2 An introduction to evidence-informed policy and practice in Africa

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Summary

This chapter introduces the theory around evidence and evidence-based policy making, otherwise referred to as evidence-informed policy and practice. The authors acknowledge that, in practice, policy makers use values, experience and political necessity as well as evidence to inform decisions, so they apply a limited or 'bounded rationality'. We discuss different types of evidence use, including instrumental, conceptual, symbolic and process use. An overview is given of the historical development of use of evidence, in Africa and internationally, from a focus on data to monitoring and evaluation to evaluation as a distinct discipline, and the move from single studies to research synthesis. The role of knowledge brokers is discussed, dealing with both the supply and demand for evidence. The authors emphasise the importance of creating an enabling environment for evidence use. This is introduced in this chapter and is a theme throughout the book.

Evidence matters, or does it?

All governments have to make choices about how to deploy their resources. In Africa, where resources are more limited and social problems are pressing, these choices are critical. Much has been written about how evidence can assist, for example, in demonstrating progress in implementing national plans, negotiating and designing large-scale investments and assisting in decision making (Parkhurst, 2017; Weiss, 1979).

Yet, in spite of the rhetoric around the importance of evidence, use of evidence for policy and practice remains challenging and somewhat elusive. A study of policy makers in South Africa found that while 45% of senior managers hoped to use evidence in decision making, only 9% reported being able to translate this intention into practice (Paine Cronin and Sadan, 2015). In Chapter 4 of this book, it is reported that between 40% and 50% of managers in Benin, Uganda and South Africa rarely or never use evaluation evidence. This situation is not just limited to Africa. Stewart et al. (2019) refer to several examples of evidence not being used: 85% of health research not being used internationally; in the Obama administration only 1% of government funding was informed by evidence (Bridgeland and Orszag, 2015); and, despite

extensive spending on What Works Centres in the UK, only 4 out of 21 government departments were able to account for the status and whereabouts of their commissioned research evidence, let alone demonstrate that they were using it (Sedley, 2016). Evidence can also be used inappropriately, for example, to validate pre-existing viewpoints – sometimes referred to as policy-based evidence (Weatherall et al., 2018).

There is little research into African policy makers' use of evidence. A study carried out in South Africa in 2011 found that policy makers' primary source of evidence was informal rather than more rigorous sources of evidence (Paine Cronin and Sadan, 2015). A positive sign, however, was that officials across departments were unanimous about the need to improve the use of evidence in policy making.

In Chapter 1, it was pointed out that generating or acquiring high-quality evidence does not automatically lead to use. Attention, therefore, needs to be given to the processes and factors that enable use so that they can be more consciously promoted. That is the central focus of this book.

We explore how evidence use was promoted in eight different regional, national and subnational cases and how evidence use influenced the eventual policy outcomes. This chapter lays out the theoretical foundations for evidence-based policy and practice and how it is applied in Africa.

What do we mean by evidence and evidence use?

Policy making is grounded in theory, values, ideology and practice, and so it will always be subject to political contestation (Davies, 2011).

Chapter 1 refers to the debates as to whether we should refer to 'evidence-based' or 'evidence-influenced', 'policy making' or 'decision making', 'evidence-based policy making' (EBPM) or 'evidence-influenced decision making' (EIDM).

This book is based on the premise that policy decisions are not and cannot emanate solely from evidence – or even rational analysis! Such is the nature of humanity that emotions, politics, power, fear and many other factors play a central role in the directions we take and choices we make. In terms of using the words 'policy making' or 'decision making', Cairney (2016, p. 2) suggests that in practice, policy is 'the sum total of government action, from signals of intent to final outcome', i.e. actors make and deliver policy continuously.

We recognise that policies and practice are influenced by many factors of which evidence is a part, and so prefer 'informed'. We also feel that policy is important because it is the agreed guideline as to what is to be done (policies, legislation, plans, etc.), but that in the end it is what is actually done (i.e. implementation or practice) that matters. So while the different authors use EBPM and EIDM interchangeably, we have a preference for using evidence-informed policy and practice (EIPP).

Some definitions of the term 'evidence'

According to Cairney, 'evidence is an argument or assertion backed by information' (Car). Evidence is sometimes associated with rigorous quantitative scientific studies. However, evidence can take many forms and come from many *sources*, including:¹

- *Statistical evidence* from surveys, official statistics and administrative data, each of which can indicate the size, nature and dynamics of the problem in hand;
- *Descriptive and experiential evidence* including experience and intuitive/tacit knowledge from stakeholders which illuminate the nature, size and dynamics of a problem;
- Individual evaluations and research studies;
- *Research synthesis* including systematic reviews of evidence, meta-analyses and rapid evidence assessments;
- *Economic and econometric evidence* which refers to the cost benefit or cost-effectiveness of interventions;
- *Implementation evidence* indicating how similar policies have been successfully implemented and how barriers to successful implementation have been overcome;
- *Ethical evidence* in terms of questioning or understanding the ethical implications of a policy.

Davies (2013) defines *quantitative evidence* as data that meet the standards of:

- *Internal validity*: what is the extent to which the design and conduct of the study eliminate the possibility of bias?
- *Adequacy of reporting*: are the statistics adequate, and does the data support the findings?
- *External validity*: does the study have the potential to be extended to the wider world?

In this definition, the key qualities of evidence are independence, objectivity and verifiability. In contrast, *opinions* are statements and claims that do not meet the standards of evidence, as they are positional, subjective, partial (selective) and hard to verify.²

Qualitative evidence has an equally strong claim and a need for rigour. Spencer et al. (2003) suggest that qualitative evidence meets the tests of:

- *Contribution*: does the study advance wider knowledge or understanding about a policy?
- *Defensibility*: does the study provide an appropriate research strategy to address the evaluative questions posed?

- *Rigour*: how systematic and transparent are the collection, analysis and interpretation of qualitative data?
- *Credibility*: how well-founded and plausible are the arguments about the evidence generated?

The use of evidence involves policy makers and practitioners drawing on these different sources of evidence and linking them to their own experience and their local context when making choices of what and how to implement.

What do we mean by evidence use?

Humans have been refining scientific research methods over the centuries but have only recently turned their attention to methods for using research to inform policy. Weiss (1979) is the author of one of the earliest papers looking at research utilisation, which talks about a knowledge-driven versus problem-solving model. In a *researcher-focused model*, basic research leads to applied research, which is then developed and finally applied. In the *problem-solving model*,

A problem exists, and a decision has to be made, information or understanding is lacking either to generate a solution to the problem or to select among alternative solutions, research provides the missing knowledge. With the gap filled, a decision is reached.

(p. 427)

Weiss also distinguishes between research undertaken to *anticipate needs*, or the commissioning of evaluation or research to *address a knowledge gap*. Cairney (2016) points out the importance of understanding policy-making processes and the use of evidence within these complex and political processes in order to better understand which model might be most effective in a particular circumstance.

In this book, we apply the concepts of instrumental, conceptual, process and symbolic use. Johnson et al. (2009) define these terms in the following way. *Instrumental use* refers to instances where a specific action has been taken arising from an evaluation or research. *Conceptual use* refers to cases when no direct action has been taken but where people have greater understanding as a result of the evaluation. *Symbolic use* occurs when evidence is used to legitimise pre-existing views. We also consider the case of *positive symbolic use*, for example where the presence of an evaluation raised the profile of an issue.³ Patton emphasises the importance of *process use*, the ‘individual changes in thinking and behaviour and program or organizational changes in procedures and culture that occur among those involved in evaluation as a result of the learning that occurs during the evaluation process’ (Patton, 1998, p. 225).⁴ Apart from intended use, there may well also be *unintended uses*, which are as important to identify and learn from.

Evidence use will rarely be the result of a single study or piece of evidence changing the world but will rather be the result of multiple small steps. The

larger changes can take many years to accumulate (Stewart et al., 2019), often through interactions between multiple agents (Weiss, 1979). The case studies in this book all highlight the multiple steps that took place, sometimes forward, sometimes backward.

When we talk about influencing policy makers – who are we influencing? Here, we draw on the definition used by Cairney: ‘Policy-makers include elected and unelected civil servants, individuals and organisations who collectively make decisions’ (Cairney, 2016, p. 2).

When can evidence be used?

Figure 2.1 is a policy/programme cycle developed for training in evidence-based policy and implementation in Africa. The cycle includes the stages of agenda setting, diagnosis, selection of intervention, planning/design, implementation, and evaluation.

Figure 2.1 Policy/programme cycle used in training in Africa

Source: University of Cape Town; Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, South Africa.

evaluation and ongoing learning.⁵ Evidence can (and should) be used at different stages of the policy cycle:

- Diagnosis (e.g. to establish the size or extent of a problem);
- Design of an intervention (e.g. in developing the theory of change, appropriate outcomes or appropriate indicators of scale or quality);
- During implementation to assess progress (e.g. as part of monitoring);
To assess outcomes (e.g. the effectiveness of a solution).

How likely are policy makers to use evidence?

The reality of many development situations is the pervasiveness of ‘wicked’ emergent problems ranging from climate change to violence against women to migration, where simple answers do not work, solutions are unclear and the values of groups in society differ. We need to be realistic about what to expect from the use of evidence in this complex world where policy makers and practitioners are subject to multiple pressures, there are many different stakeholders and decisions often have to be made rapidly. In an idealistic rational view which Cairney refers to as *comprehensive rationality*, policy makers have clear priorities, gather and understand the relevant information and make informed choices. In a *bounded rationality model*, policy makers have unclear aims and limited information, and the rationale behind the choices they make is often not clear (Cairney, 2016).

If one looks at key features of comprehensive or bounded rationality within Africa, what does the evidence tell us? The research presented in Chapter 4 on the performance culture in Uganda, Benin and South Africa suggests that 50%–60% of managers are using evidence. However, around 40% of managers say departments do not champion monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and are not honest about performance; approximately 25% reject the accuracy of results that reflect negatively on their performance; and in around 30% of cases, learning is not documented to improve future results (refer to Table 4.3 in Chapter 4). This is clearly within the bounded rationality end of the spectrum.

Historical development of different forms of evidence

National statistics

Pre-colonial states which had a centralised administration and hierarchical organisation, such as the Shongai Empire in western Africa, the Luba kingdom in central Africa and the kingdoms of Buganda and Ankole in eastern Africa, must have had mechanisms for collecting, storing and using data. However, current national statistics offices (NSOs) originate from colonial governments. For example, Kenya’s National Bureau of Statistics has its origins in 1925 when the colonial government appointed its first official statistician. The first population census in Kenya was undertaken in 1948, with the results published in 1952.⁶

Today, all African countries have national statistics offices and are gradually strengthening their capacities. A study carried out in 2014 by the Centre for Global Development and the African Population Health Research Centre states:

Nowhere in the world is the need for better data more urgent than in Africa, where data quality is low and improvements are sluggish, despite investments from country, regional and international institutions to improve statistical systems and build capacity.

(Center for Global Development and the African Population and Health Research Centre, 2014)

The Statistical Capacity Development Outlook 2019 indicates that countries in sub-Saharan Africa have performed relatively well in improving their capacities since 2009 (PARIS21, 2019). The same study identifies four main obstacles to data collection and use in Africa (Center for Global Development and The African Population and Health Research Center, 2014):

- *Limited autonomy and unstable budgets:* The majority of NSOs across Africa lack autonomy and do not manage their own budgets. Capacity and resource limitations are the most commonly cited reasons for the lack of progress in statistical capacities. This often results in a reliance on development partners and increases the vulnerability of data production and management to political and interest group pressures.
- *Lack of adequate incentives to produce accurate data:* Accuracy of data is a significant problem across the region. While technical capacities are one obstacle, politics and the uses of data can work against producing accurate data or create incentives to produce inaccurate data.
- *Dominance of donor priorities:* The larger proportion of funding for data gathering across many Africa countries comes from donor-driven initiatives. Therefore, NSOs and their individual staff often spend more time involved in donor-funded projects than in improving national statistics.
- *Access and usability of data:* There is often a reluctance or lack of capacity to generate useful data, manage data and ensure that it is easily and widely accessible for use.

Despite these challenges, NSOs are a primary source of data which is much used by policy makers. However often the data is not analysed to the depth that is possible and necessary for evidence use, and NSO data is not necessarily good for explaining *why* things are happening or whether interventions are working.

The development of monitoring and evaluation

Following the shock of the Second World War, in the 1940s the US and Europe implemented a variety of social programmes to address the challenges facing society. Many of these programmes were innovative and redistributive, with the

Box 2.1 Distinguishing between monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring helps managers and policymakers to understand what the money invested is producing and whether plans are being followed. Evaluation helps to establish what difference is being made, why the level of performance is being achieved, what is being learned from activities and whether and how to strengthen implementation of a programme or policy.

(Porter and Goldman, 2013)

creation of welfare states and widescale social assistance for children. Governments looked for ways to assess whether the money was being well spent, and in 1949 in the US, performance budgeting emerged as a response. This was followed by ‘management by objectives’ and ‘monitoring for results’ in the 1960s (Parkhurst, 2017). Meanwhile, adoption of a logical framework approach in 1969 by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was a significant milestone in the monitoring, evaluation and evidence journey (see Box 2.1 for a definition of M&E). The logical framework approach included the development of a programme logic, with indicators at different levels of performance. This was widely adopted in the aid industry in the 1970s and is still widely used – one of the drivers for monitoring as well as evaluation in the developing world.

During the 1980s, the advent of New Public Management (NPM) led to a focus on separating the commissioner of a service from the deliverer of a service, the creation of agencies and the resultant need for performance control, including through public service agreements, with monitoring of key performance indicators (Ranson and Stewart, 1994; Mouton et al., 2014). In the 1990s, the Government Results and Performance Act of 1993 in the US provided for the establishment of strategic planning and performance measurement and for a widespread assessment of government performance.

In Africa, a network of evaluation practitioners was established in east Africa as early as 1977, supported by UNICEF. This network comprised the national evaluation associations of six countries.⁷ The imposition of structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s and 1990s, and the adoption of NPM frameworks, were important influences in the development of evidence use in Africa. Management frameworks and economic models necessitated the establishment of mechanisms to strengthen results orientation, transparency and accountability. This, in turn, stimulated a demand for M&E (Basheka and Byamugisha, 2015; University of the Witwatersrand, 2012). Evidence use in Africa during this period was primarily driven by external influences from former colonial countries (Mouton et al., 2014).

In the 1990s, the newly established Expert Group on Evaluation, established by the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD, together with multiple donors and financing institutions, convened two pivotal pan-African forums to raise awareness of and identify African evaluation needs and capabilities, with the support of multiple international donors and financing institutions.⁸ These forums led to the creation of the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA), formed in 1999 as an umbrella organisation for African evaluators across the continent.

Howard White refers to this period, with its focus on a results agenda and on measurement and monitoring, as *wave one* of the evidence revolution (White, 2019b; see also Figure 2.4).

Across multiple countries over the last 10 to 15 years, national M&E systems and processes have been established to respond to increasing pressures to demonstrate performance, accountability and transparency – key elements underpinning good governance. The development of these systems has taken place in very different ways across the different countries, but the process accelerated generally in the 2000s. For example, Benin started an evaluation system in 2007, while Uganda and South Africa started theirs in 2011.

In addition to evaluation networks and associations, a number of regional initiatives exist. These regional initiatives were established to support countries in strengthening M&E and evidence-based decision making. Examples include AfrEA, Twende Mbele,⁹ the African Evidence Network (AEN), the African Parliamentarians Network on Development Evaluation (APNODE) and the West African Capacity-building on Impact Evaluation (WACIE).

The emergence of evaluation as distinct from monitoring

The use of evaluation, with its focus on independent, objective and credible assessments of performance and reasons for under-performance, was already well established in the US, Australia and Canada by the 1980s. As mentioned earlier, the first moves to focus on evaluation in Africa were as early as 1977. Since then the discipline of evaluations has expanded dramatically in Africa. The Centre for Learning and Evaluation for Results for Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA), and the Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology (CREST) at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa, undertook a search for African evaluations between 2005 and 2015 in 12 countries and came up with 2,635 evaluations (Blaser Mapitsa and Khumalo, 2018).¹⁰ Taking just one country as an example, the Campbell Collaboration¹¹ worked with Uganda's Office of the Prime Minister to search for evaluations and found a total of over 500 evaluations since the year 2000 (White, 2019a).

A limitation of conventional M&E work is how to identify causal links and attribution of effects to interventions. To address this, the use of impact evaluations (IEs) using randomised controlled trials grew in the mid-1990s (Banerjee, 2016), in what White (2019b) refers to as the *second wave* of the evidence revolution. We would rather describe the development of evaluation more generally as the *second wave*, with impact evaluation as the *third wave*. Key organisations

were created in the 2000s to support impact evaluations such as the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) in 2008¹² and the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL).¹³

The expansion of evaluation can also be seen in the increasing numbers of impact evaluations. The IE repository of 3ie shows the number of completed impact evaluations per year, rising from less than 10 in 1995 to around 50 in 2003, 100 in 2008, and over 500 in 2012, having levelled off since then. IEs focused on health, nutrition and population account for around half of these, followed by education, social protection, and agriculture and rural development. Africa is well represented in terms of the geographical areas in which these IEs were conducted, with over 300 in each of South Africa, Kenya and Uganda, 50–99 in Tanzania, Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia and Zimbabwe, and 21–49 in Mali, DRC and Mozambique, with few in the remaining countries (Sabet and Brown, 2018).

From single studies to research synthesis

As it became clearer that single studies on a topic can be misleading, a new field of research has emerged known as evidence synthesis which seeks to summarise and synthesise the findings from multiple studies on the same topic. White (2019b) refers to this as the *third wave* of the evidence revolution (we would use fourth). The science is most established in the health sector with systematic reviews (SRs) and the development of standard methodologies and protocols to try and eliminate bias in the research process.

Evidence synthesis has taken longer to emerge in international development. The main sponsors have been 3ie, the Cochrane Collaboration (which houses a database of SRs in health care) and the Campbell Collaboration (which produces and disseminates SRs in the social, educational and behavioural areas). To date, 3ie has been supporting and cataloguing SRs, evidence maps and other synthesis products, notably outside the health field, and has a repository of these. The 3ie repository demonstrates a similar steady increase in SRs as with IEs, with fewer than ten completed SRs before 2006, rising to over 100 in 2016 (White, 2019b). As of 6 March 2019, the total number of SRs in the 3ie database was 691, of which 337 were in health.¹⁴

What about SRs in Africa? The Cochrane Library contains the health SRs registered with it, of which 169 have the word ‘Africa’ in their abstract. Once again there is a rising trend, with 5–8 per year between 2009 and 2012, rising to 23 in 2017.¹⁵ This indicates a fairly steady progression in Africa. A search on the 3ie systematic review database carried out while writing this chapter yielded 180 out of 691 SRs with the word Africa, of which 72 were in health.

In terms of capacity to conduct and use SRs, the African Centre for Evidence (ACE), which is located at the University of Johannesburg, conducted a survey of its Africa Evidence Network members in 2017 and obtained 177 responses from 18 African countries. Sixty-five percent (112/173) of respondents had participated in at least one evidence map, systematic review, review of systematic reviews or other form of synthesis. This shows growing evidence synthesis capacity across Africa, with the strongest capacity in South Africa and within the

health sector. This ACE study also identified factors affecting the use of evidence synthesis (Stewart et al., 2017). Common factors included the following:

- 1 Capacity, collaboration and support
- 2 Access to literature and data
- 3 Need for clear questions and guidelines
- 4 Time availability
- 5 Funding availability.

Focusing on the demand for evidence

The previous sections have focused on some of the drivers for evidence from NSOs, M&E and research synthesis. We now consider the *demand* from policy makers, which is needed if evidence is to be used.

Demand for evidence in relation to government policy and programmes can come from a number of sources:

- *Ministers*, wanting to know how best to achieve a manifesto commitment, or wanting to monitor rollout (e.g. a commitment to meet targets for development infrastructure, such as schools);
- *Parliamentary committees* and the parliamentary research services that serve them, whether to promote their oversight of specific departments, to review progress with a national plan, or to review budget allocations;
- *Senior managers* in the public service, seeking to make policy choices, decide on implementation strategies, or decide where budgets should be reprioritised;
- *Managers* of programmes and services who need information to adjust their programming;
- *Civil society* seeking to hold government to account;
- *Sector think tanks* seeking to strengthen their knowledge and awareness of what government is doing.

Government ministers have manifesto commitments to fulfil (the agenda in Figure 2.1), but many factors influence what they want to do and how they intend to do it. There is more chance of evidence being used if it is readily available at the time when choices need to be made, hence the development of evidence maps. Evidence maps, sometimes called evidence gap maps, were developed by 3ie and are being used by the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) in South Africa to build the evidence base for a sector or topic, which can then be drawn on rapidly as needed.¹⁶ The case study from Uganda on the Makerere Rapid Response Service in Health (Chapter 8) provides an example of using existing research to provide rapid synthesis reports for government.

There is also an emerging demand for evidence from *parliamentary committees* and their support services, which include parliamentary researchers and libraries. South Africa and Uganda both provide M&E information, including evaluation reports, to Parliament (Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), 2018; Goldman et al., 2018). In South Africa, for the

first time, an evaluation has been initiated that was specifically requested by a parliamentary committee, where the Standing Committee on Public Accounts requested an evaluation of scholar transport (Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), 2018).

Through participation in APNODE, some parliaments have established parliamentary groups focused on EBPM. For example, Kenya's Parliamentary Caucus on Evidence-Informed Oversight and Decision Making was established in 2015. The Caucus has implemented evidence dialogue forums focused on specific topics related to evidence generation and use.

Examples of *senior managers* requesting evaluations are found in the cases of South Africa's Department of Basic Education (Chapter 5), an evaluation of violence against women and children in South Africa (Chapter 6), an evaluation of procurement policy in Uganda (Chapter 7) and of agriculture in Benin (Chapter 9). The Makerere Rapid Response Service is an example of a national ministry of health and district offices of health requesting specific evidence, as are the evidence maps being produced by DPME. The South African system also encourages government departments to propose evaluations for the National Evaluation Plan and to propose evaluations within their departments (Goldman et al., 2015). ACE has also worked with South African government departments to develop evidence maps and undertake systematic reviews.

Some countries, such as Benin and Uganda, have been more successful at involving *civil society* in the evaluation system, while South Africa has been less successful (Goldman et al., 2018). NGOs and foundations also commission evaluations. Porter and Feinstein (2014) identified some key think tanks in five African countries and their involvement with evaluation. An important initiative has been the Think Tank Initiative, which has sought to strengthen think tanks and their contribution to the policy process. A recent evaluation of the African think tanks found that

across the region, national think tanks tested are generally seen as performing well with regards to having knowledge of the policy-making process, having quality research and researchers, as well as solid regional knowledge. Areas for improvement are fairly consistent across the region, with gender empowerment/equality research, having adequate infrastructure to function effectively, and partnering with non-government policy actors topping the list.

(Globescan, 2018, p. 7)

However, these think tanks are fragile, and an earlier study suggests that 30% are highly vulnerable, and an additional 25%–30% are extremely fragile, with a serious risk of disappearing, given unstable funding, staff turnover and brain drain (Muyangwa et al., 2017).

Role of donors

Many countries in Africa receive donor funding for government programmes, which may contribute a major part of national budgets. For example, 'about

93% of Malawi's nutrition financing is from donors, with government providing only 7.3 percent' (Khunga, 2018). This dependence on donor funding is true for many of the lower-income countries in Africa, while less true for middle-income countries like Kenya, Ghana, Botswana or South Africa. Donors influence the development agenda by, for example, controlling what programmes get funded, and by insisting on following their own systems rather than building country systems. Many of these programmes are evaluated, and so donors then also become key in funding evidence generation. There are times when this can adversely influence use of evidence – for example, in the case of the review of Uganda's procurement regulations (Chapter 7), concerns were raised about donor influence having an adverse effect on ownership of the review and review findings.

Donors are also key in funding work on EIDM/EIPP, as in the Hewlett Foundation funding this book, Twende Mbele and 3ie. Similarly, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) has been an anchor donor for 3ie and Twende Mbele; has funded M&E work in DPME and in Uganda's Office of the Prime Minister; and has funded the BCURE (Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence) project, which helped ACE and AEN to develop.

Mediating supply and demand for evidence – the role of knowledge brokering

Use of evidence can be seen as a link between supply and demand for evidence. However, the link is neither seamless nor automatic and requires thoughtful mediation. Figure 2.2 shows a model developed in South Africa. The elements

Figure 2.2 Supply, demand and knowledge brokering for evidence

Source: Ian Goldman.

include the supply of appropriate evidence, demand and capacity to use the evidence, and the knowledge linkage and translation to stimulate and support both the supply and demand for evidence, which involves all these roles. This is discussed further in Chapter 3.

The type of supply and demand differs in each country. Figure 2.3 (from Segone, n.d.b) categorises countries based on the quality and trustworthiness of their evidence, as well as the policy environment. The figure shows four categories: evidence demand-constrained countries where the evidence is good but demand is weak (evidence-influenced), vicious circle countries where the quality of evidence is poor and demand poor (opinion-based), evidence-supply-constrained countries where demand is good but supply low (evidence-influenced), and virtuous circle countries, which he refers to as evidence-based, where supply and demand are high.

Figure 2.3 shows the role of an evidence broker or knowledge broker. White (2019b) refers to knowledge brokering as *wave four* (we would use wave five) of

Figure 2.3 Different evidence: policy dynamics

Source: Segone, n.d.a; open access.

the evidence revolution. Martinuzzi and Sedlacko (2017) discuss the role of the knowledge broker, suggesting three different dimensions:

- The development, transfer and translation of knowledge, in which case knowledge brokers act as *knowledge managers*;
- Development of knowledge-based networks, in which knowledge brokers act as *linkage agents*;
- Development of capacity to produce and use policy-relevant knowledge, in which knowledge brokers act as *capacity builders*.

In the cases in this book we see examples of these different roles:

- *Knowledge managers* who often play multiple roles as transmitters, interpreters and synthesisers of information. An example in this book is the Parliamentary Research Unit¹⁷ in Kenya, which was central to brokering supply and demand between civil society and the government (Chapter 10).
- *Linkage agents*: the national evaluation units in Benin, Uganda and South Africa support development of an evaluation agenda, commission the evaluations, ensure policy makers buy in to these, ensure the quality of the evaluation process and then undertake the knowledge translation of the products at the end, ensuring they end up in the policy space (Goldman et al., 2018). The case of the Department of Basic Education in South Africa and the Ugandan procurement case (Chapter 5 and 7) are examples of this.
- *Capacity builders*: Goldman et al. (2018) point out the development of capacity development elements in the evaluation systems in Benin, Uganda and South Africa.

White (2019b) differentiates the levels of curation and interpretation of data in knowledge brokering (see Figure 2.4). An example of high levels of interpretation and curation of data is the Educational Endowment Foundation in the UK, which synthesises evidence and turns it into toolkits of practical recommendations which it supplies to schools. There are similar examples in South Africa and Uganda of synthesis, at least at the evidence map level, but most countries are at the level of single studies, or SRs. Langer and Weyrauch discuss the knowledge translation process further in Chapter 3.

Supporting an enabling environment for evidence

Governance of evidence systems

Evidence can easily be politicised by the cherry-picking of favoured evidence (White, 2019b). In addition, social value can be obscured through the supposed technical rigour of evidence. Evidence inclusion or exclusion is often based on the content expertise of the policy maker and the active policy area interests

Figure 2.4 Levels of knowledge brokering

Source: White, 2019b [Permissions – Creative Commons].

of senior managers (Davies, 2011). In a challenging paper titled ‘How to Beat Science and Influence People’, Weatherall et al. (2018) suggest that

biased production, which does not involve fabricating results, is a successful strategy for misleading the public. And in many cases, biased production is itself less effective than selective sharing, even though it involves more direct and explicit interventions on the production of science.

(p. 3)

We need to move beyond the notion that evidence quality is in itself a greater good to supporting the *ecosystem which supports evidence*, so that rigorous,

systematic and technically valid pieces of evidence are used within decision-making processes that are inclusive of, representative of and accountable to the multiple social interests of the population served (Parkhurst, 2017, p. 8). Parkhurst (2017) calls this the good governance of evidence. He suggests eight principles (pp. 161–162) which could add significant value to policy making in Africa; these are discussed further in Chapter 3.

Establishing evidence ecosystems

So what could an evidence ecosystem involve? Stewart et al. (2019, pp. 3–4) refer to an evidence ecosystem as ‘a system reflecting the formal and informal linkages and interactions between different actors (and their capacities and resources) involved in the production, translation, and use of evidence’. A key feature of some of the evidence systems that have been established is the many components that are needed to make the overall ecosystem work. These range from governance and management of the system overall, knowledge broker roles, building relationships between suppliers and users, resourcing the system, building capacity to both supply and use evidence, quality assurance functions such as setting standards and providing guidelines, and planning for the evidence needed each year (for example, see Goldman et al., 2018). We come back to this in Chapter 13, looking at elements of the enabling environment which can be seen in the different cases.

In conclusion

There is limited data available on how evidence is actually used by policy makers and practitioners in Africa. The contribution of this book is in its in-depth cases of evidence use and the factors which have supported or inhibited use, using a behavioural change lens. This chapter defines some of the concepts we use in the book and provides an overview of the state of evidence production and use in Africa. We clarify that use of evidence will only be one factor that governments consider in their decisions and actions.

Overall, there is an increasing supply of evidence in Africa ranging from evaluations to research synthesis. While capacity in Africa is increasing, supply continues to be dominated by international players, primarily due to donor policies and preferences from which much of the demand for evidence originates, particularly in the form of evaluations. However, demand for evidence by governments is on the increase and is gradually being institutionalised in both the executive arm of government and legislatures. Civil society and think tanks are using evidence to hold government to account, and this has been institutionalised in the reporting on progress against the UN Sustainable Development Goals. An important knowledge broker role is emerging, of units with an understanding of the content, the evidence generation process and the ability to reach policy makers.

Chapter 3 takes these basic concepts and looks at the evidence relating to what works to stimulate use of evidence. Chapter 3 also presents the analytical framework that has been used to inform the case studies that are presented in Chapters 5 to 12.

Notes

- 1 Adapted from Davies (2011, p2).
- 2 Phillip Davies, in training materials used in training of senior managers in evidence, 2013–2018, University of Cape Town.
- 3 An example of this is an evaluation of nutrition interventions for children under 5 in South Africa, which helped to raise the profile of the challenge of malnutrition. In 2017, 27% of children under 5 experienced stunted growth.
- 4 Forss describes five different types of process use: learning to learn; developing networks; creating shared understanding; strengthening the project; and boosting morale (Forss et al., 2002).
- 5 This cycle is derived from training materials on evidence used in a range of settings, including the University of Cape Town/DPME course for senior managers.
- 6 www.knbs.or.ke/history-of-knbs/
- 7 Today, there are 40 Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation (VOPEs) across Africa who are members of AfrEA (Adeline Sibanda, former chair of AfrEA, personal communication, August 2019).
- 8 The first was convened in May 1990 in Abidjan with the support of DAC/OECD Expert Group on Aid Evaluation and the African Development Bank (AfDB). A second forum was convened in November 1998 with the support of AfDB, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and agencies of international cooperation of Denmark, Norway, Switzerland and Sweden.
- 9 A programme established to establish partnerships between countries to develop and implement M&E systems that improve government performance and impact on citizens. For more information, see www.twendembele.org.
- 10 The database aims to capture academic journal articles, conference presentations, evaluation reports, terms of reference, and other documents clearly related to evaluation, between the years of 2005 and 2015. Only open access articles and reports were considered due to the need for the resultant database to be open access.
- 11 An international research network that produces policy-relevant evidence syntheses. <https://campbellcollaboration.org/>.
- 12 Ian Goldman is a commissioner of 3ie.
- 13 J-PAL is a global research centre working to reduce poverty by ensuring that policy is informed by scientific evidence, focusing in particular on the use of randomised impact evaluations.
- 14 www.3ieimpact.org/search/site?search=&f%5B0%5D=category%3Asystematic_review&t%5B0%5D=systematic_review&sort_by=search_api_relevance, accessed 21 March 2019.
- 15 Own search from Cochrane library.
- 16 DPME has developed four evidence maps to date – on human settlements, early grade maths, the role of a developmental state, and the National Spatial Development Framework/Spatial Transformation. DPME has also initiated an evidence map on land reform to support a presidential advisory panel (Harsha Dayal, personal communication, 20 February 2019).
- 17 Parliamentary research units are interesting knowledge-brokering entities in that they often play multiple roles as ‘transmitters, interpreters and synthesisers of information’, depending on the capacity of the units. In some countries, dedicated units have been

established to provide specialised information and analysis to members of Parliament (Draman et al., 2017). Key factors identified as influencing the effectiveness of these units include the following (Ibid.):

- Resources: Levels and skills of research staff, access to adequate budgetary resources, linkages with external research institutes and access to existing research.
- Leadership and support for research within parliaments: A key obstacle is the high level of turnover of members of Parliament (MPs), particularly in Africa where, typically, 60% to 75% of MPs do not win re-election. In addition, the attitude of MPs towards evidence and research has a strong bearing on the research units, and MPs' education and awareness.
- Timing and ability to plan: Research units often struggle to anticipate key issues and plan in advance, as legislative calendars are often released with very short time frames.
- Institutional structures and processes: Including quality assurance mechanisms for evidence as well as modalities for interdepartmental collaboration and coordination.

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