Africa Evidence Network

A conversation about evidence with policy-makers in Malawi

Different policy-makers have various evidence needs: this was one of the messages at a workshop hosted by the African Institute for Development Policy last month. Doctoral researchers just about to complete their PhDs and dive deep into research careers and policy-makers from Malawi attended the workshop. Dr Kainja – Principal Secretary at the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability, and Social Welfare – urged researchers to reach out to policy-makers: "We would like researchers to collaborate with us when they are starting their research, not just come to us with research findings".

Picture: Victoria Kusamale/AFIDEP

Having a conversation Dr Rose Oranje of the African Institute for Development Policy hosts a workshop between early-career researchers and policy-makers to explore how to effectively communicate research findings.

In a recent article featured in The Conversation Africa, Africa is touted as the ideal place to increase the number of clinical trials for specifically neglected tropical diseases. The prevalence of these diseases on the continent and its diverse population make it the ideal place to run trials. However, the author suggests, pan-African ethical legislation is needed before increased trials can occur in Africa.

The International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications has published a report on the lessons learnt from their five-year project to strengthen research and knowledge systems in the global south. They share five key lessons in a related blog post; one lesson is that key parts of in-country research infrastructure are often overlooked.

The UK Department for International Development in Somalia held a technical dialogue on urban planning in Somalian cities. Ministers from several ministries, researchers, and international funders came together to discuss how to improve urbanization in Somalia, one of the fastest growing urban regions in the world.

To what extent are sub-Saharan Africa's youth employment challenges youth-specific? This is the question addressed by a report published earlier this month by the Department for International Development. One finding of the report is that young people are entering the labour market faster than new jobs are being created for them.

Evidence events

26-27 July: Biodiversity Research and Evidence Indaba, Pretoria, South Africa.

1-2 August: MERL Tech, Johannesburg, South Africa.

13-24 August: Development Evaluation Training Programme in Africa, Johannesburg, South Africa.

25-28 September: EVIDENCE 2018, Pretoria, South Africa.

Announcements

- Travel funding available from the International Initiative for Impact Evaluations.
- Multiple vacancies available at the African Institute for Development Policy
- Call for nominations for science prizes.

In this month's blog, post available online now. The EVIDENCE 2018 draft programme was reviewed and shared by ACE researcher, Natalie Tannous. View all blog posts online and submit your AEN blog here.

Principles guiding evidence synthesis for policy

An article published in *Nature* last month provided researchers with four principles to make evidence synthesis useful to decision-makers. These four principles included evidence syntheses being inclusive, transparent, rigorous, and accessible. To be inclusive, syntheses should involve decision-makers from the outset of the research process, while transparency about the application and limitations of the methods used increase the likelihood that the research will be updatable. Succinctly put by the authors, "synthesis which is not rigorous is bad science": research producers must always aim to reduce the existence of bias that might misrepresent the evidence or analysis thereof. Finally, useful syntheses should be easily accessible to policy-makers and written in an engaging way.

FOUR PRINCIPLES
These features help researchers, policymakers and others to commission, do, share, appraise and use evidence syntheses.

INCLUSIVE
- Involves policymakers and is relevant and useful to them.
- Considers many types and sources of evidence.
- Uses a range of skills and people.

RIGOROUS
- Uses the most comprehensive feasible body of evidence.
- Recognizes and minimizes bias.
- Is independently reviewed as part of a quality-assurance process.

TRANSPARENT
- Clearly describes the research question, methods, sources of evidence and quality-assurance process.
- Communicates complexities and areas of contention.
- Acknowledges assumptions, limitations and uncertainties, including any evidence gaps.
- Declares personal, political and organizational interests and manages any conflicts.

ACCESSIBLE
- Is written in plain language.
- Is available in a suitable time frame.
- Is freely available online.

Picture: *Nature*
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Evidence synthesis for decision-making Authors of the *Nature* comment piece showcase two examples of evidence synthesis useful for decision-making.

INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE

A new database of countries' tax revenue information was launched last month in Lima, Peru. The database is the world's largest collection of public information about over 80 countries' comparable tax revenue data. The aim of the database is to enable governments and tax decision-makers to create and exercise tax policy reforms in the effort to raise domestic funds to provide for vital goods and services in their respective countries.

Emily Hayter, programme specialist and acting head of Evidence for Policy at the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications, shares five tips for researchers trying to share their work with decision-makers. In one tip, Hayter recommends that researchers get to know the sometimes teams of people within specific ministries responsible for reviewing or commissioning evidence and providing guidance to decision-makers.

Research organisations in the United Kingdom (UK) need to do capacity development better: this was one of the messages that came out of the re-launch of the UK Collaborative on Development Research. Capacity development is challenging to do right, reflects Jon Harle, because it requires a unique set of expertise, dedicated time, focused leadership, and support from team members to ensure lasting legacies of both southern-run and UK-based projects.

Evidence from academia

Datta: 'Negotiating difference in an interdisciplinary collaboration: lessons from a small island developing state's resilience project'.

Gamoran: 'Evidence-Based Policy in the Real World: A Cautionary View'

Mendel: 'Unpublished policy trials, the risk of false discoveries and the persistence of authority-based policy'

White et al: 'Evidence-informed policy making at country level: lessons learned from the South African Tuberculosis Think Tank'.

Sharing his personal views via the London School of Economics and Political Science Impact blog, Alastair McCloskey argues that the demise of the Ask Me Anything (AMA) series on Reddit is a major setback for science communicators. One reason, he says, is that the AMAs performed as barrier breakers between citizens, scientists, decision-makers, and many others. The solution? Communities should make valuable content available to those who would like to engage with it.