

Session 7: From Evidence to Impact

Understanding the 'How' and 'Why':

Understanding causality, conditions, systems, and sustainability mechanisms of change, contextual enablers and constraints, and moving beyond surface-level success stories.

Keynote Speaker

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June 2026

at the University of Ghana, Legon

- **Object** -----→ Social and economic impact
- **Subject**----- → Evidence
- **Social and economic impact** -requires robust evidence for appropriate policy making, program design and implementation.
- **Evidence**—systematically collected data, research findings, and evaluative information
 - —can improve development outcomes by guiding resource allocation,
 - informing policy choices, and enabling course correction in
 - implementation
- **Evidence-impact link depends on:** (i) quality of available evidence; (ii) moderating processes eg governance quality, institutional capacity (eg feedback loops), political economy dynamics.

Selected Highlights on Desired Impact...African Context No 3

- Sustainable economic growth
- Better public health outcomes
- Employment outcomes
- Strong education and skills development
- Stable democracy and governance
- Successful digital transformation
- Effective climate action

Ambitions:

- every \$ investment,
- every programme &
- every policy



should translate into

**Real and lasting
improvements in
people's lives.**

Cause for Concern-- The evidence-to-action ecosystem in Africa

Challenges abound in production, translation, and use of research in policy and practice in Africa:

- i. limited research funding and infrastructure (<1% of GDP);
- ii. capacity constraints (all actors);
- iii. weak institutional linkages;
- iv. political and contextual influences on policy and practice;
- v. inadequate knowledge translation mechanisms;
- vi. data quality and accessibility issues, and
- vii. sustainability and coordination problems.



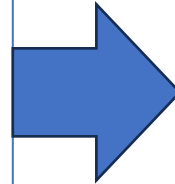
Lack/little/No Impact

- promising pilots that never scale up;
- reforms that look successful in reports but quietly fade once funding (donor-supported) ends;
- success stories with beautiful brochures, but get lost within 5 years;
- Short-lived progress tied to political cycles;
- Silo-type reforms that are not linked with anchoring support mechanisms –*water sector in Kenya*
- Evidence not translated into durable policy and practice due to weak feedback loops, political incentives, and institutional constraints.

Positives in Evidence Development in Africa But More is Required.....

Evidence revolution in development from beginning of the century

- A lot of data;
- Rigorous evaluations;
- Data bank of “what works”;
- Impact evaluations;
- Big data analytics;
- Demonstration effect;
- Regional and International pacts (MDGs, SDGs etc);
- African initiatives to strengthen evidence–impact nexus by institutionalizing evidence use and increasing domestic ownership;
- Building capacity for systematic evidence appraisal and use; and
- Participatory agenda-setting processes (Longterm development planning; policies, programmes etc)



- How does it work?
- Why does it work?
- For whom, and under what conditions?
- Is the translation context relevant?
- Causality and not a just correlation (studies proving that an intervention causes an outcome eg deworming schoolchildren increased school attendance and later earnings in Kenya)
- The Mechanisms Question.....>>

Mechanisms linking Research Data and Experiential Knowledge to Public Decision and Implementation

A) Translating evidence into policy and practice in Africa

- i. Formal governmental structures and processes,
- ii. intermediary and knowledge-brokering institutions,
- iii. Donor and regional initiatives, and
- iv. Learning-oriented implementation practices.

B) Actors and Institutions

- i. Executives (presidents, cabinets), parliaments, judiciaries.
- ii. Subnational governments, traditional authorities, religious leaders.
- iii. Civil society, trade unions, private sector, regional bodies and development partners.

C) Decision-Making Mechanisms

- Legislation and parliamentary processes.
- Executive decrees, policy papers, national development plans.
- Consultations, public hearings, referenda and participatory budgeting (varies widely).

D) Key Challenges and Trends

- Balancing growth with equity, environment and social cohesion.
- Managing external influence (donors, lenders, investors) with domestic priorities.
- Growing roles of digital tools, data, and civic activism in shaping public decisions.
- VUCA environment (reduced predictability)

All Hands on the DeckWhat should we do ?

>>Policy makers and Senior government officials

- For all new governance reforms obtain answers for critical questions on evidence on mechanisms of the change (details, institutions, preconditions)
- Ensure reforms are supported by sufficient learning/capacity building
- Build national monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems inside government, not only for donors.
- Support pilot projects that are explicitly designed to test and adapt, not just to scale immediately.
- Shape politically smart reform coalitions
- Identify reform champions beyond a single ministry—inside parliament, civil society, professional associations, and local government.
- Use political windows—elections, crises, leadership transitions—to advance feasible, context-sensitive reforms.

All Hands on the DeckWhat should we do ?

>>Researchers, Think Tanks and Evaluators

- Design studies that examine mechanisms and the context;
- Inquire into why and how reforms work out by combining quantitative methods (e.g., impact evaluations) with qualitative approaches;
- Consider and document implementation politics—who resisted, who supported, how coalitions shifted;
- Co-produce and share governance knowledge;
- To improve definition of research questions and interpretation of findings, engage officials, civil society and communities widely;
- Translate evidence into practical insights for decision-makers—short notes, dialogues, and tools; and
- Ensure that findings achieve external validity within Africa.

All Hands on the DeckWhat should we do ?

>>Practitioners and development Partners

- Ensure that all reform matters are dealing with real problems, not presenting ready-made solutions ;
- Work with governments and communities to identify locally salient problems and then jointly explore options.
- Support adaptive, problem-driven approaches
- Use a combination of instruments: financing, technical assistance, policy dialogues
- Be honest to admit what is not working, not just polished success stories.
- Invest in African governance capacities and institutions-very important
- Support regional and national schools of government, public administration institutes, audit and statistics bodies, and evaluation societies.
- Strengthen networks that allow African practitioners to learn from each other's governance reforms.

General Opportunities to Improve Evidence to Action

- A deeper understanding of causality—how reforms actually change behaviour and power.
- A serious engagement with African contexts—political settlements, social norms, and historical legacies.
- A systems perspective that aims not just for model projects, but for capable, resilient institutions.
- A commitment to learning and adaptation, moving beyond surface-level success stories to durable improvements in how our states serve our people.
- Move beyond “**What works**” to “**How, why, for whom, and under what African conditions?**”

Opportunities to Strengthen Transmission Mechanisms

- Investments in statistical capacity and administrative data systems;
- Support local research institutions and knowledge brokers,
- Reforms that enhance transparency and parliamentary oversight to deepen the integration of evidence into decision-making;
- Embed learning in implementation to bridge the gap between policy documents and real-world outcomes;
- **Note:** Effective mechanisms are critical for African countries to pursue and achieve their ambitious development agendas commonly captured in Visions, Development plans and political party manifestos

END

Thank you