Social Safety Nets to Mitigate the Impact of Reform
- NOTE 6** Identifying the Impacts of Higher Energy Prices on Firms and Industrial Competitiveness
- NOTE 7** Modeling Macroeconomic Impacts and Global externalities
- NOTE 8** Local Environmental Externalities due to Energy Price Subsidies: A Focus on Air Pollution and Health
- NOTE 9** Assessing the Political Economy of Energy Subsidies to Support Policy Reform Operations
- NOTE 10** Designing Communications Campaigns for Energy Subsidy Reform