



**AFRICA
EVIDENCE
NETWORK**

**AFRICA EVIDENCE NETWORK
MEMBERS:** Qualitative and
quantitative membership
analysis report

January 2022

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CONTRIBUTORS

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Introduction

The Africa Evidence Network (AEN), was officially launched in December 2012 and has since grown into a community of over 3400 diverse people who share a vision to see an end to poverty and inequality through the use of evidence in Africa. The Network's mission is to work with others to contribute to this vision by increasing the use of evidence in decision-making. The AEN is pan-African, open to all who live and work on the continent and beyond. Its goals are to:

- Foster collaboration among those engaged in or supporting evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) in Africa,
- Increase knowledge and understanding of EIDM,
- Share capacities across the evidence-informed decision-making ecosystem,
- Improve the enabling context by promoting EIDM in Africa, and
- Advocate for Africa's full voice and participation in the national, regional and global movements to increase EIDM

At the time of writing this report, the Network had drawn membership from 99 countries worldwide, 45 of which are African countries (see table 1 below). The AEN's membership has always been diverse, with researchers engaged in systematic reviews, evidence maps and rapid evidence assessments, government science advisors, statisticians, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) officers, evaluation specialists, parliamentarians, local councillors, civil servants, government interns, academics, and a whole range of people from civil society in its membership.

The goal of this qualitative and quantitative membership analysis is to understand what individuals are doing to support EIDM, and where in Africa they are working. The analysis focuses on firstly, getting a better understanding who is doing what and where to contribute to shaping the future development of the EIDM field and to facilitate new connections and foster stronger collaborations. Secondly, on uncovering the major thematic areas that inform members' interests and reasons for joining the AEN.

The strength of the AEN lies in the extent to which it shares information and builds links amongst members of the broad EIDM ecosystem in Africa. The AEN monitors the extent to which it includes diverse constituents. The Network secretariat does not only want to consider its overall membership but also wants to be cognizant of who makes up that membership and what roles they play in the larger EIDM ecosystem.

This report has five sections. The first section describes the data and methodology used to compile this report. The second section shares the demographics of AEN members drawn from quantitative

data before it moves on to explore in the third section the reasons members join the Network. The fourth section of this report shares the limitations of this study. The fifth and final section of this report is where key findings are discussed and the report is concluded.

SECTION 1 | Data and methodology

This membership analysis draws from two datasets¹. The first dataset is an excel sheet of the sum total of all the members of the AEN with members' information on the following categories: title, gender, name and surname, organization, designation and description, email, region, country, city, and month and year of joining. The second dataset has the above categories except designation and description. Additionally, the second dataset has another field which is the reason for a member's interest in joining the AEN; this information is not available in the first dataset.

The membership database gives a unique opportunity to have access to information on individuals working in and supporting EIDM across the continent and beyond. Members were asked to complete a membership form upon joining the network. This form asked questions relating to members' demographic information and reasons for why they were interested in joining the AEN. Information from a total of 3471 respondents, who are all members of the AEN, informed the quantitative analysis. These members joined the Network from a period spanning March 2014 to March 2021². The initial dataset was incomplete where members had not completed all fields (dataset 1). To get the missing information, an online form was developed and sent out to the members whose information on the database was incomplete. Members had six weeks to complete the form to update their information in the dataset. Below, we discuss what the membership database shows us about members' demographics.

¹ The primary difference between the two datasets is that one set is a paper-based membership application form while the other is an online membership application form. Since 2018, new members of the AEN have signed up using the online application form. Previous to this, members would join the Network during in-person events by completing a paper application.

² Data within the analyses are accurate as of March 2021.

SECTION 2 | Demographics of AEN members

Understanding details about members, like where they are geographically based as one example, assists the AEN secretariat tailor its services to members. This section provides the demographic information of all the 3471 members (as of March 2021) of the AEN. The demographic information captured here includes information about members' joining date, gender, countries of citizenship, and professional designation.

When members joined the AEN

The first registrations of AEN members took place in March 2014 and saw 319 people join the Network. The AEN membership has grown steadily over the years since then to a total of 3471 members in March 2021. The year 2020 recorded a sharp rise in the number of new membership (826), closely followed by another sharp rise in 2018 and 2016. One possible reason for the sharp rise could be attributed to a general pattern in that in the year the AEN hosts its biennial event, EVIDENCE, the Network observes a sharper increase in numbers of new members.

A couple of factors can explain this general pattern, most probably. There is an active distribution of membership forms around the in-person EVIDENCE events to attract new members. There is also a concerted effort to establish exhibition stands in these large events that the AEN hosts and participates in. Prior to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, some of the members initially joined the Network by completing the membership form at event exhibition stands. These recruiting mechanisms have an overall effect of registering spikes in new memberships. Figure 1 depicts the total number of new members over the years, from inception 2014, with the pattern of spikes in the years of hosting large events clearly evidence³.



Figure 1 Number of new AEN members in each year

³ The AEN's largest event occurs biennially, with the first happening in 2014 and every second year subsequently. Due to COVID-19 restrictions in 2020, that year's biennial EVIDENCE event took place exclusively online.

In the graph above, clear spikes in membership increase are visible in the years 2016, 2018, and 2020. The years correspond to the AEN's hosting of its biennial conferences. For instance, [EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE](#) – the most recent of the AEN's biennial gatherings – brought 403 delegates together virtually. Some of these participants were not members of the AEN until after they participated in the event.

Gender disaggregation

Fifty-five percent of the 3471 registered AEN members that joined between March 2014 – March 2021 self-identified as males (1906) with 45% self-identifying as females (1565) (figure 2).

Country disaggregation

The AEN members currently come from 99 different countries, 45 countries in Africa (see table 1), and 54 countries outside of Africa (see table 2). The country with the highest number of members is South Africa (929), followed by Nigeria (340) and Kenya (290). There are 20 countries with one member each, 13 countries with two members each, and eight countries with three members each. Table 1 below illustrates the distribution of members per country both from African and non-African countries.

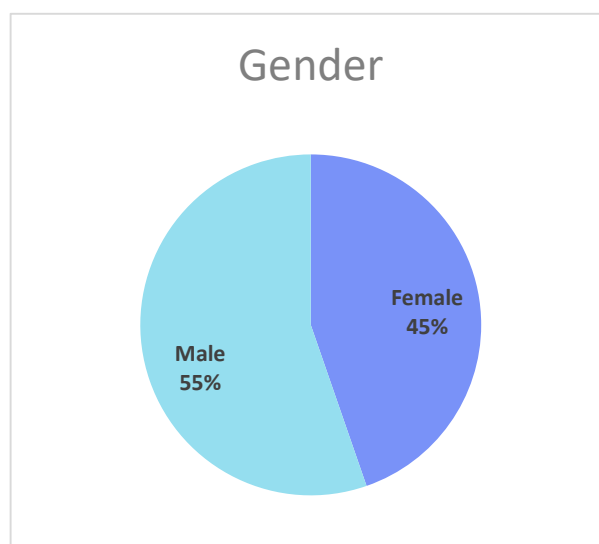


Figure 2 The gender distribution of AEN members

Countries in Africa	Number of AEN members	Country income level ⁴
Algeria	5	Lower-middle
Benin	34	Lower-middle
Botswana	14	Upper-middle
Burkina Faso	29	Low
Burundi	8	Low
Cameroon	146	Lower-middle
Cape Verde	2	Lower-middle
Central African Republic	5	Low
Chad	1	Low
Comoros	1	Lower-middle
Congo	2	Lower-middle
Côte d'Ivoire	35	Lower-middle
Democratic Republic of the Congo	22	Low
Egypt	8	Lower-middle
Ethiopia	93	Low
Gabon	2	Upper-middle
Gambia	3	Low
Ghana	127	Lower-middle
Kenya	290	Lower-middle
Lesotho	6	Lower-middle
Liberia	9	Low
Libya	3	Upper-middle
Madagascar	4	Low
Malawi	150	Low
Mali	5	Low
Mauritania	2	Lower-middle
Morocco	3	Lower-middle
Mozambique	8	Low
Namibia	6	Upper-middle
Niger	5	Low
Nigeria	340	Lower-middle
Rwanda	46	Low
Senegal	27	Lower-middle
Sierra Leone	9	Low
Somalia	19	Low
South Africa	929	Upper-middle
South Sudan	1	Low
Sudan	6	Low
Swaziland	11	Lower-middle
Tanzania	53	Lower-middle
Togo	8	Low
Tunisia	13	Lower-middle
Uganda	257	Low
Zambia	30	Lower-middle
Zimbabwe	88	Lower-middle
Total		2865

Table 1 Numbers of AEN members from African countries and those countries income levels

⁴ Country classification by income level is according to the [Worldbank.org](https://data.worldbank.org/). Information accessed on the 17 of November 2021.

Of the total 45 African countries that members of the AEN come from, 20 countries register as low-income countries, another 20 classify as low-middle income countries, and five countries register as upper-middle income countries. These statistics translate to more than 88% of the AEN's members being from African countries coming from low- and low-middle income countries. Table 2 below gives the numbers of members from non-African countries.

Countries outside Africa	Number of AEN members	Country income level ⁵
Afghanistan	1	Low
Argentina	2	Upper-middle
Australia	19	High
Bangladesh	4	Lower-middle
Belgium	7	High
Bhutan	1	Lower-middle
Brazil	5	Upper-middle
Canada	64	High
Chile	5	High
China	5	Upper-middle
Colombia	6	Upper-middle
Czech Republic	1	High
Denmark	3	High
Ecuador	1	Upper-middle
El Salvador	1	Lower-middle
France	9	High
French Polynesia	1	High
Germany	19	High
India	40	Lower-middle
Indonesia	1	Lower-middle
Iran	1	Lower-middle
Ireland	1	High
Israel	1	High
Italy	6	High
Japan	1	High
Jordan	4	Upper-middle
Lebanon	4	Upper-middle
Malaysia	2	Upper-middle
Mexico	5	Upper-middle
Nepal	4	Lower-middle
Netherlands	8	High
Northern Ireland	3	High
Norway	4	High
Oman	9	High
Pakistan	3	Lower-middle
Peru	2	Upper-middle
Philippines	3	Lower-middle
Poland	1	High
Portugal	2	High
Qatar	2	High
Republic of North Macedonia	2	Upper-middle
Romania	1	Upper-middle

⁵ Country classification by income level is according to the [Worldbank.org](https://data.worldbank.org/). Information was accessed on the 17 of November 2021.

Russia	2	Upper-middle
Saudi Arabia	2	High
Singapore	1	High
South Korea	2	High
Spain	3	High
Sri Lanka	1	Lower-middle
Sweden	4	High
Switzerland	7	High
Turkey	1	Upper-middle
United Arab Emirates	2	High
United Kingdom	217	High
United States	99	High
Total		606

Table 2 Number of AEN members from non-African countries and those countries income levels

For non-African members, 29 countries of a total of 54 are classified as high-income countries. Fourteen countries are classified as upper-middle-income countries, while 10 countries are low-middle-income countries. Finally, one country registers as low-income country. In comparing AEN's members based in low-income countries from both within and outside Africa, 1.8% of the AEN's membership are based in low-income countries in non-African countries compared to 44% of members who are based in low-income African countries. If we compare within low-middle countries, 44% of the African countries fit under this income bracket compared to 18.5% of non-African countries.

Regional disaggregation

AEN members come from all seven regions of the world as classified by World Bank data⁶. Of the 3471 members, a majority come from the sub-Saharan Africa region. We have used the African Union summit fact sheet⁷ on the different regions in the African continent to understand the sub-regional composition of the AEN members in Africa. For instance, 1095 members are from southern Africa, which is one of the sub-regions in sub-Saharan Africa. This statistic tells us that close to a third of the current membership come from the southern African region. Following this, 922 members come from East Africa and 636 members are from West Africa.

⁶ The World Bank classifies countries in the world into seven primary regions and these are: (1) East Asia and Pacific, (2) Europe and Central Asia, (3) Latin America and Caribbean, (4) Middle East and North Africa, (5) North America, (6) South Asia, (7) Sub-Saharan Africa. This information is found on the [World Bank data page](#) by country. Information was accessed by 17 November 2021.

⁷ The [25th African Union Summit](#) fact sheet on Regions in Africa. Information was accessed by 17 November 2021.

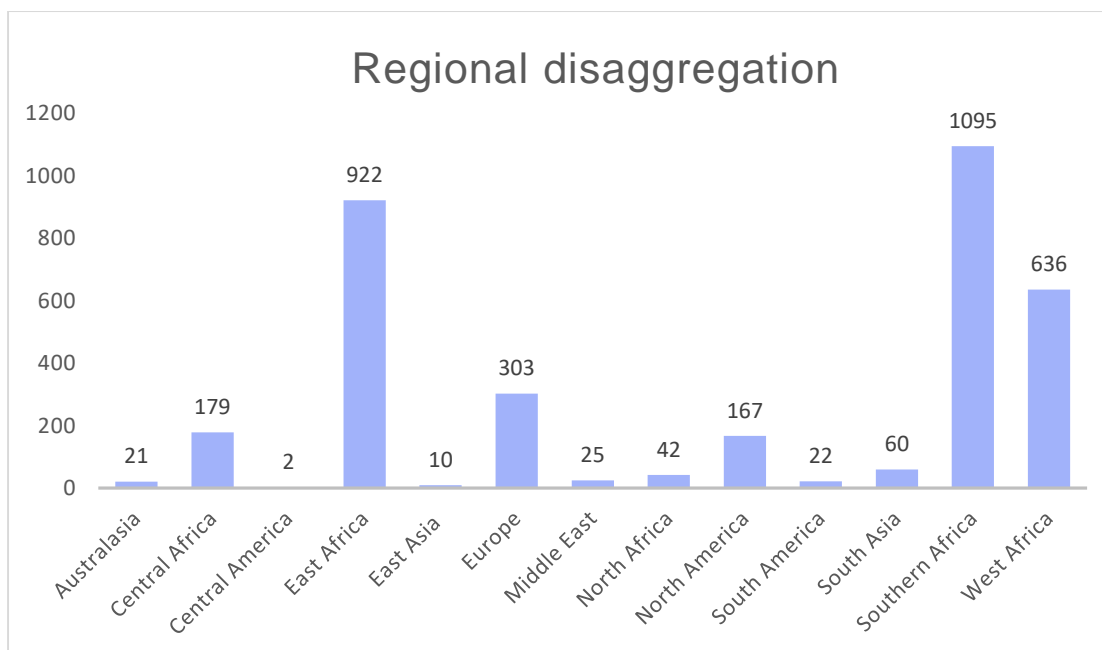


Figure 3 Regional disaggregation of the AEN membership

Figure 3 above gives information on the breakdown of the total membership by region. However, only members from the African continent have been presented by their geographic regions. Members from non-African countries have been presented by their continents (not *necessarily* regions within their continents). These continents are Australasia, Central America, Europe, the Middle East, North America, South America, and South Asia.

Next, we look at the different designations that inform us of the kinds of work and professions that our members do.

Designation disaggregation

AEN members hold different positions across different sectors in many countries. Focusing on membership from Africa (82.5% of the total AEN membership), this analysis has grouped designations into three broad categories. These are designations in: 1) government positions; 2) fields outside government and academic institutions, hereafter (practitioners); and 3) academic institutions and centres, hereafter (researchers). The majority of AEN members are practitioners (1466), followed by researchers (957), and those working in government (442). Members who have registered as working in government are significantly lower than other designations at 15.4% of the total membership from African countries. This reduced proportion of government members could partly be because the AEN, in the last five years, has not been engaging as directly with government colleagues as it did in the first five years of the Network through the University of Johannesburg-led Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence (UJ-BCURE) programme. In this programme of work, the AEN was used as a mechanism to focus on “building relationships with members of government

departments in both Malawi and South Africa” (Stewart et al, 2017, p.27). Table 3 below illustrates the designation disaggregation of AEN members in Africa.

Regions in Africa	Government	Practitioners	Researchers	Total
Central Africa	12	104	61	177
North Africa	4	21	16	41
West Africa	56	373	206	635
East Africa	119	527	272	918
Southern Africa	251	441	402	1094
Total				2865

Table 3 shows regional composition by designation

The data in table 3 above allows us to zoom into particular regions in Africa to see the designation profile of the AEN’s membership in particular regions. Of the largest pocket of the membership from southern Africa (1094), 251 members have registered as working in a government job, 441 have signed up as practitioners working in the EIDM space, and 402 have registered as working in research.

The North African region registered the least number of members currently (41). This is the breakdown by designation: four members work in government jobs, 21 members are general practitioners in the EIDM space, and the remaining 16 members work as researchers. Clear enough, AEN’s membership from this region is substantially lower than in other regions. A possible factor that could explain this might be the language constraint. In most North African countries, Arabic is the majority language. However, the AEN’s official language is English with efforts made to communicate in French. The language barrier could be one reason for the low AEN membership from North African countries.

If we zoom into southern African countries (where the largest number of AEN members are based), we see that 224 out of 251 AEN members working in government jobs in southern Africa come from South Africa. Table 4 shows the seniority level of these AEN members working in roles within government.

Seniority levels⁸

224 members working in the South African government	High	Middle	Low
	55	96	73

Table 4 Number of members working in the South African government at high/middle/low levels of seniority

Of the total 224 members, 55 work at a high seniority level. Examples of job titles at this level include minister, director general, and chief directors. Ninety-six members operate at middle level of seniority; typical job titles include middle managers, analysts, and specialists. Lastly, there are currently 73 members working at low levels of seniority, which could include government interns, coordinators, and officers. From table 4 above, we see that AEN members working in South African government range from minister to a graduate intern. Below, we analyse the designation of members from other countries in Africa.

⁸ In deciding these seniority levels by government occupations, we devised a tool to help us understand whether government colleagues are 'high, medium or low' levels of seniority. This tool allocates certain occupations to different levels.

Country in Africa	Number of members	Working in government	Working as practitioners	Working as researchers
South Africa	929	224	345	360
Nigeria	340	20	198	122
Kenya	289	16	171	102
Uganda	259	40	145	74
Malawi	150	48	70	32
Cameroon	146	8	92	46
Ghana	127	15	64	48
Ethiopia	93	5	55	33
Zimbabwe	88	10	57	21
Tanzania	53	3	32	18
Rwanda	45	3	29	13
Côte d'Ivoire	37	3	25	9
Benin	34	5	19	10
Zambia	30	5	13	12
Burkina Faso	29	3	21	5
Senegal	27	3	19	5
Democratic Republic of the Congo	22	2	8	12
Somalia	19	4	12	3
Botswana	14	5	5	4
Tunisia	13	3	6	4
Swaziland	11	3	7	1

Table 5 Countries in Africa with more than 10 members by designation descriptions

Table 5 above shows the AEN membership from African countries with at least more than 10 members per country by designation (a total of 21 countries with more than 10 members). Four countries from the table above have numbers of members working in government larger than the number of those working as researchers; these countries are Malawi, Somalia, Botswana, and Swaziland (highlighted in table 5). In Malawi, as an example, 32% of the members work in government compared to 21% of those who work as researchers and 47% of members who work as practitioners.

In the next section, this study delves into the qualitative component of this analysis and focuses on the responses members have given as the reasons for their interest in joining the AEN.

SECTION 3 | Reasons for joining the AEN

This section of the report draws on the qualitative dataset where members share their reasons for joining the AEN. Of the total 3471 members, this qualitative analysis focuses on the information completed by 487 members on the joining application form. Of the 487 responses, 168 are from hard copy responses of members who joined completed a paper-based membership form with the remaining 311 responses from people who joined online. This section orders responses into four thematic areas that emerged when members' reasons for joining were analysed: networking, collaboration, promoting and supporting evidence-use, and capacity development.

Reason one: networking

Networking was cited by AEN members in the annual member survey as the leading reason for joining the Network. Gould and Penley (1984) define networking as “the practice of developing a system or ‘network’ of contacts inside and/or outside the organization, thereby providing relevant career information and support for the individual”.

Networking as the reason for joining the AEN is summarised in the comment of one member who stated: *“I joined the AEN to network with other researchers on the continent of Africa”*. These sentiments align well with the vision of the AEN’s chair, Professor Ruth Stewart, about the role of ‘evidence networks’. She argues that for individuals “to make a difference, you need a better understanding of who else is part of the evidence ecosystem in which you work, what their work is about, their priorities and processes” (Stewart 2018). In this quest for ‘making a difference’ members of the AEN three different aspects of networking as their reason for joining the AEN: 1) networking as providing an avenue for exchange of ideas, 2) networking with other members from similar fields, and 3) networking with other organisations. We look at each in turn below.

Networking as an avenue for exchange of ideas

Most of our members perceive networking as an avenue for the exchange of ideas. This is captured in the comment of one member who said: “Networking is an avenue to exchange ideas, it is an avenue for newer opportunities. It improves the creative intellect and above all, I want to develop long-lasting relationships.”

The comment in the quote indicates an acknowledgement of the potential of networking. Not only does networking comprise an avenue for the exchange of ideas, but it is also a path for members to access opportunities, and improve creative intellect and foster long-lasting connections. Members express that they join the AEN to find these avenues of useful information and many opportunities of various kinds ranging from job vacancies, information on training and skilling, and information on

conferences and other exiting engagements. Members' responses list networking as a key ingredient in delivering professional benefits to individual members:

"I am a strong believer of the power of networks to deliver services for the benefit of many. Networking and engaging with other professions in various sectors is essential – not just for personal growth but for community development and ultimately national and continental development. The diversity of skills and experiences and the combination of various efforts work better, together. As a Development Economist and Migration Governance Specialist, I can offer my knowledge and expertise from over 17 years of professional experience in various African countries, South East Asia and China supporting regional organisations, governments and civil society".

The sentiments expressed in the quote above underscore the critical role of networking for the benefit of many. In this instance, the member shares their depth of experience in the EIDM field spanning many years and in different parts of the world. The member goes on to share that they joined the AEN with the view of wanting to share, to "offer my knowledge and expertise", with other members in the Network.

Networking with other members from similar fields

Our members highlighted an interest in meeting with other researchers as a reason for why they decided to join the AEN. For example, one member noted, "I would like the opportunity to network with other professionals in my field and from other fields; share my research and receive feedback". A similar sentiment is expressed by another member who states their reason for joining the ACE was "To network with other researchers on the continent of Africa". Yet another member noted:

"As a prospective Africa Evidence Network member, I plan to develop strong professional relationships with diverse professionals from the network imperative for my contribution to Kenya's future developments. Additionally, I believe I will learn a lot by fostering partnerships, sharing ideas".

While the quest for reaching out to others in the Network who are from a similar field is explicitly expressed, wanting to network with people across fields is also hinted at. Members express that connecting with people across traditional boundaries enriches their outlook and improves their relevance within the general EIDM ecosystem. For instance, one member explains that "networking with this set of researchers (from across boundaries) will help to further sharpen my capacity on evidence provision".

With members from 54 other non-African countries and 45 African countries, the opportunity for working and networking with people from diverse backgrounds is large and varied. Members' interest in networking is not only limited to member-to-member exchanges but extends to members' organisations also.

Networking with other organisations

Their reasons for joining the AEN show that members view the Network as a platform that will enable them not only to connect with like-minded individuals but also with other organisations in the EIDM field. As one member highlights, he joined the Network "to network with other organisations with shared objectives and goals". Another member further shares that "As a researcher, it would be good to network with individuals and organisations that endeavour to translate evidence of what works into action/ programs and policy".

Interestingly, while AEN members are aware that the Network currently offers individual membership and not organisational membership, they nonetheless do not find this limiting in their efforts to network with new organisations. Members explain that they want to reach out to other members and explore what their organisations are working in. A study by the AEN seeking to understand what organisations are doing to support EIDM, and where in Africa they are working, echoed this interest from individuals wanting to know more about what other organisations and their members are doing (Etale and Jessani 2020). It is clear that AEN members recognise the role the Network can play in linking them with not only other members but also with other organisations working in the field of EIDM.

In summary, AEN members identify networking as having the potential to increase their circle of associates by enabling members' access to more information about opportunities in their fields, and across fields and boundaries. Networking has also been suggested as a route to learning about not only other individual members and what they do but also their organisations.

Reason two: collaborations

Many of our members also cited collaboration as a leading reason for joining the AEN. Collaboration is essential to how we work, deliver services as well as how we produce innovations. Many of our members stated that they joined the AEN to collaborate with other professionals. This sentiment is expressed in the comment of one member who states that: "joining AEN would afford me the opportunity to network and collaborate with young researchers and leaders in Africa". Members understand collaboration in two ways: first as an essential mechanism for sharing ideas and second as essential for producing useful evidence for decision-making.

Collaboration as an essential tool for sharing knowledge and experiences

Our members cited collaboration as an essential mechanism for sharing ideas and experiences. This view is clearly articulated in the quote: “In collaboration with other AEN members we can share ideas and experience, then tackle down the issues of poverty and inequalities from all angles of Africa, to bring brighter, transparent and evidence-informed solutions”. The collaborative spirit in the sharing of ideas and experiences to tackle poverty and inequality reverberates one of the six strategic goals of the AEN which is about fostering collaboration among those engaged in or supporting evidence-informed decision making (AEN Strategy 2020).

Collaboration for evidence production

Members recognise the AEN as a platform that facilitates collaboration between members in producing relevant data and evidence to address problems that affect people on the continent of Africa. One member stated:

“My area of interest is nutrition. The relationship between poverty and poor nutrition is that of a vicious cycle. Since the vision of AEN is to end poverty and inequality in Africa, I want to collaborate with my peers on the platform to generate evidence on the magnitude of malnutrition in the continent of Africa and possibly attract policy thrust that may help in alleviating the problem. If malnutrition is attended to in the continent, poverty will reduce”.

Another member’s reason for joining the AEN highlights a similar view:

“To collaborate to establish organisation X (anonymised) on non-communicable diseases and associated environmental and infectious agent determinants. Additionally, to partner with members with relevant expertise and interest in starting an evidence-based health research and institute of Africa for partnerships to provide evidence-informed and cost-effective non-communicable diseases healthcare in Africa”.

Partnering with other members in the Network who share in the interest and expertise is raised as core in both quotes above. AEN members want to make positive differences in abating the ills and challenges facing the African continent and they look within the AEN for collaborative partners to join them on this mission. Many challenges confronting the world today are dynamic, complex and interrelated; collaboration-based approaches are increasingly becoming the norm as best practice in addressing them effectively.

Reason three: promoting and supporting evidence-use

Many members reported the promotion of evidence-informed practices as their reason for joining the AEN. Evidence-informed practices employ the finest available research and practices to guide

the design and implementation of programmes to address societal problems. Addressing problems facing people globally remains an urgent task that policymakers and development practitioners confront. In addressing these problems, the role of up to date evidence cannot be underscored enough.

One member points out that he joined the AEN “because of the incredible work it is doing; especially in promoting evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) in Africa”. Another member expressed the same sentiment about the AEN in this way: “an important network across the continent in promoting evidence-based decision-making and peer support.” What both members’ reasons for joining the AEN highlight is the deliberate attention to supporting and promoting EIDM by the AEN. Members recognise the AEN as a network of like-minded professionals who advocate evidence-informed decision making as a crucial approach in dealing with the challenges confronting the continent such as poverty and inequality. Another member shares:

“I am happy to join a like-minded community that seeks to work to promote and advocate for evidence uptake for an informed decision making that affects the vulnerable and indigents in the societies of Africa. I look forward to contributing to the AEN”.

A few other members reported that they joined AEN because of the support the Network provides as a platform for promoting EIDM in their specific professional fields. A member from the health field reports:

“As we practice medicine, I increasingly understand how important the role of researchers is when it comes to improving the quality of healthcare provided to our patients. I am interested in Evidence-based medicine, as I know it is the key to making better-informed decisions regarding healthcare and it is the cornerstone to enhancing transparency, objectivity and fairness of health services. I am currently an official member of the Cochrane community and planning to advocate for the support and dissemination of up to date health evidence.”

Another member highlights the importance of evidence-use from cross-country programmes and the role the AEN plays in foregrounding these within the Network:

“Africa's development can be possible through meaningful learning and scaling if and only if data from across country programmes is shared and/or transferred for open usage. This idea influenced my choice of finding a network that provides a platform for improving Ghana's development interventions. As well a network that supports continent-wide efforts of

learners and doers who are critical and keen on implementing successful and sustainable development projects”.

Reason four: capacity development

Our members cite capacity development as another leading reason for why they join the AEN. Often, members are direct and specific about which skills they want to develop when they join the Network. Consider, for example, one member who notes: “I want to develop my capacity in the area of Monitoring and Evaluation”. Another member shares that they want “to develop my capacity and horizon in evidence-informed decision-making processes as a ‘research and information officer’”.

Moreover, members are direct about the skills and capacities that they possess and wish to share with others in the Network. Members, in some instances, also mention who they intend to share their capacities with, as in the following example. A member identifies early-career young people within the Network and proposes capacity development through mentorship:

“In Africa, we have young people who need mentoring in their career and to become entrepreneurial. Joining AEN with the mentoring skill I have acquired from the Laboratory for Interdisciplinary Statistical Analysis (LISA) in the USA, I would be able to contribute to the career development of many young minds”.

Looking to help others, some members share as their reasons for joining simply “To contribute my skills and experience”. Importantly, the AEN is actively encouraging members to share their skills and experiences with one another. This work has culminated in a declaration by the AEN about the kind of capacity development they want to see practiced in Africa (Manifesto on Capacity Development for EIDM in Africa 2021). This Manifesto was developed through input by members mainly working in the capacity development field and guided by members of the AEN secretariat. The manifesto is the beginning phases of a process that aims to culminate in a new Africa-led approach to enhancing capacities for EIDM in Africa (Manifesto on Capacity Development for EIDM in Africa 2021).

All of these thematic areas drawn from members’ reasons for joining the AEN attest to the member-driven nature of the AEN. In the next section, we briefly explore some of the more general reasons shared by members for why they joined the Network.

SECTION 4 | Limitations of the study

This study would have been richer had it also delved into more detail about members from non-African countries. For instance, any possible future analyses can focus at looking at the different designations by continent where this analysis focused on Africa and its regions where the majority of members are based.

Future inquiry into a larger proportion of the evidence for the qualitative analysis would be valuable. However, the reason for joining the AEN in the online or paper-based membership forms, from which the bulk of the qualitative analysis draws, was not completed by all 487 members sampled. We attempted to mitigate the small sample by inviting members to complete a survey and share their reason for joining the AEN in that way. However, such efforts yielded insufficient responses. This challenge underscores the secretariat's reliance on active members to further our understanding of the AEN membership to ensure the Network's offering remains effective and relevant.

SECTION 5 | Key findings and their conclusions

The key finding from this membership analysis is that the AEN enjoys a growing membership. The regional distribution of its members suggests that the AEN retains its Africa-focus while experience of its impact becomes globally renowned. One interesting thing related to this growing membership is the number of individuals from outside Africa who are becoming members. A couple of reasons could be offered to explain the steadily growing numbers of non-African members in the Network.

Firstly, it is perhaps in part because people work across regions, so one might be based in Lebanon but working in Africa. Secondly, we know some members are interested in learning from the AEN in the hope of setting up evidence networks in other regions of the world. Thirdly, the remarkable work and people already within the AEN attract membership from non-African members through the impact and importance of what they do.

Interestingly, the key finding of the healthy growth of the Network relates well to other relevant studies previously conducted on the membership by the AEN. For instance, when Etale and Jessani (2020) studied organisational and institutional capacity, demand and opportunities for collaboration with the AEN, one of their findings were the provision of core functions that a network such as the AEN should provide. These core functions were providing capacity development opportunities for members, resource mobilization, advocacy for the use of evidence, and providing support and training. Presumably then, as most members of the AEN list networking and capacity development as reasons for joining the AEN, it is clear that the AEN is providing these core functions, which in turn contribute to the growth of AEN membership. This finding is echoed in former reports about the AEN membership where member's expectations of AEN were shared and validate the view that the Network is on the right track.

What do the findings of this study mean to the AEN and its members, what implications does it carry for the EIDM ecosystem in Africa as a whole? Firstly, to the African EIDM ecosystem, the findings are a validation of the role of networks in promoting and supporting EIDM in the region. Networks are not new globally but in a region where non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international aid organisations have predominately been relied upon for societal and developmental agendas, networks are relatively a new phenomenon. For this reason, cases of successful and growing networks validate their role and relevancy in supporting EIDM. In the past few years the AEN has anchored its position, role, and relevancy to the African constituency on the evidence-use and support agenda.

Finally, the findings of this study are a testimony of a healthy member-led network. Findings mainly from the qualitative analysis specify what members wanted to gain by joining the AEN.

Understanding who our members are and their motivations for joining the AEN is crucial for guiding the direction and strategic plans of the Network going forward. The AEN appears to be on track as a member-led, proudly African network of people passionate about and working on supporting EIDM in Africa for poverty alleviation.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Sample of the AEN Membership form



Working to produce and use better evidence for the benefit of Africa

WHAT IS THE AFRICA EVIDENCE NETWORK?

The Africa Evidence Network (AEN) is a community of people who work in Africa and have an interest in evidence, its production and use in decision-making. The Network is supported by the Africa Centre for Evidence at the University of Johannesburg and includes researchers, practitioners and decision-makers from universities, NGOs and government. The aim of the Network is to link people and activities across various initiatives, organizations and fields working to produce and use better evidence.

WHY JOIN THE AFRICA EVIDENCE NETWORK?

The Africa Evidence Network has 1000 plus members across Africa and outside the continent. This brings opportunities for networking and knowledge sharing in the evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) field.

WHAT WE ARE OFFERING:

- Free individual membership including information, resources, networking and events worth over \$54.00 USD per year.
- The latest content on evidence and decision-making through our website;
- A monthly newsletter which features local and international news;
- An opportunity to promote your own research, events and other news through the Network
- Regular seminars, workshops and networking events that support the use of evidence in decision-making; and
- Opportunities to attend the biennial Evidence Conference (cost excluded) - www.evidenceconference.org.za

Please complete the Africa Evidence Network membership form below with your information to become a member. This can also be completed on the website www.africaevidencenetwork.org.

Title	First Name
Last Name	
Gender	Profession
Organization	
Organization's Web URL	
Tel	Email
City	Country
Reasons for your interest in Africa Evidence Network	

This form can be submitted to any of our team.
For further information on the Africa Evidence Network,
you can contact:

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Email: prmotha@uj.ac.za
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www.africaevidencenetwork.org

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