

**VAKA  
YIKO**

inasp 



**AN INTRODUCTION TO  
EVIDENCE-INFORMED  
POLICY MAKING:**

**A PRACTICAL HANDBOOK**

Primary authors:

**Alexander Ademokun**  
**Annelise Dennis**  
**Emily Hayter**  
**Clara Richards**  
**Laura-Elena Runceanu**

Contributors:

**Caroline Cassidy** (Overseas Development Institute)  
**Jan Liebnitzky**  
**Shahenda Suliman**  
**Maria Kovacs**



INASP

2/3 Cambridge Terrace,  
Oxford OX1 1RR, UK

t: +44 (0)1865 249909

f: +44 (0)1865 251060

email: [info@inasp.info](mailto:info@inasp.info)

web: [www.inasp.info](http://www.inasp.info)

[blog.inasp.info](http://blog.inasp.info)

[www.facebook.com/inasp.info](https://www.facebook.com/inasp.info)

[www.twitter.com/INASPinfo](https://www.twitter.com/INASPinfo)



INASP, 2016. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike Licence (CC BY-SA 4.0). Trainers are encouraged to reproduce material from this toolkit for their own training and publications under the same conditions as the materials are made available.

Charity No. 1106349

Company No. 04919576

ISSN: 2415-4520 Edition 1

Design: [stevendickie.com/design](http://stevendickie.com/design)



**VakaYiko** is  
part of the DFID  
programme  
Building Capacity  
to Use Research  
Evidence (BCURE)

This handbook forms part of the VakaYiko Evidence-Informed Policy Making Toolkit. The Toolkit aims to support skills development and practical processes for evidence-informed policy making in public institutions in developing countries. It consists of a training course, a series of practical handbooks, and a range of informational and promotional materials.

This is the first in the four-part series of practical handbooks for civil servants. The complete Toolkit is available on the INASP website:

**[www.inasp.info/vytoolkit](http://www.inasp.info/vytoolkit)**

# FOREWORD

**T**he case for using evidence in policy making has been made for some time, not only in an international development context but also in other areas.

In working to improve the way evidence feeds into policy, much effort has been directed towards strengthening the way researchers, think tanks, universities and policy-research institutes develop and communicate their research, and improving their strategies to **influence** policy. International donors continue to fund research that attempts to find solutions to the most acute problems that cause poverty.

But less emphasis has been put into promoting a culture of evidence-informed policy. Such a culture prioritizes building a robust evidence base for decision making, one that includes different perspectives, findings, and, often conflicting evidence. The promotion of evidence-informed policy making focuses on working with the ‘demand’ side – improving the policy-making **process** – and strengthening policymakers’ capacity to decide what evidence is useful, when and for what policy purpose.

In line with this thinking, in the DFID funded VakaYiko project we support policymakers and their staff to access and use robust evidence in their work. We are mindful of the political environment in which they are embedded, where different values, ideas and interests are at stake when making policy. We have found that this complex process could be improved by tackling three key areas:

The first is **attitudes** towards research. Here we focus on understanding the process of research, including different types of research, and how it can enhance informed decision-making.

A second key factor is improving policymakers' **knowledge** of a range of different types of evidence – not only research but also data, citizen evidence and experience. By combining them, staff in public institutions can create a robust evidence base for their policies. Often, this means raising awareness of the extensive support network that exists locally.

Lastly, our approach focuses on building the **skills** of civil service staff – such as researchers and policy analysts – to effectively search for, assess and communicate evidence to those who need it to make fast and important decisions.

In recognition of the importance of research in development, countries around the world are prioritizing investments in science, technology and higher education, as well as data and statistical quality. Now is an exciting time for us to build on this momentum by supporting our partner institutions to realize this vision.

We have developed this toolkit in collaboration with practitioners and policymakers from our partner organizations and institutions in Ghana and Zimbabwe. It is also informed by the rich insights we have gained from VakaYiko's work in other countries including Argentina, South Africa, Sudan and Uganda. We hope it contributes to improving how staff in public institutions use evidence. We also hope that it helps to shape debate and dialogue, ultimately contributing to building supportive cultures of evidence-informed policy making.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clara Richards', with a horizontal line underneath.

**Clara Richards**

Director VakaYiko, Team Lead EIPM (INASP)

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This handbook has benefited from a rich breadth of insights, ideas and comments gathered through the VakaYiko Consortium's work on evidence-informed policy making. We are grateful to all those who provided comments and feedback on our drafts and pilots over a two-year period, and would like to extend our particular thanks to Ajoy Datta, Kirsty Newman, Louise Shaxson, Leandro Echt and Vanesa Weyrauch.

We would like to thank the partner institutions in Zimbabwe and Ghana who piloted this course and provided valuable insights: in Ghana, the Civil Service Training Centre and the Parliament of Ghana; and in Zimbabwe, the Ministry of Youth, Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, and the Parliament of Zimbabwe. We are grateful also to the group of advisors and many facilitators who assisted the VakaYiko team in delivering the pilots and who shared feedback with us, in particular Masimba Muziringa, Lovemore Kusekwa, Nyasha Musandu, George Amoah and Prince Kulevome, who each assisted us with several parts of the course.

Finally we would like to thank our Consortium partners in Ghana and Zimbabwe: Ghana Information for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS) and Zimbabwe Evidence Informed Policy Making Network (ZeipNET), who shared their experience and insight with us throughout.

# ABOUT THE VAKAYIKO CONSORTIUM

The VakaYiko Consortium is a three-year project involving five organizations working primarily in three countries (Ghana, South Africa and Zimbabwe). Work in a fourth country, Uganda, started in late 2015. Consortium members are the Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS), the Zimbabwe Evidence Informed Policy Making Network (ZEIPNET), the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), the Parliament of Uganda and INASP.

The project starts with the understanding that the routine use of research to inform policy requires at least three factors to be in place:

- individuals with the skills to access, evaluate and use research evidence;
- processes for handling research evidence in policy-making departments; and
- a wider enabling environment of engaged citizens, media and civil society.

This course addresses the first level of capacity (individual skills and knowledge). In the VakaYiko programme, course delivery and embedding was part of a range of activities targeting all levels of capacity, including public events and policy dialogues, a mentoring and learning exchange programme, and technical assistance to institutions.

# CONTENTS

ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK	8
<hr/>	
1	
THE POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS	10
<hr/>	
2	
WHAT IS EVIDENCE AND WHAT IS EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICY MAKING?	15
<hr/>	
3	
TYPES OF EVIDENCE	18
<hr/>	
4	
RESEARCH EVIDENCE IN POLICY MAKING	21
<hr/>	
FURTHER READING	27
GLOSSARY	28
BIBLIOGRAPHY	29

# ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

VakaYiko's series of practical handbooks has been developed to support civil servants and parliamentary staff to find, assess and communicate a range of quality evidence to support policy making. The handbooks can be used on their own, or as a resource for participants in VakaYiko's Evidence-Informed Policy Making course.

# WHO

## IS IT FOR?

---

This handbook has been designed for, and piloted with, mid-level civil servants such as researchers, analysts, committee clerks and librarians in government agencies and parliaments in Africa. These individuals play a crucial role in providing information, analysis and recommendations to guide decision-making and support informed debate. The handbook therefore focuses primarily on the process of gathering and presenting quality evidence, rather than the process of taking decisions based on this evidence.

“Evidence-informed policy is that which has considered a broad range of research evidence; evidence from citizens and other stakeholders; and evidence from practice and policy implementation, as part of a process that considers other factors such as political realities and current public debates. We do not see it as a policy that is exclusively based on research, or as being based on one set of findings. We accept that in some cases, research evidence may be considered and rejected; if rejection was based on understanding of the insights that the research offered then we would still consider any resulting policy to be evidence-informed.”

Newman, Fisher and Shaxson, 2012.



# FOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

---

There are four core principles which underpin our approach:

1

## COMPLEXITY AND CRITICAL REFLECTION

This handbook recognizes and values the complexity of the policy-making landscape and the role of evidence within it. It does not provide 'easy answers' or a one-size-fits-all template for evidence-informed policy making. It also takes a broad view of 'evidence', without making an argument for one type of evidence over another.

2

## THE ROLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

While recognizing and reflecting on the roles of organizational, institutional, political and other factors in evidence-informed policy making, the handbook starts with the assumption that all civil servants are contributing to policy making in some way, no matter how small.

3

## NETWORKS

A key emphasis of the VakaYiko approach is on the importance of interpersonal connections in building capacity for evidence-informed policy making. This includes both the need for different departments in the information system to work together (e.g. researchers, librarians and information technology staff) as well as the need for strong external linkages, in particular those between researchers and policymakers.

4

## PRACTICALITY

This is not an academic or theoretical resource. It does not cover complex academic topics such as systematic reviews, randomized controlled trials or data analysis in much detail. Drawing from the experience of our pilots, it focuses on practical skills that affect evidence-informed policy making in day-to-day work life.

# 1 THE POLICY-DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

## WHAT IS POLICY?

*Based on International Livestock Research Institute, 1995: Section 1.3.*

The word 'policy' is difficult to define and has many different meanings. Webster's dictionary offers the following definitions:

- A definite course or method of action selected (by government, institution, group or individual) from among alternatives and in the light of given conditions to guide and, usually, to determine present and future decisions.
- A specific decision or set of decisions designed to carry out such a course of action.
- Such a specific decision or set of decisions together with the related actions designed to implement them.
- A projected programme consisting of desired objectives and the means to achieve them.

We use the following working definition of policy:

***“A policy is a principle or a course of action adopted by an institution or individual. Policies may either aim to maintain the status quo or bring about change.”***

MacDonald, 2005: 21.



## LIVESTOCK POLICIES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

In sub-Saharan Africa, livestock policy may mean either **a complete package of decisions covering all aspects** of the livestock subsector, or **a particular set of decisions dealing with a single aspect**. Examples of the former are the Livestock Policy of Tanzania and the National Livestock Development Policy of Kenya.

Examples of the latter are:

- Livestock-related land-tenure policies, such as the Tribal Grazing Land Policy of Botswana, or the policies and related laws covering grazing reserves in Nigeria or group ranches in Kenya.
- Pricing policies, such as those embodied in the purchase prices established by the Cold Storage Commission in Zimbabwe or the Meat Commission in Kenya.
- Disease-control policies, as for foot-and-mouth disease in Botswana, Zimbabwe and Kenya.

International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), 1995.

# HOW ARE POLICIES FORMULATED?

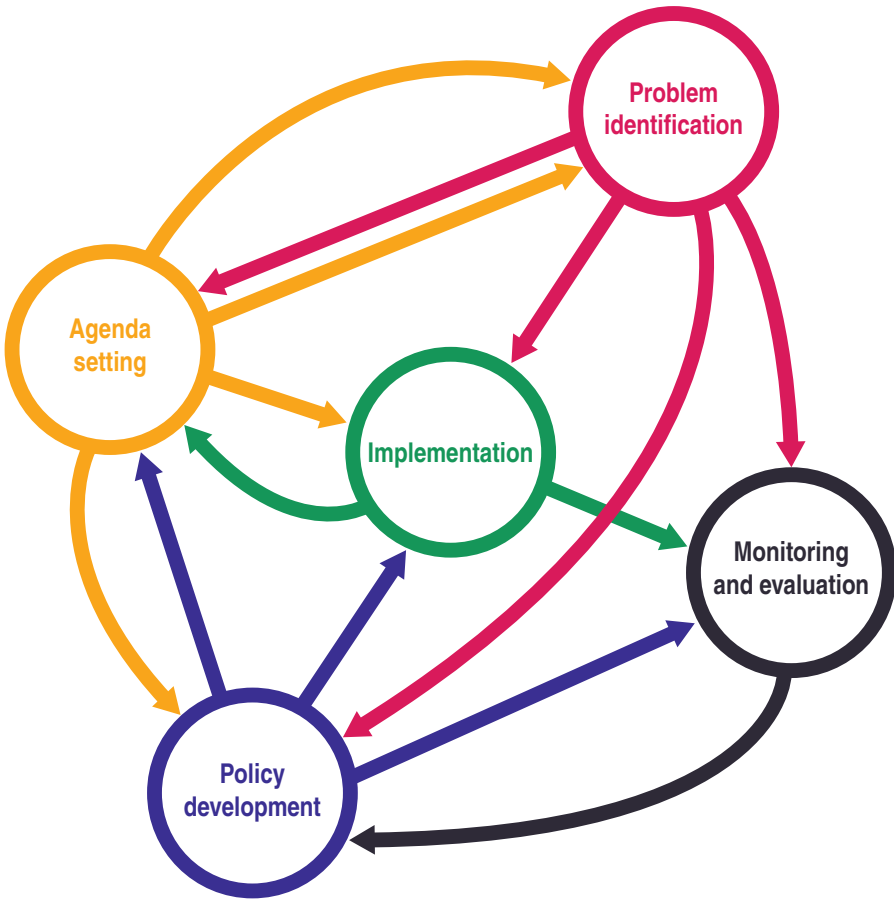
In theory, the formulation of government policy follows a process that starts by recognizing problems that require government intervention.

---

**FIGURE 1**  
**THE POLICY-DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN THEORY**



**FIGURE 2**  
**THE POLICY-DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN PRACTICE**



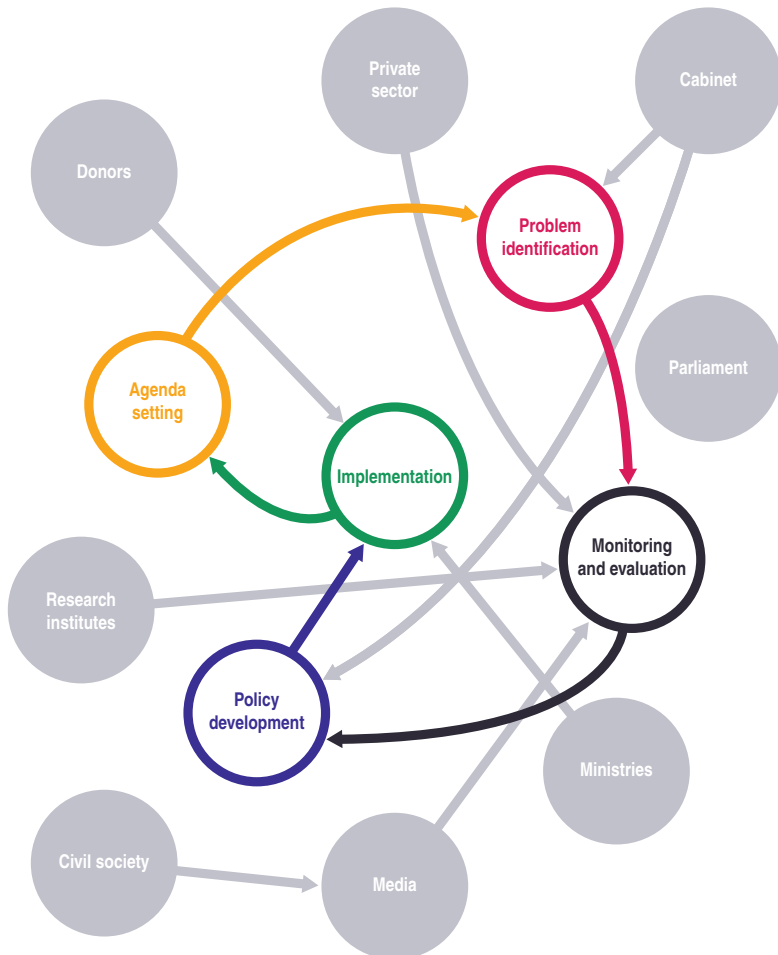
While most policy processes involve sequential stages **from agenda setting through decision-making to implementation and evaluation**, some stages take a very long time, and sometimes several stages occur simultaneously. For example, three steps of the process – agenda setting, policy formulation and decision-making – might happen simultaneously, and some steps such as consultation or monitoring may be skipped entirely. The political, social and economic contexts surrounding policy making mean that, in practice, it rarely happens according to a formal cycle.

The policy process can be defined as **complex, multifactorial and nonlinear** (Davies, 2005a).

# WHO IS INVOLVED IN THE POLICY PROCESS?

A very broad range of stakeholders are involved in the policy-making process, both formally and informally. Different parts of government are involved at different stages. For example, the cabinet would usually focus more on decision-making and agenda setting, while parliament would focus on scrutinizing the government's decisions and building legislative frameworks. Civil servants play a key role in the policy-making process, as they support decision-makers in policy formulation as well as implementing the policies they establish.

**FIGURE 3**  
**STAKEHOLDERS IN THE POLICY-DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**



International and regional frameworks such as the European Union, United Nations and African Union, and specific initiatives such as those on climate (Rio+20) and gender (Beijing Platform for Action) also affect policy.

Other stakeholders such as the private sector, NGOs, donors, multilateral organizations, think tanks and the media influence policy development in many different ways. Some of this influence may come through formal consultative channels, but many channels of influence are unpredictable, informal and difficult to map.

Each of these different actors is pursuing their own agenda, and attempting to influence other stakeholders as well as the government. Evidence is one of the tools used by stakeholders throughout the policy-making process. Each of the stakeholders, including the government, produces and uses different types of evidence at multiple points throughout the policy-making process.



## REFLECTION POINT

In your experience, how is evidence used in policy-making processes within your sector?



## KEY LEARNING POINT

The policy-development process is complex, multifactorial and non-linear, involving multiple stakeholders with different interests, who all produce and use evidence as a tool for influence throughout the process. No matter how small one's role in the civil service, all civil servants contribute to policy making.

# 2 WHAT IS EVIDENCE AND WHAT IS EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICY MAKING?

We have seen in Topic 1 that evidence is entangled in the complex and multifactorial policy-making process at multiple points. Evidence is produced by many different stakeholders who use it as a tool to shape their arguments.

Because of this, what we conceive of as evidence is framed by ideas, concepts and narratives, and its interpretation is not neutral. But within this web of competing interests and narratives is valuable evidence that can help to design and implement effective policies. The politicization of the policy landscape, the proliferation of evidence available and the many competing stakeholders, mean that it is important to have a systematic process for gathering, appraising and using evidence.

## WHAT IS EVIDENCE FOR POLICY MAKING?

***“Evidence for policy making is any information that helps policymakers make decisions and get results that are concrete, manageable and achievable.”***

Shaxson, 2005.

Each of the stakeholders in the policy process has their own ideas of what evidence is, and uses their evidence as a tool to shape arguments in the policy-making process.

Policymakers' evidence	Researchers' evidence
Colloquial (narrative)	Scientific
Highly contextual	Generalizable
Policy relevant	Contribution to knowledge
Clear message or response	Caveats and qualifications
Timely	Takes as much time as needed

Source: based on Lomas et al., 2005, as in Davies, 2015.

# WHAT IS EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICY MAKING?

‘Evidence-based policy’ is a term that came to prominence in the 1990s and was used in particular by health sector organizations such as the World Health Organization.

More recently, and especially in the context of discussions about the use of evidence in different sectors, there has been growing recognition of the fact that evidence is only one of a number of important factors which influence policy making. The expression ‘evidence-informed policy’ takes this into account. It also points to a more nuanced picture of evidence use, whereby different kinds of research with different points of view all feed into the policy-development process. This is in contrast to the idea of basing decisions on one piece of research or the concept of ‘policy influence’, which usually looks at once piece of research trying to make its way into policy.

While we recognize that governments may use many different forms of words to describe the use of evidence in policy making, the stimulation of informed debate and support of knowledge-based societies, we use the following definition of evidence-informed policy:

***“Evidence-informed policy is that which has considered a broad range of research evidence; evidence from citizens and other stakeholders; and evidence from practice and policy implementation, as part of a process that considers other factors such as political realities and current public debates. We do not see it as a policy that is exclusively based on research, or as being based on one set of findings. We accept that in some cases, research evidence may be considered and rejected; if rejection was based on understanding of the insights that the research offered then we would still consider any resulting policy to be evidence-informed.”***

Newman, Fisher and Shaxson, 2012.

“Good governance is the positive exercise of authority. It is characterized by citizen transformation and participation in governance, control of corruption, political stability, and respect for the rule of law, government effectiveness, regulatory quality and **effective knowledge management.**”

*Uganda Vision 2040*, 2013.



## WHY EIPM?

EIPM helps policymakers and providers of services make decisions that are informed by the best available evidence from research and evaluation and other sources. This includes decisions about:

- the nature, size and dynamics of the problem at hand, including its causes and who is most affected by it;
- policy options that might be considered to address the problem;
- effective and ineffective interventions to solve the problem;
- the likely positive and negative consequences of the proposed policy option;
- the intended and unintended consequences of the proposed policy option;
- effective and ineffective modes of delivery and implementation;
- how long the policy will have to run before positive results will be achieved;
- the resources that will be required to implement the policy;
- the costs and benefits of the proposed policy, and on whom these costs and benefits will fall; and
- the sustainability of the policy economically, socially and environmentally.

“Against the realisation that weak institutions undermine national development efforts, the government’s Transformation Agenda will aim to strengthen state institutions responsible for development planning and economic management as well as develop efficient mechanisms for citizens’ engagement in the development process. **Evidence-based public policy making** and enhancing development communication will form a major part of these initiatives.”

Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda II: 23.



### KEY LEARNING POINT

Evidence-informed policy making considers different types of evidence from a broad range of sources, as part of a process that also considers factors such as political realities and public debates.



### REFLECTION POINT

What other factors aside from evidence influence policy making in your country?

# 3

# TYPES OF EVIDENCE

## TYPES OF EVIDENCE

*Material in this topic has been informed by Jones, Jones, Shaxson and Walker, 2013.*

There are multiple types of evidence used for policy making, produced by different stakeholders, and there are many ways to conceptualize these. The following model divides evidence into four categories, which are interlinked and are often used simultaneously.

1. **Data.** This is information collected to be examined, considered and used to help decision-making (Cambridge English Dictionaries, 1990). Data is factual information only, without context. Many different stakeholders in the policy-making process produce different kinds of data, and there are complex debates about the process of gathering data and how to ensure quality.
  - a. **Qualitative data** describes the nature of answers (evidence) in terms of their verbal, written or other descriptive natures. It asks 'who, which, what, when, where and why?' For example, a feedback form using open-ended written answers would produce qualitative data.
  - b. **Quantitative data** is expressed in various measures and indices, and its description and analysis is done by means of statistical methods. It answers 'how many', 'to what extent' or 'how much' questions. For example, a feedback form using tick boxes would produce quantitative data.

---

**FIGURE 4**  
**TYPES OF EVIDENCE**



2. **Research evidence.** For the purposes of our approach, we understand research evidence to be that which is **produced through a formal, comprehensive and rigorous process that uses primary and secondary literature and adheres to accepted principles of quality**. Research evidence varies according to sector (social science research is different from natural science research) but has some key common principles, including literature review, methodological rigour, a very specific question or topic, objective treatment of evidence and triangulation of results. Research papers usually combine other kinds of evidence such as data, citizen evidence and practice-informed evidence to build a deep understanding of an issue and explain context and causality. Within this definition, we include peer-reviewed academic work as well as research papers by think tanks, multilaterals and NGOs and evaluations.
3. **Practice-informed evidence is knowledge gained from experience of implementing policy and practice.** Often highly tacit in nature, it is held by individuals and organizations with long histories of tackling an issue, and has its roots in work experience and an understanding of what works and what does not in specific contexts. This type of evidence can be found in formal processes such as programme documents, monitoring and evaluation data, and formal evaluations. It can also be found in informal spaces such as in meetings, stakeholder consultations or roundtables. It is held and produced by all stakeholders involved in the policy process.

4. **Citizen (or participatory) evidence is held by citizens, both individually and collectively, drawing on their daily lives.** It is knowledge of a **place, a culture, people and their challenges**, gained through direct experience. It can be difficult for outsiders to access without considerable sensitivity, but is often brokered through representatives, such as civil society organizations or cultural or religious groups. Citizen evidence may be expressed through the democratic process itself, as well as via stakeholder consultations, social audits and community mapping or monitoring exercises. Too often, however, the actual influence of people's expressed voice is minimal or tokenistic, as some actors hold the power to frame and even marginalize it.

Each of the types of evidence has its own value and complements the others, but evidence-informed policy making would not use any of them in isolation. An over-reliance on research can lead to technocratic policy making with little citizen involvement or practical experience taken into account; citizen evidence may need to be balanced with technical research to prevent more populist approaches to policy making; and policies based solely on what has been shown to be effective may be slow to innovate (Jones, Jones, Shaxson and Walker, 2013). The result of a successful combination of research and participation is an **evidence-informed policy**.

## EVIDENCE USE IN GHANA'S PARLIAMENT



"Parliament is an information intensive and information demanding institution.

Therefore, acquiring, organizing, managing, distributing and preserving information is fundamental to its constitutional mandate. Parliament creates and requires information from many external sources including the government, the judiciary, civil society, experts, the media, academicians, international organizations and other legislative bodies and citizens.

To ensure that both parliament and the citizens are properly informed in today's fast evolving environment it is increasingly important to have a comprehensive approach to identifying, managing, and providing access to critical resources."

Joyce Adliene Bamford-Addo, Speaker of the Parliament of Ghana, quoted in GINKS Parliament Review



## KEY LEARNING POINT

We identify four main types of evidence used in policy: citizen evidence, data, research evidence and practice-informed evidence. Effective evidence-informed policy-making should combine these different types.



## REFLECTION POINT

Which kinds of evidence do you think are most used in policy making, in your experience?

Which are used least often? Why?

# 4

# RESEARCH EVIDENCE IN POLICY MAKING

## WHAT IS RESEARCH EVIDENCE?

We understand research evidence to be that which is **produced through a formal, comprehensive and rigorous process that uses primary and secondary literature and adheres to accepted principles of quality**. Research evidence varies according to sector (social science research is different from natural science research) but does have some key common principles, including literature review, methodological rigour, a very specific question or topic, objective treatment of evidence and triangulation of results. Research papers usually combine other kinds of evidence such as data, citizen evidence and practice-informed evidence to build a deep understanding of an issue and explain context and causality. Within this definition, we include peer-reviewed academic work as well as research papers by think tanks, multilaterals and NGOs and evaluations.

It is important to distinguish between the **process** of doing research, and **research evidence**. The **process** of doing research may involve a desk review of documents, site visits, surveys or focus groups. The term '**research evidence**' refers to the final product of this research activity, and synthesizes the primary and secondary information gathered in a rigorous and formal written output.

**We focus on how to use the best research evidence available at the time that it is needed and in the time available.** Research evidence may be lacking, incomplete, imperfect and even contradictory. But policymakers still need to make decisions, and they need the best support possible (Lavis, Oxman, Lewin and Fretheim, 2009).

“This is what science, research, technology and innovation should do: meet the people at the point of their greatest need.”

President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya (DFID, 2014)

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF RESEARCH EVIDENCE?

*Based on Shaxson (2005), Newman, Fisher and Shaxson (2012).*

- It is methodologically robust and follows accepted international principles of rigorous enquiry.
- It rigorously, scientifically tests what we think we know and challenges perceptions.
- It has inbuilt quality controls to strengthen objectivity and reduce bias.
- It builds on existing knowledge by first looking at what we already know, then identifying a gap and building on it, unlike other forms of evidence which risk 're-inventing the wheel'.
- It answers the 'how' and the 'why' questions in more depth than other forms of evidence – establishing and distinguishing between correlation and causality.
- It systematically interprets and analyses data and other forms of evidence.
- It combines other kinds of evidence into a synthesized picture on a specific question.

## DEFORESTATION IN GUINEA



“Parts of Guinea feature patches of dense, semi-deciduous forest, which orthodox thinking has tended to view as relics of previously more extensive forest cover. The belief that this situation has resulted from farmers destroying vegetation has been dominant since the 1890s, and has been used to justify repressive measure measures against the inhabitants’ land-use practices.

Fairhead and Leach (1996) looked at the historical evidence in relation to Kissidougou prefecture, particularly air photographs and more recently satellite pictures, from 1952 to 1992. They found that ‘in many zones, the areas of forest and savanna vegetation have remained remarkably stable during the 40 year period which today’s policymakers consider to have been the most degrading. Where changes are discernible these predominantly involve increases in forest area’. Landscape descriptions and maps from earlier periods ‘clearly falsify assertions of a more generalized forest cover’.

The researchers further collected oral information from local inhabitants, who described how village forest islands are usually formed through human settlement and management. Observation of more recent settlements confirmed this. People value the forest islands around their villages for a variety of reasons, and habitually do a number of positive things to encourage their development.

Fairhead and Leach suggest that, rather than being half-empty, the landscape should be seen as half-full. This challenges the notion, which they trace to colonial times, of African farmers as ignorant and careless of their environment. It also challenges current policy towards farmers.”

Laws, Harper, Jones and Marcus, 2013: 29 -30.

## FACTORS INVOLVED IN THE USE OF RESEARCH EVIDENCE IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

The table on page 25 outlines some of the systemic, organizational and individual factors affecting the use of evidence in the public sector. Depending on the context, these factors may present opportunities or challenges.

“You can have the best evidence in the world, but if you put it through poor processes you won’t get good evidence-informed policy making.”

Louise Shaxson  
<http://bit.ly/1P6Sm3s>



# SYSTEMIC LEVEL

These factors are related to a certain context or environment

Factors	Enabling/constraining elements
<b>Communication between researchers and policymakers</b>	Researchers and policymakers often 'speak different languages', and have different purposes, timescales and conceptualizations of research. As the main focus of most research papers is on the design of the study and the results, many facts that most interest policymakers – such as context, implementation details and costs – are not covered in sufficient detail for policymakers to draw conclusions for their own use.
<b>Political system</b>	A pluralist political system favours the creation of an open market of ideas and an intense competition among the different types of knowledge, as well as a high level of scrutiny of the government. A centralized system can create a narrower market of ideas with less space for research to challenge and scrutinize policy positions and power structures. Whatever the political system, policy making is an inherently political process. Ulterior political motives, politicians' self-interests, conflicting interests and incentives all affect whether evidence is used and if so, which evidence.
<b>Citizens' demand for the use of evidence</b>	Incentives to support decisions with information weaken if citizens do not demand that their political leaders justify the decisions they make. These demands may be expressed through public consultations or via civil society groups.
<b>Other stakeholders</b>	Donors, international and national organizations, lobbyists/pressure groups, the private sector and research institutes all influence the use of evidence in policy making. Their relationships with decision-makers and the level of power they have to influence decision-making affects the degree to which evidence is incorporated in the public policy processes.
<b>Habit and tradition in government</b>	In civil service, parliament and government, there are often habitual and traditional ways of doing things. When it is asked why things are done in a certain way, the answer is "because we have always done them that way". This gives preference to the existing frameworks to understand policy problems and can therefore favour evidence confirming the efficiency of current practices.
<b>Timing</b>	The unpredictable time span in which policy decisions are commonly made complicates the use of evidence in policy making. The urgency to reach a decision often hinders the possibility of resorting to new sources of information, but can also provide sudden windows of opportunity for use of evidence.
<b>Changes in administration</b>	Changes in administration, whether at national, sub-national or local level, can result in the new government dismissing the information produced by their predecessors. Changes can also present opportunities: the new administration may take more interest in information generation and use.
<b>Planning</b>	Formalized planning can limit the use of evidence in the implications of the evidence point to alterations in direction or implementation. But planning may also encourage the use of evidence (e.g. evaluations) in shaping interventions to address long-standing issues. During unplanned emergencies, such as the 2013-2015 West African Ebola epidemic, the modus operandi of government changes: some say that this is when there is no time to use evidence; you have to be a decision-maker, use judgement and expertise (Davies, 2005b). However, this need to make decisions quickly can also present opportunities for evidence use. For example, during the Ebola emergency, previously obscure anthropological research suddenly came to the fore in informing health workers' understanding of cultural burial rites.
<b>Sector</b>	There are some areas of public policy that, due to their nature, are exposed to a higher use of information. This is the case in the health sector, for example, where having research on the effects of certain medications or interventions is important for defining policies. Decisions on other policy areas may be more subject to ideological, value-related considerations.
<b>Quality of information or data</b>	Sometimes information, whether provided by academic institutions or the state itself, is outdated or incomplete. On issues where there is incomplete or no data, policymakers will not be able to design evidence-informed interventions.

Source: based on Echt and Weyrauch (2015), Leicester (1999), Dhaliwal and Tulloch (2011), Liveranni et al. (2013), Levitt (2013) and Davies (2005b).



# ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

These are factors that can affect the use of evidence within a specific institution.

Factors	Enabling/constraining elements
<b>Organizational culture</b>	There are agencies that, due to tradition, the will of politicians involved or personnel characteristics, have developed a higher preference for processes that allow for more efficient information management – from its creation to its use, including its processing and communication. Hierarchies and cultures within organizations create more or less space for sharing and applying information.
<b>Resources</b>	Not all organizations have resources and budgetary processes that enable them to conduct/commission research projects and systematize information. This includes IT resources such as the availability of adequately maintained computers and sufficient bandwidth, statistical analysis software, storage systems etc.
<b>Library and information services</b>	Many government institutions do not have a library on the premises. Libraries may be under-resourced and may not have access to academic journals due to a lack of resources for subscriptions, and a lack of awareness about free, discounted or open-access resources available to them. In many cases government researchers focus primarily on online desk research, which affects the type of sources they consult and the information they use.
<b>Knowledge management processes</b>	The storage and circulation of information within and between institutions may not be systematic or effective. There are often delays requesting information from line ministries or statistics agencies, as well as complications when sharing information within departments. Many departments have challenges with systematizing and storing their own information and records (for instance, many areas of the State have not computerized their information), which makes it even more difficult for others to access it. And, in some cases, organizations actively conceal information for fear of it being used to assess their performance (common when talking about monitoring and assessment systems).
<b>Turnover rate</b>	Evidence use is influenced by the high turnover rates of civil service personnel, which public agencies are often exposed to. This can lead to the loss of valuable information, but can also be an opportunity for innovation and the flow of new ideas.



## KEY LEARNING POINT

Research evidence is a crucial part of the spectrum of evidence and has unique values which complement the other types of evidence. Understanding the range of factors affecting the use of research evidence makes us better positioned to exploit opportunities for using evidence and to address challenges.

# INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Individual knowledge, skills and attitudes play a key role in the use of evidence.

Factors	Enabling/constraining elements
<b>Leadership</b>	Top-ranking officials, or those in a leadership position within their agencies, have significant influence over the demand for the use of evidence in policy design and monitoring.
<b>Attitudes to research</b>	Many officials, when consulting research sources, tend to prefer certain institutions or researchers due to their own background/experience, political leanings or other factors. Officials may have an attitude of suspicion and mistrust towards information and ideas coming from sources external to the public system.
<b>Knowledge about research and how to access it</b>	As officials are often under time pressure, many will refer to sources and types of research they already know, to quickly gather the necessary information. Many civil servants are discouraged by the cost of subscriptions to academic journals and are not aware of the many free or open-access resources available to them.
<b>Skills in evaluating research evidence</b>	It requires technical expertise, time and effort to manage conflicting evidence of different quality from a range of contexts, identifying the best evidence for a particular policy problem and applying it to that context, all within a typically very tight timeframe.
<b>Skills in communicating research</b>	Analysts' and researchers' skills in clearly and effectively communicating research to policymakers are an important factor in the use of evidence. If policymakers feel that the information reaching them is not relevant, too detailed or not detailed enough, they will be less likely to engage with it.
<b>IT skills</b>	IT skills affect the user's ability to find and apply evidence. This can include skills in searching different types of search engines and databases, storing and systematizing documents, using statistical analysis software and navigating library IT systems.
<b>Professional experience and expertise</b>	Like any organization, governments and the civil service are staffed by people who have professional expertise and experience in specific areas. This affects whether evidence is used (for example, in some cases experience may be seen to trump evidence) and also what evidence is used.
<b>Personal judgement</b>	This is what politics and good decision-making are about, and skills of good judgement are developed over time. Individual judgement is shaped by personal experience, ideology, beliefs and a host of other factors. All of these affect the use of evidence.



## REFLECTION POINT

Shaxson highlights the role of processes in EIPM. What processes does evidence go through in your department?

# FURTHER READING

---

## **Africa Evidence Network**

An online network of people (researchers, NGOs, government) with an interest in producing evidence and using it in policy making: [www.africaevidencenetwork.org](http://www.africaevidencenetwork.org)

## **Bridging Research and Policy: Insights from 50 Case Studies**

This paper gathers insights from EIPM processes all over the world and includes a useful summary of examples of EIPM at the end: [www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/180.pdf](http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/180.pdf)

**Case Study: Online course promotes the use of knowledge and evidence in policy:** [www.inasp.info/en/publications/details/198/](http://www.inasp.info/en/publications/details/198/)

**Case Study: Kenyan round tables support cross-sectoral climate-change work:** [www.inasp.info/en/publications/details/199/](http://www.inasp.info/en/publications/details/199/)

**Case Study: Improving capacity for evidence-informed education policy in the Philippines:** [www.inasp.info/en/publications/details/200/](http://www.inasp.info/en/publications/details/200/)

Duncan Green on the **politics of results and evidence:** [www.oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/icymi-best-of-this-summers-book-reviews-the-politics-of-evidence](http://www.oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/icymi-best-of-this-summers-book-reviews-the-politics-of-evidence)

## **Evidence Based Policy in Development Network (EBPDN)**

A global network of people who work in think tanks, NGOs, and policy research institutes from around the world. Free to join: [www.partnerplatform.org/ebpdn](http://www.partnerplatform.org/ebpdn)

## **Knowledge Sector Initiative**

Insights on EIPM in Indonesia: [www.ksi-indonesia.org/index.php/publications/2015/08/10/14/diagnostic-studies-on-the-knowledge-sector.html](http://www.ksi-indonesia.org/index.php/publications/2015/08/10/14/diagnostic-studies-on-the-knowledge-sector.html)

**Louise Shaxson** shares insights from her experience working on EIPM with the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: [www.alliance4usefulevidence.org/persistence-pays-lessons-from-a-uk-department-on-evidence-informed-policy-making-2](http://www.alliance4usefulevidence.org/persistence-pays-lessons-from-a-uk-department-on-evidence-informed-policy-making-2)

**A reading list on EIPM** from Research to Action: [www.researchtoaction.org/2015/09/building-capacity-around-demand-eipm-resource-list](http://www.researchtoaction.org/2015/09/building-capacity-around-demand-eipm-resource-list)

# GLOSSARY

---

## **Citizen evidence**

knowledge of a place, a culture, people and their challenges, gained through direct experience.

## **Correlation**

the association between two variables such that when one changes, the other changes too. Correlation does not prove causality.

## **Causality**

a causal relationship between two or more factors in which one factor directly explains the other.

## **Data**

information collected to be examined, considered and used to help decision-making.

## **Evidence-informed policy**

'that which has considered a broad range of research evidence; evidence from citizens and other stakeholders; and evidence from practice and policy implementation, as part of a process that considers other factors such as political realities and current public debates' (Newman, Fisher and Shaxson, 2012).

## **Narratives**

a representation of a particular situation or process in such a way as to reflect or conform to an overarching set of aims or values. For example, a coalition carefully constructed narrative about its sensitivity to recession victims (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014).

## **Policy**

'a principle or a course of action adopted by an institution or individual. Policies may either aim to maintain the status quo or bring about change' (United Nations, 2005: page 21).

## **Practice-informed evidence**

knowledge gained from experience of implementing policy and practice.

## **Systematic review**

an evaluation and synthesis of the results of the best available research on a specific question. Procedures are explicitly defined in advance, studies included are screened for quality, and the process is formally peer reviewed in order to ensure that the exercise is transparent and can be replicated (The Campbell Collaboration).

## **Tokenistic**

the practice of making only a symbolic effort to do a particular thing, especially by recruiting a small number of people from under-represented groups to give the appearance of sexual or racial equality within a workforce. For example, the use of female supporting characters is mere tokenism (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014).

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

- Cambridge English Dictionaries (1990). *The Chambers English Dictionary*. Cambridge: Cambridge English Dictionaries.
- Davies, P. (2005a). *Impact to insight meeting*. Impact to insight meeting. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Davies, P. (2005b). Evidence-based policy at the Cabinet Office. *Impact and Insight Series*. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Davies, P. (2015). What Is Evidence, and How Can It Improve Decision Making?. *BCURE Evidence-Informed Decision-Making Capacity Building Workshop*. Pretoria: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation.
- DFID (Department for International Development) (2014). *Use of evidence in policymaking - scoping document*. London: Department for International Development.
- Dhalwal, I. and Tulloch, C. (2011). *From research to policy*. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Government of Ghana National Development Planning Commission (2014). Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda II. Retrieved 30 May 2016 from: <https://s3.amazonaws.com/ndpc-static/publication/GSGDA+II+2014-2017.pdf>.
- Government of Uganda National Planning Authority (2013). Uganda Vision 2040. Retrieved 30 May 2016 from: <http://npa.ug/wp-content/themes/npatheme/documents/vision2040.pdf>.
- International Livestock Research Institute (1995). *Livestock Policy Analysis*. ILRI Training Manual 2. Nairobi: ILRI, 264. Retrieved 30 May 2016 from: [www.fao.org/wairdocs/ilri/x5547e/x5547e05.htm#TopOfPage](http://www.fao.org/wairdocs/ilri/x5547e/x5547e05.htm#TopOfPage).
- Jones, H., Jones, N., Shaxson, L. and Walker, D. (2013). *Knowledge, Policy and Power in International Development*. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Lavis, J., Oxman, A., Lewin, S. and Fretheim, A. (2009). Support tools for evidence informed health policymaking. *Health Research Policy and Systems*, 1–7.
- Laws, S., Harper, C., Jones, N. and Marcus, R. (2013). *Research for Development. A Practical Guide*. 2nd edition. London: SAGE.
- Levitt, R. (2013). *The challenges of evidence*. London: Alliance for Useful Evidence.
- MacDonald, L. (2005). *Indicators for policy management*. New York: United Nations Development Group.
- Newman, K., Fisher, C. and Shaxson, L. (2012). Stimulating demand for research evidence, what role for capacity building? *IDS Bulletin*, 5.
- Oxford Dictionaries (2014) *language matters*, 22 September 2014. Oxford: Oxford Dictionaries.
- Shaxson, L. (2005). *Is your evidence robust enough? Questions for policy makers and practitioners*, *Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research Debate and Practice*, 1(1):101–112.
- The Campbell Collaboration (n.d.). What is a systematic review?. Retrieved 30 May 2016 from: [www.campbellcollaboration.org/what\\_is\\_a\\_systematic\\_review](http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/what_is_a_systematic_review).





**[vakayiko@inasp.info](mailto:vakayiko@inasp.info)**

**[inasp.info/vakayiko](http://inasp.info/vakayiko)**

**[#VakaYiko](https://twitter.com/VakaYiko)**