AFRICAN PARLIAMENTS

*Evidence systems for governance
and development*

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

3D	Three-dimensional
4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
ACRES	Centre for Rapid Evidence Synthesis
AFIDEP	African Institute for Development Policy
AFLI	Africa Leadership Institute
AfrEA	African Evaluation Association
ALP	African Legislature Project
APNODE	African Parliamentarians' Network on Development Evaluation
BDP	Botswana Democratic Party
BEPP	Bureau of Evaluation of Public Policies
BEPPAAG	Bureau of Evaluation of Public Policies and Government Action Analysis
BVR	Biometric Voter Registration
CDFs	Constituency Development Funds
CSC	Committee Score Card
CSIR	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DPME	Department of Performance (later planning) Monitoring and Evaluation
DRS	Department of Research Services (DRS)
EALA	East African Legislative Assembly
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EIDM	Evidence-Informed Decision-Making
ETWG	Evaluation Technical Working Group
EVI	Electronic Voter Identification
FES	Friedrich Ebert Foundation
FRELIMO	Frente de Libertação de Moçambique
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEF	Government Evaluation Facility
GNPBO	Global Network of Parliament Budget Offices
GPFE	Global Parliamentarians' Forum on Evaluation
GTAC	Government Technical Assistance Centre
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HR	Human Resources
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IDS	Institute of Development Studies

IIAG	Ibrahim Index of African Governance
INASP	International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications
IoT	Internet of Things
IPAB	Benin Parliamentary Institute
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
KEWOPA	Kenya Women Parliamentary Association
KEWOSA	Kenya Women Senators Association
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDAs	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MEJN	Malawi Economic Justice Network
MPs	Members of Parliament
MPL	Members of Provincial Legislatures
NCOP	National Council of Provinces
NEDLC	National Economic Development and Labour Council
NES	National Evaluation System
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NMETWG	National M&E Technical Working Group
NPM	New Public Management
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PARMAN	Project for Support of the Strengthening and Modernization of the National Assembly
PBOs	Parliamentary Budget Offices
PC-EIDM	Parliamentary Caucus on Evidence-Informed Oversight and Decision-Making
PCOs	Parliamentary Constituency Offices
PFMA	Public Finance Management Act
POT	Parliamentary Oversight Tool
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PRS	Parliamentary Research Service
RSP	Revolutionary State Party
RTS	Results Transmission System
SADC-PF	Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum
SCOA	Standing Committee on Appropriations
SCOPA	Standing Committee on Public Accounts
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
Stats SA	Statistics South Africa
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation

UNACEB	State Budget Control and Assessment Analysis Unit
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
VOPES	Voluntary Organisations of Professional Evaluators
WBI	World Bank Institute
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front
ZEPARU	Zimbabwe Economic Policy and Analysis Research Unit

**POSITIONING AFRICAN
PARLIAMENTS TO USE EVIDENCE
EFFECTIVELY IN SHAPING
DEVELOPMENTAL AND
DEMOCRATIC FUTURES**

Tania Ajam

Introduction

The previous chapters in this volume have highlighted the importance of parliamentarians using sound evidence in policymaking. Credible evidence provides parliaments with deeper insight into policy dilemmas, the service delivery and financial performance of public sector organisations, programmes and projects, and the effectiveness (or otherwise) of government regulation. These insights could enhance parliamentarians' oversight, lawmaking, budget appropriation and representation roles. It is clear, however, that while evidence is a prominent component of decision-making, it is only one of many competing factors that ultimately influence decision-making within parliaments. Successful realisation of these benefits also depends on the nature of the political culture and party dynamics.

This concluding chapter aims firstly to synthesise the themes emerging from previous chapters in this volume and to explore future directions for building the institutional capability of parliaments to systematically use evidence in pursuit of their core mandates of lawmaking, oversight, representation, and budget appropriation. It considers the kinds of investments that parliaments need to make to successfully support good governance at the level of the institution as a whole, at the level of parliamentary committees, and at the level of the individual MP. The focus is both on the use of evidence *by* parliament in executing its functions as well as the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) *of* parliament itself as a critical institution of democracy. The chapter concludes by presenting the implications of the volume's key findings on practice as well as avenues for further research.

Emerging themes and lessons from the Volume

Key themes emerged from this volume which are critical to understanding parliamentary evidence systems. These provide a useful foundation for efforts to support parliaments to systematise evidence use and function transformatively as institutions of good governance on the African continent and elsewhere. These themes also provide a sound foundation for further research in the area and can be classified into three broad areas. First, **the macro governance context of evidence use in parliaments**. This highlights the need to understand parliamentary functions within the broader development context as this influences the incentives for evidence use. In the preceding chapters of

this volume contributors emphasised that evidence use is inherently political and highlighted the need to examine the effects of neopatrimonialism and systems of patronage on parliaments which are themselves institutions of power contestation.

Secondly, **the micro governance context of evidence in parliaments** reiterates the importance of understanding parliaments' internal processes and structures that may hinder or support evidence systems. These include efforts in strengthening the supply of evidence and paying attention to factors such as evidence sources and the nature and presentation of evidence. Furthermore, the role of parliamentary structures such as portfolio committees has been emphasised, as these are the engines of parliament and critical hubs for evidence use. Further, parliaments' values, incentives, and disincentives to use evidence have been discussed extensively in this volume and have been identified as critical drivers of parliamentarians use of evidence.

Lastly, the volume has made significant contributions in examining **the internal and external structures, processes and approaches that contribute to systematising the use of evidence in parliaments**. Fundamental considerations in strengthening systems of evidence in parliaments include enhancing parliamentarians' roles in fostering inclusive public participation in decision-making; nurturing parliamentary evidence use champions; strengthening leadership commitment for systematising use of evidence; and institutionalising systems of evidence use. These key themes are discussed and implications and recommendations for future practice in strengthening systems of evidence use in parliaments are provided.

The macro governance context of legislative evidence use

Before focusing on individual parliaments and the micro-governance dimensions at the level of parliamentary committees or individual MPs, it is useful to gain a broader understanding of the external macro governance factors which may shape the demand for and supply of evidence use in legislatures. These include the orientation of parliaments (rubber-stamp, emerging, informed or transformative legislatures); their historical institutional development trajectories, whether they are bicameral or unicameral, whether the system of government is presidential, parliamentary or hybrid in nature, the balance of power between parliaments and executives and the tenor of this relationship, the political culture, power dynamics between governing and

opposition parties; the role Speakers of parliament, committee chairs, political party whips and other parliamentary structures, to name just a few. All of these environmental factors shape the inclination and aptitude of stakeholders within African parliaments to demand, create or apply evidence in pursuing their mandates.

As alluded to by Morkel and Bradshaw (2021) and Masvaure et al. (2021) earlier in this volume, most African parliaments emerged as artefacts of a European colonial past and, to this day, retain some of those inherited features. While European legislatures (such as France and the United Kingdom) were born of the struggles to wrest power from kings and establish a democratic order for their own (male) citizens, these same legislatures were happy to impose slavery and colonialism on the territories they had subjugated. Universal female suffrage was a much later historical development. For example, a Legislative Assembly was established in 1850 in the British Gold Coast as an advisory body to the colonial governor without any meaningful legislative authority or representation from the majority of the population. Similarly, Zimbabwe also inherited a Westminster style system of government, with a political culture which relegated oversight to opposition MPs rather than regarding it as an obligation of parliament as an institution. The same would apply to South Africa.

After independence, many African countries adopted a series of constitutions which shaped the institutional development of their parliaments. Thereafter, extensive periods of one-party politics followed in some African countries and, in some cases, their history was punctuated by military regimes which periodically dissolved parliaments. While parliaments continued to merely fine-tune legislation crafted by the executive and perfunctorily perform the rituals of oversight and accountability in form, in substance they submissively yielded to executive dominance by enacting laws and policies which favoured post-colonial elites, often further entrenching inequality. The reduction of parliaments to rubber-stamping entities was often accompanied by curtailment of the freedom of the media and civil society. The role of parliaments in budget approval was often simply ceremonial.

With the strengthening of multiparty democracy, calls were made for African parliaments to play a more activist role in shaping their country's development, and with these reforms came the need to strengthen institutional capability to execute that role. The Yaoundé Declaration of African Parliamentarians on Evaluation in 2014 recognised the important role played by (particularly

evaluation) evidence in national decision-making and this included the crucial role of parliamentarians in ensuring evaluation evidence is used for strengthening decision-making.

Parliaments' functions within the broader development context

Notably, the broader development context shapes how parliaments are structured as state institutions, with parliaments themselves encompassing multiple spaces and structures of power. The international development agenda continues to be embedded in global and national socioeconomic inequalities and is beset with systems of power and patronage, for example, international donors and neoliberal agendas continue to dominate development efforts. Moreover, the rise of the New Public Administration bolstered the need for systems of governance, compliance, and accountability with parliaments functioning as critical role players (Morkel & Bradshaw, 2021). MPs play critical roles in shifting attitudes from EIPM practices being founded on bureaucracy and compliance principles which overlook citizen needs, towards supporting more transformative evidence practices that are anchored on achieving development outcomes and ensuring the representation of citizens in policy-making agendas. There has been growing recognition of the importance and relevance of EIPM with parliaments' roles as institutions of good governance acknowledged as critically important. This volume has explored parliaments' roles as transformative institutions of good governance and their significance to systematising evidence use in policymaking to ensure that development programmes meet their intended objectives in improving citizens' livelihoods.

The political nature of evidence use

The nonlinearity and political nature of evidence has been a central theme throughout this volume. Parliaments and individual MPs are deeply embedded in power relations and value contestations which inherently shape what evidence is demanded, selected, and, ultimately, used for policymaking. At a macro level, party politics and systems of patronage are part and parcel of the neopatrimonial state culture which can be expressed in individuals being incentivised to be and to remain in positions of power for personal and party political gains (Khumalo et al., 2021). Party politics in parliaments play out in electoral incentive systems where MPs strive to be voted back in by maintaining party allegiance while simultaneously ensuring they remain loyal and maintain populism with their constituents. Evidence use needs to be understood

alongside these complexities as policy decision-making intertwines different norms, values, power, influences and authority and evidence cannot therefore be viewed merely as a neutral, objective tool for more effective decision-making.

In the politically charged governance arena of the legislature, the use (or rejection) and interpretation of evidence is quintessentially political; that is, conditioned by divergent values, ideologies and opinions; competing wants, needs and opposing interests vying for power and staking claim to limited resources and the changing dynamics of conflict and cooperation among rival stakeholder groupings. Evidence of poor performance could be 'weaponised' by opposition parties to cast the ruling party in a bad light and ignored or suppressed by defensive MPs of the ruling party intent on deflecting criticism rather than on improving performance.

Another factor which inhibits the use of evidence in decision-making is the (frequently non-transparent) political party funding system. Newly elected MPs, beholden to the funders of their political party election campaigns, may be pressured into facilitating the award of contracts and kickbacks to their benefactors, as well as patronage appointments. Under these circumstances, there is little incentive to consider evidence. This entrenches neopatrimonialism among political elites, and further marginalises representation of groups like women, persons with disabilities, and the rural poor who are deemed risky candidates offering a lower probability of returns on investment. This creates a market for political influence with political entrepreneurs rewarded for putting party and/or self-interest above the legitimate aspirations of their citizens or constitutional responsibilities. Voter alienation and apathy are exacerbated as the public perception of parliaments' legitimacy and performance declines, as has been shown in public opinion surveys such as the Afrobarometer. These political dynamics prevail in much of the developed and developing world, and Africa is certainly no exception.

The micro governance context of evidence in parliaments

Parliaments' internal processes and structures that affect evidence systems: institution-wide, committees and MPs

The incentive of African parliaments to demand evidence, and the opportunity and capacity to use evidence in their core business activities depend largely

their governance structures, parliamentary procedures and leadership, the control and deployment of resources, and the complex interactions among political parties, all of which exist in a dynamic politically charged context. Parliaments enact legislation for the establishment and operation of NESs.

Senior political leadership and structures (such as the Speaker and presiding officers, leaders of the majority and opposition parties, the leader of government business, the whippers and procedural and liaison committees) shape decision-making, the business of parliament and possibilities for the SUE, the rules of parliament, programming, the time parliament has to deliberate and perform its functions, the deployment of MPs as parliamentary committee chairs and other offices, and the sequence and timing of voting procedures. Party whips may enforce party leader's agendas through disciplinary processes despite evidence to the contrary.

Informal institutions, despite being somewhat less tangible and structured, are equally critical drivers of, or barriers to, evidence use. These informal institutions include the political values and culture of transparency, accountability and genuine public participation, the organisational culture of the administration of parliament, the incentives/disincentives for evidence use, political values and commitment to evidence use, and power relations in parliament's interaction with the executive and various levels of government and state entities. There may be trade-offs, tensions and synergies among these factors, which are dynamic, fluid, unfold over time, and occur across various spatial locations.

There is often a gap between formal institutions which may explicitly favour evidence use, and the informal, often tacit, institutions which may actively undermine its use. Therefore, while legislation, regulation and protocols may nominally exist, they may often not be enforced. The formal institutions often set out how evidence should be used, but the informal institutions determine how it is used in practice. Constrained financial resources are sometimes cited as barriers to effective evidence use but limited budgets are often symptomatic of a lack of political will which places low value and priority on evidence use. Conversely, as resources and capacity have increased in some parliaments, the quality of oversight has declined. The Parliament of South Africa, for instance, failed to combat state capture during the Zuma administration (2009-2018) and, despite greater resources and capacity, performed worse than it had in the first decade after democratic elections in 1994 (Ajam, 2020). Parliaments

like EALA have committed, as far as possible, to a dedicated budget line for the professional development of MPs and support staff and for evidence generation and use.

Trust (or lack thereof) is another important informal institution. Some MPs tend to prefer evidence they themselves have requested or evidence from internal sources rather than from external sources, especially when the standpoints of those sources do not resonate with their own perspectives. This points to the need not only to build institutional linkages but also to adopt more relational approaches to building credibility and trust. The application of evidence is often selective. Opposition parties, for instance, may prefer to ignore evaluative evidence which suggests good performance by government programmes or institutions. There may be little agreement on the quality of evidence.

It is often the operations of portfolio committees that are most amenable to evidence use, as there is generally more time for deliberation, the MPs are familiar with colleagues, and there is personalised support from committee staff and researchers, especially on policy issues which are uncontroversial. In parliaments like Ghana, the lack of adequate meeting rooms and staff shortages requires administrative staff to support multiple committees and this constrains effective committee performance. Neither committees nor support staff may be aware of evaluations already undertaken in NES and may also be unaware of forthcoming evaluations. This lack of knowledge results in research products not drawing sufficiently on NES evaluations.

The nature of democratic elections means considerable turnover of MPs and hence a continuous need for training and capacity building for new parliamentarians. These induction programmes should cover the roles and responsibilities, structures and processes in parliaments and the executive. Ideally, these should integrate evidence use within the scope of the other orientation dimensions. Low rates of returning members can result in a loss of institutional memory and the inexperienced new incumbents may be unfamiliar with parliamentary processes and procedures and may take some time to become functional.

MPs navigate the contested spaces between their constitutional role which tends to support evidence use, political party allegiances (which often do not), the interests of their constituents (who may not fully understand their constitutional role), and personal self-interest. This is especially true in settings

where public office confers status and income which individuals otherwise would not be able to access, and they face considerable pressure to provide services far beyond the public representative function. Once elected, MPs earn salaries which are high relative to the degree of poverty in their countries, have access to perks like favourable loans on new cars and subsidised accommodation, have control over funding for constituency development, and have increased access to networks for business opportunities. For MPs of the governing party, deployment as a minister becomes an attainable prospect should they find favour with party bosses. Simply waiting for directives from party superiors to dictate their positions may be an easier path to career advancement and, conversely, being the bearer of unwelcome evidence may well be severely career limiting.

Many social groups, such as women, the disabled, and youth are still largely excluded from parliaments despite their rising numbers. This limits their political visibility and influence in marshalling the evidence that would support their causes. National issues that are often pursued by female parliamentarians include healthcare, water, food security, waste management, disaster and risk management, public procurement, youth, environmental sustainability, and marriage-related issues. Even when elected, youth and women may be relegated to lower echelons in the party hierarchy (such as women's leagues or youth league) with limited participation in party policymaking or decisions. The increasing presence of female MPs in Kenya led to the formation of the Kenya Women Parliamentary Association (KEWOPA) and the Kenya Women Senators Association (KEWOSA) which engage and train women members to enhance their contributions to parliamentary debates. In other cases, multiparty gender caucuses have been less successful in championing the gendered use of evidence.

Strengthening the supply of evidence

Evidence is typically drawn from a broad range of sources including written and oral answers to questions by the executive, petition processes, oversight reports by parliamentary committees, routine administrative data from government services on their operations, more in-depth research, reviews and evaluation studies (which build deeper understanding about performance and beneficiary needs and impact), survey data from national statistical agencies which can provide data on outcomes, other reports from the executive, petitions, whistle-blower testimony, reports of statutory bodies (the Auditor-General, the human

rights commissions and the inspectorate of government), oral and written information from civil society stakeholders, the media and research institutions. Opposition parties often draw on evidence in alternative policy statements, Bill analysis reports, issue briefs, minority reports, sectoral briefs, analytical reports, statements, motions, oversight reports, accountability reports and questions. The use of formal external evaluations tends to be very limited due, inter alia, to the urgency of decisions needed, and the relatively long time required to execute effective evaluations.

It is critical that parliaments diversify their sources of rigorous evidence and that they are not overly dependent on the executive for evidence through official reporting lines. Moreover, they need to develop sufficient internal research and policy analysis capacity to independently verify reporting by the executive. To this end, they need to cooperate with a range of other institutions, such as the supreme audit institution, other institutions supporting democracy such as independent ombuds, and academia.

Internally produced evidence (by parliamentary researchers, PBOs, legal advisors and policy analysts, etc.) is preferred due to ease of access, quick turnaround times to meet tight – and often unpredictable – programming deadlines, and its customisation to the specific needs of committees and MPs. Internally sourced evidence is frequently perceived to be more independent and hence more credible than that provided by the executive. In countries with an NES, internally produced evidence typically reflects only tenuous links with governments' formal evaluation programmes.

Internal sources of evidence

Within the parliamentary ecosystem, there are a number of organisational structures which interact as knowledge managers, linkage agents, and capacity builders and this interaction is pivotal to institutionalising and systematising the use of evidence. Such structures include the Table Office (which mediates between the Office of the Speaker and MPs in managing the activities in the Chamber during plenaries), committee administrative support structures, libraries, parliamentary research units, information, and communication technology (ICT) units and (relatively recently established) PBOs. Hansard – the official publication of parliamentary proceedings – also plays an important role in preserving institutional memory. Many of these structures lack capacity, skills

and funding to perform effectively. Libraries, for example, are often chronically under-funded and struggle to afford subscriptions to electronic resources (especially when these are paid in foreign currencies).

ICT departments play an important role in designing the information architecture, rolling out and maintaining the necessary infrastructure, and the oversight of related policies. This includes managing the parliament's website, email servers, the intranet, business continuity and – increasingly important – cybersecurity. Various communications and public participation units may also be engaged in generating video and audio electronic records and distributing them to all media, including social media. Increasingly ICT departments are also playing a lead role in leading digitisation in parliaments such as Kenya and South Africa.

As in-house structures of parliament, research units, libraries, committee support staff and PBOs are easily accessible to MPs but may fail to timeously meet the demand for evidence by MPs due to insufficient staff and vacant posts, inadequate budgets, inappropriate skill-sets and the broad territorial scope of the research required. There may also be ineffective coordination of these structures, with overlapping roles and responsibilities which are not always well delineated. The number of researchers varies widely across parliaments: Malawi had about 5 researchers, Ghana 10 researchers (for 275 members), Zimbabwe 15 researchers (for 350 members of parliament), Kenya around 31 and South Africa around 50 researchers. These institutional arrangements are described in greater detail in the case studies in Volume 2 of this series.

It is becoming increasingly important that internal knowledge brokers within parliaments coordinate their efforts to provide seamless access to credible information which is required by MPs when they want it and how they want it (format, medium). Since 2016, the relevant components within the Ghanaian parliamentary service (research, library, ICT, Hansard, committees, Table Office, and the Journals and Public Affairs department) have collaborated and coordinated their activities through the steering committee and various technical committees of the Inter-Departmental Research and Information Group (IDRIG), culminating in the launch of a service charter in 2019.

The challenges which confront portfolio committees are often highly technical, cross-sectoral and multi-disciplinary in nature. Faced with very tight turnaround times, parliamentary researchers must synthesise many disparate information

sources succinctly and accessibly in their policy briefs. With the increased depth and volume of new scientific knowledge, many researchers and other content providers as generalists struggle with the very specialised research topics which confront them. Under this circumstance, quality assurance of internally produced research reports and briefs becomes very challenging. In some cases, external experts can be contracted to serve as consultants, but budget constraints often render this option unfeasible.

External sources of evidence

In many countries there are independent institutions supporting democracy which could provide objective information and analysis to African parliaments such as auditors-general, public protectors and other ombuds, human rights and gender commissions, public service commissions, etc. Specialised research institutes and policy think-tanks associated with the executive could be useful sources of evidence (e.g the Zimbabwe Economic Policy and Analysis Research Unit (ZEPARU) aligned to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, and the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation in South Africa). Similarly, in South Africa, parliamentary committees have established relationships with a number of government research institutions including the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and Statistics South Africa (Stats SA).

Given parliament's reliance on evaluative evidence generated through an NES, the independence and objectiveness of the evaluators is of prime importance. Inclusion of a broad array of key external evidence producing stakeholders (research and policy think-tanks, CSOs, e.g. for health and education, and higher education institutions) can enhance the transparency, rigour and independence of the evaluation function. Some of these organisations generate their own evaluative evidence while others, like the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP) in Kenya, synthesise secondary research to meet the needs of MPs.

Some of these organisations may be advocating for certain policies or interventions and hence favour evidence and interpretations supporting their missions and downplaying or ignoring evidence to the contrary. It is critical for parliaments to canvass as broadly as possible on policy issues, especially from poor and marginalised communities, including oral evidence in all official languages and sign language.

Engagement with institutions of higher learning could also be an important source of affordable access to the latest evaluative evidence for parliaments (e.g. the Centre for Rapid Evidence Synthesis (ACRES) based at Makerere University in Uganda) through accessibly written policy briefs, position papers, and responses to calls from committees for submissions. While academic sources of evaluative evidence tend to be more balanced and verifiable, they are often too complicated, theoretical, and abstract, and generally take too long to produce to be responsive to parliamentarians' short-term, and often unpredictable, requests. The Department of Research Services (DRS) in Uganda has also, though a memorandum of understanding with the Uganda National Academy of Sciences, facilitated joint projects and the secondment of young graduate scientists volunteering to be seconded to the DRS to share their expertise, promote the uptake of scientific evidence while being trained on policymaking and scientific communication.

The media can also play an important role in awareness raising and providing evidence on policy issues which influence agenda setting in parliamentary debates and committee work. The quality of media output is variable. While certain articles offer deeper insights based on fact checking and sound research, others are much less rigorous. The media itself may not be completely independent or free and could possibly be biased by commercial or government interests. Overreliance by MPs on media sources without other diverse complementary evidence sources is unadvisable. There are few journalists who specialise in parliamentary reporting but, for those who do, there is a risk that they could become embedded and co-opted.

The rise of the internet and social media has lessened the power of commercial interests and governments to control the media, resulting in greater public participation in newsmaking, including citizen journalism where the mainstream media draws on mobile phones and social media to generate eyewitness content and 'alternative' journalism platforms. This has given citizens' 'voice', disrupted mainstream power configurations in public life, and helped to enforce accountability by the executive and by parliament. While new information and communication technologies open up new possibilities for unprecedented civic engagement and public participation through social media, ubiquitous 'fake news' and other forms of unverified propaganda, as well as lack of cybersecurity, could destabilise democratic processes. Regrettably, cyberspace also opens up

the door to hate speech and racism, misogyny and violence against women and children, terrorism, undue influence on electoral processes, unfounded allegations, and a host of other ills.

The convergence of technologies in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) such as digitisation, artificial intelligence, and big data, introduces both risks and opportunities. A deluge of unverified, real-time information may undermine – rather than improve – the quality of evidence used in decision-making. It is also critical that the social and economic inequalities which bedevil the physical world are not replicated and perpetuated in cyberspace, widening the gaping chasm of the digital divide.

CSOs can also play a critical role in the evaluation of parliaments, hold MPs accountable, incentivise MPs to improve their performance and, in some cases, also provide capacity-building support to parliaments. These include Parliament Watch in Uganda, Mzalendo in Kenya, Open Parly in Zimbabwe and the Parliamentary Monitoring Group in South Africa, among others. The relationships between these CSOs and the parliaments they focus on may often be fraught with tensions. The CSOs are often critiqued by parliamentarians for painting an uncomplimentary picture of the performance of parliament and the ruling party. These tensions may be exacerbated when CSOs monitoring parliament rely on funding from donors or independent foundations. Parliaments, on the other hand, may frustrate the CSOs access to information and attendance at parliamentary activities in subtle or blatant ways. For example, public committee meetings may be held in camera or may end in closed ‘working lunches’ unobserved by the public. If there are constitutional/statutory rights to freedom of information and public participation and an independent judiciary, then CSOs may have some form of legal recourse.

Internal and external structures, processes and approaches that contribute to systematising the use of evidence in parliaments

Strengthening evidence use by parliaments will need to build on the emerging good practices while mitigating barriers to systematising use of evidence. Strengthening practices that call for the routine demand of evidence by MPs and instituting criteria that trigger further production of evidence where specific gaps or contradictions emerge are crucial for institutionalising the demand

for evidence by parliaments. This can be complemented by strengthening the technical skills of the parliamentary service support staff who play vital knowledge brokerage roles. The critical assessment of the impact of parliament and preparation of insightful and robust M&E reports on internal performance also play an important role in this regard. Dedicated parliamentary M&E units can also perform a pivotal brokering role in evaluation and evidence use, e.g. through housing databases of CSOs who are key evidence providers and linking them with the relevant parliamentary committees of parliament and other forms of knowledge management and information sharing. This can expand the sources of evidence available to parliaments to exercise oversight over the executive and ensure that its decisions consider the viewpoints of divergent groups in society.

Enhancing systems of evidence production (through NESs and internal research and policy advice) may increase the supply of accurate, reliable, timely and relevant evidence. This increased demand may result in improved quality of information and analysis. This needs to be complemented by initiatives that strengthen the demand and usage of evidence through consensus and cross-party collaboration that promote the credibility of parliament as an institution, supported by a political will hold the executive accountable and following up and acting on the evidence presented and the recommendations emanating from evaluations.

Strengthening leadership commitment for systematising use of evidence

The commitment of the political leaders in parliament to support the demand, supply and systemic use of evidence may perhaps be the critical factor that determines success within the contested and resource-constrained environment faced by African parliaments. Strengthening this commitment requires consideration of the macro and micro governance context of parliament and parliament's ability to engage with diverse constituencies through meaningful public participation.

Nurturing parliamentary evidence use champions

There are a number of parliamentary networks operating at global, regional and local levels such as the African Parliamentarians Network on Development Evaluation (APNODE) and its national chapters, the Global Parliamentarians' Forum on Evaluation (GPFE), Kenya's Parliamentary Caucus on Evidence-

Informed Oversight and Decision-Making (PC-EIDM), the International Parliamentary Union and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Such network organisations have been found to contribute positively to strengthening parliaments' eco-systems of evidence by knowledge sharing. In many cases they are not part of the formal parliamentary structure of specific parliaments and tend to rely on external development partners for support. This external funding tends to focus more on secretariat functions and capacity building support rather than on networking activities. As a result, some of these network organisations may face binding budget constraints which hinder their activities. Such networks advocating for evidence use in policymaking and for MPs being central players have been very instrumental in fostering a culture of evaluation in parliaments. For example, evidence champions have emerged from these platforms and it is evident that key parliamentary leaders – such as speakers of parliament – who champion evidence use in their parliaments have more influence and also nurture peer exchange with other parliaments.

However, the maintenance of institutional memory has been a challenge when key parliamentary champions are not voted back into parliament. For instance, capacity-building programmes may suffer setbacks if their erstwhile champions fail to be re-elected. This points to the need to strengthen ties between knowledge brokers inside the administrative support structures of parliament and other stakeholders to ensure that conduits for evidence remain functional.

Parliaments and public participation

As Chapters 7 and 8 have highlighted, the capacity of parliaments to engage in genuine public participation lies at the heart of its representative role and the democratic project. For most African parliaments, consultation and engagement with citizens is constitutionally or legally mandatory. Parliaments are representatives of the people and, as such, are central to the establishment of an effective relationship between government and its citizens. Citizen engagement is a prerequisite to ensuring that development outcomes, especially those pertaining to underrepresented populations, are heard and recognised in parliaments' decision-making agendas. UN Women has highlighted the crucial role that African parliaments can play in promoting gender equality and social inclusion and in raising awareness around the imperative for an integrated focus on generating and using evidence on gender equality and equity within the framing of the SDGs, including contextual gendered power relations and how they impact on development.

The outcries of poverty-stricken citizens and their yearning for improved circumstances and livelihoods have manifested in constituencies expecting MPs to support them by meeting their basic immediate needs rather than participating in longer-term community development objectives. Citizens' expectations include reliance on MPs for family and community needs such as support for funerals and school fees thereby rendering the representation function more complex for MPs. It is important that parliaments are not captured by powerful interest groups but ensure that a wide range of different beliefs, ideologies and interests are expressed and represented in deliberations. In practice, however, not all voices are heard. Often the voices of the politically sophisticated, powerful, and organised groups which receive the most attention while the voices of other groups are marginalised or silenced. MPs and parties may mobilise constituents and other stakeholders to appear before committees and bolster their stance and influence decisions in their favour.

Institutionalising systems of evidence use

In Chapter 3 of this volume, Masvaure et al. reject a reductionist approach to systems thinking in favour of a holistic approach which recognises the importance of the interconnectedness between the various components of parliamentary evidence systems. This is aligned with the precept of *evidence-informed policymaking* which recognises that policy decision-making is affected by myriad factors such as values and ideologies as well as the political considerations demonstrated in this volume.

Strengthening African parliaments through national evaluation systems

The fundamental role of national evaluation systems (NESs) in institutionalising evidence systems in parliaments is highlighted by Chirau et al. in Chapter 4. Parliaments are inherently evaluative institutions, both internally and externally. To oversee the executive, parliaments demand evaluative evidence from their technical departments and their partnerships with evidence producers such as CSOs and academia. Moreover, parliaments increasingly invest not just in research departments but also in M&E units/departments to ensure that the important function of monitoring their internal performance against their core mandates is achieved. M&E policies in countries like Uganda have been instrumental to fostering leadership, including parliamentarians' appreciation of the role of institutionalising evidence for effective policymaking. However,

the use of evaluations for policymaking is still limited and remains a challenge. This is attributable to the long time periods and extensive financial resources that are required to conduct evaluations, especially impact evaluations. Moreover, there remain limited instances of parliaments themselves producing evaluations, although there is evidence of some parliamentary committees demanding evaluations from the executive.

In principle, NESs offer a huge advantage for parliaments wanting to exercise oversight over progress towards a national development plan since they allow legislatures to access evaluations regularly across the whole of the executive, rather than the occasional ad hoc evaluation. NESs are, however, generally driven by the executive which sets out national M&E policy on how evaluations are prioritised, conducted and used, designates a national M&E champion, and provides a framework for enhancing the quality, coverage, usefulness and dissemination of evaluative evidence, building the requisite capacity, integrating with evidence-based planning and promoting the utilisation and sharing of data.

It is evident from the case studies explored in this book that NESs are at different stages of maturity. While there have been some gains (e.g. identification of gaps in the legislative framework for M&E and clarification of roles and responsibilities – including of parliament), the culture of demanding M&E information to improve decision-making and performance still has to be embedded, the quality of evaluations may be inconsistent, funding for evaluations may be uncertain, and an emphasis on monitoring may still predominate.

Links between knowledge brokers within the executive and parliament may not be formalised and MPs may either be unaware of or not have access to evaluations and associated improvement plans based on their recommendations. Similarly, links between parliaments and national statistics systems may still be weak with parliaments relying more on administrative datasets. From a legislative perspective, parliamentarians may feel that the executive should not be evaluating itself in the NES and that evaluations should be independent. In this volume, Chirau et al. highlight the need for formal linkages between the executive structures and parliamentary internal institutions to ensure that evaluations are demanded and that evaluation findings are subsequently implemented to ensure programme development.

The early experience of the newly established Department of Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) in the Presidency of South Africa highlights the importance of regular interactions with the Committee of Chairs of Portfolio Committees to raise awareness about the NES and evaluations undertaken, stimulate demand for evaluative evidence among MPs and parliamentary researchers, the parliamentary budget office and other internal knowledge brokers. In Benin and South Africa, evaluations are made publicly available through a website to facilitate access to the broader public. Links between evaluations and planning and budgeting are still not as strong as they could be. The Government Technical Assistance Centre (GTAC) in the National Treasury of South Africa has also undertaken many performance and expenditure reviews which are more closely aligned to budgeting and are available to the public on its website.

Future directions in building the capacity for systematic evidence use by African parliaments

Much of the focus has historically been on the tangible, technical and logistical capacity of parliaments such as skills, budgets, management systems, legislative or procedural frameworks, information flows, definition of roles and responsibilities. Initially interventions targeted skills development and knowledge sets among individual MPs and support staff, but there has been increasing recognition that these need to be accompanied by institutional reforms to the structures, processes, and organisational culture of the administration of parliament. A more holistic strategy to strengthening the capacity for evidence use will need to stimulate both evidence supply and demand, as well as have the necessary internal capacity to verify and synthesise evidence. All these requirements should be underpinned by the political will and organisational culture to respond to evidence amidst the competing priorities already discussed in the micro governance perspective.

The ability and inclination to apply and transfer learning gained from capacity-strengthening initiatives is conditioned by political will and a political culture that values evidence use in lawmaking, oversight, budgeting and representation. Political strategies for capacity building which engage with the underlying political-economy drivers of the macro governance context, the power dynamics they create, internal institutional politics and incentive structures that shape the behaviours, decisions and actions (or inactions) of various stakeholders in parliaments, are absolutely indispensable. These strategies

should not only factor in formal institutions, but also the equally powerful but intangible informal institutions: traditions, tacit conventions, ideologies, values, habits and attitudes.

Effective capacity building for systematising evidence use is always transformative and may shift existing power structures with resulting but inevitable political repercussions. Just as development initiatives fail if they are not contextually relevant, capacity-strengthening initiatives carry a double burden, as articulated by Blaser Mapitsa et al. in Volume 2 of this series. They must be relevant to the context of a specific parliament, but they must also be able to shift strategic levers of power that previously limited the effectiveness of parliaments. These dual demands often pull programmes in opposite directions and managing both can often seem like a zero-sum trade off. The intricacies of systematising capacity-strengthening initiatives in parliaments and how they work in practice are described more by Blaser Mapitsa et al. (2021) in Volume 2 of this series.

For those countries that have established NESs or are contemplating doing so, it is important to institutionalise linkages between the NES and the evaluative role of parliament. As a starting point, this may just require a specific committee(s) to be charged with oversight over evaluations and relationships among the knowledge brokers within parliament (such as parliamentary research services and budget offices) and the executive. Such an arrangement would ensure that completed and planned evaluations are shared with parliament. It would also enable committees to request particular evaluation topics. In time, it would include strengthening parliamentary committees to engage with evaluation findings and follow-up on evaluation recommendations and improvement plans. Ideally, in some cases, this relationship should be formalised in a National Evaluation policy so that information sharing workshops coincide with specific milestones in parliaments' programmes to influence legislative decision-making, e.g. when strategic and annual performance plans are adopted, budget votes are approved, or progress against the national development plan is reported. This would then allow portfolio committee chairs to factor planned evaluations and improvement plan follow-up into their annual operational plans.

In some cases, new legislation on M&E may be appropriate. For example, some countries adopted the position that all publicly funded evaluations and annual performance reports should be freely available to the public on the department's website. Transparency around evaluations may create an incentive

to evaluators to be rigorous since their methodology and findings would be open to peer-review scrutiny. More importantly, it would provide the public with deeper insight on issues, obstacles and possible courses of action and may enable and encourage civil groups and minority constituencies to embark on continuous engagement with parliamentarians to act on these matters.

In other cases, executive reporting requirements could be changed. Possible considerations include requiring the disclosure of all completed and planned evaluations, full access to the recommendations and progress on the recommendations in annual reports and objective reporting to parliamentary committees by the custodian department for evaluations, rather than a more nuanced version first approved by the executive department.

Parliamentary rules may also be changed to require relevant forms of evaluative evidence before legislation is enacted or budgets are adopted (e.g. environmental impact or carbon footprint studies, gender analysis of the budget, economic sustainability projections, and regulatory impact assessments). A court case in South Africa in August 2019 set aside the findings of the Seriti Commission of Inquiry into the arms deal on the grounds that the Commission's proceedings fell short of the requirements of legality and rationality. This opens the way to review current *Commissions Act 8 of 1947* and Parliament's House rules (where necessary) to ensure that this legislation is congruent with constitutional intent. Revised legislation is crucial as it may enhance the ability of special parliamentary committees of inquiry to investigate by enabling the summoning of witnesses, calling for submissions from interested parties, and the holding of public hearings (Ajam 2020). This could potentially increase the demand for forensic and computer auditing evidence that may currently not be readily available to many parliaments.

A major benefit of M&E legislation or parliamentary rules which clearly position parliament as an institution in relation to a NES, is that it promotes institutional continuity and, hence, the effectiveness of capacity-building interventions. It also encourages the establishment of routine reporting and oversight procedures and can help motivate the establishment and financial support for appropriate support capacity (e.g. research units or access to evidence databases). Promising evidence-based initiatives may initially receive support from the current political and administrative leadership due to their close alignment to the political objectives of the incumbent government, only to fall apart after elections. Legislation and parliamentary rules provide continuity for consecutive parliaments.

Capacity-building interventions should ideally have a 3 to 5 year planning horizon which factors in key governance milestones in the executive annual planning, budgeting and reporting cycles as well as the parliamentary programming cycle and calendar (e.g. when MP inductions take place, when parliament is in session and recess, when plans and budgets need to be approved, how different parliamentary committees, support staff and other parliamentary structures will be affected, and how they relate to each other). The less generic and abstract capacity-building interventions are and the more tailored to a particular parliamentary context and the roles of the various stakeholders, the more impactful they are likely to be. Capacity strengthening should not only focus on technical skills but should endeavour to create an inherent appreciation of evidence use and a supportive organisational culture. All parliamentarians should be exposed to capacity-strengthening initiatives and be familiarised with the available support structures available to MPs. Portfolio chairpersons would benefit from additional support to successfully facilitate robust engagement and discussions, especially in politically contested areas. Despite the best planning intent, the political environments in which African parliaments operate are dynamic and often unpredictable. A great deal of mutual flexibility may, therefore, also be called for.

Securing buy-in from political and administrative leadership is critical to harnessing institutional support and, from a micro governance perspective, encouraging individual MPs, political parties and support staff to invest the time, effort and resources to capacity-building interventions will enhance the likelihood of success. Their visible commitment facilitates the identification of institutional champions, the selection of the most appropriate participants, ring-fencing their time so that they can concentrate rather than constantly being called back to the office, and arranging for the use of available resources (e.g. meeting venues). These champions could use diverse techniques and learning methods in a 'train the trainer' approach, or could use parliamentary mechanisms which help capacity-building interventions to reach the broader group of MPs and the different levels of support staff. Training interventions often reveal issues with the processes of parliament which impede the effective use of evidence (e.g. lack of coordination among internal knowledge brokers) which can be resolved by informed and capable political or administrative leadership. Similarly, if MPs are dissatisfied with certain aspects of current arrangements for accessing evidence, institutional strengthening of this

shortcoming may require ownership from parliamentary leadership. Without a commitment to action, development partners may become frustrated and discouraged from pursuing and participating in capacity-building partnerships.

Parliaments tend to be large institutions governed by protocol, processes and traditions, and are quite bureaucratic with time-consuming processes. Development partners need to invest in understanding the communications and authorisation protocols of parliaments and should devote sufficient time to raising awareness on proposed initiatives, consulting on their objectives, ensuring advance planning with sufficient lead times, and building relationships of trust. Trust is maximised when the intentions of the development partner are to strengthen the capacity of parliament. Care should be taken to avoid introducing other reform agendas as part of capacity-building initiatives as this erodes the established trust and may erode the progress made towards systematising use of evidence.

Parliamentary research units are in a good position to package evaluations from the executive and other external sources with other forms of evidence in their research briefs for MPs. Although they face capacity and financial constraints, over time they can endeavour not only to provide reactive desktop studies, but also to undertake proactive studies (e.g. in relation to the progress of national development plans or emerging policy issues which require legislation) and primary research (e.g. rapid evaluations and other forms of empirical research). While parliamentary researchers may have expertise in one area, capacity constraints may force them to support committees where their expertise is general rather than specialised. Building partnerships with research institutions may help fill that gap. While parliamentarians may find information from research institutions too technical or theoretical, research staff can play a critical role in interpreting and packaging available evidence in an objective and balanced way in order to be useful to the deliberations and discussions without imposing specific political directions or viewpoints.

Systematic capacity building and parliaments' adaptability to technological transformations

Skills development of parliamentary researchers should be ongoing and should focus on asking the right policy questions, critical and independent thinking, and accurate interpretation and utilisation of M&E information. Equally important are the ability to work under pressure and excellent writing

and verbal presentation skills, which include the ability to succinctly and clearly present evidence in an impartial and politically neutral manner that encourages thorough consideration by the recipients of the information. Internal monitoring databases can be very useful as they capture the type of information requested by parliamentarians and can serve to systematically build appropriate evidence platforms and avenues to respond to these requests for information in an increasingly efficient and thorough manner. Analysis of these request databases could constitute a useful proxy for evidence demand and could feed into the strategic planning of parliamentary research departments. Parliamentarians' perceptions of the usefulness of the available research support staff and the value of the information available will determine future requests and uptake of such services. Parliamentary researchers could also participate in evaluation steering committees or validation workshops in order to contribute a legislative perspective. Interaction and mutual support between parliamentary researchers and the custodian department for the NES can facilitate the inclusion of evidence from completed evaluations in the submissions to parliamentarians at crucial milestones in the parliamentary calendar. Such interactions can also serve to validate and further augment the research findings of parliamentary research staff before such findings are presented to parliamentarians.

Despite resource constraints, parliamentary libraries are being compelled to re-think their offerings in an increasingly digital information multiverse. With the advent of the internet and digitisation of archives and other documents, there has been an unprecedented explosion in the production of electronic and multimedia publishing – domestically, regionally, and internationally, as well as filtering and search tools to access both non-electronic and digital resources. The array of information formats (texts, numeric, graphic, video, audio, images, etc.) is also expanding rapidly as are computing and telecommunications technologies for content creation, storage, retrieval, and delivery systems/services. In African countries the cost of data remains high, the quality of internet access is variable, and access to appropriate devices may be limited. Ideally, specific budget allocations should be made to enable access to rich digital information. Cybersecurity also becomes a concomitantly greater challenge under these circumstances. European parliaments could support their counterparts in Africa and the developing world by enacting laws and approving other incentives for open access to academic journals and other scholarly works. Content development in local languages is also crucial.

Notably, parliaments have continuously digitalised their systems and processes to support real-time evidence, although this varies across parliaments depending on their resources, leadership buy-in, and their prioritisation of investing in evidence structures and processes. Importantly, the politicised nature of evidence and the myriad power dynamics in parliaments stand to hinder the introduction of systems that aim to achieve a shared evidence culture. Naturally, the prioritisation given to the reform of the parliamentary landscape to be more evidence enabling will vary from party to party. Notwithstanding, some innovative examples have been devised including digitalising oversight visits and facilitating real-time capturing of information and brokering evidence from parliamentary researchers to MPs by means of a mobile application (app) for oversight – the African Parliamentary Oversight Tool (POT) developed by CLEAR-AA. Moreover, the digitalisation of parliamentary libraries and the creation of e-database management systems, for example, ensuring the accessibility of the Hansard online for public consumption, are strides worth noting. However, some parliaments with fewer resources such as limited budget and research staff capacity have been slower in adopting more digitalised processes such as up-to-date online information, library systems and services to support timely and relevant evidence demands.

These developments are a boon, but also very confusing to MPs and other information users. The conventional information access and management roles of parliamentary librarians will inevitably expand to include the new role of information specialist intermediary between potential information user bases and the body of recorded information. They, in partnership with ICT departments, will have to lead the design and deployment of new information products, services and tools (such as mobile apps) to support information seeking, selection, analysis and synthesis of information content on behalf of users. They will also have to assume a capacity-building function for information users.

With the increased penetration of mobile phones in Africa, social media such as Twitter, Snap, YouTube, Facebook or Instagram have given voice to, and permitted the participation of formerly marginalised citizens and grassroots movements. This has invigorated demands for engagement from civil society using these channels e.g. for petitions, referendums, mobile phone campaigns and other forms of civic engagement. Scandals in the developed world have already illustrated that social media (such as Facebook) could influence the

outcomes of elections. As these trends and other 4IR technologies converge (e.g. artificial intelligence, machine learning, virtual and augmented reality, facial recognition), parliaments will have to enact legislative framework and enforce legislation which protects the privacy, consumer protection, safety and other rights of citizens against international technology platforms.

As parliaments venture increasingly into the social media space in order to facilitate public participation, they will have to adopt social media strategies and acquire the necessary skills to implement them. When new ICT systems and apps are introduced by the parliamentary service, it is important to secure the buy-in of MPs at the beginning of the process to pre-empt possible resistance from MPs to using official email and cybersecurity systems, apps and social media accounts. These new approaches should be used to complement existing civil outreach initiatives by parliaments, thereby enabling inputs and interactions not only with more constituencies, but also more frequently. Committee support staff should develop tracking mechanisms for following-up committee recommendations. If the committee engages with evaluation recommendations or improvement plans, these could be included in resolution tracking systems.

Systematising use of evidence in parliaments: Implications for practice

Given the complexity of EIPM, there is a need for a clearer understanding of the decision-making criteria that direct and influence the deliberations of MPs and parliamentary committees. The need to invest in parliaments as evaluative institutions cannot be overstated. It is necessary to strengthen multistakeholder interactions in the evidence flow to enable parliaments to access the multitude of credible evidence sources. For example, in a study on South African portfolio committees, Rabie (2019) found that knowing which executive department proposed a policy plays a significant role in how a problem is contextualised and the potential solutions that are offered as these will align to the mandate of the department. An important conclusion to be drawn from this is that the stakeholders who wish to influence the direction of policies or bills may need to engage with the mandated department prior to the issue being brought to the parliamentary committees for deliberation and referral. Therefore, strengthening the oversight capacity of parliamentarians and providing access to diverse sources of evidence may also create the

capacity to offer countering perspectives to the suggested course of action by the executive and truly enable parliament to lead, rather than just endorse, the direction set by the executive. As explained in this volume, systematising the use of evidence is complex and requires a multifaceted approach with interaction across various players, and central to this are the linkages between the executive and parliaments. Steward, Langer and Erasmus (2019) further highlight the need for and importance of multifaceted and context-specific engagements focusing on the individual, organisational and institutional levels to strengthen the capacity of evidence use. Consequently, in addition to the importance of advancing technical and logistical aspects such as improving processes, resources, capacity building and recruiting more research staff to support evidence use, it is equally critical to nurture a culture of evidence which is underpinned by leadership buy-in to the importance of an evidence culture. Beyond the existence of NESs, any attempt to foster an evidence culture also requires the institutionalising of evidence use across the various arms of the state and other institutions. Here, parliaments interaction with the executive and other external stakeholders becomes critical to systematising evidence use. This requires increased trust and collaboration across both internal and external stakeholders in the evidence chain. To reiterate the findings of Chirau et al. (2021) this includes the need to strengthen interactions between national evaluation system functions, evidence generation, and use in policy decision-making. This means bridging the prevailing silo approaches between the executive and parliament by supporting processes that foster an evaluative culture with the common goal of meeting development objectives.

As Khumalo et al. highlight in Chapter 5, the systematisation of evidence use in parliaments requires adherence to Parkhurst's (2017) precepts relating to the good governance of evidence. This includes advocating for rigorous, systematic, and technically valid evidence for decision-making. Moreover, EIPM should remain inclusive to citizens needs and MPs, as citizens' representatives, have important roles to play in ensuring that evidence systems contribute to achieving meaningful development outcomes for citizens, including marginalised groups. An acknowledgement of the politicised nature of evidence reinforces the need to be wary of a political lens for evidence selection and use in favour of a values-based evidence-informed policymaking lens that advocates for evidence as a negotiated space across diverse stakeholders. Therefore, interventions to strengthen evidence use should recognise the MPs' values and incentives and

not downplay political influences such as party manifestos and constituency demands as they are key incentives to parliamentary evidence use.

Concluding remarks

Democracies face huge challenges with declining legitimacy. Using new datasets drawing from 25 data sources, 3 500 country surveys, and 4 million respondents between 1973 and 2020, Foa et al. (2020) conclude that the proportion of people dissatisfied with democracy has risen continuously since the mid-1990s and has reached an all-time global high, especially in developed democracies. Against this backdrop, parliaments will have to decide on the role they wish to play in the political system and their inclination to assert their independence in holding the executive to account. Ultimately, this will determine their appetite for systematic evidence use.

With the necessary political will, parliaments can change and empower themselves to play the role their constitutions envisage. The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated that some parliaments have been agile enough to respond rapidly to the escalating health crisis, through applying videoconferencing technologies for virtual plenary sessions, committee sessions and public engagements, and with library information being made available to MPs digitally. The parliamentary service function has had to adjust to unsettling new conditions such as dispersed working staff working remotely from home. It remains to be seen whether parliaments will continue to pursue more effective and flexible operating models in a post-pandemic world geared to increased SUE or if they will simply revert to old bureaucratic conventions. Ideally, parliamentary protocols and procedures should be reviewed and adapted to allow for the more sustained application of these innovative tools that were seen to have added value during the Covid-19 pandemic.

A multistakeholder approach is required for introducing more innovative approaches to meet high evidence demands in parliaments, especially those less resourced. The short turnaround time required for some evidence requests presents a challenge in parliaments that may not be capacitated sufficiently to meet such demands. This has further implications for the use of evaluation recommendations by parliaments, given the length of time it often takes to undertake evaluations and present the findings for policymaking. This may be more feasible for longer-term policy decisions. Therefore, the use of rapid

evaluations and other innovative evaluative approaches to communicate evidence to parliamentarians is encouraged.

African post-pandemic reconstruction will regrettably entail more resource constraints and challenges in the wake of the health crisis, lockdown induced economic recession, increased unemployment and poverty, the collapse of tax systems, and burgeoning debt. Resources for capacity building and the time available to MPs and parliamentary service staff will be equally constrained. Collaboration and partnerships in joint programmes will be imperative, despite the huge investment in time, effort, and patience required for mutual understanding and accommodation of different objectives, focus areas, approaches, philosophies, interests, and expectations. As is the case with parliaments themselves, development partners may be compelled to explore joint resource mobilisation strategies on greater shared responsibility for direction setting, implementation and management which reap the synergies of the strengths of different development partners. These joint strategies may promote sharing of knowledge and insights, prevent duplication, identify gaps, minimise capacity-building fatigue, and may result in the adoption of approaches which draw upon international good practice, but are designed and implemented by Africans for the unique legislative contexts in different African parliaments.

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