

iConnect Ghana Newsletter

• ICTs for Development

• Research Evidence for Development

Feature Story



VakaYiko Consortium Ends 2016 International Symposium in Accra

A two-day international symposium on approaches to capacity building for evidence-informed policy making ended in Accra with a national stakeholder forum on evidence-informed policy making in Ghana.

[Read more on page 2](#)

WHAT IS EVIDENCE INFORMED POLICY MAKING?

Evidence-Informed Policy Making (EIPM) activities aim to increase the uptake of research in policy making.

EIPM is therefore an approach to development, where policy makers are equipped with necessary resources (improved skills, enhanced work processes, and enabling environments) that position them to assimilate evidence into policies.

This approach seeks to fill the information gap that exists between policymakers and researchers.

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT

Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D) refers to the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the fields of socioeconomic development, international development and human rights.

ICT4D can refer to assisting disadvantaged populations anywhere in the world, but it is usually associated with applications in developing countries.

It is concerned with directly applying information technology approaches to poverty reduction.

Source – Wikipedia

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to another edition of iConnect Newsletter, we hope you would find this issue interesting and useful reading.

The first item is an article on six lessons about change that affect research impact. The writer affect research impact. The writer discusses some of the things that researchers need to know about changes which can help their research have greater impact, the lessons illustrate some of the complexities inherent in understanding and trying to influence change.

The second paper poses a very interesting but critical question: "Scientists are giving advice, but are governments listening?" The authors are of the view that although scientific advice and evidence features prominently in recent UN initiatives, it is easy to feel frustrated by the visible failures of evidence to influence policy in so many areas. However, despite frustrations, obstacles and occasional setbacks, demand for scientific advice continues to grow.

The next item is titled "Evidence Spotlight - Development Planning in Ghana". It is a contribution by three authors on the outcome of a National Stakeholder Forum on EIPM in Ghana. Areas covered include a wide range of types of evidence used by the National Development Planning Commission in policymaking, from citizen consultations to administrative data, censuses, surveys, research reports, Think Tanks and academia. The processes in Planning, Budget preparation; Monitoring and Evaluation; and Reporting are also discussed in this paper. The writers conclude that in the future, evidence-informed policy-making must be promoted in order to enhance national development decision-making and good governance.

The final item in this issue is a pictorial summary of the various presentations at the VakaYiko Symposium 2016.

The Editorial Team wishes our readers a fruitful reading. Please let us have some feedback from you.

Thank you.
The Editorial Team

VakaYiko Consortium Ends 2016 International Symposium in Accra

A two-day international symposium on approaches to capacity building for evidence-informed policy making ended in Accra with a national stakeholder forum on evidence-informed policy making in Ghana.

The symposium, which marks the end of a three-year VakaYiko project, attracted over 35 researchers, practitioners and policy makers from 12 countries, who shared their experiences, challenges and solutions to building capacity for evidence-informed policy making.

The forum was hosted by Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS), VakaYiko partner in Ghana, "to consolidate knowledge gained from all strands of VakaYiko work in Ghana." It also explored "opportunities for improving evidence use in Ghana's policymaking processes and promote networking among the different stakeholders."

To meet the objectives, GINKS brought together past participants of its EIPM training programmes, resource persons from the Civil Service Training Centre

(CSTC) and the academia to critically examine the impact the three-year EIPM training had had on Ghana's civil service and parliament, the two institutions in Ghana that went through the EIPM training.

Two beneficiaries of the EIPM training at the CSTC, Mrs Thywill Eyra Kpe of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and Mr George Amoah of the Ministry of Labour shared their experiences in two separate presentations: The use of evidence in the Gender Ministry of Ghana and EIPM in Ghana-perspectives from the evidence absorbing units of a Ministry.

Dr Isaac Mensah-Bonsu, of the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC), highlighted the collaboration between the Commission and Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) to ensure that the developmental plans of the commission are in sync with the MDAs in a presentation 'on existing systems for evidence uptake in policymaking.

Source: ISD <http://bit.ly/2eFMjFO>

Africa's community of evidence-informed policymakers is growing fast

Last month, 180 delegates from twenty African countries spent three days in Pretoria, South Africa debating how evidence can be more widely used in decision making. The emphasis of the Evidence 2016 meeting was on shared learning across the continent, in support of Africa's development goals. Participants came from a diverse range of fields, including scientific advice, evidence-based medicine, policy evaluation and financial planning.

Naledi Pandor, South Africa's Minister for Science and Technology, opened the conference with a call for more decisions to be informed by evidence, tempered by a reminder that social and political factors must also play a role. Her keynote speech reflects the prominence that a growing number of African governments are placing on the use of evidence.

The meeting was hosted by the Africa Evidence Network (AEN), a 'made in Africa' initiative that brings together public servants, researchers and civil society representatives who share an interest in evidence-informed decision-making across the public sector. The network came about when twenty Africans found themselves at a conference in Asia, and decided to build a stronger community of practice in their own continent. Three years on, that core group has expanded into a network of nearly 1000 people across thirty-five countries. More than a quarter of its members are drawn from African

governments.

As a result, there is now a growing community in practice in Africa focused on the use of evidence to support development agendas. Given the limited resources of many African governments, it is important that policies and programmes have the desired effect. Better use of research, data, evaluation and citizen views can make a real difference. The delegates at Evidence 2016 shared experiences of the use of evidence by legislators and policymakers in their countries.

And the network plans to keep on growing. Challenges remain in engaging francophone countries, and tapping into the full range of individuals and communities who can bring expertise and insights to decision-making across Africa. As Naledi Pandor reminded us in her opening speech, the greatest potential lies in using evidence to inform how Africa tackles its three big challenges: unemployment, inequality and poverty. None of these has simple solutions, and they all require extensive collaboration between the public and private sectors, civil society and academia. The Africa Evidence Network is bringing people together who care deeply about these issues, and have the power, willingness and energy to tackle them head-on.

Ruth Stewart is programme director, of UJ-BCURE (Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence) at the University of Johannesburg, and chair of the executive committee of the Africa Evidence Network. To join the AEN, visit www.africaevidencenetwork.org.

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Six lessons about change that affect research impact

What do researchers need to know about change to help our research have greater impact?

What kind of impact is it realistic to expect? Will understanding change improve the ways we assess research impact?

The six lessons described here illustrate some of the complexities inherent in understanding and trying to influence change.

#1. Research findings enter a dynamic environment, where everything is changing all the time

As researchers we often operate as if the world is static, just waiting for our findings in order to decide where to head next. Instead, for research to have impact, researchers must negotiate a constantly changing environment. In addition, everything is connected, meaning that it is rare for only one aspect of the environment to be affected; rather there are multiple knock-on effects.

Research findings therefore enter a swirling cauldron of change and it requires work to ensure they have impact. Further, in that swirling cauldron (the environment), change is not uniform. The rates of change in different parts of the environment are variable, as are the degree and direction of change. Some parts of the environment are moving rapidly, some slowly. Some parts of the environment are transforming dramatically, other parts are developing incrementally. Some parts are heading in the same direction, others are cancelling each other out. Change also varies in scale. It can affect one or more of individuals, communities, geographical regions and beyond.

To achieve and assess research impact, we need to accept and work with the inevitability and complexity of change.

#2. Stopping change from happening requires work

A corollary to the inevitability of change is that stopping change from happening requires effort. It is not the case that doing nothing will allow things to stay the same. If our research findings point to the need for conservation, perhaps of a species, an environment or an historical

artefact, this will require action to be taken. Similarly research that points to the need for continuity in social affairs, political systems or individual behaviour requires intervention to combat the forces of change.

#3. Once something exists it can be hard to get rid of

For society to function effectively, many government and other agencies are built to be reliable, consistent and predictable. Indeed, as sociologists have shown, considerable effort goes into maintaining social continuity. As a consequence there can be considerable resistance to change. The resistance can be direct opposition or inertia that results from accumulated organisational structures, power bases and ways of doing things.

#4. Change does not necessarily lead to improvement

A consequence of the dynamic, highly interactive change environment is that much change is self-generating. This can be negative and maladaptive. On-going genetic mutation is an example. Most mutations do not bring benefit and many of those mutations are perpetuated, with only the most maladaptive dying out. On a social level, 'progress' (which can be seen as analogous to biological evolution) needs constant monitoring to look for self-generating negative aspects.

#5. Success is in the eye of the beholder

In human affairs, change is not value neutral and whether it is seen to be good or bad depends on the perceptions of those making the assessment.

#6. Any attempt to influence change can have unpredictable outcomes

The inevitability of change, the interconnectedness of what is changed and the various aspects of change dynamics discussed above mean that attempts to influence change usually have outcomes that are unpredictable.

Unintended consequences, unexpected events and serendipity are key dimensions of unpredictability. In addition, anyone trying to influence change cannot control the larger circumstances or context in which they are operating.

Conclusion

Laying out the complexities of the dynamic change environment highlights the challenges of achieving and assessing research impact. Researchers seeking to influence change are buffeted by a range of forces—some supportive, some hostile, some neutral—and even in the best circumstances unpredictable outcomes may occur. There is no sure way to negotiate a path through those forces and there are no guarantees of success. No consequences at all or adverse unintended consequences are always real possibilities.

Those assessing research impact must be sensitive to the realities of the cauldron of change—for example, that hard work and skill are not always rewarded, that luck may play a large hand, and that good intentions may be punished with bad outcomes.

What do you think? Does this resonate with your experience?

Further reading

These lessons are drawn from the insights on change of 18 disciplinary and practice experts, which are described in: Bammer, G. (ed.) (2015). *Change! Combining analytic approaches with street wisdom*. ANU Press: Canberra, Australia. Online open-access at: <http://press.anu.edu.au/?p=319221>

See especially chapter 20: Bammer, G. (2015). Improving research impact by better understanding change: A case study of multidisciplinary synthesis. In, G. Bammer (ed.) *Change! Combining analytic approaches with street wisdom*. ANU Press: Canberra, Australia: 289- 323. Online at: <http://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p319221/pdf/ch20.pdf> (PDF 348KB)

Source:

<https://i2insights.org/2016/10/18/change-and-research-impact/>

Scientists are giving advice, but are governments listening?

Tomorrow, six hundred policymakers, practitioners and researchers from seventy-two countries will assemble in Brussels for a meeting of the International Network for Government Science Advice. All this week, hundreds more have been participating in the What Works Global Summit in London. If conferences are anything to go by, these are boom times for evidence and expertise in policymaking. But the mood of many participants will be sober rather than celebratory.



There's certainly progress to point to. In the past decade, policymakers from Beijing to Brussels, Prague to Pretoria, and Wellington to Washington D.C., have experimented with new institutions for scientific advice and evidence-informed decision-making. More established advisory bodies – such as the US Office for Science and Technology Policy, which recently celebrated its fortieth birthday – have become increasingly sophisticated and multi-disciplinary. An expanding cohort of scientific academies and learned societies is investing in policy capacity at a national level, and networking to influence global agendas, through new collaborations like the InterAcademy Partnership and the European SAPEA platform.

In the international arena, there are now more regular and intense interactions between science advice, foreign policy and science diplomacy. Several governments, including Japan, New Zealand, United States and the UK, have appointed science advisers to their foreign ministries. There has been debate about how to strengthen expert advice across the United Nations system, particularly in support of the sustainable

development goals (SDGs), agreed by the UN General Assembly in 2015. A new UN Scientific Advisory Board was established in 2014, and there have been recent calls for its remit to be expanded by the incoming UN Secretary General.

Scientific advice and evidence features prominently in recent UN initiatives, such as the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction. There are moves underway to strengthen advisory mechanisms in support of international treaties, such as the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. New mechanisms for evidence-informed assessments have also been created, drawing on lessons from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), such as the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), formed in 2012 and now involving 125 countries. And the assessment model is being applied elsewhere, for example, through the International Panel for Social Progress, through which social scientists aim to develop “research-based, multi-disciplinary, non-partisan, action-driven solutions” to pressing social challenges.

Yet despite these positive developments, it is easy to feel frustrated by the visible failures of evidence to influence policy in so many areas. On thorny issues like climate change, obesity, biodiversity and migration, the response to overwhelming evidence is often sluggish and incremental. Global actions require domestic policy decisions. These need to be properly informed by national advisory systems, which remain very mixed in their structure, quality and capability to influence policy.

New developments in science or novel applications of technology may provoke skepticism or resistance from a public that perceives them as allied to elite interests. And populist politicians, campaigners or social media warriors can tap into the anxieties caused by globalisation and

rising inequalities, and channel these towards resentment, as we saw in the claims during the Brexit referendum that “people in this country have had enough of experts”.

Such tensions aren't new, but they are becoming more acute and visible, reflecting what some have called the “paradox of scientific authority”. Expert advice is being sought with growing urgency across a proliferating array of policy and public questions. At the same time, and often on the same issues, the legitimacy of evidence and expertise has rarely been so fiercely contested.

Paradox coexists with possibilities. We need to better understand what lies behind the former, and forge alliances to advance the latter. This is why the International Network for Government Science Advice (INGSA) was set up, following an initial meeting in Auckland in 2014.

Operating under the auspices of the International Council for Science, INGSA's membership now includes over 950 practitioners, academics, knowledge brokers and policymakers. The network's focus is on assisting the development of effective advisory systems for bringing evidence into policy, and the individual skills and institutional capacities that these require. Through workshops, conferences and a growing catalogue of case studies and guidance, the network aims to improve the potential for evidence-informed policymaking at national and transnational levels.

At many levels of government, the ecosystem of institutions and individuals engaged in expert advice and evidence-informed policymaking is more diverse than ever before. Distinct yet overlapping communities of research, policy and practice are congregating around a core set of questions about how to improve the provision, communication, relevance and application of evidence to policymaking.

Scientists are giving advice, but are governments listening?

Perspectives from the natural sciences and engineering are being enriched and complicated by a deeper understanding of public values, cognitive biases and political psychology from the social, political and behavioural sciences. The assumptions of those on the evidence “supply side” are increasingly tempered by pragmatic insights that come from experience on the “demand side” of policy institutions.

If we are to practice what we preach, it is also vital that we build the evidence base in this field, through analysis and evaluation of different systems. This week’s Brussels meeting coincides with the launch of a thematic collection of the open access journal Palgrave Communications, which includes new research on the theory, practice and politics of scientific advice from a range

of disciplines and countries, including Canada, China, Japan, Netherlands, Nigeria, the US and UK.

The insights from this collection, and the outcomes of the Brussels meeting, will inform INGSA’s work and contribute to one of its priorities for the next year: to develop a set of principles and guidelines for effective advisory systems. Despite frustrations, obstacles and occasional setbacks, demand for scientific advice continues to grow. We need to reflect more systematically, and learn from one another, about what works, what doesn’t and why. Meetings like those taking place this week are an important step in the right direction.

Sir Peter Gluckman (@PeterGluckman) is chief science advisor to the prime minister of New Zealand and chair of the International Network for Government Science Advice (@INGSciAdvice). James Wilsdon is professor of research policy at the University of Sheffield, and vice-chair of INGSA. More information about this week’s INGSA summit, held in partnership with the European Commission, can be found here. The Palgrave Communications thematic collection can be accessed here.

Source:

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/political-science/2016/sep/28/scientists-are-giving-advice-but-are-governments-listening>

Evidence Spotlight - Development Planning in Ghana

As part of [VakaYiko's](#) recent event in Accra, [GINKS](#) hosted a National Stakeholder Forum on EIPM in Ghana. Dr Isaac Mensa-Bonsu, the Director of Plan Coordination from Ghana's [National Development Planning Commission \(NDPC\)](#) outlined four major national-level systems in Ghana that require evidence, and described the role of the NDPC in each of these.

Throughout his presentation, Dr Mensa-Bonsu made reference to a wide range of types of evidence used by the NDPC in policymaking, from citizen consultations to administrative data, censuses and surveys conducted by GSS, as well as research reports published by think tanks, research institutions

and academia.

1. Planning

Ghana has for some years been preparing and implementing 4-year medium-term development frameworks, the current one being the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (2014-2017) 9GSGDA-II). However, the country is in the process of preparing a 40-year [Long-term National Development Plan](#) (2018-2057), which will be implemented through ten 4-year medium-term plans. A Constitution Review Commission in Ghana has recently recommended that the Plan be made binding in nature for all future governments. Recent consultations undertaken as part of the [preparation for the Long Term National Development Plan](#) are illustrative of the broad

range of stakeholders involved in development planning in Ghana, including traditional rulers, faith-based organizations, the private sector, universities, youth groups and political parties. The production, implementation and reporting of national development plans is led by the NDPC, with involvement from the district, regional and national level. NDPC issues planning guidelines for plan preparation by districts and sectors. The entire process requires evidence gathering and analysis as basis for development decision making. The planning guidelines issued by NDPC, for instance, require an assessment of the current state of development of the district or the sector, which requires evidence gathering from individuals, groups, institutions as well as from the environment.

Cont. on page 6

Evidence Spotlight - Development Planning in Ghana

2. Budget Preparation

Guidelines for budget preparation by public sector institutions are issued by the Ministry of Finance. Ghana's medium-term development agenda published by NDPC provides the framework for budget preparation.

The first stage in budget preparation is the Policy Hearings, co-managed by NDPC and Ministry of Finance, to ensure that the policies of Ministries (basis for their expenditure) are linked to the national development agenda.

The second stage is the Technical Hearings. This requires that Ministries present their budget proposals using the programme-based budgeting framework (PBB). The presentation requires evidence of policy output and policy outcome from the previous budget allocation and expenditure. The PBB also requires establishing output and outcome indicators, evidence of past performance, baseline situation and target for ensuing budget years.

3. M&E

Districts and Ministries prepare annual progress reports on the implementation of their plans, including evidence of progress made towards outputs, outcomes and impact, using guidelines provided by NDPC. These reports are submitted to NDPC, which prepares and publishes the national Annual Progress Report (APR). A copy of the APR is

submitted to the appropriate committee of Parliament which often invites Ministries for further discussions based on the evidence contained in the APR.

NDPC also does evidence gathering and analysis to evaluate selected government policies and pilot programmes. One such policy which was recently evaluated by NDPC is the Capitation Grant in the educational sector.

4. Reporting

The NDPC is involved in two main types of reporting.

The first is the President's report to Parliament via the State of the Nation Address, which requires evidence gathering and analysis. This is often done by the appropriate unit of the Office of the President, with the support of NDPC.

The second type of reporting is international. With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Ghana will have to report on evidence of progress in the achievement of the 17 goals using the 169 indicators stipulated. While the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) has been collecting evidence for some of the indicators, for others the evidence exists but has not been collected regularly, and for some there is the need to develop capacity to gather and analyze the evidence. NDPC and GSS will collaborate on how to build the necessary capacity to meet the reporting requirements of the SDGs

EIPM in Ghana: Looking Forward

Dr Mensa-Bonsu stressed the increasing importance of ICT in gathering and processing evidence for decision making—for example, he sees great potential in using drones for a more effective and efficient evidence gathering on environmental and spatial phenomena, based on NDPC's recent experience using them for evidence gathering in connection with the Long Term Development Plan.

“We need to enhance and promote evidence-informed policy making in the country for enhanced national development decision-making and good governance, particularly ensuring transparency and accountability”, he said.

“This will require strengthening the national statistics system, including promoting record keeping culture in both state and non-state institutions for readily available administrative data.

The use of ICT and other emerging technologies should also be promoted for accurate, timely and effective evidence gathering and processing for decision-making.”

This post is co-authored by **Emily Hayter with Kirchuff's Atengble (GINKS) and Dr Isaac Mensa-Bonsu (Ghana National Development Planning Commission).**

VakaYiko Symposium 2016

Policymakers, researchers and civil society from 12 countries discuss evidence-informed policy making in Accra, Ghana #Vy2016. VakaYiko has worked for the last three years to build capacity for evidence-informed policy making. During this two-day symposium, participants shared their experiences, reflections and learning from the programme.



The meeting kicked off with a session exploring research and knowledge 'systems' and how they link to policy. The session showed that the complexity of the research to policy system means that there are many more stakeholders that need to join the conversation aside from researchers and policymakers. And often these stakeholders are working in silos.



Session one: Taking a systemic approach to getting knowledge into policy

Building networks for evidence use was a big part of the VakaYiko programme. In session two, VakaYiko partners from Kenya, Uganda, Peru and UK, talked about how we can break down the silos and get stakeholders talking.



Session two: Approaches to building networks for evidence use: public engagement and co-creation

Next, we heard from three parliaments working with VakaYiko: Ghana, Uganda and Zimbabwe, about the role of evidence in parliament and how they are strengthening systems for evidence use.



Session three: Evidence informed scrutiny in parliaments

Training for civil servants was one of the most popular capacity building approaches used in VakaYiko. During the programme, we created and tested a new Toolkit for evidence-informed policy making.



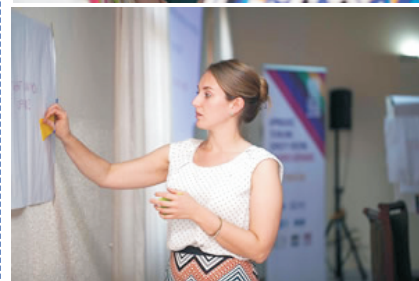
Session five: Approaches to training for evidence informed policy making

Day two kicked off with a session on sharing experiences and lessons

for future training.



Although VakaYiko is coming to an end, we want to continue to grow our network, to share expertise, experience and contacts. Here we are thinking about how we can continue to support each other.



There was also lots of time for networking!



Upcoming Events

Event	Date	Venue
Workshop & Stakeholder meeting with Parliament	November 2016	Accra
CSIR International Convention	December 8-9, 2016	Pretoria, South Africa
Pilot of EIPM training at GIMPA	January 2017	Accra
Review workshop for Parliament	February 2017	Accra

About iConnect Ghana Newsletter

iConnect Ghana is an online, offline and email service knowledge vehicle that seeks to bring together developments in the areas of ICT4D and Evidence Informed Policy Making (EIPM) for enhancing development. It is a joint initiative of GINKS, IICD and Vaka Yiko.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Coordinator
 Ghana Information Network for
 Knowledge Sharing (GINKS)

OUR LOCATION

GINKS Secretariat
 Behind Gold House, Airport
 Residential Area (on the same
 compound with CSIR-INSTI HQ.)

ABOUT GINKS

GINKS is a network of individuals and organizations sharing information and knowledge that influences EIPM and puts ICT resources for public good.

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