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iConnect Ghana **Newsletter**

Research Evidence for Development

Feature Story



Two years of EIPM training in Ghana - the journey so far

Nana Agyekum lauded the EIPM paradigm as a unique policy approach that would move people away from the usual desk top policy formulation to a more rigorous scientific process.

Read more on page 2

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.

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

You are welcome to the September issue of the iConnect Newsletter. We begin with a review of the past two years since GINKS, and part of the VakaYiko consortium, launched an evidence-Informed Policy Making (EIPM) training programmes for civil servants and information support staff of the parliament of Ghana. The review covers the training content; experts invited as trainers; and comments from trainees

The next item in this issue discusses Policy Dialogue with reference to Lessons learnt from Zimbabwe. Various guidelines are provided on best practices on how to plan effective policy dialogues. These include the objectives of the programme; the size of attendees; and who to invite.

This is followed by a case study of a mentoring programme developed by Jimma University in Ethiopia in collaboration with the Ethiopian Ministry of Health to improve the Ministry's capacity for using evidence in policy making.

This issue also includes s collaborative work on Evidence-based Policy-making. This is based manly on examples from the United States of America, but which could also be applied to other countries in the developing world.

The final presentation in this issue of iConnect is a report of a workshop by scientists and Policy-makers at the European Commission's Joint Research Centre. Over one hundred participants from 45 European and African countries participated in this events, which was dedicated to improving skills in the use of evidence for policy.

We are always grateful to our readers for sharing their time with us. Please let us have some feedback from you.

Thank you. The Editorial Team

Two years of EIPM training in Ghana - the journey so far

ana Agyekum lauded the EIPM paradigm as a unique policy approach that would move people away from the usual desk top policy formulation to a more rigorous scientific process.

Clara Richards, Head of EIPM at the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP), said civil servants needed skills to be able to search for relevant information and effectively communicate it to those who make policy. At the training for parliamentary staff, which started in January 2016, the Deputy Clerk of Parliament, Alhaji Ibrahim Gombilla, who opened the training on behalf of the Clerk of Parliament, Mr. Emmanuel K. Anyimadu, applauded GINKS and VakaYiko for choosing the Parliament of Ghana as a beneficiary of the programme, since EIPM was very important to the work of the parliamentary staff.

The uniqueness and consistency of the EIPM course was admired by both participants and resource persons. At the closing ceremony of the 4th session for civil servants, the participants said in their training report that the workshop had finetuned and sharpened their focus on EIPM. According to them, "it is indeed evident that the programme has been successful and we hope to discharge our duties as expected of us with the knowledge and skills acquired here". The participants expressed appreciation to the sponsoring agencies and promised to be change agents as they went back to their various Ministries Departments and Agencies (MDAs).

Going forward based on previous experiences

To sustain the intervention at the CSTC, we again partnered the CSTC to organize a five-day training of trainers (ToT) workshop, aimed at equipping beneficiary trainees with the competence to manage and facilitate training sessions on EIPM skillfully and also create a pool of trainers to aid CSTC deliver on its mandate. Participants benefited from knowledge, skills and attitude to facilitate adult learning, and the ToT enabled these new trainers to work with other civil servants, with or without donor support.

For all the training sessions held, we incorporated knowledge from experienced

industry players within the research-to-policy sector to share first-hand experience with participants. Dr. Grace Bediako, former Government of Ghana Statistician; Nina Chachu, Librarian at <u>Aseshi University</u> and Dr. Joel Sam, both from the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Ghana (<u>CARLIGH</u>); Dr. Naalamle Amissah and Dr. Niilante Amissah, both from the College of Basic and Applied Sciences (CBAS) of the <u>University of Ghana</u>; were among such expertise consulted.

Others include Prof. A. A. Alemna, former University Librarian for the University of Ghana; Dr. Henry Telli, from the International Growth Centre (IGC); and Isidore Kpotufe and Aboagye Mintah, both from the IMANI Centre for Policy and Education. There was also a site visit to the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) during the fourth session of training for civil servants.

Conclusion

It has been an exciting two years already, and GINKS has worked successfully with all programme partners to develop a training toolkit for EIPM. We have also delivered training for the civil and parliamentary services of Ghana, and furthermore institutionalized the EIPM course at the CSTC. It is our hope that the positive feedback that we have started receiving such as increased capacity to access, evaluate and use evidence and the introduction of innovations by beneficiaries of these trainings to improve information management in their institutions encourage the uptake of particularly research evidence in policymaking in Ghana.

VakaYiko is led by <u>INASP</u>, and includes other members like the <u>ODI</u>, <u>GINKS</u>, <u>ZeipNET</u>, <u>HSRC</u> and the Research Department of the <u>Parliament of Uganda</u>. Country partners in Ghana include the <u>CSTC</u>, <u>Office of the Head of Civil Service</u>, and the <u>Parliamentary Service of Ghana</u>. Funding of the programme was by the United Kingdom's <u>DfID</u>.

This article will also appear in the November issue of Research to Action online blog

http://www.researchtoaction.org/2016/11/two-years-eipm-training-ghana-journey-far/

Good Facilitation is key

Policy dialogues, unlike other forums, are unique in that they are what one author termed 'a form of conflict resolution.' They are typically 'deliberative meetings that address both politically controversial and technically complex aspects of an issue in a dispute.' As such the facilitator or moderator becomes key in the process. They send extremely important signals that regulate the dialogue. In most instances the participants have vested interests in the issues discussed and may be very passionate. The facilitator is supposed to be knowledgeable and also be in a position to provide a balanced environment for dialoguing. They need to manage both time and the power dynamics in the room, so as to have a balanced discourse.

Always provide feedback and follow-up

Lastly, it is so imperative for conveners or facilitators to follow up and even make solicitations for ongoing work associated with policy dialogue outcomes. Otherwise, the recommendations or other actions may just fizzle out. Even just a simple email to thank participants for taking part may yield tremendous results in terms of motivation and giving the stakeholders some impetus to act.

The Zimbabwe Evidence Informed Policy Network (ZeipNET) and the VakaYiko Consortium are supporting a series of policy dialogues with government partners in Zimbabwe under the Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence (BCURE) project. Policy dialogues seek to strengthen sustainability and knowledge sharing across the research-into-policy system by expanding professional networks for policy makers to engage with critical players like researchers and civic society organisations. This way they obtain the much-needed evidence to inform their policy decisions.

Ronald Munatsi is the Executive Director of the Zimbabwe Evidence Informed Policy Network (ZeipNET) The views expressed in this article are the author's personal views and not necessarily the views of the organisation.

Source: https://zimevidence.wordpress.com/

Increasing evidence use among Ethiopia's health planners and policymakers

etween 2015 and 2016, Jimma

University developed and ran a training and mentoring programme with the Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Health to improve the Ministry's capacity for using evidence in policy making. Morankar Sudhakar and Mirkuzie Woldie discuss the project and its potential for shaping the institutional culture of this busy department. Without research evidence, it is difficult for public policies to respond effectively to the needs of the population and realties on the ground. But in many countries, the capacity of government departments to use evidence rigorously and effectively is often very limited. This was certainly true of the Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH) in Ethiopia. FMoH's struggle to use evidence in decision making came down to three key obstacles:

1. Institutional culture. There was no existing culture in the Ministry of checking best available evidence when making policy decisions.

- 2. **Staff capacity.** Even when health managers did choose to use research evidence, very few knew how to assess its quality, nor did they have the skills to extract the relevant information.
- 3. Evidence availability. The evidence available to the FMoH was limited as many of the relevant databases were accessible with paidfor subscriptions only. Jimma University's programme of learning 'Building research

of learning – 'Building research evidence utilization capacity of health planners and policymakers' – aimed to address these first, two critical issues. The programme sought to strengthen the capacity of Ethiopian health professionals and decision makers to access, critically appraise and use evidence in policy making. In turn, it hoped to encourage an institutional culture of consulting research evidence when developing health polices and guidelines.

A positive attitude but a knowledge gap

The need for such a programme was clear: while more than two thirds of Ministry staff interviewed

during the project needs assessment viewed evidence in decision making positively, fewer than half were familiar with research methods terminology.

The 20 individuals questioned also gave various reasons for the lack of evidence use in the Ministry.

These included a shortage of time and skills to search for relevant information systematically; a lack of policy relevant research; an absence of nationally representative studies; and interruptions to internet services. The project team used the needs assessment to identify particular areas of capacity-development focus and, based on these, devised a three-part, five-day training course. Held in September 2015 in Addis Abba, the training enabled a total of 21 participants from 11 departments in the FMoH to better understand, access, appraise and use research evidence. More than three quarters of these were decision makers and their officers, the rest were service providers.

Putting theory into practice

To support participants in using

Cont. from page 4



Increasing evidence use among Ethiopia's health planners and policymakers

what they had learned in their day to-day roles- and work towards the programme aim of embedding a culture of evidence use in the FHoM - Jimma University paired training participants with facilitators to mentor them on their current policy projects. The mentoring programme ran for six months, and Jimma University created an online sharing and collaboration community (using Google Groups) for mentor-mentee and cross-group communications. The mentees were asked to share details of a policy programme or issue they were working on and the facilitators (and other mentees) provided guidance and advice through the platform.

The platform was also a good channel for knowledge sharing, where facilitators uploaded webbased resources, attached relevant published papers, documents, policy briefs, systematic reviews, and systematic review summaries. Where required and according to people's need, mentoring was also conducted via email, phone and a few face-to-face interactions.

Participation is key to embedding learning

Pre- and post-training tests showed that participants' understanding of evidence had improved after the training by an average of around 20%. Furthermore, those who were fully involved in the mentoring reported that the project had improved their skills, knowledge and attitude towards use of research evidence for policy and programme design. Several participants confirmed that the mentoring provided the opportunity for them to put what they had learned during the training into practice, and to get feedback on what they were doing so that they could continue learning and improving their approaches. One participant even noted that it had helped them to "memorize" what they had learned a positive step towards the cultural shift that the project had

hoped to see. Participants said that not only had many of them made strides in tangible areas of work – such as initiating disease prevention programmes or setting directives – but they also reported increased motivation, creativity and confidence, and improved communication skills.

Busy people, busy ministry

As might be expected, working with busy civil servants meant not everything ran smoothly. The needs assessment had revealed that one of the biggest obstacles to the use of evidence in policy making was a lack of time on the part of ministry staff.

This was shown to be the case throughout the project, in dealing with staff time and availability to organize the programme. Bringing together a large number of people from a number of different ministries proved logistically challenging and finding a time for the training that suited everyone's availability took the project team more than six months. Planned activities organized by appointment were also considered low priority as an 'emergent' area of work. Uptake of research evidence for policy and programme takes time and we have to be patient. Despite concerted efforts – and holding the training after national elections had taken place, in the typically less busy period just after the Ethiopian New Year – 21 of the planned 36 participants were able to attend. Several participants also missed out on the post-training questionnaire because they had urgent meetings to return to. Access to the internet also became an obstacle for participants to respond and engage actively. Though the project team sent various reminders, only around 60% of mentees actively participated in the online community. The postproject report showed that this was in part due to internet speed and connectivity issues.

Nor were internet outages and slow speeds unique to the mentoring programme; those interviewed for the project's needs assessment cited internet connectivity as one of the biggest challenges to using evidence in the Ministry more generally. This is clearly an essential area for improvement.

Future work: knowledge review and translation

To really embed a culture of using evidence in health policy, the project team recommends that evidence training be a nationally accredited, professional course. But the training and mentoring programme identified two specific areas of need, which Jimma University plans to address in cooperation with the newly established Knowledge Translation Department at the Ethiopian Public Health Institute:

- 1. To better target and focus **support** on what staff need: Planning and policy staff and staff providing services should undertake separate training. The programme's focus on research design, research methodology and validation of research results was considered relevant by those participants whose day-to-day work involved planning and research, but those participants providing services – such as the blood bank, legal, ethical and clinical services – found it less relevant.
- 2. There is a need for specialized training on systematic review training and knowledge translation tools for researchers within the ministry.
- 3. Figure out how to improve access to information both by providing better internet connectivity and skills to search effectively.

Based on this, courses are planned in: systematic, umbrella and rapid reviews, a clinical fellowship programme for medical and clinical personnel, preparing summaries from systematic reviews for clinical practice, and writing policy briefs and statements.

Source:

http://www.inasp.info/en/publications/details/243/

info@ginks.org

Introducing the Evidence-Based Policymaking Collaborative

omentum for evidence-based policymaking is building at all levels of government, from federal legislation funding rigorous evaluations to the bipartisan Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking to counties looking to make funding decisions based on results.

Increasingly, government agencies, policy stakeholders, and program administrators want to know how well their programs work and how they can be improved.

They're also looking across the country for the most effective and efficient ideas that can be scaled up and tested in new geographic contexts.



In New Mexico, state policy leaders, informed by evidence-driven cost-benefit analyses, are pursuing programs that are estimated to reduce the occurrence of child maltreatment by over 25% while generating millions in predicted benefits to taxpayers.

In Massachusetts, former governor Deval Patrick worked with private partners to launch a criminal justice pay for success project geared toward using data and evidence to reduce recidivism among atrisk youth.

In New York City, data-driven experimentation through the Center for Economic Opportunity, a focus on results, and a commitment to learn from both failures and successes helped to decrease poverty from 2000 to 2013, while poverty rates in other cities were rising.

Similar innovative efforts are taking place around the country and in the federal government. Most importantly, the increasing momentum for evidence-based policymaking cuts across both sides of the aisle. Both Republican and Democratic leadership agree that this should be a priority to inform future public policy.

That is why we are excited to announce the launch of the Evidence-Based Policymaking Collaborative. Funded by the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, the collaborative brings together researchers from the Urban Institute, the Brookings Institution, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative to create tools to inform evidence-based policymaking at all levels of government:

•Principles of Evidence-Based
Policymaking: An outline of the core
principles that apply to policymaking at
every level of government.

• Evidence-Based Policymaking

Toolkit: Actionable strategies to advance an evidence-based policymaking agenda, including both existing approaches that can be implemented in new areas and fresh ideas applicable to multiple policy contexts. Initial tool pieces are focused on tiered-evidence grantmaking, pay for success, PerformanceStat, and cost-benefit analysis.

• **Policy briefs:** Practical policy proposals that demonstrate where evidence-based strategies can be applied in different areas of social policy or to specific issues.

The collaborative will also host roundtables and briefings to share our resources and discuss how best to apply the principles and tools to all levels of policymaking.

Evidence-based policymaking has significant room for growth, and we will seek out new ideas by awarding an Innovation Prize in 2017 for practical and unique evidence-based proposals. We will search for ideas from outside the Beltway that contribute a new perspective to the evidence-based policymaking field and award prizes to thought leaders to help them further develop the most promising ideas.

Recognizing the efforts of organizations that have promoted evidence for the past decade, we will also work closely with an advisory group that will share its expertise in promoting evidence and help us translate our work from ideas to action.

Evidence-based policymaking can change how government operates. We are excited for the opportunity to build on growing momentum and elevate the use of research and evidence in government work across the country.

This blog post was coauthored by the Evidence-Based Policymaking
Collaborative, made up of experts from the American Enterprise Institute, Brookings
Institution, Urban Institute, and Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative.



Scientists and policymakers meet at European Commission's Joint Research Centre to develop their skills in evidence-informed policymaking for the Water-Energy-Food nexus

NGSA was proud to collaborate with the European Commission's Joint Research Centre on their recent workshop. Over a hundred participants from 45 European and African countries assembled at the European Commission's Joint Research Centre site in Ispra, Italy for a capacity-building event dedicated to improving skills in the use of evidence for policy.

Co-organised by the European and African Union Commissions, in the framework of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy and co-financed under the JAES Support Mechanism II, as well as the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), the sciencepolicy discussions were carried out in the context of Water-Energy-Food nexus challenges.

The event was designed for scientist and policymaker participants to better understand together the constraints and needs surrounding evidence-informed policymaking. Full of enthusiasm for sharing their experiences and learning from each other, the participants attended interactive masterclasses on a broad range of topics.

They were introduced to practices of informed decision-making during crises and disasters, when there were political and scientific controversies and at different levels of policymaking. They gained insights in combining scientific and non-

scientific knowledge, using and providing systematic reviews, earth observation images, foresight, design thinking and behavioural insights for policy. They also had a chance to polish their communication and visualisation skills, to make sure that the needs of policy and input of science can converge for better outcomes.

After four intense days of work, the participants are bringing home new skills, inspirations and concrete ideas for collaborations. If you are interested in finding out more about the event and explore the material used at the event, please join the dedicated follow-up community on Capacity4Dev platform:

http://capacity4dev.ec.europa.eu/eu-au-evidence-and-policy/

Two years of EIPM training in Ghana - the journey so far

n 1st October 2014, the Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS), as part of the VakaYiko consortium, launched an Evidence-Informed Policy Making (EIPM) training programme for civil servants and information support staff of parliament at the Civil Service Training Centre (CSTC) in Accra. EIPM is a development approach that encourages the use of robust evidence for policymaking purposes.

Through this programme, we sought to equip policymakers with the requisite skills to enable them to understand the need for evidence, access and assess these, and use robust research evidence in policymaking. It attempts to fill the gap between policymakers and researchers.

Training content

We took participants through topics that included the policy development process, EIPM in their workplaces, the concepts of evidence and EIPM, types of evidence, justifications for research evidence and the challenges of using evidence.

Other topics included an introduction to a search strategy, understanding the request for information, familiarizing themselves with a topic, using their networks, choosing the right literature, searching in the right places, using the right terms and keywords in searching, and filtering results after a search.

The remaining topics were, justifications for assessing evidence, an approach to critically assess evidence, an introduction to research design, effective communication and messaging, presenting key messages and evidence, effective written communications, and data visualization and infographics.

National development issues and course feedback

Two years after the takeoff, we have, together with our partners, trained 94 civil servants and 39 information support staff of parliament in six training sessions – thus, four sessions for civil servants and two sessions for parliamentary staff.

At the launch of the programme, the Head of the Civil Service, Nana K. Agyekum Dwamena, said the country had gone through the evaluation of the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA I) and recently launched the GSGDA II (read more here).

He therefore urged policy analysts at Ministries, Department and Agencies (MDAs) to start looking at those documents and find out the linkage of policies to their ministries so that action plans from the workshop were not drawn without aspiration to national development.

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Policy Dialogue: Lessons from the BCURE programme in Zimbabwe

Policy dialogues can really contribute to evidence-informed policies. They provide a platform for policy-makers to consider different evidence, values, beliefs and experiences around a policy issue. And this is particularly important for sustainable development outcomes. However, the events need to be well organised and properly thought through as deliberate focused processes.

Over the last three years, the Zimbabwe Evidence Informed Policy Network (ZeipNET) has held a number of policy dialogues on policy issues ranging from youth empowerment and social engagement to improving industrial and trade policy coordination. Here are some of our reflections and insights into how to plan an effective policy dialogue.

You need a clear scope and specific objectives

If there is no coherent and intelligible scope including specificity in setting up objectives of the policy dialogue, there will be mixed expectations from participants.

This may be further compounded by the fact that different people may use the term 'policy dialogue to describe different things, resulting in varying expectations of the scope and purpose of the event. In ZeipNET's early policy dialogue, the objectives were flexible and broadly defined, and this led to different participants having different expectations and ideas about what we were there to do. In such a case the facilitator is faced with a delicate task of trying to balance different stakeholders' expectations.

Ultimately this led to a less productive dialogue. Having a short, closely organised event with a focused statement of the problem and a clear purpose can help in this regard.

Create meaningful partnerships

There is immense value in partnering with other organizations with the same or similar remit when organizing policy dialogues. This enables expanded coverage of interventions including better alignment with policy priorities. In

ZeipNET's case, our most successful dialogues were those in which we partnered with other organisations supporting the same or similar cause.

For example, our forum on strengthening the Zimbabwe institutional landscape to support the use of evidence where we partnered the Africa Evidence Network. This dialogue brought more media and coverage and also attracted very relevant stakeholders.

The smaller in size and less on formal protocol the better

There are different approaches to ensure effective dialoguing depending on the nature of the dialogue and what it intends to achieve. However strait-jacketed formal policy dialogues tend to stifle free, independent and innovative contributions. It gets worse when the number of both participants and speakers is bloated. A lot of time is wasted when participants and the facilitators or speakers alike observe multiple pleasantries and protocols.

But if a dialogue has a relatively small number of invited focused stakeholders and little emphasis on official protocol there is likely to be more fluid policy deliberations.

However, it should also be acknowledged that with some dialogues and the respective audiences you cannot get away without a certain level of protocol so you need to be aware of this and factor it in timings. In some cases, you may want to think about other formats, like knowledge cafes, which allow for much more informal and fluid discussions.

It is partly because of this reason that the more informal knowledge cafes implemented by ZeipNET were more successful and more popular with different stakeholders as opposed to policy dialogues. An example is the one on use of evidence in gender mainstreaming.

Be strategic about who to invite

Although conveners play a vital role in setting the policy dialogue agenda, the policy dialogue is participant-driven. The actual policy decisions and action points come from the participants, not the

organisers.

It is therefore imperative to strategically and systematically map stakeholders who should participate in the dialogues. Mapping stakeholders' interests, relationship to the cause, and knowledge of issues to be discussed are all critical factors to consider. Another very important ingredient is the power of the participants not only to influence but also possess authority to actually make implementation decisions.

Upcoming Events

Event	Date	Venue
VakaYiko Symposium 2016	4- 6 October 2016	Accra
VakaYiko/GIMPA EIPM Startup Workshop	7 October 2016	Accra
Pilot of EIPM training at GIMPA	January 2017	Accra

Research Evidence for Development

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

The Coordinator Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS)

OUR LOCATION

GINKS Secretariat Behind Gold House, Airport Residential Area (on the same compound with CSIR-INSTI HQ.)

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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