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Making evidence matter in Africa's development

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to Enrich Development Efforts in Africa

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**African Institute for
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Editorial

Rose Oronje

Although there is no doubt about the important role of evidence in development efforts, it is widely acknowledged that evidence often does not play this role due to many reasons. The good news is that there is increasing focus, through investments and programmes by development actors, to address these reasons to enhance the role of evidence in development decisions and actions. This Issue of the African Development Perspectives brings you a wide range of lessons, experiences and insights drawn from past and ongoing efforts to increase the use or consideration of evidence in development efforts in sub-Saharan Africa. The Issue is a collage of interesting topics covering capacity building for evidence-informed policymaking (EIPM), evidence in African parliaments, the role of evidence in unlocking the policy implementation impasse in many resource-poor countries, designing evaluations that can be used in informing government decisions, networks promoting EIPM in Africa, the central place of politics in EIPM, and monitoring and measuring EIPM efforts.

Lessons from capacity building efforts

The last five years have seen the implementation of pioneer capacity building programmes in Africa and elsewhere aiming to increase demand and use of evidence in decision-making. This Issue discusses

the lessons from these initiatives in Africa in order to inform future EIPM. An important lesson from this work has been the need for sustained, long-term investments in strengthening institutional systems, mechanisms, and processes for enabling EIPM. Although many of the interventions tested individual technical capacity building as well as institutional capacity building, they had more successes with individual capacity building, but limited success with institutional capacity building. The limited success with institutional capacity building is attributed to the short-term nature of the interventions and limited adoption and adaptation of these interventions by governments into existing institutional and political structures and processes.

Evidence use in African Parliaments

Although information and evidence are critical for the effective delivery of parliaments' functions of oversight, resource appropriation, legislation, and representation, there is quite limited understanding of the ecosystem of evidence in African parliaments and how this shapes debate and decision-making by parliamentarians. In this Issue, we discuss the state of evidence use in the Kenyan Parliament, as well as, share lessons from work with various African parliaments and parliamentary networks in improving members of parliament's (MPs) demand and use of evidence in their work. An interesting lesson from this work is finding a mechanism that can enable MPs to actively champion evidence use in the work of committees and in debate on the floor of the house, as well as use the functions of parliament to address the persistent weak institutional capacities for facilitating evidence use in many African countries. Caucuses of MPs in African parliaments are discussed as potential institutional platforms that MPs can use to champion evidence in their parliaments and their countries.

Can evidence unlock the policy implementation challenge in resource-poor countries?

Conversations around evidence use in policymaking have placed more emphasis on the role of evidence in informing policy formulation than on informing policy implementation. Yet, even when policies are informed by the best available evidence, they will still fail if they are not effectively implemented. Results for All, AFIDEP and IDinsight convened a workshop on 23-25 July 2018 that brought together multi-sectoral government teams working on various policy issues (health, education, gender and social welfare, science and technology, environment, and planning and finance sectors) from nine countries in Africa and Latin America. Country teams shared innovative ways they are using to facilitate increased use of evidence in tackling implementation challenges, the challenges they continue to face, and identified ideas for entrenching evidence use in implementation processes.

Designing evaluations for decision-making

Evaluations are an important source of evidence for informing policy and programme decisions. Although a lot of resources are being

invested in impact evaluations, the question of whether evidence from impact evaluation is being used by governments to inform policy and programme decisions remains. In this Issue, we discuss three ways of designing evaluations so that these are useful for governments' decision-making. We go ahead to use a Zambian case study to demonstrate how adopting these ways helped generate evaluation evidence that the government found useful in informing its programming decisions. These three ways include that evaluations should be: demand-driven, crafted to the constraints of real-life implementation, and specific to the context.

Networks championing evidence

The role of networks in extending and strengthening practice, and facilitating the sharing of lessons in development efforts is well known. We discuss, in this Issue, how various networks are promoting EIPM practice in Africa, including the Evidence-Informed Policy Network (EVIPNet), Africa Cabinet Government Network (ACGN), Africa Evidence Network (AEN), Joint Learning Network for Universal Health Coverage, Open Government Partnership, Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative, and Twende Mbele. Crucially, networks are making important contributions in nurturing evidence champions, and strengthening national institutional systems for supporting EIPM. The Evidence-Informed Policy Network (EVIPNet), for instance, is noted for making important contributions to strengthening institutions for EIPM in various countries in Africa.

Politics and evidence

Policymaking, or making policy, investment, and programme choices is inherently political. The problem is that some scientists and other EIPM actors often do not recognise this fact and/or are unwilling to engage with the politics in their efforts to support evidence use. This Issue ends with a commentary that argues that scientists and other professionals seeking to promote and support the use of evidence in policymaking must pay attention to politics. Recent evaluations of EIPM interventions have pointed to the fact that the failure by these interventions to undertake political economy analyses to inform their design and implementation, has limited their impact and sustainability. Some scientists often argue that engaging with politics is not appropriate as it may result in their evidence being used for political reasons. This commentary further challenges the very view that science in itself is not political.

We hope that the lessons, experiences and insights shared in this Issue will contribute to ongoing efforts within countries and regional level towards the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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Lessons from AFIDEP's pioneer work in strengthening capacity for evidence use

Rose Oranje, Violet Murunga, Eliya Zulu and Isabel Vogel

With funding from DFID, AFIDEP implemented one of the pioneer programmes aiming to strengthen individual and institutional capacities and leadership to increase demand and use of evidence in decision-making between 2013 and 2017. The Strengthening Capacity to Use Research Evidence in Health Policy (SECURE Health) programme was a multi-partner, multi-country initiative implemented in the Ministries of Health (MoHs) and Parliaments in Kenya and Malawi, and regionally through the East, Central and Southern Africa Health Community (ECSA-HC).

To strengthen individual capacity for evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM), we conducted an intensive one-week training workshop followed by a one-year mentorship of technical staff (i.e. mid-level policymakers) in the MoHs and Parliaments in defining clear policy issues that need evidence, finding the evidence, appraising its quality, synthesizing and packaging the evidence for high-level policymakers, and applying evidence in decision-making.

To strengthen institutional capacities for EIDM, we engaged high-level policymakers on the value of investing in institutional structures that facilitate evidence use through sustained one-on-one meetings and annual conferences; supported MoHs to implement a series of science-policy cafés on their urgent policy issues to elevate evidence and sustain interactions between policymakers and scientists; developed guidelines for evidence use that the MoHs and parliaments adopted and are currently implementing; supported Kenya MoH to develop a Research-for-Health Policy as well as Research-for-Health Priorities to guide the generation and application of research that is responsive to the needs of policymakers; and supported Malawi MoH to review the effectiveness of its National Health Research Agenda adopted in 2011 to improve its effectiveness. The achievements of this work in the 30 months that the programme was implemented are captured in Textbox 1. These are drawn from internal and external evaluation of the project commissioned by DFID.

What did we learn?

01 Skills in evidence use are lacking, translating to a huge demand for EIDM training among civil servants

Our capacity needs assessments revealed huge skills gap in EIDM among civil servants in both countries. Our training programme generated substantial demand for this kind of training. Both MoHs requested that we train all their technical staff in EIDM, and the Kenya MoH requested for an abridged version of the training for its higher-level policymakers. The solution, which we are currently exploring, is in embedding EIDM training in existing pre-service and in-service training programmes to ensure that many more civil servants can benefit from this training.

02 Need for training to benefit a critical mass of civil servants clustered within divisions and to involve supervisors and other senior officials

While our training participants from the MoHs were a dispersed group of individuals drawn from different divisions and units, those from the Parliaments were closely connected individuals who work in teams (i.e. research and committees). We therefore achieved a certain level of training a critical mass of civil servants in Parliaments but not in the MoHs. The evaluations revealed that clustering trainees within one division (e.g. more than 3 officials from a division/unit), and involving the high-level leaders (supervisors) so they allow and support trainees to cascade and share their learning, and bring in new ways of working, seems to be a more effective way to seed and cascade EIDM skills. This is especially important because it is unlikely that there will be enough resources to train everyone, so clustering and cascading needs to be used as an explicit strategy to sustain changes in practice after the intervention ends.

03 Ensuring high-level policymaker involvement and ownership from the design of interventions and throughout implementation

The SECURE Health programme was embedded within the MoH and Parliaments and implemented as an institutional programme of these institutions. This meant that high-level policymakers were involved from the design of interventions, implementation and evaluation. This ensured that the project responded to real needs identified by these institutions, thereby supporting the realisation of their objectives. For instance, the programme's science-policy cafés intervention (i.e. regular evidence dialogues) focused on urgent policy

Textbox 1

Impact of the SECURE Health Programme

SECURE Health programme kick-started the process of entrenching a culture of evidence use in the MoH and Parliament in Kenya and Malawi that future efforts can build on. Specifically, the programme:

- Increased awareness and mind-set shift among top officials and technical staff on the value of EIDM.
- Improved skills and confidence in EIPM among technical staff.
- Produced evidence use champions within the MoH and Parliament in the two countries.
- Provided the MoH and Parliament with tools for guiding and embedding evidence use in their work, namely Guidelines for Evidence Use in Policymaking, EIDM Training Curriculum.
- Increased commitment and leadership for EIDM in the MoH and Parliament. For example in Kenya, MoH introduced a budget allocation to the research unit to support EIDM, whereas Parliament formed the Caucus on Evidence-Informed Oversight and Decision-making, as an institutional platform for MPs to champion evidence use in parliament. Also, both the Kenya and Malawi Parliaments increased the number of research staff (from 5 staff to 31 in Kenya in 2014, and 3 to 5 in Malawi in 2017).
- Stimulated new thinking and leadership on EIDM in the two countries that is translating into new initiatives to strengthen institutions for evidence use.

issues that MoH was grappling with, which resulted in active participation of MoH's high-level policymakers in the cafés, and uptake of the recommendations from the cafés into policies and programmes.

04 Strengthening individual capacities for EIDM must go hand-in-hand with strengthening institutions

The SECURE Health programme was designed to ensure that its interventions to strengthen individual technical capacities in EIDM went hand-in-hand with interventions to strengthen institutional structures, mechanisms and processes for enabling EIDM. While we realised notable successes with strengthening individual capacities, we realised limited success in addressing institutional bottlenecks to evidence use. Introducing new institutional procedures represents a reform process that requires sustained high-level leadership and middle-level steering to embed the reform or change process; from our experience, this is often a long process in many African bureaucracies. And, an EIDM reform has to compete with many other reforms. This is why the external evaluation observed that EIDM reform needs to bring incentives with it, like improving policymakers' chances of

mobilising donor resources, or meeting a political priority, as in lesson 6 below. Future efforts to strengthen institutions will benefit from having a long-term strategic focus, with sustained investments, and built-in incentives for high-level and middle-level policymakers.

05 Taking an “accompaniment” and co-production approach that enables stakeholders to adapt, own and embed interventions in their contexts

As noted earlier, the design and implementation of SECURE Health was a collaborative effort with the MoHs and Parliaments. This did not only generate ownership and leadership for the interventions by policymakers, it also enabled policymakers to adapt interventions to address specific challenges as well as embed these in their existing strategies and programmes. For instance, the science-policy cafés intervention was coordinated by the MoHs, which ensured that the cafés focused on urgent policy issues the MoHs were dealing with.

06 Linking interventions on a real need by government to solve a problem

The main focus of the SECURE Health programme was to strengthen capacities for EIDM in MoHs and Parliaments in Kenya and Malawi. This was a priority need identified by the government agencies during the development of the proposal for the programme. For example, the MoH in Kenya had just created a Research and Development Division, and the SECURE Health programme was seen by MoH's leadership as an opportunity to help operationalise the division. In Malawi, the MoH had, two years earlier in 2011, established a Knowledge Translation Platform (KTP), but its operations were limited due to lack of resources. The programme was, therefore, seen as timely in enabling the KTP to realise its goals. In the Kenyan Parliament, the programme was seen as critical in helping build the capacities of new research staff who were recruited during the first year of our implementation (the Parliament expanded its research unit from about 5 staff to 31 in 2014). The successes the programme achieved were largely because senior policymakers in these agencies saw the programme as critical in contributing to addressing real and urgent needs of these institutions.

07 Thinking and working politically

Policymaking is a political process and so efforts to improve the consideration of evidence in decision-making must “think and work politically” if they are to realise success.



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While the SECURE Health programme exploited political opportunities, which produced notable successes, political economy analysis was not explicitly undertaken to ensure that the programme fully integrates political considerations in its design and implementation. For instance, while the recent creation of a research division within the MoH was an important entry point for the programme within the MoH, we did not constantly analyse the political shifts that were taking place within the MoH during programme implementation and respond to these. These shifts resulted in reduced allocation of human and financial resources to the division and ultimately affected programme implementation.

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Evidence use in African Parliaments: Lessons from AFIDEP's work

Rose Oronje and Diana Warira

Given ongoing reforms over the last two decades, parliaments in Africa are increasingly playing an important role in development efforts. This is the reason why AFIDEP prioritises parliaments in its efforts to support government institutions to improve policy and investment decisions for more effective development. At national level, we have worked with the Parliaments of Kenya and Malawi to stimulate and facilitate a focus on strengthening technical and institutional capacities for demand and use of evidence in debate and decision-making since 2013. At regional level, we co-convene the Network of African Parliamentary Committees on Health (NEAPACOH) (since 2011), whose purpose is to strengthen and focus these committees on tackling urgent health issues on the continent.

Over the years, our work has involved: synthesising and providing evidence needed by committees or parliamentarians to inform their debate and discussions on key development issues; building individual and institutional capacities for increased demand and use of evidence; and generating evidence that improves our understanding of the evidence ecosystem in African parliaments and provides lessons for strengthening ongoing parliamentary initiatives for improving performance. Key lessons we have drawn from this work are summarised below.

01 Parliaments have institutional structures for facilitating evidence use, but these are weak and sometimes ineffective

In Kenya and Malawi and in many of the other African parliaments that we engage through the NEAPACOH network, there are institutional structures to support the use or consideration of evidence in debate and decision-making. These include research divisions, budget offices, legal counsel offices, libraries, and Internet and other IT support. The main challenge, however, is that in most of these parliaments, these structures are often ineffective in adequately facilitating evidence use. For example, libraries have outdated collections, no functional computers, and lack access to reliable Internet and subscriptions to relevant online databases. Except for Kenya and Uganda, research teams in many parliaments are thinly staffed and therefore unable to meet the evidence demand in the parliaments.

02 Need to create awareness, interest and motivation for evidence use among MPs

We have learned from our work that many MPs are often not aware of the important role of evidence in their work, and/or do not know the different types of evidence and evidence sources available for them to use in their work. In one incident, an MP said to us “I’ve been hearing about evidence, but I’ve not understood what this is all about. This meeting has helped me understand what evidence is about and I don’t know why you did not start this work earlier on in our term in parliament. This is so important to our work.” In another incident an MP said to us “I thought the evidence you’re talking about is the evidence that people give in court cases, and since I stopped going to court, I didn’t have much interest in this. But now I see that this is different and is important for my work.” We have realised that just creating awareness among MPs on evidence, types and sources of evidence can be useful in generating interest, demand and motivation for evidence use among MPs.

03 Getting MPs involved in championing evidence: Are networks a possible solution?

The evidence structures within parliament noted in 1 above do not provide institutional platforms for MPs to actively champion evidence use in parliament. To navigate this issue, we have supported an MP-led network for evidence in Kenya (the Parliamentary Caucus on Evidence-Informed Oversight and Decision-Making since 2015) whose focus is to provide an institutional platform for MPs to champion evidence use within committees and on the floor of the house. To ensure continuity beyond the electoral cycles, the Kenyan Caucus has been embedded in the Research Unit, i.e. the Research Unit provides a secretariat for coordinating the activities of the Caucus as well as re-establishing the Caucus when new parliaments come into place. In Malawi, MPs have spearheaded the formation of the Parliamentary Caucus on Population and Development. We are drawing on this Caucus to focus MPs on evidence on different population and development issues in the country so as to stimulate commitment and actions from MPs on tackling these issues. These two caucuses draw on MPs from across different parliamentary committees, which is useful in ensuring that the work of the caucuses influences discussions and decisions in different committees in Parliament. There have been discussions on whether these caucuses should be formalised into parliamentary committees. However, our experience shows that this will limit their reach (among MPs) and their influence on committee work. As cross-cutting caucuses, they attract MPs from different committees, which facilitates their influence across committees.

04 Efforts to create demand for evidence should go hand-in-hand with efforts to meet this demand

Our work with the parliaments has created demand for evidence on a wide range of subject areas, some of which we (as AFIDEP) lack internal capacity to provide. For instance, following an evidence forum for Kenya's Parliamentary Committee on Health on financing healthcare in the country, the Committee requested for specific analyses on different financial options that the country can take to enable adequate and sustainable funding for the health sector. This information was needed by the committee urgently to inform their discussions on an amendment bill the committee was discussing. We failed to meet this need because it was difficult for us to quickly find partners who could respond to this need immediately and on a "pro bono" basis. We have received many other evidence demands from parliaments that we have not been able to meet. If efforts that create demand for evidence fail to meet this demand, MPs could become disillusioned.



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05 Resourcing EIPM efforts with parliamentarians can be challenging

We have learned from our work with parliaments that it can be resource intensive to hold activities with MPs. This is mainly because of the nature of politics in many African countries, where election and re-election is often driven by the amounts of money a politician gives to voters. This has meant that MPs are always looking for money for their campaigns, and so activities with MPs could easily be used by individual MPs as sources of money, as opposed to them having a genuine interest in the activities. We have gone around this problem by: hosting evidence forums for MPs in parliament or adjacent to parliament to avoid demands for transport refunds; hosting these forums when parliaments are in session to avoid transport refunds for MPs claiming to be in their constituencies; and identifying and working with MPs who are genuinely interested in development issues and evidence.

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The state of evidence use in the Kenyan Parliament

Marale Sande

The legislative authority of the Republic of Kenya is derived from the people and is vested and exercised by the Parliament at the national level and county assemblies at subnational levels in accordance with the country's Constitution. For Members of Parliament (MPs) to undertake the functions of Parliament of representation, oversight, legislation, and appropriation of resources they need robust evidence (research evidence and routine data), and inputs from their constituents.

In Kenya, the evidence-informed approach to decision-making has gained pace over the last decade, more so following the promulgation of the new Constitution in 2010. This can be attributed to the following reasons: First is the adoption of the presidential system of governance which resulted in the enhanced separation of powers between the Executive and the Legislature. This meant enhanced roles in legislation, oversight and the budget-making processes. Secondly, the devolved architecture that resulted in two

levels of government, national and county-level, meant that each of the 47 Counties has unique, characteristics, opportunities, challenges and hence requires context-specific interventions. Parliament, and particularly the Senate, is expected to engage with devolved units including ensuring they are adequately informed to ensure the interdependence, consultation, and cooperation as envisioned in Article 6(2) of the Constitution, enhances development. Article 6(2) states, "...the governments at the national and county levels are distinct and inter-dependent and shall conduct their mutual relations on the basis of consultation and cooperation."

Thirdly, the Constitution calls for the need for public involvement in decision-making with Article 118(1) (b) compelling Parliament to engage the public and ensure such engagements are entrenched in decision-making processes. At institutional level, the National Assembly Speaker, Hon. Justin Muturi's "Communication from the Chair" on 1 March 2015 instructed that the research and policy analysts attend House proceedings to adequately provide information and evidence to Members during and after debates was an acknowledgment of the place of evidence in decision-making in Kenya's Parliament.

Professional offices facilitating evidence use

The Kenya Parliament boasts of at least three key professional offices and departments. These are the Parliamentary Research Services (PRS), the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) and the Legal office (National Assembly and Senate). The PRS was established in 2003 as a specialised, non-partisan and professional department to provide independent and objective research evidence to individual MPs, House Committees Constitutional offices, Presiding officers and other Parliamentary staff. The range and scope of research services offered by PRS are designed to facilitate Parliamentary discourse by linking research evidence and policy analysis to the decision-making and legislative agenda of Parliament. The evidence provided tends to be fast-paced and driven by short to medium-term work of Parliament. The interaction between Parliamentary Committees and the PRS is characterised by a two-way demand and supply of evidence. This information provided to committees by the PRS' research analysts is tailored to the specific needs of the Committee as part of the wider range of services to support the Committee's work. The PRS also proactively provides MPs with peer-reviewed evidence briefs on emerging issues, taking into consideration the policy context.

On the other hand is the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO), established in 2007 to support MPs in scrutinising the national budget and key performance indicators of the country's economy. The budget is a tool with which the government of the day implements its manifesto - the national development agenda. As such, the annual budget estimates should reflect the priorities in the manifesto, and adhere to agreed expenditures and approved ceilings.

With regards to the country's economy, the PBO assesses the micro fiscal framework; economic outlook, inflation, interest rates, private

sector performance, exchange rates, and how these variables are likely to impact the implementation of the budget framework. The indicators that the PBO assesses are: limits of fiscal policy, alignment to Medium Term Plans (MTP) and the current government's Big Four Agenda (I); Effectiveness of the budget framework, that is, does it meet the national development needs in a cost-effective way; and justification of the allocations – the PBO facilitates the House Budget Committee to get information from the various ministries to justify their previous and current budget allocations.

The Legal Department, also established in 2007, provides legal services to MPs in both the National Assembly and Senate. It also undertakes legal scrutiny of proposed bills as well as their legal implications, and provides advice to committees and MPs.

Besides these professional offices, Parliament also has a library to support access to information by staff and MPs. It also has a fully-fledged IT department to ensure Internet connectivity and other IT support to MPs and staff.

Caucus on evidence-informed oversight and decision-making

The need to have MPs actively involved in championing evidence use in committees and in the house necessitated the formation of the Parliamentary Caucus on Evidence-Informed Decision-making (PC-EIDM), dubbed the "the Evidence Caucus". This is a classic example of MPs-staff collaboration and a product of peer learning by two MP champions of evidence, the Hon. Dr. Susan Musyoka (former MP for Machakos County) and Sen. Dr. Wilfred Machage (former Senator for Migori County). The Evidence Caucus was established in 2015 as a non-partisan, informal committee of both the National Assembly and Senate whose objective is to increase evidence uptake among Parliamentarians. It exists to advocate and encourage Parliamentarians to eliminate debate and decision-making based on politics or personal opinions and instead, embrace evidence-informed decision-making. The Evidence Caucus works with the PRS and the Clerks Chamber to undertake activities that enhance evidence use by Parliamentarians across the political divide and in both Houses of Parliament - the National Assembly and Senate.

Within two and half years of its existence, the Evidence Caucus members have lobbied their colleagues in Parliament to participate in issue-based policy dialogues in collaboration with think tanks such as the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP). During these conversations, experts share the existing evidence on the issue and participants drawn from within and outside Parliament, discuss the policy implications and options and where possible, how these can

inform legislation and oversight. For instance, in 2016, the Evidence Caucus in collaboration with the National Assembly Committee on Health and AFIDEP held a policy dialogue on Universal Health Coverage (UHC) where the discussions informed the Health Bill 2017 that was before the Health Committee at the time. As curtains closed on the 11th Parliament, the Caucus observed that uptake of research evidence had increased two-fold with support by Parliament leadership, with the Speakers and the Clerks of both the National Assembly and the Senate being identified as the leading reason for its success.

Existing bottlenecks

The process of entrenching a culture evidence-use among Parliamentarians and stimulating uptake has not been without its fair share of challenges. In 2017, the Parliamentary Service Commission (PSC) acknowledged that public policymaking is a "political process influenced by many actors, factors and different kinds of priorities." As such, the most notable challenge is the extent to which political correctness for the sake of political expediency plays out at the expense of evidence. Also, although nearly half of the PRS experts have been trained in critical skills (including accessing, appraising, synthesising and sharing evidence), half of the team still has weak skills in these areas and this compromises the quality of evidence they provide to committees. In addition, there is a lack of meaningful linkages between Parliament and experts working in academia, government research institutes, and think tanks, which limits the provision of technical advice to committees by these experts. Finally, despite the existing provision on the right to access to information held by the State as outlined in Article 35(1) of the Constitution, the existing bureaucracies within the Executive occasionally slow down access and uptake of critical information and evidence by Parliament, particularly on the extent of implementation of government policy. This impedes decision-making processes of Parliament on oversight and legislation.

In the 12th Parliament, we are focusing on reviving and sustaining the momentum of the Evidence Caucus. The Caucus membership has been reconstituted and we are working with the new Caucus leadership to plan activities that will champion evidence use in committees and the house, as well as those that will meet the evidence needs of committees and MPs. We are also focused on activities that continually strengthen the capacity of research analysts to enhance the quality, accessibility, and timeliness of evidence they provide to parliamentarians.

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Can evidence unlock the policy implementation challenge in resource-poor countries?

Violet Murunga

Conversations around evidence use in policymaking have placed more emphasis on the role of evidence in informing the formulation of policies than on informing the implementation of policies. Yet, even when policies are informed by the best available evidence, they will still fail if they are not effectively implemented. In Africa, the biggest problem is that policies are not being implemented. Many governments have developed quite good policies, but they are not translating these into actions on the ground through service delivery. Where policies are being implemented, they face many challenges in meeting the needs of citizens. We believe that evidence can play a role in unlocking the implementation challenge in many developing countries.

This was the reason why Results for All, AFIDEP and IDinsight convened a workshop on 23-25 July 2018 that brought together policymakers, researchers, civil society members, funders, and other partners to discuss how evidence can be used to improve policy implementation. The aim was to foster dialogue, exchange of ideas and insight, and active engagement among participants, to more deeply understand policy implementation challenges and lessons from different contexts; and introduce tools and approaches for improving implementation using various types of evidence.

The workshop attracted multi-sectoral government teams working on a range of policy issues including health, education, gender and social welfare, science and technology, environment and planning and finance sectors from nine countries participated in the workshop. Countries represented included Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda from East Africa, Ghana and Nigeria from West Africa, Malawi and South Africa from Southern Africa and Chile and Mexico from Latin America.

Some of the teams were grappling with how to better monitor and evaluate the implementation of the policies (Ghana, Malawi and South Africa). Whereas other teams sought to understand how to use data and evidence to advocate for policy change and/or enhance policy outcomes (Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda), Chile and Mexico presented baseline results and plans for monitoring and evaluating their policies.

Workshop discussions revealed that across sectors, the use of evidence to improve policy implementation is not happening optimally largely because of limited attention to planning for monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation. However, at the root of the problem is a lack of a culture of evidence use. Dr. Bitange Ndemo, a professor at the University of Nairobi and the immediate

06 Think long-term and institutionalise efforts to work around the frequent electoral cycle turn-overs

MP turnover in many African countries is very high, which means every 4-5 years there are new MPs. To go around this problem, we have focused a lot of interventions on technical staff, but also embedded MP-focused activities within existing staff departments so that the staff can revive these initiatives when new parliaments come into place. This is what we have done with the evidence Caucus in the Kenyan parliament, and the research unit has successfully revived the Caucus following Kenya's 2017 general election.

07 Relationships and trust are critical

Building and sustaining relationships with parliamentarians, their staff, and other key actors has been an important

driver of success in our work. These relationships have also facilitated constant exchange, which ensures that our interventions respond to the real needs of parliaments.

08 Understand and engage the politics

This is something we have not done very well in our work with parliaments. It is therefore an area we continue to learn how effectively to engage the politics that inherently underpin the work of parliaments.

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former Permanent Secretary for Kenya's Ministry of Information and Communication, articulated this point in his remarks at the opening session of the workshop on what needs to be done to improve the use of evidence in improving policy implementation.

One of the recommendations he made was that "Our governments need to free up all the data they are holding and not using. When data is freed up, people will scrutinise it and use it." He added that Kenya, for instance, now has a lot of data on counties, which, if freed up for analysis and scrutiny, could help address a lot of the development challenges in the counties. Of course, he cautioned that there are big issues around data protection, which African countries need to leverage lessons from Europe on how they are handling these.

The keen interest in using evidence to improve policy implementation among government teams attending this workshop shows that such initiatives could be useful in unearthing and contributing to a shift towards a culture of evidence use. However, lessons from other related initiatives, including AFIDEP's SECURE Health programme, which aimed to optimise the use of evidence in the health sector and parliament in Kenya and Malawi, show that lasting changes in norms require institutional adjustments that favour evidence-informed decision-making.

Workshop deliberations pointed to the need for government, industry, academic/research institutions and civil society organisations including media, to institutionalise structures and processes that incentivise evidence-informed decision-making and promote interaction of a wide range of actors as well as synthesis, exchange, and use of the evidence. Structures and processes that promote interaction of actors can nurture trust and relationships

among the various actors and their shared understanding of decision-making and research processes and contexts, which are widely acknowledged to facilitate evidence-informed decision-making. Specifically, meaningful interactions between government, industry and academia, was noted as critical in facilitating sustained interrogation of existing data needed to continuously improve the provision of services to citizens.

The work of IDinsight, a non-profit organisation that designs, deploys, and promotes evidence-generating tools that help people eliminate poverty worldwide, shows how making government data accessible to other actors for further analysis can be beneficial. IDinsight worked with the Zambia Ministry of Community Development to re-code and re-analyse data from their social cash transfer programme to assess its performance and used (geographic information system) GIS mapping technology to present the data. The new analysis showed gaps in the reach of the programme that informed adjustments in the programme's implementation.

Finally, funding is critical, and therefore, government and development partners must allocate finances and other resources to support the generation of relevant, timely and quality evidence, synthesis, exchange and use of the evidence, and skills development.

The workshop started a conversation that AFIDEP and partners will build on to champion a focus on strengthening capacities and leadership needed to increase the use of evidence in policy implementation and service provision.

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Decision-focused evaluations: Generating evidence to inform the scale-up of the Zambian social cash transfer programme

Alice Redfern and Alison Connor

Billions of dollars are spent on development programmes each year. Yet, programme managers and policymakers have to make decisions on a daily basis on how to spend this sizable amount of funds with incomplete information. In contrast, while more than 2,500 impact evaluations on development programmes have been published since the year 2000, there are relatively few examples of the evidence generated by these evaluations resulting in at-scale action by implementers. While the development sector is moving toward making more evidence-informed decisions, there is often a disconnect between the information that decision-makers need and the information that researchers produce.

Through our work, we have identified several priorities for the design of evaluations that help us to close this gap by making evidence more useful for decision makers.

1. Evaluations should be demand-driven. To maximise the usefulness of evaluations for decision-makers, key questions they seek to answer should be custom-tailored to implementers' needs.

2. Evaluations should be crafted to the constraints of real-life implementation. They should be designed with decision-making time frames and implementation cost constraints in mind.

3. Evaluations should be specific to the context. There should be a clear path for evidence generated to be used by local decision-makers. Secondly, the evidence gathered should be specific to the context in which it will be scaled up.

To give you a real-world case study of these priorities, in 2014-2015, IDinsight partnered with Zambia's Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) to improve the scale-up of their unconditional social cash transfer (SCT) programme. At the start of the engagement, the government was ready to roll out an electronic enumeration system with the assumption that this would cost less, result in fewer errors, and shorten the time between household enumeration and dispensing payments to beneficiaries, when compared to the previous paper data collection system. We followed the above principles to help MCDSS identify barriers that prevented them from rolling out a low performing enumeration system and to generate actionable recommendations to better achieve government's overall goals.

Choosing the right question

Misalignment of evaluator incentives with those of the decision-maker serves as one of the biggest challenges we have encountered in the promotion of evidence-informed decision-making. For instance, many evaluations about SCT programmes have focussed on learning more about development theory, by understanding which households to target and the expected impacts of the programme. However, we realised that this was not the priority question when we began conversations with the Zambian government about their SCT scheme.

The evaluation we designed was demand-driven, in that it focused on the immediate needs of the implementers; understanding how to effectively scale-up and monitor the programme with the given resources.

By conducting an impact evaluation specifically comparing 'MTech' to paper enumeration, we were able to fully explore barriers to an efficient data collection system. Our first finding was that the electronic system did not lead directly to the expected gains in accuracy and efficiency. We used our results to inform the development of a comprehensive implementation guide to improve data collection. In-depth analysis about enumeration errors allowed us to recommend a supervision structure that improved accuracy for both data collection methods and provided on-going assurance of data quality. The evidence generated over the course of the evaluation was immediately used to inform decisions, because it had been designed specifically with these decisions in mind.

Working within the constraints of the implementer

An important reason that evidence may fail to inform a decision, is that it may not fit with the implementation timeline and context. In this example, the Zambian government had set a clear timeline to scale-up their SCT programme within three years. A plan for implementation had already been partially developed before our engagement began. Therefore, we quickly designed a flexible evaluation that balanced the need for rigorous evidence and the constraints of reality. The evidence we've generated is less likely to be useful in a different context than a traditional evaluation; it is specific to the implementation of a cash transfer programme by the Zambian government. However, by tying evidence to implementation on the ground, we were able to immediately produce useful data that directly influenced scale-up.

The study also found that the length of time required for the processing of electronic data was a lot longer than anticipated, due to problems with integration with the background data system. Fortunately, given that we built the evaluation into the predetermined time frame for developing and piloting the MTech software, the developer was able to use this information to make direct improvements to the application, leading to immediate efficiency gains.

Fitting the evaluation to the context

In academic research, the goal is often to conduct an evaluation whose results can generalise to multiple contexts. However, often predictions of how an intervention might work in a new location, based on previous research does not pan out. A substantial part of the evaluation we conducted in Zambia was aimed at fully understanding the context, so that we could confidently say that any recommendations are likely to improve impact. By fully mapping out and interviewing all relevant stakeholders for the SCT programme, we identified that different groups had very different visions for the electronic data collection. As a result, we recommended a comprehensive list of roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder to ensure that no gaps in the upkeep of the programme were created by these differing points of view.

In this case study, by focusing on the implementers needs, respecting the constraints of reality, and fitting the evaluation to the context of the decision, we were able to encourage the use of evidence to inform multiple implementation decisions. In doing so, the Government of Zambia decided to wait to roll out their MTech system until they had addressed the critical challenges our evaluation identified. As a result, we improved the efficiency and social impact of Zambia's cash transfer programme and encouraged the government to think differently about how to incorporate evidence generation into future programmes.

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Advancing evidence-informed policymaking in Africa: The role of peer learning networks

Abeba Taddese

The concept of peer learning has its roots in the classroom and can be best described as a reciprocal two-way sharing of knowledge, ideas, and experiences. Outside of a classroom context, peer learning-focused exchanges can take place through formal or informal networks of groups or individuals who have a shared history or purpose. Peer learning networks are not a new phenomenon, but recent years have seen a rise in learning-focused networks that facilitate a sharing of knowledge, tools, resources, and ideas among government policymakers working to advance national development priorities in Africa.

The new crop of peer learning-focused networks are symbolic of a wide shift from expert-driven learning approaches to country- and problem-driven learning agendas. The members of these networks are typically drawn together to advance a common objective or goal, for example, promoting open government (Open Government Partnership), improving public financial management (Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative), advancing universal health coverage (Joint Learning Network for Universal Health Coverage), strengthening evaluation systems (Twende Mbele), or increasing knowledge sharing in evidence-informed policymaking (Africa Evidence Network). The broad appeal of these peer networks is the

learning that takes place among equals – there is an appreciation and expectation that everyone has something to share and learn – in a space that strengthens social trust and promotes tacit knowledge exchange and practical learn-by-doing approaches.

Peer learning networks and evidence-informed policymaking

In evidence-informed policymaking, decision-makers use the best available evidence to inform government policy and programmes. Evidence can be generated by research such as evaluations and rigorous studies; it can also include contextual evidence drawn from an analysis of surveys and administrative data; or experiential data that are based on feedback received from citizens. Although the way in which the key elements of the policy process are often described – typically some version of agenda setting, policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation – suggests a rational and linear process. In reality however, policymaking unfolds as a complex and messy process involving many different actors. Importantly, beyond evidence, policymaking is influenced by the political, social, and economic context in which

decisions are made, such as the openness in government, the pattern of election cycles, the level of citizen participation and the freedom of journalists.

Networks that support practical learning and the sharing of experiences are particularly suited to the uncertain, complex, and messy dimensions of the policy process, where there is no predefined one-size-fits-all solution to addressing a policy challenge. By facilitating a sharing of lessons learned, ideas and accomplishments in a space that builds trust and a deep sense of community, networks targeting decision-makers and the policy process have the potential to: 1) foster an openness to new strategies and approaches for advancing evidence use, put forth by trusted government peers who are regarded as equals; 2) deepen ownership of and commitment to evidence practices in respective government offices, engendered by belonging to a community of supportive peers who are grappling with similar challenges in integrating evidence into policy; and 3) spread, accelerate and normalise good practices for evidence use in government among members and their institutions.

Peer learning networks appear to take two complementary approaches to strengthening evidence use in government: building champions, and supporting systems change at the organisational and institutional levels. Both are needed to advance the use of evidence in policy.

Building champions

The practical learn-by-doing and problem-based approaches of a peer learning network can help to build policymaker knowledge, skill, confidence and motivation. Policymakers who are confident in their ability to find, appraise and use evidence, and who understand the complexities of the policymaking process, are more likely to champion and use evidence in decision-making. Through a network's ability to function as a platform for sharing ideas, policymakers can be exposed to new ways of thinking that encourage a shift in government culture towards greater evidence use. Network members can become advocates for evidence-informed policymaking, persuading and inspiring others to become better and more systematic at using evidence to inform the decisions that affect the lives of their citizens. For instance, with its new Africa Evidence Leadership Award, the Africa Evidence Network is doing just this; spotlighting the work of champions who are committed to strengthening the use of evidence in policy, to raise awareness about evidence-informed policymaking across the continent. Peer pressure can also serve as a positive motivational force for policymakers to become better at finding and using evidence in policy and to bring new ideas and approaches to their work.

Supporting systems change

The knowledge gained from interactions with peers in a network can inspire policymakers to introduce new government systems and platforms to support evidence use. For example, through participation in the Evidence-Informed Policy Network (EVIPNet), the Ministry of Health in Malawi launched a Knowledge Translation Platform to improve the quality and accessibility of health research and strengthen partnerships between policymakers and the research community. In Sierra Leone, the Africa Cabinet Government Network (ACGN) supported the development of a new Cabinet Manual that requires ministries across the national government to provide evidence to support policy proposals. Policymaker participation in a network can also spur policy reform such as the revision of Ghana's national health insurance policy to align Primary Health Care and Universal Health Care, spearheaded by practitioners in Ghana who participate in the Joint Learning Network for Universal Health Coverage.

The power of peer learning networks in Africa

While peer learning networks alone cannot address the many constraints policymakers face in generating, sharing, and using evidence, they deserve a featured place in the toolbox of promising approaches for accelerating the spread of evidence practices in governments across Africa. The evidence champion that a network cultivates can play a powerful role in demonstrating and promoting awareness about the value of using evidence, and advocating for improved evidence use in policy. But as others have noted, it is hard for these champions to translate knowledge into any type of action without organisational systems and institutional leadership and guidelines to incentivise and govern the use of evidence in policy. In the nascent field of evidence-informed policymaking there is clear demand and room for peer learning networks to support both champion building and systems change in Africa. The enthusiastic and engaged participation of evidence champions from Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, and Uganda, in a recent workshop in Nairobi, Kenya to explore evidence use in policy implementation, only serves to confirm this demand and validate the potential of peer learning networks for advancing evidence-informed policymaking in Africa.

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So you think politics will make your evidence “dirty”?

Rose Oronje

Having worked most of my work-life (since 2002) promoting and facilitating the use or consideration of evidence by policymakers in decision-making processes, I get very surprised when I encounter scientists who still believe and argue that scientists should steer clear of politics in their efforts to support the use of their evidence in decision-making. I had this encounter again in March 2018 at the Africa Evidence-Informed Policy Forum organised by the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) in Nairobi, Kenya.

Some researchers at this forum argued that as scientists, they should only focus on presenting their evidence to policymakers and not on understanding the politics because they don't want their evidence to be used to further political interests. That's a good point. But then again, is it really? Once a scientist publishes their research results, what would stop a politician from using it to further their political interests if the results support the politician's interests, beliefs and values?

As early as 1979, Weiss conceptualised the different ways through which research is utilised by policymakers. One of these is the political model where policymakers use research that only supports their political positions, justifies decisions they have already made, or that support their own interests, values and beliefs. The point is, as scientists, once we publish science, we lose control of how it gets used, and so arguing that understanding the politics of the decision-making process will get your evidence used to support or further existing political positions may not be valid.

Talking of the “politics of the decision-making process”, what this argument by scientists means is that they don't really appreciate or accept that the policymaking process that they want their evidence to inform is inherently political in nature. This is because public policymaking is about governments choosing the courses of actions they want to take to manage public affairs and/or respond to

societal problems in order to achieve their goals. It often involves the distribution of scarce public resources. This process is therefore shaped by power and influence, i.e. politics. This means that scientists cannot run away from “politics” if they are interested in generating evidence that can inform the decisions of policymakers.

But why is it important for scientists to understand and engage the politics of the decision-making process?

Evidence is but one of the many factors that policymakers consider when making decisions. If as a scientist you believe in generating evidence that can be useful for decision-making, then you need to understand the other factors that policymakers have to consider, besides or at the expense of your evidence, when they are making policy choices. Understanding the politics of policymaking helps you as a scientist to understand the policymaking process and the political cycles, which are critical because they help you to plan and provide your evidence at the time when it's needed most, or enable you to take advantage of windows of opportunity for influence when these open up. Understanding the politics of the policymaking process enables you to build and sustain relations with the right people in the policy space that you are hoping to influence with your evidence. Put dramatically, not understanding and engaging the politics of the decision-making process is like “shooting arrows in the dark and hoping that they will miraculously kill your target”.

So, what does it mean for scientists to understand and engage the politics of the policymaking process?

It means many things, but for this short article, I'll just focus on three that I find critical. Firstly, it means at the start of your research when you're defining your research question, you understand and pay attention to the gaps in existing policies, and the politics (power, interests) that shape policymakers' actions on the issue. In my early career, I would feel very frustrated when researchers I worked with would forward me a paper that has just been published in a high-ranking journal, and ask me to “share the paper with policymakers”. Often, I would ask, “what is the specific gap in the existing policy that this paper is responding to?”. It was not uncommon to find researchers who did not even know the existing policy on the issue, let alone the existing policy gaps!

Secondly, it means building relations with policymakers and other key actors involved in the policymaking process. Unless if you are a magician, you will not be able to understand and engage politics without having meaningful, trusted relationships with key actors in the policy space that you are trying to influence.

Thirdly, it means understanding the context of the policy issue and the policy space that you are hoping your science will influence.



Context could mean many things, but it is often “the elephant in the room” when it comes to making and implementing policy decisions. Context refers to the formal and informal rules and norms that guide people's thinking and behaviour. Engaging politics means you strive to understand the context within which policymakers make decisions, which enables you to generate evidence that is responsive to the context or challenges the contextual limitations undermining efforts to resolve a development issue.

Science is not apolitical, or is it?

I cannot end this without asking the question: why do these scientists think their science is not already political? This thinking is connected to the “gold standard” tag attached to scientific evidence generated through certain methodologies that are perceived to be objective and neutral. In the health sector, biomedical evidence is often seen as the “gold standard” evidence that should inform health policies because of its perceived objectivity and neutrality. But social science scholars such as Lock and Nguyen (2010) challenged this, arguing that political and economic interests, and prevailing moral concerns are often implicated in biomedicine. The point I am making is that scientists need to acknowledge that even science from randomised controlled trials is not completely free of their own interests, existing societal pressures and biases, or contextual realities of culture, values and beliefs. So engaging politics cannot make science “dirty” because science itself is a product of politics as we know it.

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What does the focus on institutions and culture mean for measuring outcomes of interventions seeking to promote evidence use?

AFIDEP Update

The measurement of the impact of interventions that seek to promote and facilitate the use of evidence in policymaking is not well developed. It is also a difficult exercise because policymaking is a complex and political exercise shaped by many competing actors and factors, with varied power and influence. Also, the use of evidence in decision-making is not always tangible (i.e. conceptual use of evidence) – sometimes all evidence does is to shape or change how policymakers think about a development problem.

Instrumental use of evidence (i.e. where evidence leads to a change in policy, new investment or programme), on the other hand, is not always acknowledged by policymakers or in policy documents. This makes attribution difficult for researchers or research institutions. Also, often times, changes in policies and programmes take a long time to happen; sometimes this happens long after the end of the interventions seeking to enable evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM). Another challenge is that measuring the impact of EIDM interventions requires resources that are often lacking.

The increasing interest and focus in the EIDM field on strengthening institutional systems, mechanisms, processes and procedures

adds more complexity to measuring EIDM interventions because measuring cultural change is quite difficult using conventional impact philosophies. Also, changing institutions and cultures is harder and can take a long time to produce results. This necessitates critical thinking around the challenges of measuring EIDM as it relates to institutions and culture.

At the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP), we aim to instill a culture of evidence use in decision-making so that the right investments are made towards development in order to enhance the general well-being of people. More specifically, we seek to change the belief system and values of policymakers to a culture where evidence is always considered when making policy decisions. This focus of our work means that we think a lot about how best to measure the impact of our efforts. We are currently conducting a study that identifies the outcomes that interventions seeking to strengthen institutions and cultures for evidence use need to focus on realizing. This study will provide some thinking on “the what” and “the how” of measuring the institutionalisation of EIDM.

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