

# VAKA YIKO

inasp 

## EVIDENCE- INFORMED POLICY MAKING TOOLKIT





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Building Capacity  
to Use Research  
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# FOREWORD

**T**he case for using evidence in policy making has been made for some time, not only in an international development context but also in other areas.

In working to improve the way evidence feeds into policy, much effort has been directed towards strengthening the way researchers, think tanks, universities and policy research institutes develop and communicate their research and trying to improve their strategies to influence policy. International donors also continue to fund research to try to find solutions to the most acute problems that cause poverty.

However, less emphasis has been put into promoting a culture of evidence-informed policy. Such a culture prioritizes building a robust evidence base for decision making, one that includes different perspectives, findings, and, many times, conflicting evidence. The promotion of evidence-informed policy making focuses on working with the 'demand' side, improving the policy-making process and strengthening policymakers' capacity to decide which evidence is useful, when and for what policy purpose.

In line with this thinking, in the DfID-funded VakaYiko project we support policymakers and their staff to access and use robust evidence in their work. We are mindful of the political environment they are embedded in, where different values, ideas and interests are at stake when making policy. We have found that this complex process could be improved by tackling three key areas:

The first area to work on is attitudes towards research and the research process. Here we focus on understanding the process of research, including different types of research, and how it can enhance informed decision making.

A second key factor is improving knowledge of a range of different types of evidence – not only research but also data, citizen evidence and experience. By combining them, staff in public institutions can create a robust evidence base for their policies. Often, this means raising awareness of the extensive support network that exists locally.

Lastly, skills are necessary for effectively searching for evidence, assessing it and communicating it to those who need to make quick and important decisions. Our approach focuses on civil service staff, such as researchers and policy analysts, who are responsible for analysing and presenting research to decision makers.

In recognition of the importance of research in development, countries around the world are prioritizing investments in science, technology and higher education as well as data and statistical quality. Now is an exciting time for us to build on this momentum by supporting our partner institutions to implement this vision.

We have developed this toolkit in collaboration with practitioners and policymakers from our partner organizations and institutions in Ghana and Zimbabwe. It is also informed by the rich insights we have gained from VakaYiko's work in other countries including South Africa, Uganda, Sudan, and Argentina. We hope it contributes to improving how staff in public institutions use evidence. We also hope that it helps to shape debate and dialogue, ultimately contributing to building supportive cultures of evidence-informed policy making.



**Clara Richards**

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# ABOUT THE VAKAYIKO CONSORTIUM

The VakaYiko Consortium is a three-year project involving five organizations working primarily in three countries in the first phase: Ghana, Zimbabwe and South Africa. Consortium members are Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS), Zimbabwe Evidence Informed Policy Making Network (ZeipNET), the Human Science Research Council (HSRC), the Overseas Development Institute and INASP. Work in a fourth country, Uganda, started in late 2015; the Consortium members are the Institute of Parliamentary Studies (IPS) and the Department of Research Services (DRS) in the Parliament of the Republic of Uganda.

The project starts with the understanding that the routine use of research to inform policy requires at least three factors to be in place:

- individuals with the skills to access, evaluate and use research evidence;
- processes for handling research evidence in policy-making departments; and
- a wider enabling environment of engaged citizens, media and civil society.

This course addresses the first level of capacity (individual skills and knowledge). In the VakaYiko programme, course delivery and embedding was part of a range of activities targeting all levels of capacity, including public events and policy dialogues, a mentoring and learning exchange programme, and technical assistance to institutions.

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# INTRODUCTION



# ABOUT THIS COURSE

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This course is aimed at building civil servants' skills and knowledge for evidence-informed policy making (EIPM) in developing countries. It focuses on finding, evaluating and communicating evidence as well as developing practical EIPM implementation plans. In recognition of the complexity of the barriers to effective EIPM, it takes an interdisciplinary approach combining policy analysis, information literacy, research skills and communication techniques. It aims to contribute to strengthening the capacity of institutional structures and processes guiding EIPM, in particular ministerial and parliamentary research departments and policy analysis units.

The full course comprises four modules and eight to 10 days of training, which can be delivered either as one block or in a series of four workshops of two to three days each. The materials are designed to be adaptable, and the modules and activities can also be delivered individually or incorporated into other courses as needed. The course is practical and activity-based, centred around participants' own experience in the workplace, and adaptable for different sectors.

This course was piloted in 2014-2015 with the Ghana Civil Service Training Centre, the Parliament of Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Ministry of Industry and Commerce and the Zimbabwe Ministry of Youth.

'Evidence-informed policy is that which has considered a broad range of research evidence; evidence from citizens and other stakeholders; and evidence from practice and policy implementation, as part of a process that considers other factors such as political realities and current public debates. We do not see it as a policy that is exclusively based on research, or as being based on one set of findings. We accept that in some cases, research evidence may be considered and rejected; if rejection was based on understanding of the insights that the research offered then we would still consider any resulting policy to be evidence-informed.'

Newman, Fisher and Shaxson, 2012

## WHO

## IS IT FOR?

The course has been designed for, and piloted with, mid-level civil servants such as researchers, analysts, committee clerks and librarians in government agencies and parliaments in Africa. These individuals play a crucial role in providing information, analysis and recommendations to guide decision-making and support informed debate. The course, therefore, focuses primarily on the process of gathering and presenting quality evidence, rather than the process of taking decisions based on this evidence.

The materials are suitable for a mixed group of participants. They are not sector-specific, and participants in the pilots came from 18 different government institutions encompassing a wide range of sectors, from youth and social development to industry and commerce, employment, fisheries and agriculture, and energy. The materials are also suitable for a wide range of educational backgrounds and levels of experience with research. In the pilots, participants ranged from director level to interns.

## FOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

There are four core principles which underpin this course:

1

COMPLEXITY  
AND CRITICAL  
REFLECTION

This course recognizes and values the complexity of the policy-making landscape and the role of evidence within it. It does not provide 'easy answers' or a one-size-fits-all template for EIPM. It also takes a broad view of 'evidence', without making an argument for one type of evidence over another. Rather, it facilitates reflection and discussion about the role of evidence in policy making, while building participants' skills in finding and evaluating different kinds of evidence so that they can make an informed decision about its quality and relevance for their work.

2

THE ROLE OF  
THE INDIVIDUAL

While recognizing and reflecting on the roles of organizational, institutional, political and other factors in EIPM, the course starts with the assumption that all participants are contributing to policy making in some way, no matter how 'small'. The course takes a learner-centred pedagogical approach which puts the learner themselves at the centre of the learning process. The materials avoid excessive jargon and academic theory, and the activities focus on practical day-to-day tasks. The action plans are geared towards actions which are achievable and realistic for each participant. In this way the course highlights the role of support staff whose contribution is often neglected in more high-level approaches to policy making.

3

## NETWORKS

A key emphasis of the course is on the importance of interpersonal connections in building capacity for EIPM. This includes both the need for different departments in the information system to work together (e.g. researchers, librarians and ICT staff) as well as the need for strong external linkages, in particular those between researchers and policymakers. External speakers are, therefore, an important part of the course, and any opportunities to use the course to build connections between different parts of the system are to be encouraged.

4

## PRACTICALITY

This is not an academic or theoretical course, nor is it lecture-based. It does not cover complex academic topics such as systematic reviews, randomized controlled trials or data analysis in much detail. PowerPoint presentations are minimal. In some ways it functions more as a workshop than a traditional training course, as the activities are centred on discussion and revision of 'live' work documents as well as the development of action plans for EIPM. It is, therefore, most effective when there is buy-in from participants' supervisors and a wider institutional interest or commitment to strengthening EIPM processes.



## HOW

## TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This Toolkit is intended as a framework within which to deliver the course and the individual modules and topics. The detailed activities are particularly aimed at trainers who are newer to the course so that they can deliver the course with confidence. However, if, as professional trainers, you would like to adjust the sessions to better meet the learning objectives and/or needs of the learners, you are positively encouraged to do so. In adjusting the sessions, you are expected to ensure that the learning objectives are met, the key concept covered, and the four guiding principles above maintained.

## STRUCTURE OF THE TOOLKIT

This Toolkit is organized in four modules, each of which takes about two days. Each module starts with an overview and is divided into topics. Each follows the same structure:

**LINKS**

These are provided on the overview page of each module and are designed to help the facilitator refer back to previous modules or activities (such as the needs assessment or sensitization workshop) which may have already touched on issues covered in the module.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

What learners can expect to know and be able to do at the end of each module. The learning objectives relevant to each topic are identified at the beginning of the topic for the trainer's reference.

**READ AND REFLECT**

This section is for facilitators to read before delivering each topic. In most cases, it can also be photocopied and given to learners as a handout. This should usually be done after the topic has been finished, unless otherwise indicated.

**REFLECTION POINTS**

Questions for the facilitator and participants to reflect on when reading the Read and Reflect section. These can also serve as discussion questions.

**KEY LEARNING POINT**

Each topic has one key learning point. These are designed to guide the facilitator in maintaining focus during activities.

**PREPARATION**

Guidance for the facilitator on the necessary preparation for the topic, including printing requirements, IT equipment set-up, flipcharts etc.

**RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES**

Core activities aligned with the learning objectives. Each activity describes the steps that the facilitator can follow, and indicates the estimated time. Timings have been based on a group of 25 participants; if your group is bigger or smaller, you may need to adjust this.

**HANDOUTS**

These are the handouts and worksheets required for participants to complete the module, corresponding to the activities.

**OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES**

Extension activities which build on the core activities and key concepts, providing opportunities to go into more depth on specific aspects of the course.

**VIDEOS**

These provide options to expand on the key learning points and core concepts. The facilitator should choose the video in advance and prepare some discussion questions.

**POWERPOINT SLIDES**

Also included in the handouts folder are a few PowerPoint slides to guide the delivery of each module.

**FURTHER READING**

These are websites, readings and videos which can be shared with participants at the end of each module and can also be used by facilitators to prepare.

**GLOSSARY**

A list of key terms used in the module.

**REFERENCES**

A list of titles used when developing the content in the Read and Reflect section.

**PRACTICAL HANDBOOK**

A handbook for participants containing the Read and Reflect sections. We recommend this be provided to participants after the training course has been completed.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR COURSE DELIVERY

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### OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES AND FURTHER READING

In course pilots, facilitators found that participants often had a wide range of professional, personal and academic experience. Some activities required more or less time depending on the group, and in some cases some individuals finished activities before others. In addition, logistical issues meant that timing was sometimes unpredictable, and facilitators sometimes found themselves with extra discussion or reading time. The optional activities and further reading can help with some of these challenges.

### ‘SAMPLES AND READINGS’ FOLDER

This course is designed to be adaptable to specific country contexts, and experience in the pilots showed us that participants are most engaged when activities are designed around up-to-date, country-specific readings which the facilitator gathers in advance. However, we recognize that the course calls for a lot of samples, and that in some cases it may not be practical or feasible to gather such a range of documents. In many cases it is not the content of the readings which is important for the course, but the format (e.g. systematic reviews, infographics, fact sheets and policy briefs), and in such cases, samples from different contexts can also be suitable. We are, therefore, sharing the ‘document bank’ of readings and samples which we used in the pilots, containing a wide range of examples of the literature types and evidence products discussed in the course, which you may find useful. The folder can be found online at [www.inasp.info/vytoolkit](http://www.inasp.info/vytoolkit).

### EXTERNAL SPEAKERS

A key theme of this course is the importance of building networks and dialogue between researchers and policymakers. In the pilots, the participants benefited enormously from the insights and experience shared by experts from research institutes, policy-making bodies and library consortia. It is important that the course not only advocate for these types of linkages but also embody them in its delivery. We have, therefore, identified key points throughout the course where we feel it would be particularly beneficial to invite an external speaker. Our experience has shown us that it is very important to brief the speaker well in advance, and we recommend that you also brief participants so that they can prepare questions.

### ‘WHAT TABLE’ AND EXIT CARDS

The ‘What Table’ and Exit Cards are simple formative assessment tools for use during the workshop. The ‘What Table’ is a short exercise conducted at the beginning and end of each module. At the beginning, learners indicate what they already know about the subject of the module and what they want to know. At the end, they indicate what they have learned. Exit Cards are small (ideally 4x6 inch; 10x15cm) cards which are handed out to learners at the end of each day, answering three short questions: What helped you learn today? What do you need further clarification on? Do you have any suggestions for the facilitator? The cards should be discussed by the facilitators/organizing team at the end of each day, and a short feedback session the following morning can provide answers to questions and issues raised.

## ACTION PLANS

Our approach emphasizes the point that no matter what one's role is in the parliamentary or ministerial staff, everyone contributes in some way to policy making. This course also takes a very practical, work-based approach to EIPM – it is designed to be built around everyday situations. The action plans are an important part of the course which provide an opportunity to explore how individuals can enhance their own skills in EIPM – for example, by reaching out to new networks, creating or revising institutional processes, or simply changing the way they personally carry out their work.

We are grateful to the Ghana Civil Service Training Centre for sharing its action plan template with us, which we have adapted for use in this course. The course is designed so that participants gradually build action plans as they progress through the modules, and then finalize these at the end. We found this more effective than doing the whole plan at the end of the course. The action planning session at the end of the course could last anything from an hour to a full-day workshop, depending on the needs of the participants.

Action plans can be used in various ways. You could use them purely as a tool for individual reflection, which participants complete individually and take home with them after the course. They can also be more formalized and linked to institutional processes. In VakaYiko's pilots with the Civil Service Training Centre, where participants came from different agencies and institutions, every participant created an individual action plan which was approved by their supervisor, and the Civil Service Training Centre monitored the implementation of the plans through follow-up questionnaires. In Zimbabwe, where participants came from three institutions, each institution's Research Department created a shared action plan, and the implementation of the departmental plans was supported over a year-long period via a learning exchange and mentoring programme.

Activities listed in the action plans can vary in scope from individual skills and knowledge to wider organizational processes, depending on the profile of the participants and the needs of the partner institution. Here are some examples and ideas from our pilots:

- Meet with colleagues to brainstorm institutions from which research materials can be gathered, write to these and collect hard copies to restock the library.
- Investigate joining the National Library Consortium to gain access to research information.
- Design a draft of a client information request form.
- Develop evidence-handling procedure manuals and templates for policy briefs, policy papers, reports, minutes.
- Make a list of key online sources of relevant evidence, and share with colleagues.
- Create departmental strategies for determining evidence needs and communicating evidence.
- Invite researchers to stakeholder consultative meetings on a specific policy.
- Train other associated agencies under the institution's remit in evidence literacy.

## MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING

In pilots, the effectiveness of the EIPM course was assessed using VakaYiko's Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Strategy.<sup>1</sup> The Kirkpatrick model<sup>2</sup> was used in gauging the participants' reactions and learning. The model consists of four different levels (reactions, learning, behaviour change/transfer and impact), with each level considered a necessary prerequisite to reach the next one.

The learning and reactions levels were evaluated during the training course through pre- and post-activity assessment exercises and formative assessment activities such as the 'What Table' and Exit Cards. Facilitators and course organizers were also in a good position to observe changes in learner attitudes towards research, 'light bulb moments', and ideas and learning which emerged from the sessions. In pilots, we discussed these insights via daily debrief meetings and included them in narrative reports. Behaviour-level change and transfer were evaluated after the course via follow-up on the action plans, conducted with the aid of a monitoring form.

1. Please see: [www.inasp.info/uploads/filer\\_public/2015/02/23/eipm\\_training\\_me\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.inasp.info/uploads/filer_public/2015/02/23/eipm_training_me_strategy.pdf).

2. Kirkpatrick, D.L. (1979). Techniques for evaluating training programs. *Training and Development Journal*, 33(6): 78–92.

