1 Introduction to the book

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Summary

This introductory chapter outlines the rationale for this book on evidence-based policy making and practice in Africa and sets the scene for the chapters that follow. The book takes a policy-maker, not a researcher perspective, and is concerned with how the use of evidence by policy makers and practitioners (project/programme managers) can be supported. The book documents eight African experiences in using evidence, from Benin, Ghana, Uganda, Kenya, South Africa and the ECOWAS region (i.e. West Africa). The chapter gives a brief contextual overview of the five countries from which the case studies in the book are drawn, locating the cases within their context. The research methodology is based on case studies and a realist approach to evaluation research. The case studies cover evidence generated through evaluation, research, research synthesis and the involvement of civil society. However, the book does not focus on the evidence itself but on how interventions that promote use played out and how they influenced individuals, organisations and systems, building capability or motivation to use evidence, and creating opportunities to use evidence. The cases show how these led to policy outcomes. The chapter briefly introduces the analytical framework and outlines the structure of the book.

South Africa has had one of the highest rates of HIV/AIDS in the world. At an early stage of the pandemic, the then South African president refused to accept the evidence of the link between HIV and AIDS and that anti-retroviral (ARV) therapy was a solution. As a result, the rollout of ARVs was delayed, leading to the deaths of millions of people whose lives could have been prolonged with ARVs. With the rollout of ARVs, the percentage of deaths due to AIDS has fallen from 42.9% in 2006 to 23.4% in 2019, and life expectancy for men has risen from a low of 52.3 in 2006 to 61.5 today (Statistics South Africa, 2019).

Africa – a period of self-discovery

There is a sense of dynamism in Africa, with many countries having higher economic growth rates than developing countries elsewhere in the world (AfDB, 2019). African leaders today are determined to bring about meaningful change,

and the African electorate is demanding more of its leaders and pushing harder for accountability.

African governments have a wealth of knowledge and experience to draw on, and there is much that the world can learn from Africa and that African countries can learn from one another. Rwanda and Ethiopia, for example, brought down the percentage of people living with HIV/AIDS from 9.5% and 4.7%, respectively to less than 0.5% in just under 20 years.¹ South Africa has a GDP more than 35 times that of Rwanda and four times that of Ethiopia.² Yet, in 2018, South Africa's incidence of HIV was at 8.7% while that of Rwanda sat at 0.5% and Ethiopia at 0.4%. What can be learned from the achievements of Rwanda and Ethiopia in their respective contexts?

African countries are grappling with increasingly complex policy challenges. Across the continent, governments are struggling to translate economic growth into opportunities for all citizens to prosper. From 2008 to 2018, Africa's combined GDP increased by nearly 40%. Yet, almost half its citizens 'live in one of the 25 countries where sustainable economic opportunity has declined in the last ten years' (The 2018 Ibrahim Index of African Governance, 2018). Concurrently, the repercussions of unsustainable growth on both present and future generations are increasingly apparent (AfDB, 2019; UNECA, 2018).

Enabling growth, improving the well-being of all, strengthening resilience to shocks and stabilising the integrity of the environment and natural resource base can only be achieved through a transformational shift in policy and practice, and so in the way we learn and make decisions.

This book is based on the premise that using evidence³ contributes to improving development policies, programmes and practice. It responds to a central challenge: how can we better harness the wealth of evidence that is being generated in Africa to develop wisely and equitably under the diversity of conditions that we face?

Rationale for a book on evidence use

There is no shortage of data and information today with technology increasing access exponentially.

Evidence comes from multiple sources ranging from scientific research, evaluations, traditional/indigenous knowledge and administrative data to surveys of public opinion. To answer our development challenges, we need to be able to recognise and access evidence that is relevant, credible and robust. We need to know how to access existing evidence and when and how to commission and generate new evidence to fill the gaps. Equally important is our ability to navigate the political and social context to create opportunities to use this evidence in decision making, integrating the evidence with decision makers' and practitioners' knowledge, skills, experience, expertise and judgement.

The *use of evidence* is the focus of this book, and it was written to improve understanding of how using evidence can help inform and strengthen development policy, programmes and practice in Africa. We analyse the processes which

support or inhibit evidence use rather than focusing on the sources of evidence or the evidence generation process, of which much has been written.

The book approaches evidence from the perspective of policy makers rather than researchers. It explores how African policy makers and development practitioners can apply interventions to promote the use of evidence to improve development outcomes and impacts. Practitioners may be government or NGO staff. This book should also be of value to knowledge brokers from both government and non-governmental organisations contributing to development outcomes as well as academics interested in the use of evidence.

There are debates as to whether to refer to ‘evidence-based’ or ‘evidence-informed’, ‘policy making’ or ‘decision making’, ‘evidence-based policy making’ (EBPM) or ‘evidence-informed decision making’ (EIDM) (e.g. Stewart et al., 2019). Banks (2018) quotes an Australian public servant as saying,

some have interpreted the term EBPM so literally as to insist that the word ‘based’ be replaced by ‘influenced’, arguing that policy decisions are rarely based on evidence alone. That of course is true, but few using the term would have thought otherwise.

In this book we use EBPM and EIDM interchangeably, with a preference for evidence-informed policy and practice (EIPP). Our focus is around the relationship between evidence and change in its various forms – policy, development practice or beliefs, and world views.

Learning from African experiences of using evidence

The movement for evidence-based policy has been promoting the use of evidence to inform policy making and practice since the 1970s. The early work in this field was led by the health sector and took place primarily outside Africa. Since 2010, however, work on evidence-based policy making has been expanding in Africa. Most countries have national statistics agencies with the capacity to gather national data, although there are issues around the quality of the data (PARIS21, 2019). Most countries also have some form of national monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system, but usually they focus on monitoring, performance and accountability rather than evaluative thinking and learning (Porter and Goldman, 2013). Some countries, such as Benin, South Africa and Uganda have national evaluation systems and are systematically evaluating key policies and programmes (Goldman et al., 2018). There are numerous examples of evidence being systematically synthesised from multiple studies rather than relying on single studies, particularly in the health sector.

Countries are also investing in promoting evidence use. For example, Benin, South Africa and Uganda have offered advocacy courses to senior managers to stimulate demand for evidence. Evidence-related organisations and networks are emerging, ranging from the Centres for Learning on Evaluation and Results (CLEAR) in Anglophone and Francophone Africa to the Africa Evidence Network. Today, there are African examples of policy makers using evidence from

evaluations and evidence synthesis, of experimentation in approaches to evaluation and evidence synthesis, and evidence use is being discussed in national and international platforms.

This book draws on the wealth of practice around evidence generation and use across Africa, giving voice to African experience. We use case studies to explore the experiences of organisations and individuals using evidence to inform development outcomes. We do so across multiple countries, sectors and sources of evidence including evaluations, research synthesis and citizen engagement. In doing so, the book recognises the importance of going beyond evidence to include the knowledge of actors, acknowledging local world views, values, practitioner and citizen experience and the tacit knowledge needed to judge whether an idea is relevant and how to adapt it to a local context (Martinuzzi and Sedlačko, 2017).

The cases are written by researchers and policy makers working together to explore evidence journeys with the aim of identifying the critical factors that enabled or hindered the use of evidence in the particular context. The authors do their best to ‘tell an honest story’, recognising that often the most important insights emerge from challenges and failures.

The book identifies and documents lessons from the participating African countries with the aim of sharing these with policy makers, practitioners and researchers across Africa and beyond, and contributing to building the networks and processes which help to promote the use of evidence on the African continent. In this way it seeks to support action-learning, giving a voice to policy makers directly involved in the evidence process and to the researchers of the cases. Videos and policy briefs have also been developed to provide diverse ways of conveying the lessons.

The research process

The research undertaken for this book used an analytical framework drawn from existing work on research impact (Langer et al., 2016) and work led from Latin America on the importance of policy context (Weyrauch et al., 2016). Further detail is given in Chapter 3. The methodology is based on a case study approach, relevant when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed and where it is difficult to separate the phenomenon to be studied from the context (Yin, 1994). Case studies were identified from countries linked to the Twende Mbele programme, a partnership of African governments focusing on using M&E to inform change.⁴ These partners enabled ready access to policy makers and the potential to use the book itself as a change intervention in these countries.⁵ The case studies include good examples of evidence use, from a variety of evidence sources and a range of sectors.

Research tools included document review, interviews with key stakeholders, participant observation⁶ and, in some cases, workshops or focus groups, using similar checklists. The authors were asked to follow a similar structure in writing up the cases, and policy makers were involved in writing each of the cases. The editors then turned the cases into chapters, which were reviewed by the authors. The chapters document and analyse these examples of generating and

using evidence, how these have or have not informed policy and practice and draw out what facilitated or inhibited the use of evidence, and the lessons from this experience for Africa.

Introduction to the case studies

Eight case studies are presented, from five countries plus the ECOWAS region (the Economic Community of West African States). Benin, South Africa and Uganda have a national evaluation system in place and are demonstrating the use of evaluation in decision making. Kenya and Ghana have draft M&E policies in place, with Kenya's awaiting approval from Cabinet. All the countries have universities and think tanks conducting research as well as national statistical organisations. In some cases such as Uganda, Kenya and South Africa, parliamentarians are starting to request evidence. In the case of Uganda, the use of evidence for large-scale projects is mandatory and built into policy requirements.

This section provides a brief overview of the five case study countries and the cases selected, with the sixth covering the ECOWAS countries.

Kenya

Kenya's system of government is made up of national government and recently devolved local government units, known as counties. It has an active parliament with a research service and a Parliamentary Budget Office. Kenya has developed an M&E policy which has been awaiting approval from Cabinet for some time. The M&E Directorate in the Ministry of Finance and Planning is responsible for the national integrated M&E strategy (NIMES) as well as Kenya's Vision 2030 and its national economic recovery strategy. Other sources of evidence include the rapid results initiative (RRI), which is focused on monitoring project performance, an electronic national integrated M&E system (E-NIMES) and an electronic county integrated M&E system (E-CIMES), which facilitate real-time information sharing on project implementation. According to a diagnostic study carried out by CLEAR-AA on the status of national evaluation systems (NES) in Kenya (Khumalo, 2019), the introduction of NIMES significantly improved the role of M&E in policy formulation and implementation.

Kenya has an active National Bureau of Statistics and well-established universities and research institutes such as the African Population Health Research Centre, Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis and the African Institute for Development Policy. These institutes play a key role in evidence generation, promote research synthesis, and are directly involved in training and support for EBPM. There is also a range of international research institutions based in Nairobi. However, persistent challenges hinder effective evidence use at multiple levels. These include inadequate resources and capacities and a weak evidence culture in the country as well as limited engagement of civil society and other non-state actors (Ibid.).

The Kenyan case in Chapter 10 focuses on the wildlife sector, a sector with a long history of polarised ideologies amongst its stakeholders. Specifically,

it reflects on the role of a parliamentary committee which led the review of the Wildlife Conservation and Management Act 2013 through citizen engagement.

Uganda

Uganda has two levels of government, national and local, with two levels of local government, district and subcounty. Most services to citizens are run by local governments. The Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) is responsible for coordinating national-level monitoring and evaluation. The national integrated M&E strategy (NIMES) was launched in 2005/06 and the national M&E policy was passed by Cabinet in March 2013. A Government Evaluation Facility (GEF) was established in 2013 which oversees the management and use of evaluations. There is collaboration between state and non-state actors, with the Uganda Evaluation Association (UEA) working closely with government. The Uganda Parliament is a member of the African Parliamentarians' Network on Development Evaluation (APNODE) and has a parliamentary research office, a budget office and its own M&E office.

According to the NES diagnostic study carried out by CLEAR AA (David-Gnahouï, 2018), evaluations of large projects are mandatory and approximately 12% of the evaluations conducted by the time of the diagnostic study in 2018 had been commissioned and/or co-managed by government, with relatively high levels of quality. There are many organisations undertaking evaluation including consultants, universities, and think tanks like the Economic Policy Research Centre. The subject of Chapter 7 is an evaluation of the national public procurement system, undertaken relatively early in the national evaluation system.

Uganda has a well-established university sector – Makerere University is one of the highest-rated universities in Africa – and a range of think tanks such as the African Centre for Health & Social Transformation and the Institute for Public Policy Research. There are evidence users outside government such as the Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group (Obuku, 2018). Makerere University College of Health Sciences has had a programme promoting research synthesis and knowledge translation for some years, producing knowledge products for government (Nankya, 2016).

The second Ugandan case, discussed in Chapter 8, is a rapid research synthesis service in the health sector, situated in Makerere University. This is a pioneering service which has been synthesising existing research and testing out rapid models, where government gets a summary of existing health research within 28 days (Mijumbi-Deve et al., 2017). This is a model of great interest to Africa. Three mini-cases of evidence use are also discussed. One comes from national level and the other two are from decentralised district health services.

South Africa

South Africa is a semi-federal state, with semi-autonomous spheres of national, provincial and local government. Local government is divided into district and local municipality levels. Services to citizens such as education and health are

run by provincial governments, and water and electricity services are run by municipalities. South Africa has well-established institutional arrangements for M&E at the national and provincial levels. Key at national level is the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), which runs various monitoring systems, as well as the national evaluation system (NES), and evaluations are happening at national, provincial and departmental levels.

Research is widely used in government, which is also starting to use research synthesis and evidence mapping (Stewart et al., 2019). DPME, with the University of Cape Town, has run training for the top three levels of the public service in EBPM. The South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association (SAMEA) is actively providing a platform for multiple actors to engage around M&E. Another player in evaluation, not just in South Africa, is the Anglophone Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results (CLEAR-AA), based at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Capacity for evidence supply, such as consultancies and research institutes, is considerably higher than in other countries in Africa. Research councils such as the Human Sciences Research Council conduct research, and there is a network of universities producing high-quality research. Research synthesis work is strong in the health sector, led by the South African Cochrane Centre and the Medical Research Council, and emerging in other sectors, with an important role played by the Africa Centre for Evidence at the University of Johannesburg. There is a South African network of five research centres committed to synthesising evidence for decision making (Stewart, Dayal, et al., 2019).

The two cases in this book from South Africa cover evaluations conducted within the national evaluation system. The first is of the evidence work of the Department of Basic Education (Chapter 5), highlighting a department which has been forward-thinking in developing its own evaluation and research capacity and was an early adopter of evaluations, as well as exploring use of evidence synthesis. The case looks at two evaluations, of a teacher bursary programme and the National School Nutrition Programme, and reflects on the journey of the department in promoting and using evidence, highlighting the role of an internal knowledge broker.

Chapter 6 is the second South African case, focusing on an evaluation of the state's response to violence against women and children, a very complex issue, where significant progress has been made in informing policy supported by a deep dialogue process.

Benin

Benin has two levels of governance, central and local government, the latter with a considerable degree of autonomy. It has a national evaluation policy in place, evaluation guidelines and a national evaluation board (Porter and Goldman, 2013). The Bureau of Public Policies, Evaluation and Government Action Analysis (BEPPAG), hosted by the General Secretariat of the Presidency, establishes and leads the national evaluation system and evaluation capacity development and ensures the use of evaluation in management.

Between 2007 and 2018, Benin carried out 17 national-level evaluations and has had an impressive record of uptake and use of evaluations to influence implementation. However, the NES diagnostic study showed that approximately 90% of the demand for evaluations came from donors. Evaluations are made available to the public through a database established in 2018⁷ (Présidence du Bénin, n.d.). Ministries are required to send annual performance reports to the Supreme Court which are then published on approval and utilised in informing legislation.⁸ Broadly, there is a strong level of competence amongst evaluation consultants in the country (though some specialised skills are lacking) as well as structures offering capacity-building in evaluation (David-Gnahoui, 2018). However, in spite of its institutional framework, evidence generation and use continues to be a significant challenge, particularly with regard to local supply and demand.

The case from Benin in Chapter 9 is an evaluation of its agriculture sector policy conducted in 2009, relatively early in the implementation of the evaluation system, and subsequent evolution of the policy process to involve producers, building on the evidence in the evaluation.

Ghana

Ghana has two levels of government, national and local (district assemblies), with an intermediate regional coordinating structure (regional coordination councils). Most services are run by national departments, but there has been an ongoing decentralisation programme transferring functions to districts and municipal structures.

M&E functions take place at the national level, with the Ministry of M&E responsible for priority flagship programmes and projects and the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) responsible for planning and monitoring the national development plan and work in the sectors. A draft M&E Policy has been developed, but meanwhile the NDPC provides guidance for M&E activities, including manuals and guidelines. There is an active national statistical office: Ghana Statistical Service.

Evaluations usually take place in response to donor requirements and are carried out by external evaluators in private firms. Interest in evaluation is growing, with the Ghana M&E Forum playing an important role in promoting evaluation and evidence use (Amatoey et al., 2019). A diagnostic review carried out by CLEAR-AA found limited use of evaluation findings, due to limitations in time as well as competing interests (Ibid.). Sampong (2018) provides an example of one government agency, the Environmental Protection Agency, showing limited engagement of research institutions, fragmented evidence collection and uncoordinated research efforts.

There is a range of universities undertaking research and consultancy, notably institutes like the Ghana Institute for Management and Public Administration and the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research at the University of Ghana. Research is usually commissioned with donor funding. Sampong (2018) suggests there is limited systematic collaboration between researchers and policy makers.

Ghana's use of evidence for decision making is still fairly nascent, and emphasis remains on performance management and compliance as opposed to the use of evaluations and other forms of evidence for learning and policy making. There is an active civil society which has produced some interesting tools for tracking government performance and the state of services. Chapter 11 focuses on two civil society tools for looking at performance of services at district level, focusing particularly on management of sanitation services.

ECOWAS

ECOWAS is a regional economic community covering 15 West African states and operates in parallel to the West African Monetary Union (WAMU). It has a primary role in legislation for taxation across the community. The last case (Chapter 12) focuses on a regional initiative through ECOWAS using research evidence and a well-facilitated process of dialogue at technical and political levels to increase tobacco taxation, with the aim of reducing tobacco consumption and increasing government revenue. The case tracks the journey to get a new directive on tobacco taxation adopted and the important role played by a West African research institution, CRES, in facilitating the process.

Introducing the analytical framework

The analytical framework is discussed in depth in Chapter 3. However, for those who do not wish to read this in any depth, a simplified version is given in Figure 1.1.

The theory of change which underlies the analytical framework is based on the following:

- The external and internal *context* is key to the design, operationalisation and success of any initiative. Therefore, each case is analysed in relation to the context.
- In different cases we see different levels of *demand* for evidence, which can be from policy makers, donors, researchers or civil society.
- Evidence is *generated* through a variety of types of evidence production.

Figure 1.1 Simplified version of the analytical framework

Source: Author generated.

- Interventions to promote ownership, use and consensus around the findings occur prior to, as part of and after the evidence generation process. Other interventions promote the credibility of the evidence or wider access.
- These interventions trigger *change mechanisms* within individuals and organisations, which are critical to enabling use. Examples are making the evidence *accessible*, stakeholders *aware*, building *trust* in the evidence, or *institutionalising* the recommendations in some way.
- That should lead to an immediate outcome of strengthening the *capability* of stakeholders to use evidence, the *opportunity* to use the evidence in a particular setting, and the *motivation* for the evidence to be used.
- If that happens, then we may begin to see *changes in behaviour, policies and practice* at individual, organisational and wider system levels.
- The process is rarely linear and is usually iterative, and it may involve successive levels of evidence generation and use. Indeed, the triggers for change may come from different stages. For example, in Benin and South Africa, the need for theories of change in evaluations led to the introduction of theories of change for planning.

The cases seek to track the real pathway of change – what actually contributed to use of the evidence – so that we can learn how to do so better and more deliberately. To that end, the book draws out lessons emerging (Chapter 13) so that readers of the book can apply the learnings to their context – what use interventions might be likely to work and what change mechanisms need to be triggered to get the outcomes you want.

The flow of the book

The book essentially has three parts – four introductory chapters which introduce the topic, eight chapters presenting case studies, and a concluding chapter that provides an analytical reflection on the initial assumptions and how the understanding of evidence-based decision making prior to this research project was adjusted based on what has emerged from the case studies.

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 discusses the evidence-based policy field. Chapter 3 provides an in-depth explanation of the analytical framework that guided the case study research carried out for this book. Chapter 4 looks at the context of three of the countries in relation to use of evidence, based on a M&E culture survey carried out by Twende Mbele in Benin, Uganda and South Africa in 2017.

Chapters 5 to 12 present specific cases, documenting and analysing examples of generating and using evidence and how the evidence did or did not inform policy and why. In doing so, factors facilitating or inhibiting the use of evidence and lessons going forward are identified and discussed. In each of these chapters, the focus is on the processes which support or inhibit evidence use rather than the type of evidence source, but the cases do include a variety of evidence sources ranging from evaluations to research synthesis to citizen engagement.

The final chapter of the book (Chapter 13) provides an overall picture of what has emerged across the cases; the lessons emerging from the case studies including a refined version of the analytical framework for evidence use, based on the experience from the case studies; and lessons emerging about how to promote evidence.

We hope you enjoy the read!

Notes

- 1 Incidence of HIV (per 1,000 uninfected population ages 15–49; World Bank, n.d.-b).
- 2 GDP (current USD; World Bank, n.d.-a).
- 3 According to Cairney, ‘evidence is assertion back by information’ (Cairney, 2016). We discuss definitions around evidence further in Chapter 2.
- 4 www.twendembele.org
- 5 The cases are not projects of the Twende Mbele partnership itself, except for Chapter 3, which uses research funded by Twende Mbele into the performance culture in Uganda, Benin and South Africa.
- 6 A key method was participant observation, where the researcher or co-authors had been involved in the case. This provided access to detailed knowledge of the context, ready access to information, historical recall of events and insight into the background and motives with the possibility of a ‘thick description’ of the events that happened as well as a detailed picture of the context. A thick description is usually a lengthy description that captures the sense of actions as they occur. It places events in contexts that are understandable to the actors themselves.
- 7 Available at www.presidence.bj/évaluation-politiques-publiques.
- 8 Personal communication, Elias A.K. Segla, Spécialiste en gouvernance et évaluation des politiques publiques Présidence de la République du Bénin Bureau de l’Évaluation des Politiques Publiques et de l’Analyse de l’Action Gouvernementale.

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