

iConnect Ghana Newsletter

• ICTs for Development

• Research Evidence for Development

Feature Story



Follow-up shows positive impacts of training on EIPM Participants

Capacity building is an integral part of development assistance. It seeks to build the understanding, skills and knowledge-base of individuals and institutions.

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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

Once again, GINKS is excited about its activities and is delighted to take this opportunity to share some of its recent experiences.

The first article reports on various follow-ups that have been made since the VakaYiko Consortium entered into an agreement with the Civil Service Training Centre (CSTC) in Ghana to develop a course and train Civil Servants on Evidence-Informed Policy Making (EIPM).

This report indicates a positive feedback from course participants, with one of the recommendations being that, support be offered to successful graduates of the training once they return to their organisations.

This is followed by a brief on the GINKS training programmes. It reports on various training undertaken so far for Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) in Ghana. It is interesting to note that, apart from the MDAs, GINKS has also built the capacities of some Districts Assemblies through Policy Dialogues.

Dr. Kirsty Newman's article on "Holding decision makers to account for evidence use" discusses the impact of the full body of evidence on decision makers. She urges that it is always important to look at the body of evidence and appraise its strengths and weaknesses before using these for decision making. She concludes that the problem for those scrutinising decision making is that, if you are not a topic expert, it can be quite hard to judge the evidence presented.

Once again, we have a contribution from our partners in Zimbabwe. It is an interesting piece on the need for policy makers to have reliable, sound data and evidence in order to mitigate the effects of the drought. Farmers and policy makers have to be guided by evidence rather than continue responding to short-term pressures that tackle symptoms of bigger challenges.

We conclude this issue of the Newsletter rather on a sad note. After 20 years of the existence of the International Institute of Communication and Development (IICD), it has ceased operations. Over the years, IICD has proved that ICT can accelerate socio-economic development.

GINKS has been one of the major beneficiaries of IICD's investment and mentorship. We wish to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to our cherished international partner.

The Editorial Board is always thankful to our readers for sharing their time with us. As usual, please let us have some feedback from you.

Thank you.
The Editorial Team

Follow-up shows positive impacts of training on EIPM Participants

Capacity building is an integral part of development assistance. It seeks to build the understanding, skills and knowledge-base of individuals and institutions. But after capacity building, it is prudent to justify the intervention by measuring the impact it has on trainees.



Participants doing hands-on at EIPM training in Accra

In 2015, the VakaYiko consortium entered an agreement with the Civil Service Training Centre (CSTC) in Ghana to develop a course and train civil servants on Evidence-Informed Policy Making (EIPM). From April 20 to 30, 2015, 23 officers from 14 Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) of the civil service and 2 parliamentary staff participated in the first batch of the course.

Participants were taken through all four (4) modules of the course ranging from the concepts of evidence and evidence-informed policymaking; challenges and opportunities involved with the use of evidence for policymaking; different sources of evidence and evidence products available; accessing these evidence literature; appraising the evidence literature; understanding methodological issues within the literature; and communicating evidence gathered to appropriate audience(s) using appropriate communication tools and media.

Based on Action Plans submitted, a

follow-up impact assessment was carried out from August 17 to October 8, 2015 with 3 main objectives; to assess the status of Action Plan implementation by participants; to learn from conditions existing at their work places for course improvement; and to assist with communicating best practices. Data was collected from twenty participants who served as respondents.

Five thematic areas were assessed:

Action Plan

Participants were assessed on the levels at which they had implemented their actions plans. Twenty percent of the participants completed the implementation of their action plans, 40% were almost complete and the remaining 40% were half way through the implementation of their plans.

On challenges encountered in the implementation of the action plans, one respondent did not encounter any challenge, 9 reported overloaded work schedules, 3 had problems of internet connectivity, 3 were isolated by their members and 2 did not get adequate support from their colleagues.

Participants were also assessed on factors that created enabling environment for the implementation of their action plans. Sixteen (57.1%) respondents received cooperation from team members involved in the action plan implementation. This was confirmed by their supervisors. Other enabling factors for the performance include; the fact that activities being implemented were satisfying organisational needs; that minimal organisational resources were required; that strategic buy-ins were secured from stakeholders within and outside the organisations; and that participants showed positive attitude towards the implementation of action plans.

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Follow-up shows positive impacts of training on EIPM Participants

Internal monitoring and evaluation

Participants were required to monitor and evaluate their action plans, and they used varied means to monitor and evaluate their actions — crosschecking action plans; looking out for output/indicators; personal visits; as part of to do lists; and by collaborating with other colleagues.

Using these M&E activities as guiding tools, one participant developed an information request form to be used by the front desk unit of the organisation for information to regularise and clarify the nature of information request. Twelve others sensitised members of their organisations; while 4 made efforts to organise internally created documents.

Another 3 participants satisfied their obligations by working to gather evidence in the form of data/information/research publications for their organisations, activities that have been stimulated by the training. Other outstanding activities

performed by the participants include; uploading documents onto the website, gathering feedback, sensitisation and uploading database with current data.

Effects of training

Participants experienced better appreciation of internal documents for EIPM; better understanding of research methodologies; increased knowledge of information/evidence sources; enhanced skill-set to access evidence; improved contribution to policy documents; critical thinking capacity when assessing evidence products and an increased awareness and appreciation of EIPM concepts.

General feedback and recommendation

In general the EIPM course has enhanced the skills of participants to access evidence, improved their contributions to policy documents and increased ability to communicate evidence. All the participants recommended EIPM training to their colleagues. The training is believed to be having

significant effects on participants and their organisations. Constant introduction of innovations by participants in their work places would result in marked improvement in policy making processes with Ghana's Civil Service.



Participants doing group discussion at EIPM training

It is recommended that support be offered to successful graduates of these trainings once they return to their organizations, and training partners must endeavour to consolidate the implementation of these action plans through follow-ups such as was conducted by VakaYiko partners.

Evidence-Informed Policy Making in Ghana – GINKS shows the way

There is a growing demand for evidence informed policy making to improve relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of policy reforms. It is argued that the absence of evidence leads to opinion based policies which rely deeply on either the selective use of evidence or experimental opinions of individuals or groups.

Evidence-informed policy making is grounded on the fact that policy decisions should be informed by available evidence and balanced analysis of the policy issue in question. This is based on the fact that a policy decision made on evidence is likely to produce a better outcome than

one that is opinion-based.

The VakaYiko Consortium

To increase the use of evidence in policy making in developing countries, the VakaYiko consortium, a network of NGOs working in Ghana, Zimbabwe and South Africa; the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and International Network for the Availability of Scientific Information (INASP) was formed based on the premise that for research evidence to be routinely and effectively used in policy-making, at least three factors need 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 facilitating environment that identifies and responds to research uptake needs.



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Evidence-Informed Policy Making in Ghana – GINKS shows the way

Ghanaian Researchers' Perspectives

From the perspectives of researchers, there is no synergy between them (researchers) and policy makers. There is also the need to demystify research and policy making. Even though there are a number of platforms from which evidence (in the form of data, research articles, expert opinion and citizen knowledge) can be accessed for policy making in Ghana, the question remains whether potential users are aware of these, and have the necessary skills to access them, and also check for quality across the various platforms.

GINKS Training Programmes

GINKS, the consortium representative in Ghana, started building the capacity of civil servants and parliamentary staff on evidence-informed policy making. So far, GINKS has trained over 60 people from Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) and information support staff of the Parliament of Ghana. In April, 2015, GINKS in collaboration with the Civil Service Training Centre (CSTC), trained staff from MDAs on evidence-informed policy making. The Head of Civil Service in Ghana, Nana Dwemena Agyekum, lauded the EIPM approach as a unique

one that would move people away from the usual desk-top policy formulation to a more rigorous scientific process. Clara Richards, Director of the consortium, said civil servants needed skills to be able to search for relevant information and effectively communicate it to those who make policy.

This programme was followed in October by another training programme for middle level staff working in MDAs. In her interaction with participants, the Principal of the CSTC, Mrs Dora Dei-Tumi indicated that the quality of information submitted to cabinet affects the quality of policies the government of the day will formulate. She reiterated the core function of the civil service as the provision of policy options for government, adding that the CSTC was taking advantage of GINKS' support to build the capacity of civil servants to be able to provide information that speaks to the needs of government.

GINKS also recognises the role information support staff of parliament play in policy. The organisation therefore opened this year with a ten day capacity building training for this level of staff. A Deputy Clerk of Parliament, Alhaji Ibrahim Gombilla, was excited at the

support extended by GINKS to the parliamentary staff. He said parliament places a lot of emphasis on capacity building but did not have all the resources to do it alone; hence, GINKS' support was timely.

GINKS has also built the capacity of staff of District Assemblies through policy dialogues in Ho and Koforidua in the Volta and Eastern regions of Ghana respectively.

Training people on evidence-informed policy making also involves evaluating the trainees at their work places to get first-hand information on how the training impacts on their performance. GINKS therefore makes follow-ups to evaluate action plans drawn by trainees during these trainings and the results have been encouraging.



Parliament of Ghana staff at EIPM training in Accra

Holding decision makers to account for evidence use

Evidence-informed policy – it's a wonderful thing. But just how widespread is it? The ['Show your workings' report](#) from the [Institute of Government](#) (and collaborators [Sense About Science](#) and the [Alliance for Useful Evidence](#)) has asked this question

and concluded... not very. It states “there [are] few obvious political penalties for failing to base decision on the best available evidence”.

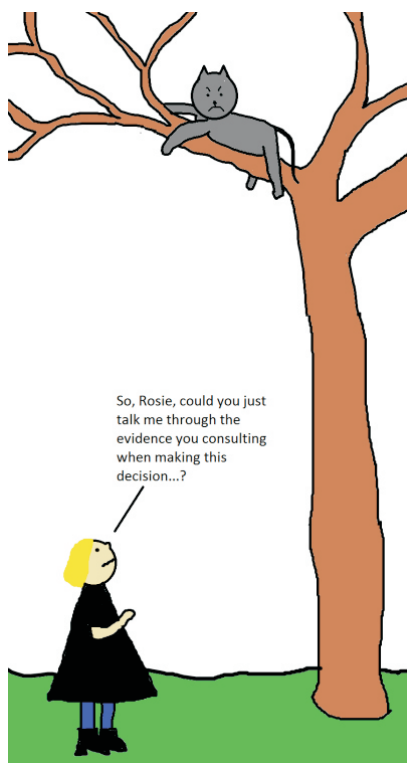
I have to say that as a civil servant this rings true.

It's not that people don't use evidence – actually most civil servants, at least where I work, do.

But there are not good systems in place to distinguish between people who have

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Holding decision makers to account for evidence use



Rosie is my actual cat's name. And she does indeed make many poor life decisions. Incidentally, I named my other cat 'Mouse' and now that I am trying to teach my child to identify animals I am wondering just how wise a life decision that was...

systematically looked at the full body of evidence and appraised its strengths and weaknesses – and those who have referenced a few cherry-picked studies to back up their argument.

The problem for those scrutinising decision making – parliament, audit bodies and, in the case of development, the Independent Commission for Aid Impact – is that if you are not a topic expert it can be quite hard to judge whether the picture of evidence presented in a policy document does represent an impartial assessment of the state of knowledge.

The IoG authors realised this was a problem quite early in their quest – and

came up with a rather nifty solution.

Instead of trying to decide if decisions are based on an unbiased assessment of evidence, they simply looked at how transparent decision makers had been about how they had appraised evidence. Now, on the evidence supply side there has been some great work to drive up transparency.

In the medical field, Ben Goldacre is [going all guns blazing after pharmaceutical companies](#) to get them to clean up their act. In international development, [registers of evaluations are appearing](#) and [healthy debates are emerging](#) on the nature of pre-analysis plans.

This is vitally important – if evaluators don't declare what they are investigating and how, it is far too easy for them to not bother publishing findings which are inconvenient – or to try multiple types of analysis until, by chance, one gives them a more agreeable answer.

But as the report shows, and as [others have argued elsewhere](#), there has been relatively little focus on transparency on the 'demand' side. And by overlooking this, I think that we might have been missing a trick.

You see, it turns out that the extent to which a policy document explicitly sets out how evidence has been gathered and appraised is a rather good proxy for systematic evidence appraisal.

And the IoG's hypothesis is that if you could hold decision makers to account for their evidence transparency, you could go some way towards improving the systematic use of evidence to inform

decision makers.

The report sets out a framework which can be used to assess evidence transparency. As usual, I have a couple of tweaks I would love to see.

I think it would be great if the framework included more explicitly an assessment of the search strategy used to gather the initial body of evidence – and perhaps rewarded people for making use of existing rigorous synthesis products such as systematic reviews.

But in general, I think it is a great tool and I really hope the IoG et al. are successful in persuading government departments – and crucially those who scrutinise them – to make use of it.

By: Dr. Kirsty Newman,

Organisation: DFID

Link:

<https://kirstyevidence.wordpress.com/2016/01/24/holding-decision-makers-to-account-for-evidence-use/>

Let's accelerate drought mitigation

Many Zimbabweans do not seem to understand the full impact of the El Nino-induced drought currently ravaging Southern Africa. The full impact is not just about crops that are affected by lack of rainfall or number of cattle that are dying. It is more about inputs that are wasted (money, time, fertiliser, chemicals, etc.). If you borrow \$50 000 from a bank and invest in agriculture and drought destroys everything, the impact is your failure to pay back the loan. While the value chain may not care about crop failure because commodities can come from elsewhere, for a farmer who fails to pay back a loan and loses livestock, the impact is more devastating.

In order to allocate resources appropriately, farmers and policy makers have to rely on sound data and evidence on the full effects of drought. Decision making has to be driven by timely access to information. Farmers and policy makers have to be guided by evidence rather than continue responding to short-term pressures that tackle symptoms of bigger challenges. That is how the link between evidence and advice can be strengthened. Unfortunately the loudest voice gets the most attention. While decisions have to be informed by evidence, evidence-based policy making is not a distinct approach. It involves a shift away from opinion-based decision making towards relying on high quality, valid and reliable evidence. However, given the contested nature of evidence in Zimbabwe at the moment, most policy makers are not sure what makes evidence high quality, valid and reliable. On the other hand, there doesn't seem to be clear guidance on how policy makers should appraise evidence and separate potentially relevant information from what is irrelevant. Juggling local contexts, lay knowledge and political demands seems a

big headache for policy makers. Unfortunately, this policy predicament has seen the loudest voices getting the most attention in the agriculture sector. Although many Zimbabweans are surviving on diverse agricultural commodities, there is so much noise about maize and cattle than other crops and livestock. While the media is saturated with the central role of maize in fighting the current drought-induced food insecurity, there is dead silence on the contribution of other agricultural commodities in mitigating drought. There is lack of systematic evidence collection and analyses on all commodities that make up Zimbabwe's food basket. For instance, at a recent meeting convened by four farmers unions to discuss the impact of the current drought on the livestock sector, the whole conversation was dominated by cattle. Goats, sheep and donkeys were not even mentioned. Workshop participants heard that at least 22 000 cattle had succumbed to drought but no statistic were provided about other livestock as if they do not exist in the same context as cattle. Again, there was no deep analysis on the impact of such cattle death. The disproportionate influence of those with a louder voice, for instance the Grain Millers Association of Zimbabwe, can be a barrier to the generation of evidence – informed agricultural policy-making where many other commodities should get an equal voice. Zimbabwean agriculture can only become holistic if mechanisms to contain powerful voices are found. At the moment, millions of Zimbabweans survive on neglected crops and livestock which receive minimal support from policy makers and development agencies. Although these commodities do not have a voice they continue to feed millions. Droughts which are threatening to become more frequent require us to stop a mono-cultural mind-set but consider the diversity

of our food basket. No country has ever developed through importing food. Our policy makers need capacity to evaluate and balance evidence and not just depend on the loudest voices. Meaningful questions have to be generated in order to streamline policy making processes and ensure impactful results are generated from diverse stakeholders using all available evidence. The current drought calls for a dynamic evidence base, mobilised through systematic evidence mapping. People's agriculture markets are becoming a crucial source of evidence for coping with drought. The following is an example of such evidence captured by eMKambo. Given the dynamic nature of evidence, resulting partly from the adoption of ICTs, people's understanding of food and their diets is also changing. Policy makers and development partners have to design ways of filtering and using information from diverse sources. Evidence-based policy making is no longer simply about creating a vast database of everything and then cherry-picking the best from what is available.

The way we have classified farmers into communal, A1, A2 and large-scale commercial has the unintended effect of creating silos, from a knowledge sharing point of view. It would appear all these categories of farmers need entirely different forms of evidence in order to be productive yet they can actually borrow experiences and ideas from each other. Driving from Harare to Mutare one sees a lot of grass growing alongside the road. Cultivating relationships between farmers along the Harare to Mutare road with those in Masvingo and Matabeleland provinces will easily see grass currently being under-utilised in these farms being cut and sent to Matabeleland and Masvingo to save livestock that are dying from lack of pastures.

Read more here <http://www.herald.co.zw/lets-accelerate-drought-mitigation/>

When it's time to leave the stage...



20 years after its foundation, IICD ceased operations in The Hague on December 31, 2015. We devolved existing activities to strong and capable organisations within our local partner network and organised our network digitally so that people interested in ICT4D could further connect with strong, experienced and locally relevant ICT4D players capable of serving ICT4D projects and programmes directly. Over the years, we proved that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can accelerate socio-economic development and that a methodology based on principles such as multi-stakeholder engagement, demand-driven approach and local ownership, is key to integrate and sustain ICT-enabled activities. Our investments in enabling individuals, organisations and networks to adequately serve the ICT needs of local stakeholders resulted in conducive environments with experienced partners well suited to offer cost-effective and locally relevant ICT-enabled solutions. “It is a great honour and privilege to continue the work of IICD in Ethiopia and support partners to help people and organisations access information relevant to their needs and aspirations. IICD's philosophy, experience and people-centred approach remain fundamental to successful ICT4D activities in Ethiopia. IICD provided us with the guidance, knowledge and means to continue its legacy and we are confident about the future,” said Gillian Brewin, IICD's Ethiopia Country Representative / ExoTalent Managing Partner.

“IICD continues to believe that digital technologies can help people in developing contexts improve their living and working conditions, but the focus should now lie on further networking and strengthening local initiatives to be the principal service providers – that's where the priority in IICD's reorganisation in 2015 has been,” said Suzanne van der Velden, IICD's Managing Director. In the context of a changing international development landscape in which ICT and capacity building no longer figured prominently on institutional donors' financing agendas, funding ICT4D capacity building through a primarily Netherlands-based organisation no longer made good business sense. We opted to not let go of our holistic approach to ICT4D in pursuit of commercial ventures but rather to adhere to our original mandate to remain independent from any commercial interest groups. These circumstances limited the basis for further continuing our activities and therefore we decided that it was time to leave the stage. “Despite all the programmatic support we received from other development partners, there is an unfortunate fact: when your own government fails to support you as a civil society organisation, it becomes practically impossible to execute your mission at the scale IICD was used to delivering,” said Karel de Beer, Chairman of IICD's Executive Board. “We hope that the future will see support for what the field of ICT4D needs beyond transient tech hypes, acting as a catalyst and adopting a genuinely demand-driven approach, which was the basic core of IICD's philosophy and existence.”

Continuation and legacy

Our initiatives are carried on by our partners such as ExoTalent, Africa eHealth

Solutions (AeHS), ChaskiTech, CERTES and others who represent IICD's success in bringing people, technology and socio-economic development closer together. “Africa eHealth Solutions represents the continuation of IICD's eHealth experience and solutions. We are a network of service providers continuing IICD's strong track record in data management for result based financing, hospital management and telemedicine. The market is there and we have plenty of experience with making it happen. As a network, we are here to share solutions, implement and support, and keep each other sharp on quality and best practices,” says Nic Moens, Director of Africa eHealth Solutions (AeHS). To make available our wealth of knowledge, experience and network of ICT4D professionals for others to draw on, we proudly introduce IICD's legacy website and digital network which we hope will continue bringing people together to exchange knowledge and experiences in the field of ICT4D, and serve as a jump off point for new collaborations. “December 2015 marks an end of an era for IICD. In what is perhaps its final act of graceful self-effacement,” said Kentaro Toyama, IICD International Advisory Board Member, “over time, I came to understand IICD's approach as one of enlightened, quality mentorship – one enabled by a period of broad-minded funding by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. IICD's methodology was to listen carefully to the aspirations of their partners and then to do everything possible to nurture in them the ability to achieve their own goals.” Our gratitude goes out to our staff, global network of ICT4D professionals, and local and international partners who throughout the years trusted and supported our work to enable people in developing contexts to become drivers of positive social change.

Upcoming Events

Event	Date	Venue
EIPM Training for Civil Servants	8 - 18 March 2016	CSTC, Accra
Policy Dialogue at Kumasi	31 March 2016	Kumasi
VakaYiko Consortium Meeting	11 - 14 April 2016	London
Policy Dialogue at Cape Coast	21 April 2016	Cape Coast
EIPM Training for Civil Servants	13 - 24 June 2016	CSTC, Accra
EIPM Training for Parliamentary staff	6 - 15 July 2016	Afiencya, Tema
EIPM Stakeholder Consultation, Accra	4 August 2016	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 VakaYiko.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Coordinator
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 Knowledge Sharing (GINKS)

OUR LOCATION

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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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