EVIPNet Activity report brief

Health Evidence Policy Brief Workshop
for Eastern & Southern African Parliamentary staff

Health Topics to develop a draft of policy brief: Cancer in Kenya, HIV mother to child transmission, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Swaziland, Maternal and child mortality Namibia, Uganda, Botswana

INASP/IAO/EVIPNet
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This workshop has been organized under the coordination of Information Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP), NGO in partnership with Information Africa Information, NGO and World Health Organization/Evidence Informed Policy Network. This workshop was set up with 22 participants for 5 days with representatives from:

- International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications or INASP
- Information Africa Organization
- WHO/EVIPNet
- Eastern and South African Parliamentary staff

1. AUDIENCE

The eastern and south African parliamentary staff, 2, 3 or 4 participants by country from Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Kenya, Swaziland, Tanzania were in majority research officer, Principal Committee Officer, Senior Librarian, Chief nursing officer, Assistant Committee Clerk, Journalists for the parliament.

2. CONTEXT

Partnerships to build collaborative collaboration to support and promote Evidence Informed Policy Making in Africa

The EVIPNet programme from World Health Organization in the framework of the strengthening and development of sustainable and constructive partnerships in Evidence-Informed Health Policymaking in Low and Middle-Income Countries (EIHP in LMIC) decided to set up a joint Health Evidence Policy brief workshop with INASP, UK Based Non Governmental Organization which support research communication in developing country through training of trainers workshop to increase the capacity of parliamentary researchers and staff to use evidence and to demystify the science at parliament level. INASP will support the parliamentary staff in the development and writing of evidence informed policy brief not only to address the health issues but any others types of topics debate in the parliament. It is a method to be sure the parliamentary staff will be able to transmit relevant and evidence based information and knowledge to the MPs or Members of Parliament.

The EVIPNet programme from World Health Organization with the approach “Learning by doing together to work and share lessons and practices learned together” decided to extend and share EVIPNet tools and methodologies to large wide of stakeholders and particularly the parliamentary staff in Low Middle Income Countries to develop evidence informed policy brief and set up a policy deliberative dialogue. The interaction between the parliament and the ministers is very important and key to be sure new law and legislation can be translate to policies or programs and also crucial to be sure the policy options adopted will be implemented and monitored. The relationship and the level of exchange between parliament and minister is a continuum and permanent process and the parliamentary staff specifically researchers officer and librarians need to develop evidence informed policy brief also to be sure the results of research or evidence can be push to MPs for a relevant policy making. The parliamentary staff need to be very effective to find the relevant evidence to address any
type of issue underlying by the parliament. The parliamentary staff could use evidence issue brief or evidence informed policy brief in relation with the constraint of time and with the steps in the policy cycle in the parliament.

3. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Evidence Policy brief workshop for parliamentary staff were to strength the scientific expertise inside of parliament departments in order to:

- describe, clarify and interpret policy issues or problems simply and clearly;
- harness and synthesize existing research;
- identify their research requirements accurately;
- procure science of high quality and relevance;
- manage out-sourced research programs;
- understand the findings of research programs and appreciate their policy implications and define policy options
- evaluate scientific advice from external sources and identify the implications for policy and impact on policy options.

The objective for the participants a majority of researcher officer and civil servants was:

- To advice and answer to the request from MPs with relevant information and knowledge and to be sure at the end that all senior officials and policy makers should have a basic understanding of the scientific method, the role and importance of peer review, the relevance of different types of evidence, and the way to evaluate it.
- To strength the core skills required to advice the MPs: human resources management; financial management; programme and project management; and analysis and use of evidence and in strategic thinking and communications and marketing.

4. METHODOLOGY

The focus on the issues/problems was about health and each parliamentary country team selected before the workshop one priority health issue. It was the first time for EVIPNet to present and train in partnership with INASP and IAO this type of target audience.

The training after the presentation of concepts and methods used participatory and interactive learning approach with the set up of mix and large groups to be sure the participants share their understanding, practices and context in the parliament.

5. RESULTS

The collaborative partnership allowed the training of 22 parliamentary staff from eastern and south Africa countries and to establish a process to motivate each parliamentary country team to prepared a draft of policy brief with the use of EVIPNet tools and methodology.

The workshop evaluation through questionnaire gave to participant at the end of the workshop show that the need to increase and improve their capacity and ability to write Evidence Informed Policy Brief
and set up policy deliberative dialogue is very important for them. It is key and critical skills to do their daily work with the MPs from the parliament.

The material presented in the workshop for the majority of participants was:

- new
- applicable in their work setting
- relevant for their professional development
- relevant to understand the differences between systematic reviews, narrative reviews and meta-analyses
- relevant to understand the different steps to write an evidence informed policy brief
- relevant to understand how to describe, clarify and frame their problem and how to find, select and appraise the relevant evidence
- relevant to understand how to identify, describe, clarify and frame policy options and implementation considerations for each option
- relevant to understand the concepts on how to set up and organize policy dialogue
- relevant to be able to prepare a draft of policy brief and use the key databases

For the majority of participants, 5 days of workshop was neither long nor short.

All participants appreciate mix of large group and country team and the interactive and participatory approach and consider this capacity building workshop as a key opportunity to develop network opportunities.

The participants learned a lot from their boundaries countries.

The visual aids and/or handouts was relevant and useful for them.

The Evidence Informed Policy workshop was close by official ceremony from:
- Hon. Farah Maalim, Deputy Speaker National Assembly of Kenya, Member of Parliament (Lagdera Constituency)
- Dr. Moses Akaranga, Vice-Chairman, Information Africa Organization
- Mr. William Mibe, Executive Director, Information Africa

| Speech from Dr. Moses Akaranga, Vice-Chairman, Information Africa Organization for the closing ceremony |

Having served as a member of parliament and as a cabinet minister of this country, I am aware that policy making is a challenging task, especially for members of parliament who are expected today with 1) evidence based talking; 2) management of people and economic resource; and 3) expertise in all area of life.

[...] most of participant here with us today comes from parliament in sub-Sahara Africa and have been equipped with the skills to aid the members of parliament in their respective countries to cut out evidence informed policy making [...]

The partnership with the World Health Organization is recommendable and the sponsorship of this Evidence Informed Policy Making Network (EVIPNet) program have provided Information literacy and writing skills training for the staff in Africa for health issues.
EVIPNet is strategic to strengthen the link between policy and evidence of scientific research for health in developing countries like ours. Indeed EVIPNet was a response to resolution 5 of 58th world health assembly in Mexico.

In this resolution, a call was made to establish or strengthen mechanisms to transform knowledge in support of evidence based public health and health care delivered systems and evidence based health related policy. As a signatory to the resolution 5, we are in obligation to obey by the same resolution and **we are encouraged by our leader to organize more workshops for the benefit of our nation.** In this regard, I tend to thank with casual kind for tacking the initiative to have this workshop carried out in this part of the world. On behalf of the Information Africa Organization, the Information Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) and EVIPNet, I wish to sincerely thank **Honorable Farah Maalim, Deputy Speaker National Assembly of Kenya, Member of Parliament** for accepting to close the ceremony of the workshop.

#### 6. NEXT STEPS AND ACTIVITIES

EVIPNet, INASP and IAO will help each parliamentary country teams to finalize their draft health policy brief and compile the appraising of relevant evidence on each health topic.

The Evidence Informed Policy Network programme in WHO will explore and develop with INASP and IAO, how the EVIPNet Country teams can support and assist the African parliamentary staff in evidence policy briefs and national policy dialogue development.

#### 7. PARLIAMENT INSTITUTIONAL MODEL

In parliament institutional model, legislative power is used as the *agenda setter and the veto player.*

Agenda setting reflects the ability to control policies that replace the status quo.

Policies are mostly closer to agenda setter’s ideal position. Agenda setting power is stronger than veto power, in which legislative actors can only accept or reject the proposals but not amend them in favor of their preferred positions (Tsebelis, 2002, Matilla & Lane, 2001). Institutional models focus on formal procedural rules of decision making and preferences of actors to determine the legislative powers of the actors.

The evidence informed policy making will support and help the institution model to capture all realities of actual situation.

More empirical findings about the parliament policy making process are required to test accuracy of the predictions and assumptions of the institutional model (Hörl & Wonka, 2005).

In the parliament as well as the ministry level scientific advice, risk assessment and management have a key role in policy making. Many of the most high profile policy issues or policy problems are critically dependent on the input of scientists and researchers.

In each case, effective policy development requires both an effective scientific advisory system and appropriate use of evidence and advice on science and risk by Government (House of Commons London, 2006).

It appear relevant in policy making process that the key actions from policy makers should (House of Commons London, 2006):
• “think ahead and identify early the issues on which they need scientific advice and early public engagement, and where the evidence base is weak and should be strengthened;
• get a wide range of advice from the best sources, particularly when there is uncertainty;
• publish the evidence and analysis and all relevant papers”

It appear very important to increase and improve the skills and competencies from scientific experts and researchers officer in evidence informed policy making in the departments of house to ensure that the advice of advisory committees, and the reasoning behind it, can be understood and evaluated. The advisory committees with their advice assist in contingency planning. The progress of research and the implications of any new developments must be kept under continuous and open review.

Recommendations to have effective evidence informed policy making at parliament level

The strategy for the parliament to have an effective management of science and research across Government, which sought to place scientists and scientific advice and evidence at the heart of policy making (House of Commons London, 2006).

The Government as a whole, and all Government departments, will have adopted a culture of using sound scientific advice to inform policy development, delivery and departmental decision-making.

This should involve all major departments from parliament with direct access to ministers and departmental managers on all major policy issues and will have adopted a culture of using sound scientific advice to inform policy development, delivery and departmental decision-making.

All scientific work commissioned and used by Government will be of appropriately high quality, drawn from the best possible sources (including the science base and the private sector), commanding the confidence of Government ministers and officials. Government departments will be paying the full economic costs of the research they commission from universities.

Priorities for research will be set at the strategic level, not just within departments but also across government as a whole and will provide advice on the prioritisation of strategic issues. The use of science in policymaking will be applied consistently across the board where an issue affects more than one department.

Analysts, including scientists, will be able to network more effectively—within their own department, across departments, Research Councils, the private sector and internationally—to ensure awareness not just of research results already generated but also active research underway elsewhere.

Knowledge transfer objectives or Knowledge translation activities will be fully incorporated into departments’ S&I strategies, and scientific advice on procurement in Government departments will be seen as a natural and logical means of pulling through the development of new technologies.
8. Organization and structure of policy making at parliament level

The parliament have in general the government scientific committee which have regular meetings with ministers and permanent secretaries from different departments and agencies and leads ad hoc advisory groups focusing on specific issues. In parliament, in general there are several Cabinet committees and Scientific committee. The experts and advisers of MPs are economists, social researchers, statisticians and operational researchers. This pool of experts uses the methods of scientific enquiry such as surveys, qualitative research, analysis of administrative and statistical data, case studies and controlled trials to measure, describe, explain and predict social and economic change. This pool of experts and advisers will be able to provide to the government objectives and priorities, reliable, relevant and timely research to inform policy-making and delivery.