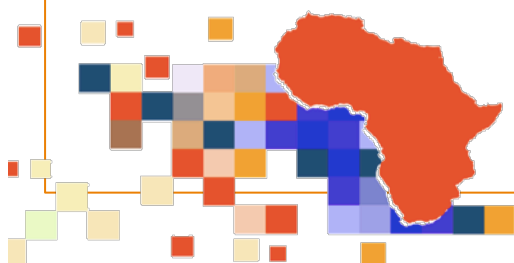


**REPORT OF THE
FIRST AFRICA EVIDENCE NETWORK COLLOQUIUM
25-28 NOVEMBER 2014**



Laurenz Langer & Natalie Rebelo Da Silva on behalf of the

**Africa Evidence Network
2014**



Africa Evidence Network

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Glossary of terms

AEN	Africa Evidence Network
BCURE	Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence
CLEAR	Center for Learning Evaluation and Results
DEA	SA Department of Environmental Affairs
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DPME	SA Department of Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation
DPSA	SA Department of Public Service and Administration
EIDM	Evidence*-informed decision-making
EVIPNet	Evidence-informed policy network
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
KTP	Knowledge Translation Platform
UJ	University of Johannesburg
3ie	International Initiative for Impact Evaluation

**when using the term 'evidence', this refers to research as well as M&E evidence if not stated otherwise.*

THANK YOU from the Africa Evidence Network

The 1st Africa Evidence Network brought together over 120 delegates from four continents including 10 African countries. We appreciate the effort of each delegate in travelling to Johannesburg and contributing to a vibrant colloquium. It was a pleasure to host you and we are looking forward to stay in touch with many old and new friends.

Having gathered such a large number of people and institutions interested in evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) in Africa pays testimony to the Network's success over the last year. It is evidence of the demand for EIDM and highlights the need for collaboration and partnerships in this growing domain in international development. Building awareness and capacity for EIDM requires a multi-disciplinary effort. We welcomed political scientists, health systems experts, research synthesis specialists, government officials, evaluators, anthropologists, public administrators, communication and public relation experts, development practitioners, knowledge brokers and many more at the colloquium. EIDM in Africa can only become a reality through the combination of the skills of each of these diverse backgrounds to facilitate an open collaboration between decision-makers and researchers.

Facilitating this collaboration and

connecting different skills and expertise with one another is the remit of the Africa Evidence Network. We are confident that the 1st Africa Evidence Network Colloquium provided a valuable opportunity to link the growing number of researchers and institutions investigating EIDM in the region. We trust the information and networking gained will add value to the work and research you are engaged in.

All outputs from the colloquium are available to delegates through the AEN website. We encourage you to stay in touch with one of our many communication channels and look forward to see you again in 2016 for the next AEN colloquium.



Prof Ruth Stewart
AEN chair person

Ms Hazel Zaranyika
AEN coordinator

1 THE DEMAND FOR AN AFRICA EVIDENCE NETWORK COLLOQUIUM

The Africa Evidence Network (AEN) was conceived in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 2012 when a group of around twenty Africans from across the continent met to discuss their shared interests in evidence production and use and agreed to form a community of practice. Thanks to efforts of some of those original members the network secured three years of funding in early 2014 from the UK Department for International Development via the University of Johannesburg-led programme Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence (UJ-BCURE).

As a result, the AEN now has over 300 members from over 21 countries; 14 countries being in Africa. It has become a wide-ranging community of practice with members from a number of governments as well as leading stakeholders from academia and the non-government sector. Together members are committed to working together to make evidence-informed policy and practice a reality across our region.

We are proud this week to have hosted our first Africa Evidence Network Colloquium in Johannesburg and pleased to have welcomed many of our founding members, as well as new delegates from across the continent and supporters from further afield. We enjoyed engaging with you on the many important issues faced in

Africa and exploring how the production and use of evidence can improve decision-making for the benefit of our region.

The colloquium was deliberately conceived to bring together the African EDIM community. It served to pay testimony to the growing appetite and demand for evidence and to connect producers and user of such evidence. In short, for the Africa Evidence Network as an organisation the objectives of hosting the colloquium can be expressed as:

Colloquium objectives

- 1** Share lessons-learned and advance discussions in supporting EIDM in Africa
- 2** Increase engagement across AEN membership and build relations with relevant institutions and professionals in EIDM.
- 3** Situate the AEN as a key player in, and umbrella body, for EIDM in Africa.

2 COLLOQUIUM INFORMATION

Venue

The AEN Colloquium took place at the Kerzner Building, School of Hospitality and Tourism, located at the University of Johannesburg Bunting Road Campus. The state-of-the-art building features world-class conference and education facilities, including amenities such as kitchens, restaurants, bars, and a wine cellar. The Colloquium had booked the entire Kerzner Building for this event, with a main conference room and several break-away rooms. Exhibitions, posters, and a speakers' room were also available throughout the Colloquium.

Delegates

In total, 122 delegates attended the colloquium. They represented a variety of backgrounds and professions. Delegates came from 14 different countries on 4 continents, including 10 African countries.

There was an almost even distribution between policymakers (i.e. decision-makers in government), researchers, and knowledge intermediaries (i.e. institutions aiming to bridge the evidence-to-policy-gap). Government institutions were represented by 37 delegates from 16 different departments. Thirty-two researchers affiliated with 13 universities represented evidence producers. A large number of 33 delegates from knowledge intermediaries such as 3ie and BCURE also attended the colloquium. Lastly, 20 delegates attended from NGOs.

Conference programme:

A diverse set of 23 speakers from government, academia, and knowledge intermediaries presented at the colloquium. These 23 presentations were supplemented by 6 practical in-depth learning sessions focused on training in systematic reviews and the evaluation of government programmes. High-profile speakers such as Prof John Lavis (McMaster University), Dr Phillip Davis (3ie), and Dr Ian Goldman (Department of Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation) delivered keynotes at the colloquium. A poster exhibition was also facilitated before lunch on Day 2 and Day 3 of the event.

The colloquium also provided space for networking opportunities. On Day 1 delegates were invited to Moyo's for an evening of getting to know each other. This was followed-up with a gala dinner on Day 3 at the end of the main colloquium. In addition, the annual general meeting of the AEN took place during the last day of the colloquium.



Social networks

The colloquium featured on a number of social networks including twitter, storify, and the AEN website. Daily breakfast blogs post summarising the previous day were published, as well as daily evening storifies of the most memorable impressions on the day. A total of 403 tweets were sent using the official hashtag #AEN2014. This number of tweets was expanded by additional conversations on the colloquium not listed under the hashtag. The official AEN twitter account (@Africa_evidence) received 4,469 views during the week of the colloquium. Top tweets of the account were viewed between 220-250 times.

List of presented initiatives & programmes

A number of practical initiatives and programmes building EIDM capacity were mentioned during the colloquium presentations. As these were not covered in the issued conference materials (the mailing list only features email address and institutional affiliation of each delegate), the following list aims to serve as a supplement:

- Evidence-based planning, processes and practices: DPSA [research strategy](#)
- UK Department for International Development (DFID)
 - What works [review](#)
 - DFID [BCURE programme](#)
 - Research Uptake [Guidance & checklist](#)
 - [Programmes funded](#) by the EiA Team
 - [How to Note](#) on Assessing the Strength of Evidence
 - Open and Enhanced Access [Policy](#)
- Other information about [DFID Research](#)
- R4D (DFID [research portal](#))
- 3ie
 - 3ie database of [systematic reviews & impact evaluation](#)
 - 3ie evidence-gap map [paper](#)
 - 3ie online training [videos](#)
- DPME
 - National Evaluation Policy [Framework](#)
- Environment sector approach to evidence-policy interface: DEA [framework](#)
- Knowledge Translation Platform [Malawi](#)
- Evidence-informed policy network ([EVIPNet](#))
- [REACH](#) UGANDA (Renewed Efforts Against Child Hunger and undernutrition)
- African Institute for Development Policy ([AFIDEP](#))
- Centers for Learning on Evaluation and Results ([CLEAR](#))
- Southern African Social Policy Research Institute ([SASPRI](#))
- Africa Center for Systematic Reviews & [Knowledge Translation](#)
- Mentorship: International Research Chairs [Initiative](#)
- Knowledge Translation Tool [Kit](#)
- McMaster Health [Forum](#)
- Center for Evidence-based [health care](#)
- Systematic Review
 - [Campbell Collaboration](#)
 - [Cochrane Collaboration](#)
 - [Collaboration for Environmental Evidence](#)
 - Evidence for Policy & Practice Information & Co-ordinating center ([EPPI Center](#))
 - EPPI-reviewer [software](#)
 - Social Programmes that [work](#)

Colloquium programme

Africa Evidence Network Colloquium

24-28 Nov 2014

PROGRAMME

Time	Steering Committee			AEN COLLOQUIUM																	
	24-Nov			25-Nov			26-Nov			27-Nov			28-Nov								
	Monday			Tuesday			Wednesday			Thursday			Friday								
0800-0830	Set-up			Registrations Open			Set-up Posters			Set-up Posters			Track A - Systematic Reviews		Track B - Government Evaluation						
Morning Keynote - RM&E as the foundation for evidence-based decision-making							Morning Keynote - Policy Impact: the important role of researchers in research uptake into evidence-informed policy and practice			Learning Session A-1 - Systematic reviews and rapid evidence assessments for decision-making. Dr Phil Davies, 3ie		Learning Session B-1 - An introduction to using research evidence in decision-making. Dr Wanga Zembe, SASPRI/ Dr Maxton Tsoka, UNIMA									
0830-1000				Opening Remarks/Chair			Dr Yvonne Erasmus, Univ of Johannesburg/Prof John Lavis, McMaster University			Opening Remarks/Chair			Prof Tshilidzi Marwala, Univ of Johannesburg Deputy Vice Chancellor								
				Keynote Address			Dr Collins Mitambo, Ministry of Health, Public Health Institute of Malawi			Keynote Address			Ms Beryl Leach, Deputy Director and Head of Policy, Advocacy and Communication, 3ie								
1000-1030				Tea break			Tea break			Tea break			Tea break		Tea break						
1030-1100				Opening Plenary			Parallel BCURE Sessions			Speaker Session 3 - Viable strategies for regional M&E capacity building			Parallel BCURE Sessions			Speaker Session 5: Systematic reviews and evidence synthesis					
				Welcome/ Opening		Prof Ruth Stewart, Univ of Johannesburg				Presentation 1		Dr Timothy Clynick, CLEAR Wits				Presentation 1		Dr Philip Davies, 3ie			
1100-1200	Rapporteur Training			Keynote 1		Ms Collette Clark, Department of Public Service and Administration, Government of South Africa		BCURE Partners		Presentation 3		Dr Amusaa Inambao, CLEAR		BCURE Partners		Presentation 2		Prof Taryn Young, Stellenbosch University			
										Presentation 4		Mr Anthonio Hercules, DPME									
										Presentation 5		Dr Kambidima Wotela, Wits									
										Discussion		Chair: Dr Maxton Tsoka, UNIMA									
1200-1230				Keynote 2		Mr Walusungu Kayira, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, Government of Malawi				Poster Sessions		Poster Sessions		Lunch		Lunch					
1230-1330	Lunch									Lunch			Lunch								
1330-1500	Pre-meetings – Steering Committees			Parallel BCURE Sessions		Speaker Session 1 - Building demand for evidence		Parallel BCURE Sessions		Speaker Session 4 - Building research capacity		Closing Plenary			Learning Session A-3 - An in-depth practical session on synthesis of evidence. Dr Isaac Choge/Mr Evans Muchiri, UI-BCURE		Learning Session B-3 - Approaches to evaluating government programmes. Mr Deo-Gracias Houndolo, 3ie				
				BCURE Partners		Presentation 1		Mr Ed Barney, DFID		Presentation 1		Dr Ekwaro Obuku, Makerere University		Rapporteur Report Back					Mr Laurenz Langer, Univ of Johannesburg		
						Discussion		Chair: Prof Thea de Wet, Univ of Johannesburg		Presentation 2		Prof John Lavis, McMaster University		Keynote Address					Mr Shanil Haricharan, National Treasury, Government of South Africa		
												Discussion		Chair: Dr Hannock Kummenda					Final Closing/Thank you		Prof Ruth Stewart, Univ of Johannesburg
1500-1530	Tea break			Tea break			Tea break			Tea Break			Tea Break		Tea Break						
1530-1700	Early Registrations Open			Pre-meetings – Steering Committees			Parallel BCURE Sessions		Speaker Session 2 - Government commissioned evidence		Afternoon Keynote - Evidence gap map of productive safety net programmes with a focus on poverty (related) outcomes			African Evidence Network AGM							
							BCURE Partners		Presentation 1		Dr Ian Goldman, DPME		Opening Remarks/Chair		Dr Ekwaro Obuku, Makerere University		AGM Proceedings		Prof Ruth Stewart, AEN Chairperson		
									Presentation 2		Mrs Mapula Tshangela, DEA		Keynote Address		Ms Martina Vojtkova/ Dr Phil Davies, 3ie		Ms Hazel Zaranyika, AEN Coordinator				
									Discussion		Chair: Dr Isaac Choge, Univ of Johannesburg						Why networks form, what they do and why they do it are very important to understand and agree as network members. Ms Beryl Leach, 3ie				
1700-1800										AEN Colloquium - GROUP PHOTO OF ALL PARTICIPANTS											
1800-1830										AEN Welcome Drinks											
1830-1900																					
1900-2000																					
2000-2100																					

3 COLLOQUIUM PRESENTATIONS

TUESADAY, 25 NOVEMBER



'Opening plenary'
- Ruth Stewart

Prof Stewart welcomed the delegates to the colloquium with a brief overview of the AEN, which has operated since 2012 and now has over 300 members in 21 countries. She reminded the audience about the importance of research evidence in Africa citing that government uses a large amount of public resources to fund research and that this research since should be of benefit and relevance to society. Research merely filling up book shelves, hidden behind pay walls inaccessible to the public and removed from the policy environment, is of no benefit to the society. She justified the network's current focus on Malawi and South Africa as the countries that present two of the poorest and most unequal countries in Africa respectively.

Prof Stewart outlined the colloquium's objectives as an opportunity to bring together people interested in EIDM in Africa. The colloquium was a chance to catch up with old friends, make some

new ones, and establish networks of individuals and institutions that work towards the same goal. Relationships and mutual sharing present the core values of the AEN and participants were since encouraged to use the week to make as many new connections as possible.



'Transforming the Public Service into an effective service delivery machinery'
- Colette Clark

Ms Clark gave an overview of the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) plans to use evidence to improve the effectiveness of service delivery in South Africa. She laid out the Department's efforts to establish effective research networks, develop capacity-building programmes, as well as toolkits, instruments and guidelines to support the use of evidence within decision-making. The Department is currently at the stage of finalising the research agenda for this year and Ms Clark highlighted a number of challenges the Department is facing, e.g. the influence of consulting houses

and lack of research understanding within the Department.

She then ventured into a historical analysis of the public administration frameworks in South Africa. These frameworks have changed with each new government administration (1994; 1999; 2004; 2009; 2014) but the Department failed to collect data on the effectiveness of each administration. As a result, a crucial learning opportunity is foregone. Ms Clark emphasised that this is a systematic challenge. She brought forward a number of practical suggestions to improve this situation. For example, an open-access repository of research of public administration effectiveness and an incorporation of research capability as a required core skill in the appointment of senior public servants could foster EIDM in the department.

She acknowledged that the Department is still at the early stages of developing its research agenda, but shared her optimism about the growth of evidence use in decision-making within the public administration. Delegates learned that: 'implementing policies not informed by evidence is as if one jumps out of a plane without a parachute'.



'Strengthening evidence-based programming in local authorities'
-Walusungu Kayira

Mr Kayira presented the efforts of local government authorities in Malawi to improve its staff usage of evidence in public programme design. Malawi is using a highly decentralised system of governance in which local authorities enjoy independence to explore context-aware policies and programmes in their respective areas of administration. The learnings from this tailor-made local solutions are then integrated into national policies and public programmes. Mr Kayira emphasised that it is since crucial that the data of programme effectiveness and design that local authorities report to higher-level administrations is rigorous.

Unfortunately, too often local authorities lack the capacity to collect adequate data. As a result, the Malawian government has initiated the transfer of data clerks to local districts in order to support local government. He reported that this initiative has been well-received and led to the implementation of infrastructure required for sophisticated data collection, storage, and analysis.

Local buy-in into this initiative has been crucial and Mr Kayira hoped for a culture

of using evidence in policy and programme design to emerge not just within national and local governments but further also among citizens and communities. Delegates learned that: 'there is great passion and hunger for evidence-based programming in particular in the health and agriculture sector'.



'Evidence-informed decision-making: Evidence from DFID'

-Ed Barney

Mr Barney gave an overview of how DFID, a major funder of evidence-to-policy initiatives, is using the mantra of EIDM in its own operations. DFID follows a three-step model of evidence generation, transmission, and use. In total, DFID has spent over £300 million on research, 45 percent of which is used to generate evidence of what works, how, and why in DFID-funded programmes. DFID then uses a number of channels (research reports, press briefs, KTPs, social networks, etc.) to transmit the results of this research and evaluation studies.

In this context, Mr Barney then approached the center of its talk – how can one support the use of this transmitted evidence. He showed the audience a video of senior policy-makers

in DFID commenting on their perception of research evidence. From this a key message emerged: DFID has established an institutional and individual culture of EIDM. Throughout the organisation there is a passion to use evidence fostered by institutional incentives, but further, by an inherent belief that using evidence in decision-making 'ought the right thing to do'. He highlighted the importance of this human factor in EIDM – the willingness and confidence of an organisation and its staff to 'stomach' evidence in order to support one another's learning. Before involving delegates in a practical exercise he challenged the crowd to: 'show me a piece of evidence that has changed your mind'.



'Practical exercise: Barriers & incentives to use evidence'

In four groups colloquium delegates brainstormed perceived barriers and incentives to use research evidence in decision-making in Africa. To the surprise of many, it emerged that discussions in each group were heavily focused on barriers rather than incentives. Some of the perceived barriers included:

- disagreement over what counts as evidence

- evidence is not user-friendly
- lack of confidence to bridge the generator/user gap
- vested interests and politics
- timelines of policy circle.

Delegates learned about the 'policy agora' – a term to describe why, by design, evidence will always remain just one factor in the decision-making process at government level.



'Using evidence by the government in South Africa'

-Ian Goldman

Dr Goldman's presentation was focused on South Africa's Department for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation's effort to promote EIDM within South African government structures. To set the scene, he shared the results of a survey of 54 senior government officials regarding their perception and use of research evidence. Despite a willingness to use evidence, few did so in a systematic manner and in general did not perceive evidence as a benign learning tool to improve their decision-making. Rather, a lack of trust in the political motives of evaluation studies prevailed.

In his presentation, Dr Goldman therefore stressed the importance of

ownership and institutional culture in promoting EIDM. An organisation in which staff are not empowered to admit mistakes and that does not value open debate and learning is arguable not ready to embrace the systematic use of evidence. The DPME since ensures its evaluations are produced in partnership with the departments who have an equal say in deciding which programmes to evaluate. Evaluations are then conducted by an independent organisation to safeguard against political inference.

The DPME has seen some early results of a nascent culture of EIDM across South African government. Cabinet's interest in the results of evaluation is strong and individual departments have started to incorporate more rigorous evidence in the design of their policies. Dr Goldman then shared a detailed framework of evidence-based policy making and implementation in South Africa and also touched on some of the challenges the DPME has faced in its efforts to promote EIDM. Delegates learned that: 'evidence utilisation equals evidence ownership plus a willingness to learning, plus a willingness to believe results, plus a persistent follow-up'.



'Environment sector approach to evidence-policy interface: a case of green economy in the context of sustainable development'

-Ms Mapula Tshangela

Ms Mapula's presentation highlighted how South Africa's Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) uses research, consultative processes, and practical cases to gather evidence to feed into the design of new programmes. The DEA since deliberately attempts to gather and make use of different forms of evidence. The evidence-to-policy interface consists of multiple stakeholder and Ms Mapula stressed the importance of aligning priorities and programmes. For example, it is crucial for the DEA to formulate evaluation questions in conjunction with local researchers to ensure there is no duplication of efforts. In order to understand the implications of different forms of evidence for the ambitions of the South African economy to move towards a low-carbon and more sustainable mode of production, some level of joint evidence interpretation across the government, academia, and industry is further required. The most rigorous findings of policy impact are

unhelpful if there is no local capacity to scale up the evaluated programmes.

Ms Mapula presented some practical outputs of the DEA's evidence-to-policy interface. She shared the list of 40 priority evaluation questions developed by the DEA and demonstrated how the department's collaborative approach with stakeholders established which of the question have already been investigated or are currently under investigation in South Africa. Delegates learned that: 'the systematic uptake of environmental research evidence is a crucial step towards South Africa's 2030 target of a green economy'.

WENESDAY, 26 NOVEMBER



'Opening plenary'

-Dr Yvonne Erasmus & Prof John Lavis

Dr Erasmus opened the day with an introduction to the UJ-BCURE programme in Malawi picking up on the lack of incentives for EIDM that delegates articulated in Tuesday's session. She attempted to fill this gap by offering six practical steps that UJ-BCURE has learned so far. Among these, the need for getting producers and users of evidence into the same room;

the need for a shared language and willingness to adapt; and the need for government ownership featured most prominently. She also challenged proponents of EIDM to constantly evaluate themselves and to ensure that capacity building programmes in themselves are evidence-informed. Prof Lavis built on this, introducing the Evidence-informed policy network (EVIPNet), a practical example of knowledge translation in the health sector in Uganda. He emphasised the need to bring together the best local and best global evidence to allow for context-aware policies and programmes. One mechanism to do so is to invest into emerging evidence champions in the Global South, a transition that set the scene for the next speaker, Dr Collins Mitambo.



'Building evidence-informed policy capacity in Malawi'

-Dr Collins Mitambo

Dr Mitambo shared the work of the Knowledge Translation Platform (KTP) Unit in Malawi to increase the uptake of evidence in decision-making in the country. The KTP aims to facilitate increased interaction between policymakers and researchers. In this

remit, the KTP has established communities of practice, a steering committee, and organised the co-authorship of policy (evidence) briefs. At the center of the KTP's work lies an ongoing interaction and communication between researchers and policymakers as well as an understanding of the obstacles to EIDM. In a survey conducted by the KTP, 83 percent of policymakers indicated to have either never or very rarely interacted with systematic review findings when formulating health policies.

Dr Mitambo then offered two case studies of what the KTP has learned in bringing researcher and policymakers together to draft evidence briefs. Key lessons from these were the focus on 'hot' policy topics of immediate concerns to policymakers as well as scheduling sufficient time for face-to-face interaction.

Dr Mitambo stressed that evidence briefs can only serve as a mechanism to start a conversation between policymakers and researchers. Different tools will be required to translate the research-to-policy communication into policy action. For example, the 1:5:20 model (1 page policy brief; 5 pages executive summary; 20 pages research report) could be used to follow up on the interest generated by a successful policy (evidence) brief. Delegates learned that: 'what can be asserted without evidence can also be dismissed without evidence'.



'Building M&E capacity' -CLEAR-AA

This session consisted of four presentations centered on the work of Center for Learning on Evaluation & Results (CLEAR) to build evaluation capacity in Africa. Dr Tim Clynick started the delegates off with a short background on CLEAR and the programmes it has implemented in South Africa and other African countries. The M&E landscape in Africa is fragmented and few systematic data on ongoing or completed evaluations exists. Similarly, national M&E systems and capacities vary negating effective country partnerships.

Mr Kieron Crawley and Dr Amusaa Inambao then explored the interface of politics and M&E investigating how CLEAR's capacity building programmes have tried to maneuver the political implication of M&E. Political economy is a critical factor in shaping approaches to M&E capacity building interventions. CLEAR conducted detailed political economy analyses in 12 African countries rendering it feasible in only four to commence with training. Mr Crawley explained the inherent tension of M&E efforts and authoritarian public administrations. In such contexts, the

exercise of monitoring and evaluating government programmes is constantly linked to civil society demands for more government accountability and democracy.

Dr Inambao then developed this thought and linked it to the importance of building institutional rather than individual M&E capacity. Training individuals has two serious shortcomings: individuals are unlikely to be able to apply newly gained M&E skills if the institution has no supportive systems in place; M&E skills vested in individuals also leave the institution once the individual leaves. Consequently, CLEAR advocated M&E capacity to be developed at an institutional level. Delegates learned that: 'It's the politics, stupid!'

Mr Anthonio Hercules lastly presented a government perspective on efforts to build M&E capacity on a regional (Africa) level. The DPME, as a user of M&E data and implementing institution of the South African M&E strategy, has learned a number of key lessons. Firstly, M&E needs to be acceptable to and owned by government for the findings of evaluations to have an impact on policy. Secondly, there is currently a serious shortage of skilled evaluators in the country. Thirdly, there needs to be a fit between government demand of a policy evaluation and services providers willingness and ability to deliver this evaluation.



'Building capacity to use research evidence in decision making in Africa'
-Ekwaro A Obuku

Mr Obuku explored the issue of research uptake in the African health sector. He elaborated on the work of the African Center for Systematic Reviews and Knowledge Translation's to build capacity to produce research synthesis and to foster the usage of these synthesis products. The Center has identified a lack of understanding and communication between policymakers and researchers as the main barrier to knowledge translation and, as a result, has begun to jointly produce systematic reviews to foster interaction between both groups. This interaction is assumed to form the basis of future partnerships ensuring a more timely and relevant production of reviews.

However, Mr Obuku was clear that research synthesis would always remain just one of many factors influencing health policies. To underline this point, he provided delegates with the 'policy pie' diagram on which research evidence presents only a small slice of the pie. He also emphasised the involvement of recipients of health care into the setting of review questions and hinted at the production of citizen briefs in addition to

policy briefs. Delegates learned that: "'Gough et al (2012) An introduction to Systematic Reviews.'" is the bible of research synthesis.'



'Building capacity for evidence-informed policymaking'
-John Lavis

Prof Lavis gave a comprehensive overview of the EIDM landscape in health systems. He unpacked the meaning of EIDM as well as the rationale behind it but stressed that any efforts in the domain, e.g. evidence briefs, necessarily have to be context specific. He also urged delegates to be systematic in the way evidence is incorporated into the programme design of capacity building models for EIDM. If one argues for the systematic use of research evidence in policymaking and uses a mentorship approach to improve this research uptake, the mentorship approach chosen should ideally be verified by systematic evidence too.

Prof Lavis then gave detailed ideas on what forms supply and demand interventions to institutionalise EIDM in health policy could assume. On the supply side, one stop shops, rapid responses, evidence & citizen briefs,

policy dialogue, and mentorship models have been piloted. Demand side interventions include incentives such as changing promotion and performance appraisal structures to involve evidence use, legislation (see UK), and capacity building to raise awareness of the virtue of evidence use.

He then challenged delegates to think about what knowledge, attitudes, and skills they would want the perfect evidence-informed decision-maker to have. Being aware of how these three attributes ideally could look like supports the design of capacity building programmes as it sharpens the formulation of programme objectives. Most importantly, knowledge, attitudes, and skills need to be appropriate to policy contexts, not research contexts. Delegates learned that: ‘policymakers should be trained on how to access and use – not produce – research evidence’.



‘Evidence gap map of productive safety net programmes with a focus on poverty (related) outcomes’

-Martina Vojtkova and Philip Davies

Ms Vojtkova and Dr Davies jointly reported on the evidence-gap map programme as the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation’s (3ie) latest initiative to produce more policy-

relevant research synthesis. Evidence-gap maps are thematic collections of evidence in international development that aim to give an overview of the evidence-base on a development programme or policy. Gap maps were presented as useful tools to represent the volume, distribution, and quality of the evidence for a given intervention/outcomes configuration but should not be regarded as a replacement for a systematic review. Their main objective is to provide a rapid and user-friendly tool to assess the size and quality of a body of research evidence in order to allow the more precise targeting of impact evaluation and systematic review questions.

3ie has produced 12 gap maps so far and Ms Vojtkova showcased the most recent map on productive safety net programmes with a focus on poverty (related) outcomes. The map identified 248 impact evaluations and 24 systematic reviews and illustrated major gaps in the knowledge base on micro-insurance and unconditional cash-transfers as well as cost-effectiveness data for most intervention categories. The map also highlighted poor definitions and reporting standards in development research. Delegates learned that: ‘evidence-gap maps are a public good’.

THURSDAY, 26 NOVEMBER



'Opening plenary' -Tshilidzi Marwala

As the deputy vice-chancellor of the University of Johannesburg, Prof Marwala welcomed the delegates on behalf the institution to the final day of the colloquium. He emphasised the importance of the colloquium to the University, which aims to establish itself as a world-class research facility. Researchers as well as students require awareness that they are providing a service to society. Academic work and discovery laid the foundation for the knowledge society of the 21st century and he urged delegates to continue their efforts in bridging the gap between policy and research.

Prof Marwala also stressed the importance of collaboration and extended a word of thanks to all the delegates who had travelled from four continents to Johannesburg. Complex challenges, such as enhancing capabilities and livelihoods require a collaboration of the greatest minds from multiple disciplines and an open sharing of knowledge and ideas. He congratulated the network for having brought together such a formidable mix of people and encouraged delegates to

make most of the new contacts until the reunion colloquium in 2016.



'Impact evaluations, policy-relevance and influence: what is 3ie learning?' -Beryl Leach

Ms Leach gave an introduction to 3ie's approach to ensure that the research evidence its grants support stand a chance to inform policy. Since its conceptions, it has been 3ie's mantra to expect policy influence and impact on policy and programming from the research the organisation is funding. Yet, Ms Leach explained that 3ie itself learned a tremendous amount in the last five years on how to best encourage this policy-relevance.

In the beginning, 3ie relied on researchers to choose evaluation topics with the implicit assumption that researchers would naturally supply evaluations on topics that policymakers demand. Researchers then were required to draft a policy influence plan at the beginning of the study, which 3ie monitored throughout the duration of the grant. In sum, this approach did not work well as: a) researcher chose evaluation question that were not relevant to policymakers; b) researchers did not engage policymakers in the

design of the evaluations; c) the monitoring data gained by the policy influence plan translated into a 'ticking of boxes'; and d) the assumptions underlying this approach were themselves not based in evidence.

After this honest review, Ms Leach then presented 3ie's updated strategy to achieve policy influence. Firstly, the institution moved to integrating evidence-based research communication and uptake approaches. Further, policy engagement was required right from the inception of the evaluation and 3ie staff prepared policy influence plans together with grantees during the preparation phase inception workshops. This greatly changed the collaboration between researchers and policymakers towards what she termed 'a virtuous cycle between the production of policy-informed research and evidence-informed policymaking'. Delegates learned that: '3ie is learning too'.



'Building capacity to use research evidence'

-Ruth Stewart

Prof Stewart built on Ms Leach's presentation on policy influence and placed the idea of relationship at the center of the discussion. This overlapped with 3ie's new approach to

engage the task of policy relevance face-to-face during the inception workshops. Ruth explained how the importance of relationships runs through any aspect of UJ-BCURE's work. The team's approach has been to meet policymakers' needs and to focus on their priorities in order to start from a common ground. Prof Stewart stressed how this required ongoing face-to-face interaction to build mutual trust and learning.

During the conception of the programme, the UJ-BCURE team had assumed that relationships would be central to achieve effective capacity building in EIDM in South Africa and Malawi. Yet, when the team searched for systematic review evidence on the topic of building EIDM capacity, they identified a dearth of evidence. The few systematic reviews available hinted at the importance of relationships and focusing on relationship building has since proved invaluable as an approach.

This example highlights how the principle of research synthesis (rigorous, systematic, transparent) underlines UJ-BCURE's work and that at times one needs to adapt a pragmatic approach and use the best available evidence. Prof Stewart left the delegates with some key characteristics from UJ-BCURE's experience of effective collaborations:

- Shared language, terminology, and clarity
- Investment in relationships
- Prioritizing understanding 'others'

- Mutual trust – being willing to take the first step
- Multi-disciplinary, cross-cultural experiences
- Diverse personalities and backgrounds
- Complementary partnerships.



'Evidence to the rescue: AEN2014 Rapporteur report'

-Laurenz Langer

Mr Langer was one of two rapporteurs at the colloquium. Together with Ms Rebelo Da Silva he compiled a summary report and presentation of the key themes and debates at the event. His presentation gave a short introduction to the event and key statistics. In total, 122 delegates attended the colloquium coming from four continents and 14 different countries. Delegates comprised an almost even mix of policymakers (representing 16 different government departments) and researchers. Twenty-three colloquium presentations and six training sessions took place over the course of the week.

Based on verbatim notes of the presentations and debates, Mr Langer synthesised five key themes that emerged from the colloquium:

(1) What is evidence?

- (2) Why is evidence important?
- (3) Institutionalisation of evidence
- (4) The human face of evidence
- (5) The importance of networks, communication & collaboration

He also offered a number of caveats that the delegates might want to consider when furthering their thinking on EIDM in Africa.

All in all, the idea of establishing an institutional and individual culture of EIDM in Africa was key learning during the colloquium. This is vested in the idea that evidence as a rigorous form of information can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public polices which in return enhances the capabilities and livelihoods of citizens. However, this complex process can only be achieved through the establishment of conducive networks of people and institutions working towards EIDM in Africa.



'Closing remarks – Evidence-informed policymaking in the public sector: Quo Vadis'

-Shanil Haricharan

Mr Haricharan presented the final keynote at the colloquium building on the rapporteur report and unpacking what the reports findings means for the

art of EIDM. Having rearranged the room into a circle, proving a greater sense of community, he recapped the key debates of the colloquium before placing them in context of ongoing scholarly debates on institutional decision-making.

He explained how a responsible decision-maker with experience would necessarily use a mix of evidence and intuition when deciding on appropriate policies and programmes. The choice between reason and intuition, or head and heart, is not a zero-sum game – an important hint for evidence advocates.

As policymaking takes place in a socially constructed world in which politics, culture, and power shape peoples' behaviour and norms, changing the way policy is made (i.e. EIDM's remit) is notoriously difficult. He suggested framing EIDM as a governance problem and offered a number of frameworks such as the integral theory to guide the theoretical foundation of EIDM.

4 LEARNING SESSIONS

FRIDAY, 27 NOVEMBER

The learning sessions were presented under two tracks: systematic reviews; and government evaluation. There were three learning sessions for each track. The learning sessions aimed to be interactive and provided tools and resources that hoped to be both practical and to build on the existing knowledge of delegates attending.

Systematic Review Learning Sessions

'Systematic reviews and rapid evidence assessments for decision-making'

-Phil Davis

Research synthesis is a powerful tool to generate policy-relevant evidence. The pooled results of many studies can provide more reliable and authoritative findings than single studies and might therefore be better placed to inform policies and programmes. The learning session took participants through the key steps of a systematic review. Participants learned how to commission or design reviews and what defines quality within research synthesis. Practical examples of how systematic reviews have informed decision-making were also provided.

'An introduction hands-on session on accessing, appraising and integrating different types of evidence'

-Jan Tripney and Natalie Rebelo Da Silva

Research evidence is of varying quality, often difficult to find, and challenging to integrate into decision-making. The learning session took a practical approach to show solutions to each of these three issues. Firstly, it guided participants on how to find relevant evidence. This entailed advice on how to search academic and grey literature sources, different kinds of search strategies, and how to manage the results of searches. It also included advice on open-access materials.

Secondly, the session introduced participants to the concept of quality appraisal. It is essential to critically assess the quality of any piece of evidence before feeding it into the policy process. The usage of unreliable evidence poses great risks to evidence-based decision-making, and evidence products therefore need to be rigorously reviewed on systematic and transparent quality criteria. Participants were given practical examples of appraisal tools and received guidance on how to apply these tools in their disciplines.

Lastly, the session outlined different approaches on how to integrate evidence into decision-making. Evidence integration can assume multiple roles, whose advantages and disadvantages were shortly be discussed before giving participants the opportunity to combine all three steps in a practical example. Both aggregative and configurative approaches to evidence synthesis and

their implications for integrating different types of evidence were touched on.

'An in-depth practical session on synthesis of evidence'

-Isaac Choge and Evans Muchiri

Synthesised evidence presents one of the most powerful forms of information to influence the design of policies and programmes. Yet, any synthesis of research evidence or M&E needs to follow a transparent and rigorous methodology. Synthesis methods can broadly be divided into synthesis approaches that aim to add up existing knowledge and approaches that aim to explain and arrange the current available information on the policy question.

The session was structured in two sections: the first part presented an overview of the need to synthesise evidence; selection of evidence for synthesis; methods to add up evidence; methods to arrange and explain evidence; and how to use evidence synthesis to support decisions making. The second section included a full group exercise on the preparation of evidence for synthesis.



Government evaluation

'An introduction to using research evidence in decision-making'

-Wanga Zembe

-Maxton Tsoka

The use of research evidence in decision-making at policy level is increasingly recognised. Evidence-informed policies and programmes are associated with more accountable and effective ways of governance. Policy-makers have since expressed a demand for improved capacity to include evidence in the policy process. This learning session focused on the conception of evidence-based decision-making. It aimed to provide an introductory approach, showcasing how the concept emerged, what it is most commonly associated with, and how it has been applied in African contexts. Participants received practical examples of evidence-based decision-making from South Africa and Malawi.

'Monitoring and evaluation and the utilisation of data'

-Gibson Masache, Martin Chirambo, Albert Nkhata

There are increasing efforts to generate data on government programmes at local level and to feed this information into decision-making. However, there are a number of barriers to the use of this monitoring data. These include confusion about what data is required, issues with the way in which data is collected, the quality of that data, as well as uncertainty about how to make

the most of the data. The learning session provided examples of how monitoring data can inform decision-making, explored the barriers to its use and discussed some of the solutions to these challenges.

'Approaches to evaluating government programmes'

Deo-Gracias Houndolo

Evaluation is not new to governments around the world. Monitoring and Evaluation offices are set up for most project/programs implemented by governments. However, using evaluation data and findings to build evidence on what works, when, why and how much remains a major challenge that is yet to be addressed. That challenge is particularly common in developing countries where the best possible methods to evaluate are not widely used and where there are limited human capacities to implement those studies.

The learning session covered a few major evaluation approaches and their characteristics; including when to undertake each of them. Emphasis was placed on methodological approaches to impact evaluate government programmes and how to manage impact evaluations of government programmes. The session will also discuss issues the following: planning an evaluation; preparing an impact evaluation's terms of reference; preparing an evaluation budget line; data for impact evaluation; and funding for an impact evaluation.

5 COLLOQUIUM THEMES

Based on verbatim notes of each conference presentation, as well as the informal debates and conversations surrounding the colloquium, a number of key themes emerged. These are based on the individual interpretations of the authors and do not aim to present a representative account. The themes, nevertheless, might still serve as an introduction to the main colloquium conversations and thereby provide some insights into the event as well as pointers for future discussions.

Theme 1: What is evidence?

There were extensive debates during the colloquium as to what is the definition of evidence. A common understanding of what could be defined as evidence is crucial in EIDM. Debates, broadly, could be divided into two schools of thought: advocates of a fluid definition of evidence and advocates of a rigorous definition of evidence. The first cautioned against a perceived tyranny of evidence in which rigid hierarchies of what counts as evidence limit the definition of evidence that can be used in policymaking to a number of methodologies.

'Research evidence does not have a monopoly on evidence'

Delegate

Instead of placing a focus on methods of evidence generation (e.g. impact evaluations), context will condition which types of evidence are most relevant to feed into the policy process.

This view, however, was not shared among all delegates. The counter argument cited the rationale for EIDM: If one wants to discourage the use of anecdote and opinion as a valid basis of policy, then there is inherently a value judgment that other forms of evidence are more reliable to inform the policy circle. Some form of evidence hierarchies, thus, is required in EIDM.

'Not a single interviewed senior policymaker regarded that "opinion" should be used more often in decision-making'

Presenter

Context therefore cannot serve as the sole definition of evidence and a mix of impact and context ensures that evidence that is used for policymaking is both rigorous and relevant. Having said that, both groups agreed that any efforts of EIDM need to use the policymakers' current definition of evidence as a venture point rather than imposing any type of gold standard of evidence on them.

Theme 2: Why is evidence important?

A second recurring theme was the question as to why is evidence important in the first place. Before delegates and speakers ventured into outlining detailed approaches on how to improve EIDM, the need for evidence in the design of public policies was questioned. Overall, policymakers, researchers, and knowledge

intermediaries agreed that evidence is foremost needed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public policies and programmes.

Policymakers are faced with a number of different options when deliberating on a new policy or when reviewing which policies to extend. In this process, evidence of efficiency allows for a better insight into the cost-effectiveness of each policy design. Evidence of effectiveness, on the other hand, yields knowledge of the different impacts of policies and how context might condition how the policy works. Taken together, policies that are designed more efficiently and have an evidenced impact record are more likely to lead to a better use of public resources.

'What can be asserted without evidence can also be dismissed without evidence'

Presenter

The idea of using public resources in the most responsible manner can then be linked to government accountability. Evidence can provide a robust mechanism for the public to measure the actions of its government. Systematic reviews and impact evaluations are therefore often referred to as public goods (and usually freely available).

Debates on the importance of evidence also touched on some practical aspects. Government departments which are using research evidence might have a longer life span and similar the use of

evidence can serve as a trademark in the career planning of public servants. Evidence-informed policies might also be inherently more feasible for implementation as officials will have shown care in thinking through the policy design.

Theme 3: Institutionalisation of EIDM

Having established what evidence is and why its usage is important, discussions then centered on the idea that the best way to improve EIDM is to institutionalise the use of evidence. Institutionalising evidence use refers to the idea that organisations and departments (e.g. government ministries) need to provide incentives and rules that encourage and force staff to use evidence. Simply training individuals is a shortsighted approach as individuals will leave the organisation at one point and further cannot apply newly gained skills if there is no supportive institutional system in place.

EIDM requires a culture of evidence use in institutions. Institutions that are unwilling to learn and in which staff are not allowed to admit mistakes rarely value research evidence. For EIDM to strive, a culture of open debate and willingness to learn is fundamental. Before one can think about evidence-informed policymaking, institutions need to have arrived at 'thinking-based policymaking'. Institutions in which considerable thought and deliberation are invested in the conception of policies then provide a conducive

environment to introduce evidence-informed policymaking.

For EIDM advocates this means that efforts to support the use of evidence need to commence at the current approach of using evidence in the institution. Each policymaker uses some system to draw on evidence – most commonly special advisors, think tank, and lobby groups. Efforts to institutionalise EIDM need to communicate clearly the shortcomings of the current system and highlight the consequences of not using reliable evidence in any systematic way.

*‘using evidence as it seems like
“the right thing to do”’*
Presenter

Eventually, creating an organisational culture of using evidence in decision-making might trigger an individual culture of using evidence too. The final objective of EIDM would be for staff to use evidence not because institutional systems require them to do so, but because they genuinely believe it will improve the design of their programmes. Lastly, it is crucial that the institutionalisation of evidence use refers to each step of the policy circle and does not merely apply in policy design.

Theme 4: Homo evidence

From an individual culture of EIDM, debates then ventured quickly into then evidence-literate human being – the homo evidence. EIDM can only function effectively if policymakers and

researcher have adequate technical capabilities and resources at their disposal. Moreover, though, they also require individual attributes such as the confidence or willingness to be open and review their decisions against the evidence base.

‘evidence is emotional’
Delegate

This passion and taste for evidence is also neither limited to researchers, policymakers, or knowledge brokers. In an evidence-literate society each individual contributes to EIDM. For instance, nurses and teachers in their daily activities can assume the roles of policymakers and researchers simultaneously. Evaluating their daily practices and adapting and innovating them in their own contexts is a bottom-up form of evidence use. If these lessons are then fed back to the wider institution and this institution has systems in place to aggregate and configure all these individual feedbacks, EIDM has become a reality.

This narrative and focus on the individual reminded evidence advocates about the bigger picture of EIDM. The final goal of EIDM is the development of more effective public policies that enhance the capabilities and livelihoods of citizens. EIDM is since not a means in itself. Evidence-informed public policies aim to benefit society and as a result EIDM needs to be measured against its positive impact on communities and individuals. An interesting idea in this regard was the production of ‘citizen

briefs' to bypass policymakers and target citizens directly as the beneficiaries of research and M&E knowledge.

Theme 5: Networks, communication & collaboration

The importance of networks, communication, and collaboration was the final key theme at the colloquium. Producers and users of evidence often do not understand each other. Policy and research worlds are perceived as vastly distinct requiring sophisticated communication approaches to bridge them. While the colloquium certainly learned about some innovative communication methods (e.g. knowledge cafes; evidence and citizen briefs), the difference between the two worlds might sometimes be exaggerated. Constrained resources, packed diaries, access to relevant materials, and user-friendly formatting are challenges all too familiar to both policymakers and researchers.

On the other side, commonalities might often be understated. Researchers and policymakers are each concerned about the enhancement of capabilities and livelihoods of society. This shared vision provides a rationale to work together and the feasibility of events such as the AEN colloquium shows that there is a desire for collaboration between both groups. The gap between research and policy worlds since seems not as fundamental after all.

Nevertheless, collaboration between researchers and policymakers still

requires an openness to be challenged, a willingness to leave one's comfortable world, and desire to innovate and adapt in a new environment. For this reason, relationships emerged as a crucial theme in building effective partnerships between policymakers and researchers. Strong relationships build trust and confidence, which greatly eases the common discovery of new evidence-informed territory. Relationships are about prioritizing the understanding of 'others' and the willingness of taking the first step. Building strong relationships through personal interactions such as mentorship and buddy models, emerged as one of the main approaches to capacity building for EIDM in Africa.



Practical ideas on supporting EIDM in Africa

A number of practical ideas on how to support EIDM in Africa were presented during the colloquium. The following list hopes to present a rough categorical overview of practical tools applied to (or scheduled to) support EIDM. It should not be seen as exhaustive.

Capacity building

- Mentorship models
- Focus on relationships
- Trust and confidence building
- Ownership
- Face-to-face (vs digital)
- Multi-disciplinary & cross cultural
- Summer/winter schools & short courses for senior policymakers / evaluators
- Impact evaluation inception workshops

Incentives & institutionalisation

- Performance assessment & promotional structures to include evidence use / policy relevant research supply
- Programme or policy proposal to highlight how evidence was used / will be supplied to policymaker
- Evidence brand as career strategy
- Counterfactual scenarios of non-evidence use
- Evidence repositories
- One-stop evidence shops
- Rapid Response Mechanisms
- Policy Influence Plan

Communication

- Physical interaction
- Policy briefs
- Evidence briefs

- Citizen briefs
- Social networks
- KTPs
- Evidence-gap maps (+software)
- Data visualisation
- Policy influence plans

Networks & collaboration

- Communities of practice
- Knowledge cafes
- KTPs
- Policy dialogues
- Joint production of briefs
- Joint production of systematic reviews
- Evidence repositories
- One-stop evidence shops (e.g. for pre-appraised, synthesized research evidence)
- Rapid response mechanisms

Evidence-literacies

- Citizen briefs
- Citizen panels
- Brown bag lunches
- EIDM courses at tertiary
- Evidence repositories
- Feedback loops and adaptive systems
- Social norms

6 AEN ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The annual general meeting of the Africa Evidence Network was attended by 54 delegates. Prof Stewart opened the meeting giving a short overview about the network's activities during the last year. The network now has 312 members from 21 countries. It operates a network website and monthly newsletters as well as social network activities such as Twitter and member blogs. It also just finalised the first of two network colloquia. Prof Stewart estimated the monthly financial demands to maintain the network as roughly ZAR 10,000/GBP 550 / USD 850.

She then handed over to Ms Leach, 3ie's head of policy, advocacy, and communication, who gave a short presentation on networking and networks. Ms Leach explained that networks are about people, i.e. about a human endeavor to figure out how to do things. At a network's core are learning, social relationships, shared passion and interests, as well as trust. Networks that are started organically – as the AEN – work better as people are more likely to want to stay in touch with each other.

Ms Leach described the AEN as an open, flat, and non-hierarchical network. The network is since shaped by personalities who work well together and who enjoy working together. A healthy network is coined by trust, open sharing of information, and collaboration across members. On this note, Ms Leach challenged the AEN members to think

about what they desire from their AEN membership, as well as what they assume the core values of the AEN to be. Network members then brainstormed these questions in groups, making the following suggestions:

What do members want from the AEN?

- Support
- Capacity building
- Practical learning & tips
- Awareness/sharing of information
- Advocacy
- Repository of members
- Multi-disciplinary outlook
- Collaboration
- Engagement

Values of the AEN

- Rigour, quality research
- Use of evidence for social good
- Integrity & accountability
- Open & flat organisation structure
- Honesty, trust, and relationships
- Culture of collaboration
- Responsive to members' needs
- Respect

Ms Leach and Prof Stewart then responded to the members' ideas. Prof Stewart highlighted how the results from this annual general meeting will inform the future activities of the network. Ideas to discuss were the establishment of additional country branches or topic task groups, an updated membership database, as well as more regular communication channels. Lastly, Ms Zaranyika as the AEN-coordinator extended a word of thank you to the attending members and officially closed the annual general meeting.

7 FUTURE OUTLOOK

The first Africa Evidence Network Colloquium was hailed as a great success by those who attended. After a week of vibrant interaction and networking, a consensus among delegates prevailed that there is value in hosting such an event and that the network presents a viable community of practice of people and institutions interested in EIDM in Africa.

'the atmosphere for sharing and learning was excellent'
Researcher

Supporting evidence use in decision-making is an important course of action and delegates agreed to continue to work together to produce and use better evidence for the benefit of Africa.

As a next step, delegates are encouraged to stay in touch via the issued membership list, the AEN website, and social networks. Aside from informal conversations, formal inputs can also be made through newsletter and blog post submissions. All colloquium related materials, including this report and the speaker presentations have been uploaded to the website. In January, this will be complemented by the videos from the conference keynotes.

'the AEN is an impressive network, well established, polished, and full of connections'
Policymaker

A number of possible future network activities have been suggested during the colloquium and the AEN coordinating team is currently assessing the feasibility of these. As touched on above, these include:

- Setting up of country branches or task groups
- Updated online repository of members with additional information
- Discussion boards
- AEN blogs
- AEN email discussions
- AEN webinars and podcasts.



'I now understand the value of evidence'
Policymaker

8 APPENDIX

AEN's Theory of change

Evidence-informed decision-making in Africa

During the last decade, African countries have enhanced the capabilities and livelihoods of their citizens. Fuelled by strong economic growth and more efficient and accountable governance, the range and size of public programmes have expanded rapidly outperforming by large traditional tools of international development such as foreign aid. However, large challenges remain in sustaining the gains in living standards and ensuring the benefits of economic growth are shared in an equitable manner.

There is a gap between the demand for public programmes and the resources available to fund programmes. African decision-makers since face a complicated task of identifying programmes and policies that are likely to have the most beneficial social and economic impact and at the same time are cost-effective given the available resources. EIDM positions rigorous research and M&E evidence as one factor that shows potential to guide decision-makers in identifying and designing effective policies and public programmes.

African research and M&E evidence by and large is state-funded. There is since a rationale for research to be relevant to policymakers' and society's needs. Research evidence can, for example, indicate the impact of public

programmes, while M&E data can improve efficiency and programme design.

Using rigorous evidence systematically and transparently to inform each stage of the policy circle has the ability to improve the delivery of public services in Africa and to present an additional communication channel between government and civil society. EIDM, however, requires policymakers, researchers, and civil society to develop additional capabilities to allow for an adequate production, communication, and usage of evidence in decision-making. A number of initiatives, such as the UJ-BCURE programme, have been founded to support these capabilities.

UJ-BCURE Programme

A team from the University of Johannesburg led by Prof Ruth Stewart has been funded by the UK's Department for International Development for a 3-year programme to build capacity to use research evidence. The University is working with a network of partners from across Africa, including the South African Cochrane Centre, the Centre for Evidence-Based Health Care at the University of Stellenbosch, the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), the EPPI-Centre at the Institute of Education, London, and many others.

Our goal is to increase the use of evidence in decision-making in the governments of Malawi and South Africa. Our capacity-building programme employs a mentorship-

based model, practical workshops, mentorships and work placements. We are also proud to be engaging with a wider community of practice across Africa, building and supporting the Africa Evidence Network. As part of our support for the Network, we are launching country branches, maintaining a website, and hosting two Colloquia in Johannesburg in 2014 and 2016 of which this was the first.

Africa Evidence Network

The Africa Evidence Network was conceived in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 2012 when a group of around twenty Africans from across the continent met to discuss their shared interests in evidence production and use and agreed to form a community of practice. We set up a skeleton website, produced newsletters and exchanged emails on various issues including attempts to secure funding to grow our network.

Thanks to efforts of some of those original members we secured three years of funding in early 2014 from the UK Department for International Development via the University of Johannesburg-led programme Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence (UJ-BCURE). As a result we now have a revamped website (www.africaevidencenetwork.org), monthly newsletters, and over and over 300 members from over 21 countries; 14 countries being in Africa.

We are a wide-ranging community with members from a number of governments as well as leading

stakeholders from academia and the non-government sector. Together we are committed to working together to make evidence-informed policy and practice a reality across our region.

We are proud this week to have hosted our first Africa Evidence Network Colloquium in Johannesburg and pleased to have welcomed many of our founding members, as well as new delegates from across the continent and supporters from further afield. We enjoyed engaging with you on the many important issues faced in Africa and exploring how the production and use of evidence can improve decision-making for the benefit of our region.

Theory of change

The virtue of EIDM and how a wider application of evidence in policymaking is assumed to foster positive social change in Africa has been established above. The Africa Evidence Network and the past colloquium were conceived in line with this narrative. Further, the event was in particular designed against the background of UJ-BCURE's theory of change for building capacity of EIDM in South Africa and Malawi.

UJ-BCURE proposes a people-focused theory of change for building capacity to use research evidence among policymakers in Africa. This theory of change stresses the importance of relationships and networks to deliver effective and sustainable capacity building programmes. By working through existing networks, including policymakers, research producers and

research use facilitators, a larger group of stakeholders is included in and has ownership of the efforts to improve EIDM.

UJ-BCURE sets out to work with national governments as the team deliberately strives to support organisational and systems change. Such a change is more likely to be initiated at the national level of government. By working with partners within governments, and taking time and effort to engage with their priorities, it is assumed that capacity-building activities are targeted at individuals and teams most likely to: a) have the opportunity to increase their use of research evidence; b) have the baseline skills, for example in monitoring and evaluation; and c) have the motivation to alter their working practices to take into account research evidence.

From this short introduction to the theory of change of UJ-BCURE, it should be possible to identify the fit of the AEN colloquium:

The rationale to gather the African EIDM community of practice for a week of networking and collaboration underlines the people-centered remit of UJ-BCURE. The event aimed to build new and enhance existing relationships between policymakers and researchers. Delegates and speakers were consciously identified to represent an even mix of evidence producers and users. Explicit networking sessions, sharing of delegate details, as well as the maintenance of a delegate database each particularly aimed to enforce the networking and relationship

building effect of the colloquium. In addition, the UJ-BCURE and AEN teams made every effort to connect relevant researchers and decision-makers with one another.