

iConnect Ghana Newsletter

• ICTs for Development

• Research Evidence for Development

Feature Story



Training helps embed EIPM into Ghanaian government practices

The VakaYiko Consortium has recently concluded a nine-day evidence-informed policy making (EIPM) training at the Civil Service Training Centre (CSTC) in Accra, Ghana.

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WHAT IS EVIDENCE INFORMED POLICY MAKING?

Evidence-Informed Policy Making (EIPM) activities aim to increase the uptake of research in policy making.

EIPM is therefore an approach to development, where policy makers are equipped with necessary resources (improved skills, enhanced work processes, and enabling environments) that position them to assimilate evidence into policies.

This approach seeks to fill the information gap that exists between policymakers and researchers.

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT

Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D) refers to the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the fields of socioeconomic development, international development and human rights.

ICT4D can refer to assisting disadvantaged populations anywhere in the world, but it is usually associated with applications in developing countries.

It is concerned with directly applying information technology approaches to poverty reduction.

Source – Wikipedia

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EDITORIAL

It is time for another issue of the GINKS newsletter iConnect Ghana, and our audience are treated with content from recent activities from the VakaYiko project in Ghana and some activities undertaken by GINKS in the area of ICT4D.

This issue of iConnect Ghana begins with updates from the first trial of EIPM course developed for the Civil Service Training Centre (CSTC) of Ghana. It brings readers up to speed on some background information about the CSTC, participants, trainers engaged for the course and many more. It also touches on some monitoring and evaluation aspects of the course that seek to guide utility of knowledge gained by participants.

Shahenda Suliman, Programme Assistant for EIPM at INASP, also provides insight gained by the VakaYiko consortium from engaging with governments. She presents some interesting perspectives from project countries that include government processes and hierarchies, context relevance, and milestone setting. You will need to read further as she cautions that “engagement is a continuous process”.

We bring to our readers also a brief from an ICT for Education forum organized by GINKS at the Kanda Cluster of Schools in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. Dubbed Benefit of Using Free and Open Source Software in Education, this article presents basic concepts discussed on the subject in the forum. It also discusses operational issues concerned with teachers' use of ICTs in the classroom.

Finally, readers are able to connect with another thematic area of GINKS's ICT4D projects. We present to our audience report from a forum organized on ICT in Health, through which we make a practical connection with the use of ICTs for public health services in Ghana. The article begins with general issues of public healthcare, meanders through real issues with the use of ICTs in the sector, and then links it to sector applications that are deployed in Ghana.

As always, we appreciate your time spent reading this newsletter. We expect that our readers will digest some knowledge presented, and, if you want to provide feedback or seek further clarification(s), we are always ready to receive your comments.

Thank you.
The Editorial Team

Training helps embed EIPM into Ghanaian Government practices

The VakaYiko Consortium has recently concluded a nine-day EIPM training at the Civil Service Training Centre (CSTC) in Accra, Ghana. CSTC is the official training centre of the Ghanaian government, offering more than 60 courses to in-service personnel at all levels of the Civil Service. The EIPM course will be embedded within the Centre's suite of courses, making it available to civil servants across the government in the years to come.



Mid-level civil servants play a key role in policy formulation in Ghana. In preparing briefs, memos and reports on a wide range of issues from gender based violence to petroleum smuggling, fisheries policy and telecommunications systems, participants are on the front lines of the process of gathering evidence and communicating it to decision makers. However, as the Head of Civil Service, Nana K. Agyekum Dwamena, said in his opening address, “the analysis that should go into those decisions and policies is not completed”. “The problems we are having in this country”, he said, “are a matter of policy failure”, adding that he believes one reason that 60% of policy decisions made by Cabinet are never implemented is because they do not have a sound evidence base. “You are contributing to solving this problem”, he told participants; “you are supposed to do the analysis and provide the evidence...this will impact directly on the kind of policies we have”.

Bringing together 23 participants from 14

ministries and the Research Department of the Parliament of Ghana, last month's training was the first time that the new EIPM course has been piloted in Ghana.

The course aims to build skills in searching for, accessing, assessing, and communicating policy-relevant research. It was delivered by CSTC trainers, with support from VakaYiko partners INASP and the Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS) as well as guest speakers Professor A.A Alemna and Dr Emmanuel Adjei from the University of Ghana, and Dr George Essegbey of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research. The training benefited enormously from the insights of these researchers, who were invited as part of a GINKS commitment to build alliances across different parts of the research system in Ghana.

Learning on the content and structure of the course is contributing to an ongoing process of revision of the modules after each pilot. At the end of the programme, the final EIPM Toolkit, comprising the Facilitators' Handbook for each module and associated learner-centred activities, readings, handouts and reflection tools will be shared with all stakeholders. The Toolkit is informed by real-life examples raised in the pilot sessions.

In line with standard CSTC procedure, participants produced Action Plans during the training detailing how they plan to implement the learnings from the course. Some of the initiatives planned over the coming months include sensitization meetings and report-back sessions, creation of a new statistical database for the department, improving physical document storage/libraries, and soft storage of relevant systematic reviews.

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These Action Plans are a key feature of CSTC trainings, and are followed up closely by CSTC with participants and their supervisors to ensure implementation. This is one way in which VakaYiko hopes to go beyond individual skills-building to address wider institutional factors and ensure that the programme has a clear sustainability component.

VakaYiko's approach in Ghana focuses on embedding EIPM training within existing internal structures (CSTC) and practices in the Civil Service. This

enables a very broad reach across Ghanaian government institutions, but less specific focus on individual institutional needs and also less focus on evidence-informed policy making as a topic, since it is one of several dozen different courses being delivered by trainers at the Centre.

This differs to the approach taken in Zimbabwe, where EIPM training is offered externally by VakaYiko partner ZeipNET, who focus exclusively on evidence-informed policy making to specific institutions (Parliament, the Ministry of Youth, and the Ministry of Industry &

Commerce). INASP as an organization has a very reflective ethos, and we are looking forward to drawing out and comparing the learnings from these very different approaches as we go forward.

With thanks to the Principal of the Civil Service Training Centre, Mrs Dora Dei-Tumi; CSTC trainers led by Coordinator Mr Ebenezer Rexford Amankwah; as well as our partners at GINKS for a productive and successful pilot.

By Emily Hayter, INASP

Link: <http://bit.ly/1eei7NX>

Engaging with government: experiences from the VakaYiko project

The INASP-led VakaYiko project aims to increase the capacity of policy makers to respond to research uptake needs. In this post, INASP's Programme Assistant for the Evidence-Informed Policy Making programme, Shahenda Suliman, discusses some experiences from the VakaYiko programme of engaging with governmental institutions.

Managed by INASP, VakaYiko is a three-year project involving five organizations working as a consortium in Ghana, South Africa and Zimbabwe. The first year of the project witnessed the organizations establish and maintain working relationships with the following institutions in Ghana, South Africa and Zimbabwe:

Ghana: The Civil Service Training Centre (CSTC)

South Africa: The Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA)

Zimbabwe: The Ministry of Industry and Commerce; the Ministry of Youth,

Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment; and the Parliament of Zimbabwe

During the consortium's quarterly meetings, the organizations discussed their early experiences attempting to secure engagement with these various institutions, and some common themes began to emerge across the three strands. This paper is an attempt to document some of the key approaches and challenges identified during the early days of engagement, whilst also reflecting on the advantages and disadvantages to working as part of a broader consortium.

Processes and hierarchies

One of the first things we learnt – and perhaps we were a bit naïve in this area – was the sheer level of processes and hierarchies that exist at the government level. For example, we really underestimated the time it took between getting verbal commitment from an institution and actually receiving the formal documents needed to start a

project. In one meeting concerning perceived delays to the project, an exasperated partner explained: “all these supposed ‘delays’ we’re experiencing – they’re not delays; this is just how long things take here in government.” We’ve learnt a lot about the various processes and hierarchies within the institutions we are working with and the need to dedicate greater time to developing relationships prior to project launch.

Contextual relevance

One of the things that surprised me when I first started working in development (in the UK) was the way in which a number of practitioners spoke about relevance and context – almost like it were a checkbox you could tick. With VakaYiko, we don't really ask “is this contextually relevant” (it's much easier to tell when something isn't), but rather “how can it become more relevant?” And whilst we try to always start with the political context, we also need to understand better the specific institution's environment, an issue that is related to the previous point about how we

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underestimated processes.

For example, one can have a strong understanding of the politics of indigenization in Zimbabwe, without knowing much about how the Ministry of Youth, Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment operates. The consortium may have had a combined understanding of the political context(s) and of EIPM, but our familiarity with the way these specific government institutions worked was generally limited. In both Ghana and South Africa, further partnering with people who had worked directly with the institutions and policy makers in question really helped us to secure support and commitment, as this indicated that the work would be (more) relevant to the specific institution's needs.

Resiting project design constraints

Although three years doesn't seem like a lot in project time, much can happen politically in three years: policy makers get elected or ejected, ministries are dissolved or absorbed, government priorities change, and (sometimes) governments themselves change. On the face of it, there's little sense in sticking rigidly to milestones and log frames as the political backdrop changes. In reality, when your milestones are linked to payments, there is an incentive to stick to the original plan even if you privately think it's no longer the best plan. We are trying to resist this pitfall through the following:

Not setting narrow milestones: For example, from our early experiences with this programme we realised that instead of having a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) as a milestone, we should have aimed for any evidence of commitment; the goal is commitment after all, not the MOU.

Redesigning if necessary: Rather than just ask "is what we are doing relevant to the workplan?" there's also a need to ask "is this workplan still the best way of doing what we want to do?" and be prepared to change or even overhaul a project if necessary.

Taking an iterative approach if possible:

In South Africa, the organizations adopted an approach whereby the diagnostic phase was scoped, but the change strategy and implementation phase remained open – this enabled them to effectively adapt to the evolving needs of the department.

Sitting fees for civil servants

There's no shortage of text out there lamenting the 'culture of sitting fees' amongst civil servants in developing (mostly African) countries. Sometimes this descends into cultural essentialism and discussions about whether it's considered impolite in some cultures not to gift civil servants with cars for attending meetings. For VakaYiko, it was more of a reputational issue; some civil servants

expected sitting fees because donor-funded projects had a reputation for paying generous sitting fees. The issue was therefore less about their effectiveness in securing engagement, and more about the reputational risks and what this meant for the broader relevance and sustainability of the project.

"Engagement is a continuous process"

VakaYiko is now well into its second year with new approaches, new opportunities, and new challenges emerging. Engagement is a continuous process, and securing commitment is only the beginning – developing and sustaining the working relationships required to execute a collaborative project successfully requires substantial time and work. Documenting our early experiences has enabled us to reflect critically and openly on our approaches and although their relevance changes with time and space, we hope to continue with this process for the duration of the project and beyond.

By Shahenda Suliman, INASP

Link: <http://blog.inasp.info/>

Photos from First Trial of EIPM Course in Ghana



Benefit of Using Free Open Source Software in Education

The ICT in Education forum was organized for teachers of Kanda Cluster of Schools in Accra on the topic **“Benefit of Using Free and Open Source Software in Education”**.

The facilitator, Mr. Ogochukwu Nweke, a lecturer at the Regent University College of Science and Technology urged teachers to embrace Technology use in education to achieve much more in their career.

Starting his presentation, Ogochukwu urged teachers to take the forum seriously as they will learn much from it. He said teachers will notice that students nowadays are more ICT oriented because things have changed. He added that if a teacher gives a whole book to a student to read as an assignment, the student will not do it, but if that same book is put into a kind of movie, they will remember every bit of it.

It is not that the student is not good with books, or not brilliant, but it is simply because of the tool that is used in teaching the students. The tool will make the difference. Ogochukwu noted that the current generation is different and that is why they are called digital natives. Children have the ability to operate digital devices without reading manuals.

Free Open Source software was first used in the late 1980's. The essence of Free Open Source software is the liberty to modify, alter or use to suit your community expectations not free, as in a free coke!

Free Open Source software was used in the early 1990's where it presents codes that give you access to the software itself. "It is important to have software and application to teach students to help them

grow" Ogochukwu advised.

Free Open Source software are user-friendly and very useful in social media. There is a challenge everywhere in Africa with the use of the internet. But he said that should not prevent teachers from using ICT as a tool. He added that it is amazing how mobile phones can be turned into modems by activating the hotspot and using it to browse the internet. The challenge of connectivity cuts across most universities in Ghana, as most universities do not even have ICT labs.

The moment we use Free Open Source software, it will help us to also connect with the world with no restriction what so ever. Teacher can employ the use of social media for effective class work and even teach through skype without physically being present in classroom.

Free Open Source software is straight to the point, with very brief literature compared to other available software.

"Free Open Source software is all about freedom to choose" Ogochukwu said.

In some developed countries, every child has access to a computer but in Ghana the situation is different. Teachers must therefore champion ICT use in the classroom and be able to build capacity of students.

One thing about ICT is not only about the power it presents to us but also the benefits and ability to deal with any limitation.

By Joseph Kpet., GINKS

Link: <http://bit.ly/1FK5Bvo>



ICT for Public Health Services in Ghana

The second quarter GINKS ICT in Health Forum was organized for Nursing students of 37 Military Hospital Nurse Training School as part of their preparation towards their examination.

Starting his presentation, the facilitator, Mr. Seth Afagbedzi, a Lecturer at the University of Ghana, School of Public Health quoted "A person working in partnership with an information resource is 'better' than that same person unassisted." (Dr. Friedman).

We are in Information Technology era, he said, we have moved from the stone age to this era with its privileges. He added that the privileges of the new era surpasses the stone age period as things are much faster than it was in the stone age. Seth took students through earliest ICT applications as follows: E-communication, E-commerce, E-Business, E-Administration, E-Government etc. He said, as upcoming Public nurses, they must focus much attention on the health of the population and not individuals.

He advised that: "Public health nurse's core duty is to change health conditions of the people"

The point of public health is to first of all prevent diseases from happening and the duties should align with and reflect the rules and plans of the Government. We have laws in this country but we don't enforce them to the fullest benefit.

If there is a public health need and you use technology to solve it, you are employing or using ICT in Healthcare. Now public health workers do not conduct research, their focus is just on practice and that is a all.

"About 80% nurses concern themselves with practice, ignoring research and learning" Seth Afagbedzi asserted.

Public health must do vigorous research for information and new insight in healthcare in the 21st century. He said as people, right from school, like to copy but it is time to be innovative.

We have a lot of information and resources online on healthcare delivery to a point that typing in a particular diseases like malaria will bring procedures on treatment. We have useful resources on the internet but we don't search for it. There are also lots of health related websites available free online that nurses can use and learn from to enrich their practices. But today nurses do patient centered healthcare. Let's use technology (mobile phone) so that the old woman does not also have to struggle to walk to the hospital for treatment. In some countries, when there is health problem, one has to call the hospital.

Seth said as public health nurses, they must be investigative, they must study certain trends in the community and know what is happening so far as healthcare is concerned. For instance, if in a particular community majority of people are continuously buying cholera drugs, means there is an outbreak of cholera in that community.

He said elsewhere, when doctors find dead birds, they pick them up and send them to the lab to find out what kills them but in Ghana, they will rather kick it away from the way and that is all, no investigation, nothing.

A time will come where nurses and doctors cannot practice due to differences in mode of practice and also scarcity of resources. Government must endeavour to

provide health institutions with the necessary resources to practice right from school.

Public health must make it a point to educate and inform the public on good practices. One of the best ways to send information and educate the public is by using the local public.

Principles of Public Health

There are four principles, flowing directly from the scope and nature of public health, that distinguish it from other health care specialty areas. These include:

- Promote the health of populations as opposed to the health of specific individuals
- Prevent disease and injury by altering the conditions or the environment that put populations of individuals at risk
- Explore the potential for prevention at all vulnerable points in the causal chains leading to disease, injury, or disability
- Should reflect the governmental context in which public health is practiced

What then is public health ICT?

Public Health ICT (PHICT) came about when public health officials began leveraging HIT in systematic ways.

- PHICT Definitions:
 - "The science of applying information-age technology to serve the specialized needs of public health" (Friede et al., 1995)
 - "The systematic application of information and computer science to public health practice, research, and learning" (Yasnoff et al., 2000)

He said the mission of Public Health is to "Promote Physical and Mental Health and Prevent Disease, Injury, and Disability" This is accomplished through 10 "essential public health services" organized under three main headings

- Assessment
- Policy Development
- Assurance

ICT for Public Health Services in Ghana

Essential Public Health Services

1. Monitor health status to identify community health problems
2. Diagnose and investigate health problems and health hazards in the community
3. Inform, educate, and empower people about health issues
4. Mobilize community partnerships to identify and solve health problems
5. Develop policies and plans that support individual and community health efforts
6. Enforce laws and regulations that protect health and ensure safety
7. Link people to needed personal health services and assure the provision of healthcare when otherwise unavailable
8. Assure a competent public health and personal healthcare workforce
9. Evaluate effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services
10. Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems

He said among the qualities of a typical Public Health Professional is to train in both information technology and public health and also utilize Health ICT applications to solve public health problems.

Potential of public health ICT

- Communication among geographically dispersed health workers and consumers
- Delivery of public-health services by strengthening and streamlining data collection
- Support of primary and secondary prevention via electronic health records and improved laboratory systems
- Data collection for research studies, such as drug and vaccine trials
- Environmental health interventions, such as biosurveillance, road safety and geographic mapping systems applications

HI Technologies and Tools

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- Health Information Systems

Technologies

- Electronic Medical Record (EMR)
- Personal Health Record (PHR)
- Electronic Health Record (EHR)- CPOE, CDSS, E-Prescribing, PACs etc
- Health Information Management Systems (HIMS)
- Electronic Materials Management
- TeleHealth (including telemedicine)
- Web Technology for Online health systems
- Health-related Informational Web Sites
- Peer-health Web Sites
- Health Application Web Sites
- Public Health Geographic Information Systems
- Mobile Health (mhealth) Technology
- Statistical tools
- Health care analytics/Big data
- eLearning Technologies
- Computer Programming
- Database Management Technology

Seth said the Electronic Medical Record can be used to store information on SIM card and be carried everywhere. The Personal Health Record contains details of individuals and can be modified and updated by patients/individuals. Seth explained that health information systems is longitudinal (from health to death). E-prescription has come to solve the difficulties associated with reading doctors writing. Telemedicine is also another perfect agent in solving nurses or doctor to patient ratio in Ghana and must be taken seriously in healthcare delivery.

Early Public Health ICT Applications

Syndromic surveillance

Definition: Concerned with “the continuous monitoring of public-health related information sources and early detection of adverse disease events” (Yan et al., 2008)

– Utilizes information technology, statistical algorithms, data visualization

techniques to identify trends warranting public health attention

Potential Data Sources for Syndromic Surveillance

- Sales of over the counter drugs
- Visits to the emergency department for certain ailments
- Absentee data from schools
- Physician office visits
- Nurse hotline calls
- Dead bird reports
- Prescription from pharmaceuticals
- Internet searches (i.e. Google)

Emerging PHICT Applications

- Geographic Information System (GIS)
- SMS Text messaging (has been used for public health purposes including; behaviour change support, diseases prevention, contact tracing, health education campaigns, data collections.

ICT to support patients with long term conditions

- Nurses have an excellent opportunity to contribute to innovation by using ICT to develop services for patients (NMC, 2009).
- Technology is transforming healthcare delivery. Advances in diagnostic technologies enable practitioners to contribute to clinical decision making from a distance.
- For example, ultrasound scans can be transmitted over telephone lines for specialist opinion. In acute situations, paramedics can call on medical assistance using web technologies, while patients with long term conditions can use SMS text messaging to confirm blood results (Horton, 2008; Shanit et al, 1996).

In conclusion, Mr. Seth Afagbedzi urged students to maintain seriousness with their ICT skills and be able to deploy innovation that others can use, instead of using others' applications and innovations in the field of nursing and public health practices.

By Joseph Kpet., GINKS

Link: <http://bit.ly/1HrVx1v>

Upcoming Events

Event	Date	Venue
ICT & Health Forum: ICT in Public Health Services in Ghana	June 2015	Accra
ICT in Education: Benefit of Free and Open Source Software in Education	June 2015	Accra
VakaYiko Consortium Meeting	July, 2015	GINKS, Accra
Impact of C4C project on Gender, ICT and the wayforward	July, 2015	Tamale
Northern ICT4D Series	August, 2015	Tamale, Ghana
Second Trial of EIPM Course	Aug. - Nov., 2015	CSTC, Accra
First Trail of EIPM Course in Parliament of Ghana	January-June, 2016	Accra

About iConnect Ghana Newsletter

iConnect Ghana is an online, offline and email service knowledge vehicle that seeks to bring together developments in the areas of ICT4D and Evidence Informed Policy Making (EIPM) for enhancing development. It is a joint initiative of GINKS, IICD and VakaYiko.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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ABOUT GINKS

GINKS is a network of individuals and organizations sharing information and knowledge that influences EIPM and puts ICT resources for public good.

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