



Story of change: Spotlight on Eunice Atsali

Strengthening evidence translation and use and gender-responsiveness in maternal health advocacy, policy, practice and training

By Belinda Korir and Dr Violet Murunga

Improving maternal and newborn health outcomes requires more than clinical expertise, it demands strong connections between research, frontline practice, and policy decision-making. In Kenya, Eunice Atsali has dedicated her career to building these links. A midwife, academic, and policy actor, Eunice works across multiple platforms to ensure that research evidence informs professional associations, academia, and national health policymaking.

Eunice serves as the Vice Chair of the Midwives Association of Kenya (MAK), lectures in the Department of Community and Reproductive Health at Kenyatta University and provides technical input to the Ministry of Health on maternal and newborn health policies. Eunice is also a co-principal investigator in a national programme focused on the prevention of postpartum haemorrhage (PPH), a leading cause of maternal mortality in the country.

The Alliance for Evidence and Equity in Policy-making in Africa (AEEPA) is led by the African Institute for Policy Development (AFIDEP). AEEPA is one of three Africa LEEPS initiatives who lead technical capacity strengthening and policy engagement activities. The Alliance aims to accomplish the following objectives:

- Strengthen institutional and individual EIP technical capacity at local and national levels to enhance decisionmaking in policy and programs with initial priority to reproductive health and clean energy
- Integrate gender equity in EIP processes at program and institutional levels with initial priority given to reproductive health and clean energy
- Nurture EIP networking and learning within countries and across the region
- Stimulate improvements in reproductive health and clean energy programmatic interventions in Kenya and Nigeria

Across these roles, Eunice has remained committed to improving maternal and newborn health outcomes. However, despite her extensive engagement in research, teaching, and policy spaces, she encountered challenges related to knowledge translation and evidence use and particularly within professional associations and frontline practice settings.

Evidence use challenges prior to the training

Before participating in the Evidence-Informed and Equity in Decision Making (EIDM) training under the Africa LEEPS initiative in October 2024, Eunice observed notable gaps in how evidence was accessed, synthesised, and applied. Within the Midwives Association of Kenya, members often struggled to locate credible data and translate research into policy-relevant outputs.

“Sometimes you want to develop something, maybe even write a grant, but getting the data was a challenge for many of our members,” Eunice reflected. As a result, significant effort had to be invested in guiding colleagues on where to search for evidence and how to organise it in a meaningful way.

While Eunice had prior exposure to research and literature review processes, she recognised that this capacity was unevenly distributed. Advocacy efforts often relied on lengthy technical documents that were poorly suited to policymaking environments, where concise and targeted communication is more effective. Important ideas risked remaining at the margins of decision-making processes, despite their relevance to maternal and newborn health.

The turning point

Eunice participated in the Africa LEEPS EIDM training, which focused on evidence synthesis, packaging and communicating the evidence, and gender-responsive approaches to policymaking. The training equipped participants with practical tools for literature searching, synthesising evidence, and packaging research into evidence briefs that distill policy options that speak directly to policymakers’ needs.

One aspect of the training that stood out for Eunice was preparing and delivering an elevator pitch, the ability to communicate complex policy issues clearly and succinctly within a limited timeframe.

“The pitching bit really came out very strongly for me,” she explained. **“You can actually say what you want to say to a policymaker in a very short time.”**

This approach reshaped how Eunice viewed policy engagement, reinforcing the idea that influence does not depend on the volume of information presented, but on clarity, relevance, and timing.

Applying new skills across institutions and practice

Following the training, Eunice applied these skills across her professional roles. Within the Midwives Association of Kenya, she leveraged networks formed through her engagement with the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP), connecting her team with technical experts. A year later in October 2025, Eunice invited AFIDEP to participate in and support the development of a policy brief on the midwifery model of care with Eunice taking the lead in guiding her colleagues through the process.

“Because of the EIDM training, I knew exactly what happens in policy brief development,” Eunice noted. **“I was able to guide the person taking the lead and support the team through the process.”**



The training also enabled Eunice to identify and nurture emerging leadership within MAK. During the policy brief development process, she recognised the strengths of a young member with strong skills in literature synthesis and grant writing. She later recruited him into MAK’s leadership, where he now serves as Vice Secretary, strengthening the association’s technical capacity and diversity.

Beyond MAK, Eunice’s enhanced skills increased her effectiveness in national policy spaces. Through professional connections, she is invited to contribute as a technical expert to several Ministry of Health policy and guideline development processes, including family planning policies and guidelines on point-of-care ultrasound. She now has strengthened capacity to effectively contribute to these processes.

Strengthening teaching, mentorship, and academic practice

Eunice also integrated the training lessons into her academic work at Kenyatta University. She began supporting postgraduate students more intentionally in literature searching, synthesis, and documentation, guiding them to develop literature matrices and produce more rigorous research outputs. The strengthened skills also supported Eunice’s academic work, contributing to better research outputs as part of her doctoral thesis.

Within MAK, Eunice extended these efforts through structured mentorship. As a member of the association’s Scientific Committee, she has mentored and supported midwives to develop abstracts for scientific conferences. These initiatives enabled more midwives to confidently engage with evidence and share practice-based knowledge in professional forums.

Integrating gender and equity in policy engagement

The training also sharpened Eunice's attention to gender equity and inclusion in policymaking. While midwifery is often perceived as a female-dominated profession, Eunice began to reflect more critically on how gender and professional hierarchies shape leadership, decision-making, and accountability within the health system.

"Most of the time when we are talking about gender, we skew towards female being more disadvantaged. But there are some professions where men are more disadvantaged. So, you have to be very intentional"

She has facilitated workshops on gender equity and professional hierarchies, highlighting how midwives, particularly women, are often positioned within power structures that affect working conditions, decision-making authority, and exposure to legal risk.

From evidence to system-level change

One of the most tangible outcomes of Eunice's strengthened policy engagement skills emerged through her work on postpartum haemorrhage prevention. Using concise, evidence-based pitching, she successfully engaged a development partner to support the rollout of heat-stable carbetocin, a life-saving medicine for PPH prevention.

Starting with a pilot in 15 counties in 2024, the initiative expanded to all 47 counties in Kenya. Additional funding was later secured to support treatment-focused interventions, demonstrating how effective evidence translation and strategic communication can accelerate system-level change.

Looking ahead

Building on these experiences, Eunice plans to continue strengthening knowledge translation within the midwifery profession. Immediate priorities include disseminating the midwifery model of care policy brief to stakeholders, training midwives in policy brief development and delivering an elevator pitch, and deepening gender responsive decision-making and practice at county level.

Reflecting on her journey, Eunice emphasised the importance of openness, networking, and proactive engagement. **"There is always an opportunity for learning," she said. "And there is power in asking, the worst that can happen is a no."**

What began as a single training has evolved into a catalyst for broader change, enhancing professional capacity, strengthening evidence use, and advancing more inclusive and effective maternal health policymaking in Kenya.