



Bridging Research and Reform

How 2025 Policy Dialogues are Reshaping Youth Futures in Africa

How Investment Cases are Becoming Game-Changers in Africa's Fight Against NCDs

When Budgets Ignore Women, Everyone Pays the Price

AFIDEP Supports Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) at Government Levels

Bridging the Data Access Gap

... and much more

AFIDEP *News* is the African Institute for Development Policy's biannual newsletter. It updates stakeholders on AFIDEP's programmes and highlights emerging policy issues that support Africa's Agenda 2063 and the global Sustainable Development Goals 2030. The newsletter focuses on population dynamics and the demographic dividend; health and wellbeing; education and skills development under the Human Capital Development pillar; and economic wellbeing, environment and climate change, governance and accountability under the Sustainable Growth and Governance pillar, with gender, equity and inclusion as core cross-cutting considerations.



AN AFRICA WHERE EVIDENCE IS USED CONSISTENTLY TO TRANSFORM LIVES

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Bridging research and reform: How 2025 policy dialogues are reshaping youth futures in Africa

By Nhlanhla Dhaka



Hon. Fikirini Jacobs Katoi Kahindi, Principal Secretary for the Ministry of Youth Affairs, Creative Economy, and Sports, delivers his remarks during the inaugural Youth Futures Research Policy Dialogue held in Nairobi.

Across Africa, millions of young people enter the labour market each year—yet economic transformation has not kept pace with their aspirations. While youth employment policies are abundant, too many remain fragmented, underfunded, or weakly implemented. The result is a widening gap between demographic potential and economic opportunity.

The Youth Futures Policy Research Project—a three-year strategic partnership between the African Institute for Development Policy and the CAP Youth Empowerment Institute, supported by the Mastercard Foundation—was designed to confront this challenge at its roots. The project focuses on strengthening policy performance: aligning research, political incentives, and youth leadership to ensure that national systems deliver dignified, productive, and future-ready work.

As 2025 draws to a close, the project marks a landmark year of reform momentum. Through a series of high-level Policy Dialogues across Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Senegal, and Ghana, evidence met political will in what became continental “policy laboratories.” By centring

Political Economy Analysis (PEA) and foresight modeling, the project is helping shift the narrative from managing a youth crisis to strategically investing in Africa’s demographic dividend.

From policy presence to policy performance

A recurring insight across the 2025 dialogues is clearly indicates that Africa does not lack youth policies, it lacks consistent implementation and accountability.

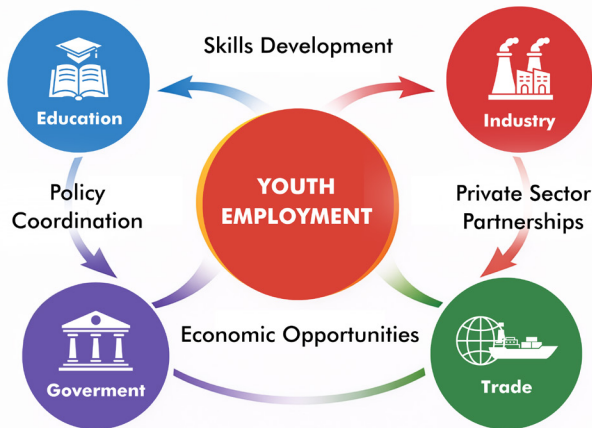
In Nigeria, October 2025, stakeholders acknowledged the proliferation of youth initiatives, but also their fragmentation and chronic implementation gaps. The dialogue catalyzed momentum toward a more unified National Youth Employment Strategy, anchored in Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) systems embedded within the national budget cycle. The shift is significant i.e. from policy announcements to performance-based delivery.

In Uganda, project research is informing the employment pillar of the National Development Plan IV (NDP IV), ensuring that “dignified work” becomes a measurable government

performance metric. Ministries are increasingly being challenged not only on what they plan, but on what they deliver.

Across countries, the message is consistent, youth employment reform must move beyond policy design to policy performance.

Breaking silos:



Solving youth employment requires a coordinated, cross-sector approach between education, industry, trade, and government.

Aligning education, industry, and trade

Another persistent barrier identified through the dialogues is fragmentation between education systems, labour markets, and trade frameworks.

In Kenya and Ghana, the 2025 engagements focused on strengthening the bridge between the classroom and the boardroom; specifically in Kenya, the dialogue deepened collaboration between government and the private sector, particularly through engagement with the Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA), to ensure the NYOTA programme remains demand-driven and responsive to labour market needs.

In Ghana, discussions emphasised strengthening education–industry linkages and preparing youth for opportunities emerging under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The focus: curricula reform, digital skills acceleration, and regulatory alignment that positions young people to benefit from the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and expanding digital trade.

These dialogues reinforced a central insight, youth employment cannot be solved within one ministry. It requires ecosystem-wide coordination.

Scaling opportunity through localisation

For employment to be meaningful, it must be accessible where young people live, not concentrated in capital cities alone.

In Senegal, for example, the November 2025 dialogue strengthened adoption of a territorialisation approach to youth employment policy. By engaging regional governors and local authorities, the project helped elevate local ownership of employment services and social protection systems.

This marks an important shift from Dakar-centric policymaking to nationally distributed opportunity. Rural youth, often excluded from formal employment structures, are increasingly being recognised as integral to economic transformation.

Localisation ensures that reform is not abstract but is tangible in communities.

Youth as researchers and reformers

A defining feature of the Youth Futures project is Youth Capacity Strengthening. Rather than positioning young people solely as beneficiaries, the project equips them as knowledge producers and accountability actors.

Throughout the policy dialogues in Addis Ababa, Abuja, and Nairobi, youth representatives played an active role in validating Political Economy findings and refining reform priorities. Their lived experiences sharpened policy recommendations and grounded discussions in practical realities.

This engagement contributed to the development of Youth Policy Action

Trackers tools enabling youth networks to monitor government commitments in real time. In doing so, the project transforms policy dialogue from a one-day convening into a sustained accountability mechanism.

With this intervention, the youth are not only preparing for the future of work, they are shaping the governance systems that determine it.

Conclusion: From evidence to investment in 2026

The 2025 dialogues went beyond validating research to building strong reform coalitions across countries. As the project transitions into its next phase, the focus shifts to developing country-specific investment cases and foresight policy scenarios that provide clear pathways for job creation across key sectors. Backed by growing trust and alignment, these tools are positioned to inform national plans, attract financing, and drive implementation. Ultimately, the engagements demonstrated that when evidence aligns with political will, and youth are engaged as partners, insight can be translated into meaningful, system-wide transformation.



Participants and media representatives at the launch of Ask-a-Metric, an AI-powered platform developed by IDinsight and AFIDEP under the POWER Consortium, in Lilongwe.

Bridging the data access gap: Introducing Ask-a-Metric for evidence-Informed decision-making

By Charlotte Chisoni

Across Africa, governments, researchers, and development partners are generating more data than ever before; from national surveys and administrative systems to programme monitoring platforms. Yet the availability of data does not automatically translate into its use.

For many policymakers and programme managers, accessing the specific data needed to answer a policy question can still be surprisingly difficult. Data is often buried in large survey reports, scattered across institutional databases, or locked within dashboards that require specialised analytical skills to navigate. In many cases, decision-makers rely on analysts or technical teams to retrieve information, which can slow down the process of responding to emerging policy questions.

This challenge is particularly pronounced in fast-moving policy environments where decisions must be made quickly, often with limited time to analyse large datasets. While tools such as national data portals and dashboards have improved access to information, they are not always mobile-friendly. This is because they require stable internet connectivity, and often assume a level of technical expertise that many policy actors do not have.

The result is a persistent gap between data production and data use. High-quality datasets exist, but they are not always easily accessible in formats that support everyday decision-making.

It is in response to this challenge that the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP), in collaboration with IDinsight under the Programme on Women's Empowerment Research (POWER) Consortium, has developed Ask-a-Metric, a WhatsApp-based chatbot designed to simplify access to key demographic and health data in Malawi.

Ask-a-Metric functions as a digital AI data analyst that allows users to interact with datasets using natural language. Instead of navigating dashboards or writing complex queries, users can simply ask questions through WhatsApp and receive responses in seconds.

The tool was officially introduced during a dissemination workshop held in Lilongwe, which brought together representatives from government ministries, the National Statistical Office, development partners, and academia to explore how the platform can support evidence-informed policymaking.

What data Ask-a-Metric currently uses

The current version of Ask-a-Metric draws on Malawi Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data from 2015–2016, covering indicators related to women and children. The database includes information on topics such as:

- ➔ Child vaccination and survival
- ➔ Age and demographic characteristics
- ➔ School attendance
- ➔ Marital status
- ➔ Childbirth history and fertility indicators

During the launch event, AFIDEP’s Director for Human Capital Development, Dr Naa Dadoo, highlighted the importance of making data more accessible to support evidence-informed policy and programme decisions. She noted that tools like Ask-a-Metric can help bridge the gap between data availability and data use by allowing users to access verified information quickly and easily.

Partners from the National Statistical Office (NSO) also welcomed the platform, noting that it provides an additional channel through which users can access data from official national surveys.

From the perspective of IDinsight, the development of Ask-a-Metric reflects a broader effort to make evidence easier to use for decision-makers.

“Access to data should not be limited by technical complexity,” noted a representative from IDinsight. “By

allowing users to ask questions in natural language and receive answers quickly, tools like Ask-a-Metric can help bring evidence closer to the decisions that affect people’s lives.”

Ask-a-Metric is currently being introduced as a proof-of-concept tool, and the development team is actively gathering feedback from users to refine and improve its functionality.

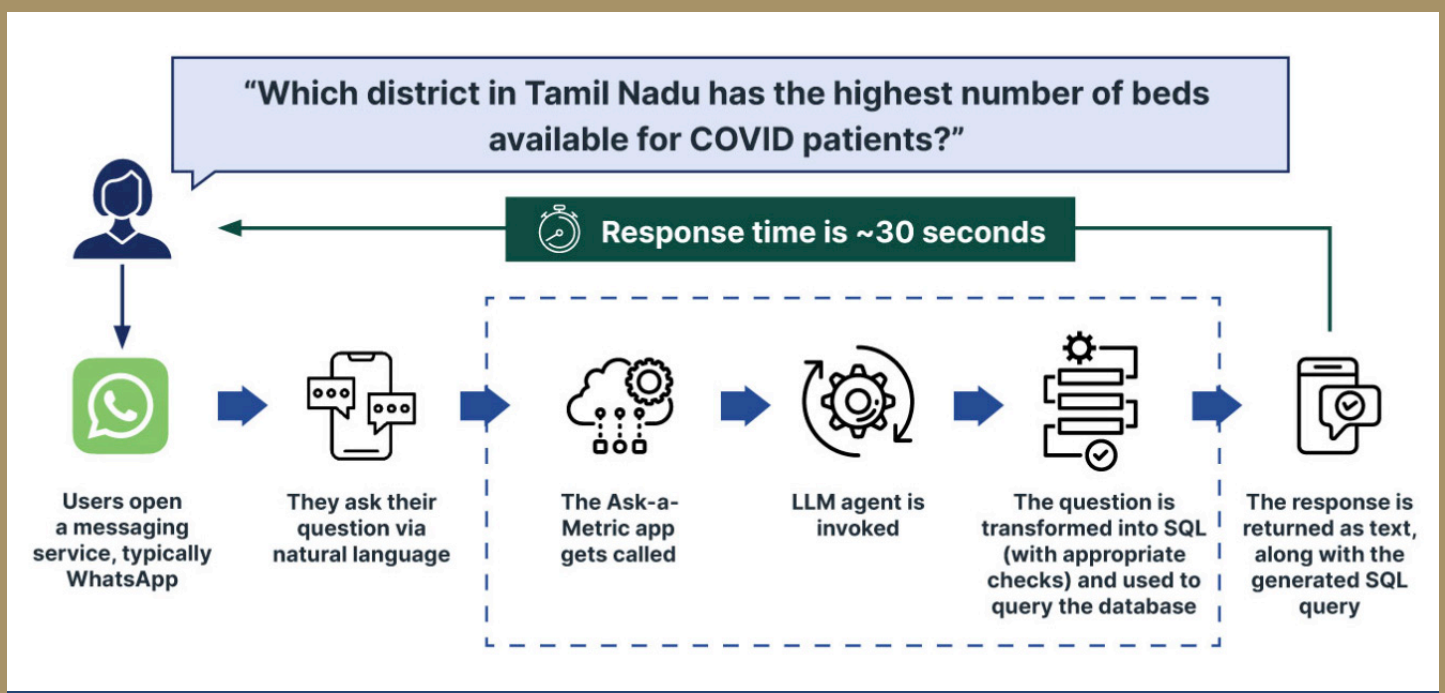
The launch of Ask-a-Metric marks an important step in exploring how emerging technologies can strengthen evidence use in policymaking.

Moving forward, AFIDEP and its partners plan to:

- ➔ Conduct deeper user research to understand decision-makers’ needs
- ➔ Identify priority use-cases within government institutions
- ➔ Pilot and refine the chatbot based on user feedback
- ➔ Establish systems for long-term deployment and maintenance of the tool

Ultimately, the goal is simple: to make data easier to access, easier to understand, and easier to use for better decisions.

As Malawi and other countries continue to strengthen evidence-informed development, innovations like Ask-a-Metric offer new possibilities for bringing data closer to policy and practice.



A flow diagram illustrating the step-by-step process of how the Ask-a-Metric tool works.

When budgets ignore women, everyone pays the price – AFIDEP supports GRB at government levels

By Edel Sakwa



Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) ensures that women’s agricultural labour is translated into tangible economic empowerment, moving from “invisible” toil to recognised financial gain.

A certain woman in a Taita Taveta village toiled through an entire planting season — preparing the land, tending to her crops, ensuring a successful harvest. But once the produce was ready, her husband arranged the transport, sold everything, and kept most of the earnings. He handed her Kshs. 5,000 out of Kshs. 50,000 and instructed her to “use it properly.” Her labour — critical to the household economy — went unpaid, unacknowledged, and unseen. — A County Team Leader (Participant)

Stories like this are not isolated. They are symptoms of a deeper, systemic failure showing the persistent invisibility of women’s economic contributions in the very policies and budgets designed to serve them.

Which raises uncomfortable questions. How often do we account for the disproportionate unpaid care and agricultural labour that women contribute? How well do policymakers actually understand and apply the tools that enable Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB)? And why do we still design budgets that are gender blind to women’s economic realities?

What GRB actually means

GRB is not about creating a separate budget for women. It is about ensuring that public resources are allocated with an understanding

of how different policies affect men and women differently, and correcting the imbalances that make women’s contributions invisible and their needs underserved.

Promoting GRB at all levels of government — national and subnational — is the only way to ensure equitable resource allocation and embed support for women’s needs across every sector.

Building capacity where it counts

The African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP), through its Macroeconomic Policy for Women’s Economic Empowerment (WEE) project, partnered with State Department for Gender and Affirmative Action under the Ministry of Gender, Culture and Children Services and The National Treasury to conduct capacity-strengthening trainings across five Counties — Nyeri, Kakamega, Kisii, Isiolo, and Taita Taveta— equipping County government finance officials with practical GRB skills.

The training delivered meaningful results across knowledge, skills, and collaboration. Participants left with a stronger grasp of GRB frameworks and, critically, how GRB connects across key county planning documents, from the County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) to the Programme-Based Budgeting (PBB) to ensure gender is mainstreamed at

In Taita Taveta, a woman toils for a full planting season only to see her harvest sold and her earnings kept by a system that renders her labor invisible. In Nyeri and Isiolo, county finance officials are dismantling this invisibility by embedding gender-responsive indicators directly into public budgets. In Kakamega and Kisii, policymakers are moving beyond “gender-blind” planning to ensure that every shilling spent accounts for the realities of women’s economic contributions. These initiatives are not mere administrative exercises; they are proof that Africa can build a future where budgets are not just balanced, but truly equitable.

every stage of the budget cycle. Hands-on practical exercises deepened understanding and built confidence in applying GRB tools, with pre- and post-test scores confirming notable knowledge gains.

Equally, there was significant shift in mindset: participants began moving away from viewing GRB as solely a gender issue, recognising it instead as a core public finance management responsibility. The cross-sectoral participation spanning five sectors and bringing together national and county government representatives fostered a more unified approach to budget reform. Participants left motivated to interrogate their county budgets and identify concrete entry

points where gender-responsive indicators can be embedded in Annual Development Plans.

Leadership that points the way

Some counties are already demonstrating what is possible. Taita Taveta County has shown commendable leadership in championing gender equity, even before this programme began. They already have quarterly webinars titled ‘Karakana za Bajeti’ where they analyse budget documents at every stage of the budget process, thus leveraging this to focus on GRB is easier. That kind of institutional commitment matters enormously. This signals that GRB is not simply a donor-driven agenda, but a genuine priority for local governance.

AFIDEP’s broader macroeconomic policy work on WEE is aimed at advancing gender-responsive fiscal governance and promoting equitable allocation of public resources for women, men, boys and girls alike. The capacity-building programme is one pillar of that mission: ensuring that the officials responsible for translating budgets into reality have both the knowledge and the tools to do so in ways that count women and all genders in, not out.

Conclusion

Budgets reflect choices about who matters and whose work is valued. A gender-blind budget does not merely overlook women, it actively reinforces the conditions that keep them economically marginalised.

Changing that requires trained officials, better gender disaggregated data, stronger frameworks, and political commitment at every level of government.



WHAT GRB ACTUALLY MEANS



Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) ensures public resources work fairly for women, men, boys and girls.

✗ **GRB IS NOT**

- A SEPARATE BUDGET FOR WOMEN**
 It is not about creating a stand-alone budget or fund for women.
- EXTRA SPENDING ONLY**
 It is not simply about increasing spending or adding more money.
- A SOCIAL WELFARE ADD-ON**
 It is not limited to social sectors or women-focused projects.
- A ONE-OFF ACTIVITY OR CHECKLIST**
 It is not a quick exercise, but a continuous process across the budget



✓ **GRB IS**

- FAIR ALLOCATION OF PUBLIC RESOURCES**
 Ensuring resources are distributed in ways that recognise different needs and remove barriers to equality.
- GENDER ANALYSIS IN BUDGETING**
 Systematically analysing how policies, programmes and budgets affect women, men, boys and girls differently.
- CORRECTING INEQUALITIES**
 Addressing disadvantages and closing gaps so that everyone can benefit equally from public resources.
- BETTER PUBLIC FINANCE MANAGEMENT**
 Improving efficiency, effectiveness and accountability by making budgets more inclusive and responsive to real needs.

THE GOAL OF GRB

Recognise and value everyone's contribution

Design policies and budgets that respond to real needs

Allocate resources equitably and effectively

Build a more inclusive, prosperous and just society for all.

GRB is about making budgets work for people, not just numbers.

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Empowering Women for Ghana's Economic Growth (2022–2025)

Gender equality: A catalyst for development



Key initiatives across Ghana

Integrating Gender Perspectives into Policies & Budgets



Women in Agriculture



Female-Led Agribusiness

Fiscal Challenges for Women Entrepreneurs



Complex taxes & procurement barriers



Recent reforms improving access to credit



Trade and Export Opportunities

Shea, Textiles, Handicrafts & Export Funding



Success Stories in Women's Empowerment

Financial Inclusion Programmes

Microfinance & Digital Banking



25K+

Women-led Businesses Supported



150K+

Women Entrepreneurs Reached



The Path Forward



Expand Credit Access



Tax Incentives for Women



Improve Childcare & Transport



Expand Childcare



Protect Women's Economic Rights

+ 12 Billion

GDP Potential by 2025

Investing in Women Accelerates Ghana's Growth



The conversation on climate change in Africa often dwells on loss in form of droughts, floods, and other climate shocks.

Ghana's macroeconomic policy framework and gender impact

By Maame Peterson, Ph.D.

Ghana's Medium-Term National Development Policy Framework (2022-2025) champions gender equality as a catalyst for growth, embedding women's economic empowerment into policy and budgets. The Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA) tracks progress via metrics like female labour participation and business registrations, while the National Gender Policy provides the architectural foundation for integrating gender perspectives into fiscal planning. Budget statements now incorporate gender analysis sections, though implementation remains inconsistent across ministries.

The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection coordinates with the Ministry of Finance to ensure Ghana macroeconomic policies gender considerations reach beyond surface-level commitments, albeit, with challenges.

Sub-national development initiatives demonstrate varying degrees of success in gender integration. The Northern Development Authority has implemented targeted

programmes addressing women's access to agricultural value chains, while the Middle Belt Development Authority focuses on supporting female-led agribusiness ventures.

Fiscal policies affecting women-owned businesses

Ghana's tax system offers mixed outcomes for women entrepreneurs. Simplified rules for small businesses and mobile money tax payments ease burdens for informal, rural female-led ventures. Yet, complex paperwork and procurement biases like requiring prior contracts or heavy guarantees still marginalise many. Recent reforms, including procurement and credit guarantees, aim to level the playing field by reducing collateral demands and boosting access to capital. However, stronger enforcement is vital to turn policy into tangible progress, ensuring women can thrive in formal markets without being trapped by systemic barriers.

Trade and export policies supporting female entrepreneurs

Ghana's National Export Strategy (2023-2027) identifies women's participation in export-oriented industries as a priority area for economic diversification. The strategy targets sectors where women already demonstrate strong participation, including shea processing, textiles, and handicrafts, providing a foundation for scaling up female involvement in international trade. The Export Development and Agricultural Investment Fund (EDAIF) has allocated specific funding windows for women-led export ventures. These programmes offer concessional financing for equipment acquisition, product certification, and market development activities. Processing facilities for agricultural exports now receive preferential support when women constitute significant portions of the workforce or management structure.

The Ghana Export Promotion Authority has established dedicated support units for women exporters, providing market intelligence, product development assistance, and connections to international buyers. Partnership agreements with international organisations have created direct export channels for women's cooperatives, particularly in the agricultural and handicraft sectors.

Success stories and effective economic empowerment programmes

Government-led initiatives driving financial inclusion

Ghana is making strides in empowering women economically through targeted initiatives. The National Financial Inclusion and Development Strategy (NFIDS) prioritises women, ensuring they benefit from tailored financial support. The Ghana Enterprises Agency's Business Development Fund has injected over millions of cedis into 25,000+ women-led businesses since 2017, offering low-interest loans to spark growth. Meanwhile, the Rural Enterprise Programme's 200+ Business Advisory Centres, where 60% of participants are women, provide vital training in financial literacy, business planning, and market access, uplifting over 100,000 rural women via agribusiness and crafts. Digital inclusion is accelerating too, with GhIPSS's interoperable mobile money platform, simplifying transactions and expanding financial reach.

Microfinance and digital banking solutions transforming access

The microfinance landscape has undergone remarkable transformation, directly addressing women's economic empowerment in Ghana through innovative product designs and delivery mechanisms. Sinapi Aba Savings and Loans has empowered over 150,000 women entrepreneurs with GHS 890 million in group loans since 2015, while 8,500 Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) mobilise GHS 125 million annually, offering 78% female members collateral-free access to income opportunities. Fidelity Bank's Fidelity Work platform digitises financial services, reaching 45,000 women in healthcare, education, and

public sectors via mobile banking. AgroMoney, supported by the Bank of Ghana's regulatory sandbox, leverages satellite tech to provide tailored agricultural loans to over 8,000 women farmers. Zeepay's rural agent banking model, with 65% women as agents, expands financial inclusion through numerous service points, boosting household incomes.

GDP growth and productivity gains from gender inclusion



Economic research consistently demonstrates that countries with higher levels of women's economic empowerment experience accelerated GDP growth rates.

When women participate fully in the labour force, Ghana stands to gain substantial productivity benefits that ripple throughout the entire economy.

The McKinsey Global Institute estimates that advancing women's economic participation could add \$12 billion to Ghana's GDP by 2025. This projection reflects the untapped potential of Ghana's female workforce, which currently faces significant underutilisation despite representing approximately 51% of the population. Cash transfer programmes specifically targeting women have proven particularly effective. Ghana's Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme, which provides direct payments to vulnerable women, has reduced extreme poverty by 15% in participating communities while simultaneously improving child nutrition outcomes.

Strategic policy recommendations for accelerated progress

Financial sector reforms to expand credit access

Ghana's banking sector needs targeted reforms to address the credit gap that limits women's economic participation. Traditional collateral requirements often exclude women who lack land titles or other acceptable assets. Banks should develop alternative credit scoring models that recognise women's repayment patterns and business potential beyond conventional metrics.

Microfinance institutions require stronger regulatory frameworks and capital support to scale their operations effectively. These institutions already serve many women entrepreneurs but need enhanced capacity to offer larger loans and longer repayment terms. The Bank of Ghana should establish specialised lending quotas that encourage commercial banks to dedicate specific percentages of their portfolios to women-owned businesses.

Risk-sharing mechanisms between government and private lenders can reduce perceived risks associated with lending to women entrepreneurs. Partial credit guarantee schemes specifically designed for women-owned businesses would encourage banks to extend credit while protecting their interests. These guarantees should cover sectors where women are particularly active, such as agriculture, retail, and services.

Tax incentives and subsidies for women entrepreneurs

The government should implement progressive tax policies that directly support women. Start-up tax holidays for women-owned businesses during their first operational years would provide crucial breathing room for new ventures. These incentives should be coupled with simplified tax registration processes that reduce bureaucratic obstacles.

Sector-specific subsidies can encourage women to venture beyond traditional sectors into high-growth industries. Technology and manufacturing sectors, where women remain underrepresented, deserve particular attention through reduced corporate tax rates and equipment import duty exemptions.

Value-added tax (VAT) exemptions for essential business inputs used by women entrepreneurs would reduce operational costs significantly. Raw materials, basic equipment, and business registration fees should qualify for these exemptions. Export incentives such as reduced export duties, streamlined documentation processes, and preferential treatment in trade missions would boost women's participation in international markets.

Infrastructure investments supporting work-life balance

Transportation infrastructure directly impacts women's ability to access markets and maintain businesses. Improved

rural road networks would connect women farmers and traders to urban markets more efficiently. Public transportation systems with safety features and convenient schedules would enable more women to participate in formal employment.

Childcare infrastructure represents a fundamental requirement for women's workforce development. Government-sponsored daycare centres in commercial districts and industrial zones would remove significant barriers to women's employment. These facilities should operate extended hours to accommodate various work schedules and include after-school programmes for older children.

Digital infrastructure investments, particularly broadband internet access, would enable women to participate in the digital economy. Rural internet connectivity would allow women to access online markets, digital training programmes, and remote work opportunities. This infrastructure supports both entrepreneurship and formal employment options.

Legal framework improvements protecting women's economic rights

Property rights reforms should ensure women can own and inherit land independently. Current customary practices often prevent women from using land as collateral for business loans. New legislation should explicitly protect women's land ownership rights and establish clear procedures for property registration and transfer.

Commercial law improvements should eliminate gender-based restrictions on business registration and operations. Some traditional practices still limit women's ability to enter certain business sectors or sign contracts without male consent. Modern commercial codes should explicitly prohibit such discrimination.

To conclude...

While Ghana has made commendable progress, persistent structural barriers like restricted credit access and inadequate infrastructure continue to stifle women's economic potential. AFIDEP's empirical evidence confirms that integrating gender-responsive approaches into national frameworks significantly bolsters productivity, accelerates poverty reduction, and enhances overall resilience.

To secure a prosperous future, policymakers must move beyond recognising these challenges to executing measurable strategies that expand financial access and protect the rights of women entrepreneurs. By dismantling these remaining obstacles, the nation can finally transform gender equity into a primary engine for sustainable national development and inclusive growth. This strategic shift will ensure that women are not just participants in the economy, but central drivers of Ghana's long-term stability and competitive edge in the global market.



Institutionalising evidence-informed decision-making in Kenya's health and energy sectors

By Belinda Korir

It will take evidence, equity, and action to bridge the gap between technical data and real-world change, ensuring that progress toward the SDGs across Africa is both sustainable and inclusive.

Across Africa, the urgency to accelerate progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has never been clearer. Whether in clean energy transitions or maternal and child health outcomes, the challenge is not only about generating data or building individual capacity for evidence generation and use, but ensuring that evidence is systematically used, interpreted, and translated into equitable action.

In July 2025, AFIDEP, through the Learning Together to Advance Evidence and Equity in Policymaking (LEEPS) project, convened two capacity-strengthening workshops in Kenya, one focused on clean energy planning and the other on maternal and child health. Though in different sectors, both engagements shared a common goal: institutionalising evidence-informed, gender-responsive policymaking.

Strengthening climate planning with KCERT 2050

In Naivasha, 28 national government officials from the Ministry of Energy and Petroleum and its agencies were trained on the Kenya Carbon Emissions Reduction Tool (KCERT 2050), an open-source model that simulates energy and emissions pathways toward net zero by 2050. Participants explored sector modules covering transport,

electricity, industry, buildings, and land use, learning how policy choices translate into emissions and cost projections.

The training improved knowledge and confidence. Before the workshop, most participants reported only basic or no understanding of the tool; afterward, nearly half rated their understanding as advanced or expert. Many expressed willingness to champion KCERT within their institutions.

Discussions also highlighted systemic challenges (fragmented data systems, limited interoperability, and insufficient gender-disaggregated data) reinforcing that tools must be embedded within supportive institutional frameworks to drive impact.

Turning health data into action in Baringo County

In Eldoret County, Kenya, AFIDEP partnered with the Ministry of Health and the African Leaders Malaria Alliance to train 32 county and sub-county health managers on the Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, Adolescent Health and Nutrition (RMNCAH&N) Scorecard. Using real-time county data, participants analysed performance trends, identified bottlenecks, and developed Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART) action plans supported by an online Action Tracker.

percent rated their understanding of the scorecard as high or very high, and confidence in using it for decision-making rose sharply.

Participants also noted barriers such as connectivity challenges, resource constraints, and socio-cultural factors that may affect implementation, underscoring the need for continued mentorship and leadership support.

A shared lesson across sectors

The workshops had a dedicated gender session which deepened awareness of how norms, power dynamics, and cultural practices shape access to energy, the adoption of technologies, decision-making authority within households, and Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH) outcomes strengthening participants' ability to apply a gender-responsive lens in planning and monitoring.

Across both workshops, a clear message emerged: building technical capacity is the first step in promoting evidence use. Sustainable progress depends on leadership buy-in, interoperable data systems, routine integration of gender analysis, and local champions who drive uptake within institutions.

From modelling Kenya's clean energy transition to improving maternal and child health outcomes, this work demonstrates that evidence becomes transformative when it is institutionalised, inclusive, and consistently applied to real-world decisions.

Through LEEPS, AFIDEP remains committed to strengthening evidence and equity at the heart of policymaking, ensuring that data informs action, and action delivers impact.



Belinda Korir, Research and Policy Associate (AFIDEP), presents on gender-responsive policymaking under the LEEPS project in Benin.

Turning evidence into action: How the LIGHT Project is shaping TB policy in Africa

By Gracious Ali



Panelists at the LIGHT session during the First National Public Health Dissemination Conference in Lilongwe.

For decades, tuberculosis (TB) has remained one of the world's deadliest infectious diseases. Millions of people worldwide continue to fall ill each year, and significant gaps remain in access to TB diagnosis, treatment, and prevention services, especially among underserved populations such as men.

Globally, men are disproportionately affected by TB as they account for 54% of TB cases compared to women (35%) and children (11%). The situation is not different in the African region, which accounts for 24.5% of global TB cases. Men alone account for 53% of the TB burden in Africa. Addressing these notable gender gaps in the fight against TB calls for more than just scientific discovery. It requires addressing the gap in translating the knowledge and innovations into policies and programmes that reach those most affected.

Through its work under the Leaving no-one behind: transforming Gendered pathways to Health for TB (LIGHT) project, African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP) is helping bridge this gap by ensuring that research does not remain on shelves but informs policies, programmes, and public dialogue on TB across Africa. Between July and December 2025, AFIDEP and its partners intensified efforts to translate research evidence on gender disparities in TB

into actionable policy discussions at national and regional levels.

Elevating evidence in national policy dialogues

In October 2025, AFIDEP in collaboration with its consortium partner the Malawi Liverpool Wellcome Programme (MLW) hosted a LIGHT Consortium plenary session during Malawi's first National Research Dissemination Conference. The event brought together over 300 delegates from government, academia, and civil society to discuss emerging evidence on how gender and social dynamics influence TB outcomes. These discussions helped elevate the importance of gender-responsive approaches in TB programming and strengthened momentum for integrating such approaches into national TB strategies.

Further engagement with policymakers took place in December 2025, when AFIDEP, MLW, and the National Tuberculosis and Leprosy Elimination Program (NTLEP) under the Ministry of Health, met with Malawi's newly constituted Parliamentary Committee on Health at the Malawi Parliament Building. The meeting introduced parliamentarians to key TB challenges and emerging

research evidence, while highlighting the importance of domestic financing and evidence-informed decision-making in the TB response. The dialogue also laid the groundwork for further parliamentary engagements in 2026, which will provide a dedicated platform for policymakers to engage with new research findings and policy recommendations.

“As policymakers, we rely on credible evidence to guide decisions that affect our citizens,” a member of the Parliamentary Committee on Health remarked during the meeting. “Platforms like this help ensure that research findings inform how we allocate resources and strengthen our health systems.”

Building capacity for evidence-informed decision-making

LIGHT Consortium partners in Kenya – AFIDEP and the Respiratory Society of Kenya (ReSoK) in collaboration with the National Tuberculosis, Leprosy and Lung Disease Program (NTLD-P) held a workshop to strengthen the capacity of policymakers and programme managers to interpret and use research evidence. In October 2025, a scientific research workshop brought together government officials and TB programme stakeholders to build skills in evidence synthesis, health economics, research methods, and mathematical modelling. The training enhanced policymakers’ capacity to interpret research evidence and apply it to TB policy discussions and programme planning. The workshop also led to the formation of a modelling working group within the NTLD-P, which will support data-driven planning and policy development.

Expanding regional policy influence

Beyond national borders, AFIDEP extended its work on evidence driven policy to regional platforms to extend the impact of the LIGHT project across Africa. In October 2025, AFIDEP co-hosted the 2025 annual meeting of TB programme managers from across the Southern African Development Community (SADC), bringing together representatives from twelve countries. The meeting served as a platform to share research evidence on gender disparities in TB care and to discuss how these insights can inform regional and national strategies.

Following the deliberations, member states reached consensus on a set of commitments aimed at strengthening gender-responsive TB policies and programming. These included improving the collection

and use of sex- and age-disaggregated data and incorporating gender-responsive interventions into national TB strategic plans and funding proposals. These commitments will inform the updated SADC TB Strategy for 2025-2030 and guide future national policy reforms.

Building momentum for research uptake

Throughout this period, AFIDEP also worked with partners to strengthen communication and dissemination of research findings. Several communication products including blogs, evidence briefs, reports, and multimedia materials were produced to engage policymakers, researchers, and the public. The AFIDEP LIGHT team also participated in two annual convenings in Copenhagen, Denmark in November 2025: LIGHT Consortium Year Six Annual Meeting and the World Union Conference on Lung Health, where it engaged in research and policy discussions on TB and gender.

These activities formed part of a broader strategy to ensure that evidence generated through the LIGHT project reaches decision-makers and influences policy processes at multiple levels.

Looking ahead: Sustaining impact

As the LIGHT programme approaches completion, its legacy extends beyond research findings. The programme has demonstrated that effective TB responses require not only biomedical innovations, but also meaningful policy change built upon strong partnerships between researchers, policymakers, and communities.

By strengthening the interface between research and policymaking, AFIDEP and its partners have contributed to building a stronger evidence ecosystem, one where policymakers, researchers, and communities work together to co-create solutions that leave no one behind.

Initiatives like LIGHT show that when evidence informs policy and programming, health systems become more responsive, equitable, and effective. This approach will remain essential as countries across Africa continue to accelerate progress toward ending TB.

From local impact to global voice: LIGHT Consortium at the Union Conference in Copenhagen

By Gracious Ali and Edel Sakwa



From left to right: Dr Eliya Zulu (Executive Director, AFIDEP), Dr Brenda Mungai (Senior Research and Policy Analyst, AFIDEP), and Gracious Ali (Research and Policy Associate) at the Union Conference in Copenhagen.

In November 2025, The LIGHT Consortium brought together its community of researchers, advocates, and change-makers for a week of sharing, learning, and influencing the global tuberculosis agenda. From our Annual Partners Meeting to the World Lung Health Conference, the consortium demonstrated how gender-responsive TB research is transforming lives across Africa, and how those transformations are now shaping global policy conversations.

Celebrating country impact at the Annual Partners Meeting The LIGHT Consortium Year Six Annual Meeting opened with evidence of progress from partner countries; Kenya, Uganda, Malawi, Nigeria and the UK. To mention a few, Nigeria's Zankli Research Centre presented findings that are fundamentally reshaping gender-responsive TB care. Their research uncovered persistent gender disparities, while more women were screened for TB, more men were diagnosed,

revealing critical missed opportunities linked to masculinity norms and economic survival pressures in peri-urban communities.

Co-creating this community-led interventions is driving real change. Working alongside communities, Nigerian researchers developed a gender-responsive TB model that improved knowledge, reduced stigma, and increased case notifications for both men and women. Most impressively, these findings have gained national traction at policy level and gender has been elevated as a standalone objective in Nigeria's National Strategic Plan (2021–2026).

From Kenya, the Respiratory Society of Kenya (ReSoK) team shared insights on youth-responsive interventions and methodological innovations. Their site visit in communities within Nairobi exemplified LIGHT's commitment to contextual, community-informed science.

With lost of gratitude, selected team members shared their personal reflections showcasing the growth, learning, and transformation experienced during the project. Each of the reflections gave a hint on how the LIGHT project has not only impacted governments and communities, but also personal growth of its own team members.

Building skills, strengthening systems

Beyond research findings, LIGHT partners reported substantial capacity strengthening across the TB ecosystem. National TB programme officers trained in scientific writing, health journalists equipped to improve TB reporting, community leaders prepared to drive stigma reduction, and surveyors skilled in data collection—these investments ensure that impact outlasts any single project.

In Nigeria, high-level engagements with parliamentarians and state leadership expanded advocacy for domestic TB financing, while community collaborations with traditional leaders strengthened trust for future work and generally this has deepened engagements.

Union conference

LIGHT participated intensively at the Union World Conference on Lung Health. Kenyan representatives presented oral abstracts on mortality predictors among young people with TB—critical data for youth-responsive interventions. Others shared methodological insights on transect walks, demonstrating how ground-level understanding ensures research remains truly contextual.

But perhaps most impactful was LIGHT’s workshop on participatory visual methods, titled “No-one ever asked us before! Building trust and collaborative action through TB research.” The session brought together researchers, TB survivors, and advocates from all four partner countries to demonstrate how photovoice, rivers of life, and other creative methods—grounded in equity and community leadership—can build trust and reduce stigma.

Zakaria Abdullahi, a TB survivor and Kenyan medical student, shared his journey from disease to cure using the “Rivers of Life” method. His participation in LIGHT research using this approach transformed him from patient to advocate. Similarly, Malawi NTLEP’s Rebecca Karimu of was celebrated as a Photovoice expert and champion during panel discussions.

Leading the gender equity conversation

LIGHT’s influence extended to high-level policy discussions. At the WHO panel on the Union Working Group on Gender Equity, co-founded by LIGHT three years ago, the African

Institute for Development Policy’s Executive Director Dr Eliya Zulu made an essential point:



Even though more resources are earmarked for interventions that are termed ‘life saving’ such as treatment, unfortunately, we cannot save more lives without addressing these gender issues.

Throughout the conference, LIGHT’s visual presence was unmistakable. Photographs from all four countries graced the Community Connect gallery, visually illustrating research and engagement in action. The consortium also hosted a joyous meet-up for its growing Alumni community—early career researchers whose professional trajectories have been positively transformed by LIGHT mentorship and opportunity.

“No-one ever asked us before. Through participatory methods, we’re not just collecting data—we’re saying to communities: your voice matters, your experience guides our science, and together we will end TB.”

Workshop participant and community advocate

Looking forward

As Copenhagen 2025 concluded, LIGHT researchers returned to their countries carrying new connections, fresh insights on diagnostic approaches and DR-TB regimens, and renewed commitment to the work ahead.

The “last lap” of this project promises continued momentum, translating global conversations into local action, and ensuring that gender-responsive TB prevention and care remain central to ending TB by 2030.

Funded by UK aid and led by Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine with partners across Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Uganda, and the UK, the consortium has consistently demonstrated how gender norms, power dynamics, and social determinants shape vulnerability to TB and access to care.



Participants at the Financing Accelerator Network for NCDs (FAN) workshop in Nairobi, where policymakers and healthcare leaders from seven African nations were convening for a two-day cross-country learning exchange to transform NCD financing across the region.

How investment cases are becoming game-changers in Africa's fight against NCDs

By Derick Ngaira and Victor Kidake

Across Africa, the rising burden of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) is prompting governments to reassess how they plan, budget, and invest in health. This urgency came through during "Making the Case for NCD Investments: Understand the What and How," the first session of the new Financing Accelerator Network for NCDs (FAN) webinar series held on 3 December 2025.

Health and financing experts from Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, The Gambia, and Uganda gathered to explore how investment cases can guide more strategic financing decisions. Hosted by the African Institute for Development Policy, FAN's regional NCD Financing Accelerator, the session provided a platform for countries to exchange

experiences and compare approaches on how evidence can shape policy and strengthen health financing systems.

Understanding the why and the what

Dr Julius Korir, Health Policy Researcher and Analyst at the Kenyatta University in Kenya opened the discussion by defining investment cases as documents that stitch together economics, policy analysis, and health evidence into a compelling argument for action.

An investment case is the bridge between evidence and political action. It shows the real cost of doing nothing and the immense economic and social gains countries stand to achieve when they prioritise NCD prevention and control, he noted.

This framing set the tone for the discussions that followed. Investment cases are practical tools that help governments answer critical questions: What is the national burden of disease? How much would it cost to scale up proven interventions? And what are the projected benefits over 5 to 10 years? The session highlighted that these analyses also consider institutional realities including governance structures, financing gaps, and the capacity of countries to implement recommended interventions.

Understanding the how

Representatives from Kenya and Ghana - both country members of the FAN Network - shared how investment cases are informing decisions.

Kenya's presentation on cardiovascular disease (CVD) modelling highlighted the scale of the challenge: CVDs account for roughly a quarter of hospital admissions and remain one of the top causes of mortality. The modelling drew from real claims data and national health information systems, showing that early screening and improved outpatient care could reduce dependence on costly inpatient treatment.

The analysis also noted that general government spending on health stands at only 2.2% of GDP, far below the 5% benchmark needed for strong universal health coverage (UHC). 30% of total health expenditure is made through out-of-pocket payments often exposing households to impoverish healthcare expenditure.

"Our modelling shows that investing early in cardiovascular care is not only lifesaving, but also economically transformative. A 10-year horizon gives us a Return on Investment (ROI) of nearly 380 percent, clear evidence that strategic financing of CVDs strengthens both the health system and the economy," said Dr Samson Kuhora, Head of Benefits Design at Social Health Authority, Kenya.

Ghana's story offered a different angle, demonstrating how investment cases can shape fiscal policy. The country faces an estimated annual economic loss of GHC 668 million (USD 58.5 million) due to tobacco-related illness, more than seven times the revenue generated from tobacco taxes before reforms. This evidence supported sweeping changes, including adjustments to the excise tax structure and the introduction of levies on sugar-sweetened beverages. These reforms unlocked more than GHS 1.3 billion (USD 113.9 million) in combined revenue from tobacco, alcohol, and sugar sweetened beverages, funds that can strengthen health financing and support NCD services.

"Our tobacco investment case proved that public health measures can drive revenue growth. Within a single year, excise earnings from sugar-sweetened beverages rose by almost 80 percent, and tobacco revenues more than doubled. This is the power of evidence-informed tax reform," noted Labram Musa, Executive Director, Vision for Accelerated Sustainable Development, Ghana.

Participants used the discussion to probe practical challenges: data availability, how to use tools such as the OneHealth Tool, and how institutional analysis can help predict political support or bottlenecks.

From knowledge to implementation

In 2026, the FAN learning series for Sub-Saharan Africa will dive deeper into economic modelling, fiscal space analysis, and strategies for translating evidence into political and budgetary action. Countries will also be supported to initiate or refine their own investment cases, backed by peer learning exchanges between early adopters, like Kenya and Ghana, and countries just beginning their journey.

With the right tools, data, and collaboration, countries can make stronger, more strategic investments that protect both lives and economies. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, there is a growing consensus that smart, evidence-driven investments in NCDs are not just a health imperative, they are a foundation for economic resilience and sustainable development.

THE BIG PICTURE


Smart, evidence-driven investments in NCDs are not just a health imperative - they are a foundation for economic resilience and sustainable development





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