MANIFESTO ON CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR EIDM IN AFRICA

HOW DID THIS MANIFESTO COME ABOUT?

As part of the Africa Evidence Network (AEN)'s biennial event EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE, a working group of AEN members was formed during April/May 2020 to plan and take forward a workstream on enhancing evidence capacities. A three-page working document – focused on unpacking why a manifesto was needed, definitions, principles, people and processes – was prepared for the event. This working document also indicated an outline for a manifesto and the first three topics were populated with some text.

During the working sessions for the stream on enhancing evidence capacities at EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE, the first three parts of this document were illuminated with case study presentations and discussions, commented on, and enhanced by participants in the session. After EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE, the document was edited by the AEN Programme Officer for Evidence Capacities – Charity Chisoro – and the two advisers of the working group: Kirchuffs Atengble and Carina van Rooyen. AEN members were then invited via the AEN newsletter of December 2020 to again contribute and comment on the draft Manifesto. Members were also invited to express an interest to the AEN Programme Officer for Evidence Capacities about their continued involvement in using the Manifesto as a tool for further collaboration.
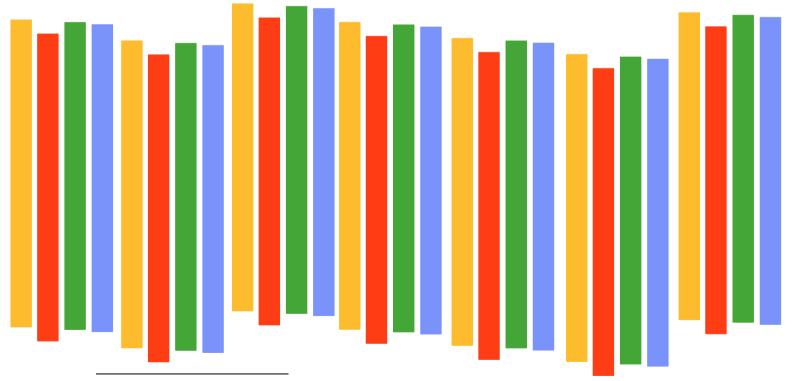
At a meeting of the working group and interested AEN members on 16 February 2021, attendees agreed to accept the draft of the Manifesto as an output of EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE and share it with the wider Network membership via the AEN website. Interested members are welcome to continue enhancing and deepening the Manifesto; contact Charity Chisoro (charityc@uj.ac.za) should you want to be part of this process.

WHY HAVE A MANIFESTO?

This Manifesto is a public declaration of our shared vision and commitment regarding evidence capacities to ensure the Africa we want.

We express this through indicating the meaning we give to capacity development, and identifying key principles of our coordinated efforts, the people involved, and the processes/mechanisms to be used[1]. The Manifesto highlights that capacity matters not only for those who are expected to use evidence, but also for those who produce and translate evidence in relevant ways. For us, evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) capacity development is about unleashing, nurturing, and retaining existing capacity in Africa. And it is not just what we do, but also how we do this that is important.

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[1] This version of the Manifesto is focused on the meaning of capacity development for EIDM in Africa, and key principles.

The purpose of our Manifesto is:

- an African-led approach to capacity-development: Africa holds her own destiny in her hands.[2] We want to strengthen our collaborations on capacity development for evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) in Africa, coordinate efforts and minimise duplication. To collaborate though we need to have shared understandings, meanings, and principles; know who is working on evidence capacities in Africa; and agree on the change processes we'll follow.

- To serve as a resource and inspiration to one another. It is propositional and provocative, to inspire and challenge us to push our individual and collective work in this area. The Manifesto is not per se about best practices, but rather a framework for AEN members and allies to support and collaborate on capacity development for EIDM in Africa.

- To serve as a challenge to the mainstream views on capacity-building for EIDM[3]. It thus can also be used as a reference document for evidence capacity development in Africa.

SHARED MEANING / DEFINITIONS

We express our understanding of what the concept of 'capacity' means in the context of EIDM. The United Nations Development Programme (2006) offers a broad definition for capacity as "the ability of individuals, institutions and societies to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve objectives in a sustainable manner". Such capacity includes not only technical abilities, skills and knowledge, but also attitudes and motivations.

Capacity development then is "the process whereby people, organisations, and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt, and maintain capacity over time" (DAC 2006). The African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) (2016:2) further specifies that

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[2] Our Manifesto acknowledges the 2018 report of the Africa Union's African Capacity Building Foundation on *Lesson notes on capacity development in Africa*, as well as its 2016 report *African Union Agenda 2063 Capacity development plan framework: Buttressing implementation of the first 10-year plan – "The Africa we want"*.

[3] See the blog post, based on a webinar, by Ruth Stewart and Beryl Leach on eight areas of concern regarding capacity-building efforts of mainstream approaches: https://www.3ieimpact.org/blogs/capacity-building-developing-capacities-dreaming-big-about-improving-evidence-use. Also see ACBF (2018:21) for concerns about the lack of African ownership, follow-through by political and technical leaders, and project-approaches rather than longer-term strategic and systemic approaches.

capacity development "is essentially about pursuing three key goals: enhance the skills of **individuals** and groups; enhance or improve the enabling environments to get things done [**organisations**]; and design or improve the systems, processes, institutional structures, and modes of operation to achieve better outcomes and effectiveness [**institutions or systems**]." This institutional/systems level of capacity development can incorporate national, sectoral, and/or network levels of capacity development.

We acknowledge that the concept of 'capacity development' has evolved significantly since the 1960s in Africa. In a broad sense, in the 1960s and 1970s capacity building (the phrase used then) was focused on training and providing technical assistance to individuals in key positions for improved project implementation. By the 1980s, the focus in capacity building shifted to the restructuring and redesigning of organisations. And by the 1990s, capacity building (by then called capacity development) was about "the capacity of individuals, organisations, and the broader institutional framework in which they operate to deliver specific tasks and mandates." (ACBF 2018:14). In the 2010s, in light of the decoloniality movement in knowledge production, there is strong urging to drop the concept 'capacity building' and its associated deficit-model, for 'capacity development', 'capacity enhancement' and even better, 'capacity sharing'; these phrases better recognise the sharing of existing capacities, and the augmenting of capacities, between equal partners.

In the light of the above, what we mean by capacity development for EIDM in Africa is (1) enhancing and sharing capacities of individuals/groups related to evidence use in Africa; (2) improving organisations and their articulation with the evidence ecosystem in Africa to get things done; and (3) improving systems, processes, institutional structures, and modes of operation of the African evidence ecosystem(s) for effective, equitable and ethical use of evidence to have the Africa we want.

The kind of **capacities** (including knowledge, skills, and values/attitudes) we value for EIDM in Africa[4] include:

- Sectoral and topic/issue knowledge (such as climate change, HIV/Aids, etc.)
- Research methodologies, including evidence synthesis
- Monitoring and evaluation (M&E), also of the impact of EIDM initiatives
- Knowledge management, including data
- Knowledge mobilisations/translation/brokering
- Policy-making processes
- Governance understandings (such as organisational cultures, budgeting systems, institutional reform)
- Building and management of evidence communities
- Collaboration and engagement, especially across sectors and stakeholders
- Personal attributes such as empathy, openness, responsiveness, adaptability, courage, commitment
- Interpersonal skills to build and strengthen relationships
- Stakeholder engagement
- Effective communication
- Capacity development and pedagogical approaches, including facilitating and negotiating
- Digital literacies and fluencies for enhanced online collaboration and learning
- Strategic, visionary and ethical leadership

PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR EIDM IN AFRICA

Our compact between all role-players in the evidence ecosystem in Africa (the full continuum from evidence producers to intermediaries to evidence users) is to commit to the following regarding enhancing evidence capacities:

- Capacity development should be about enhancement of capacities, rather than viewing such efforts as required due to deficit and weakness. In our capacity enhancement efforts we start from acknowledgement of existing capacities (in

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[4] For now we are listing the capacities we value; later, for categorisation, we can consider the European Commission's (EC JRC 2017) skills map for evidence-informed policy-making.

individuals, organisations and systems) and aim at better use of local talent and capabilities.

- Our capacity development efforts are to address especially structural and value issues, and aim for sustainable change (rather than once-off initiatives not embedded in long-term strategies and plans). We address capacity development strategically, systematically, and structurally, on both the supply- and demand-side of evidence.

- Our long- and short-term goals for capacity development include strengthening the capacity to enhance and share capacity.

- We emphasise relationships in our capacity development, through partnerships (between government, civil society organisations, universities, evidence hubs, international agencies, etc.) and through promotion of collaborative efforts.

- The capacities of the whole evidence ecosystem are to be enhanced through our efforts: demand as well as supply factors shape capacity constraints and capacity development opportunities and outcomes. We must harness the capacities of all across the evidence ecosystem.

- We acknowledge multiple sources / types of knowledge (such as research, data and statistics, practice-generated evidence, and citizen / local knowledge), multi-levels (individuals, organisations and institutions), and multi-stakeholders in our capacity development initiatives.
- We foreground pedagogy. For one, we utilise adult learning principles, such as espoused by Paulo Freire[5] and Michael Knowles[6].

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[5] Some principles underpinning Freire's pedagogy include education as liberation, dialogue, relevance, problem-posing, praxis (reflection and action) (Freire 1970).
[6] His five assumptions of adult learning are self-concept, adult learning experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation to learn (Knowles 1984).

- We acknowledge the importance of collaborative peer learning (i.e., social learning). Engagement and participation are crucial in design and delivery of our capacity sharing efforts.

- We value and foreground bridging of theory and praxis, and thus learning by doing.

- We use a variety of mechanisms, tools and methodologies to implement capacity development interventions, that is more than just training.

- Our capacity development efforts are to be evidence-informed, responding to learning especially from within our continent. In this regard, we commit to evaluate our capacity development to ensure we continue to learn.

- Capacity enhancement efforts must fit the context for which it is designed. There are many ways for capacity development to work; we are wary of 'best practice' or 'blue prints' that tend to neglect specific contexts. We celebrate complexity and diversity.

- Whilst acknowledging the importance of contextualisation, we also acknowledge the commonalities / foundational factors across the diversity of contexts.

- Our capacity development will explicitly talk to power dynamics, and enhance equity. We are especially aware of youth, women, people with disabilities, rural populations and other marginalised groups as central capacity pillars.

- We are sensitive to the language in which capacity development efforts are conducted. This includes making effort to localise the meaning of our phrases.

LIST OF REFERENCES

African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) 2018 *Lesson notes on capacity development in Africa*. Harare: ACBF.

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