

Needs Assessment

Evidence-Informed Policy Making Course in the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Zimbabwe



ZeipNET & INASP

November 2014

Summary

The aim of this assessment is to understand the needs that members of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MIC) in Zimbabwe have in terms of accessing research information, and evaluating and using it. The information collected will form the basis for content development of VakaYiko Evidence-Informed Policy Making (EIPM) courses in Zimbabwe which will be delivered for staff in the Ministry for Industry and Commerce and the Ministry of Youth, Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment as well as the Parliament in 2014 and 2015.

The needs assessment was conducted at the end of a sensitization workshop in November 2013 in which participants from the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MIC) familiarized themselves with the concept of EIPM. Overall, the participants correspond to the targeted participants for the EIPM courses in the MIC. This is because the sample represents a good mix of staff from different hierarchy levels, departments, roles and job functions.

The assessment consists of two parts:

- First, a problem tree analysis was used as a brainstorming tool to assist a participative analysis of the existing research-policy situation, identifying major problems and main causal relationships.
- Secondly, participants filled out a survey that comprised open-ended and multiple-choice questions to assess knowledge and capacities on EIPM, sourcing information for policy making and understanding of research methods.

The problem tree group exercise proved that participants are aware of the need of using evidence in the policy-making process and potential causes that prevent its use. While participants knew about the importance of EIPM, the survey did identify knowledge gaps, especially in the field of research methods and the evaluation of information sources. These gaps correspond to the self-identified capacity gaps in the group exercise and self-assessed needs in the survey. These self-identified capacity gaps go even further, mentioning a variety of needs in data collection, analysis of data and research and communication. The motivation for training on EIPM was widely expressed in the survey, as well as the group discussion.

The findings of this needs assessment will feed into the development of the EIPM training materials.

1. Introduction

The VakaYiko consortium led by INASP (the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications) involves five organizations working primarily in Ghana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe to develop the capacity of policy makers to use research evidence. Funded by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) under the Building Capacity for Use of Research Evidence (BCURE) programme, the project operates on the assumption that the routine use of research evidence 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 facilitating environment that identifies and responds appropriately to research uptake needs.

In Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Evidence Informed Policy Network (ZeipNET) and INASP work with the Ministry for Industry and Commerce, the Ministry of Youth as well as the Parliament of Zimbabwe to improve the use of research evidence in response to departmental priorities.

This assessment seeks to understand the needs that members of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce have in terms of accessing, evaluating and using research information. It will form the basis for content development of the VakaYiko EIPM courses in Zimbabwe that will be delivered in 2014 and 2015.

2. Methodology

The needs assessment was part of a sensitization workshop in February 2014 in which participants from the Ministry of Industry and Commerce familiarized themselves with the concept of Evidence-Informed Policy Making (EIPM).

The needs assessment consisted of two parts. Firstly, a problem tree analysis was used as a group brainstorming exercise to assist a participative analysis of the existing research-policy situation identifying major problems and main causal relationships. The group was also asked to identify training needs.

Participants were divided into groups and given a causal-effect policy-making scenario. Then they were asked to describe the same scenario if policy makers did not have the opportunity to use research evidence. Groups had time to discuss the matter and report back to the others afterwards. After the report-back session participants were asked to suggest possible interventions to ensure that policy makers use evidence in policy making.

Secondly, after the sensitization workshop and the problem tree exercise, participants filled out a survey containing open-ended and multiple choice questions to assess knowledge and capacities on EIPM, sourcing information for policy making and understanding research methods. Additionally, suggestions for the capacity-building programme were asked for.

Closed-ended questions were used to assess different capacity levels on the above-mentioned topics:

- Full capacity - Respondents understand the topic completely and do not need further capacity-building assistance
- Sufficient capacity - Respondents have enough understanding of the topic but there is a need for strengthening and clarifying some concepts and terms
- Some capacity - Respondents have had some approximation to the topic before and have some skills that can be improved
- Very limited capacity - Respondents have heard of the existence of the topic but never experienced it practically
- No capacity - Respondents have never heard of the topic before

3. Results

3.1 Problem tree analysis

3.1.1 Causes

Participants identified a number of causes that prevent policy makers from using research evidence. These causes can be divided into **capacity problems**, **lack of awareness** and **political reasons**.

Capacity problems included technical skills to access, evaluate and effectively communicate research to policy makers; limited capacity by the policy makers to use the research provided; and lack of resources leading to inadequate or poor research and, as a result, poor uptake by the policy makers.

Lack of awareness includes policy makers not fully appreciating the value of using research in policy making.

The politics surrounding the research-policy landscape was also pointed out as another major cause. Examples of these included selfishness or self-interest on the part of policy makers; ulterior political motives; lack of political will; and conflicting interests including national security or confidentiality reasons.

3.1.2 Effects

Having outlined the above causes, participants described potential effects. A lack of appreciation of research or misperception could have very adverse effects on the resulting policies. For example, it might lead to policies of insufficient quality; inconsistent policies; policy reversals and overlaps; and policies that fail to address problems or achieve policy objectives that include policy implementation challenges.

As a result, policy makers could lose their credibility, which is a sign of poor governance. In the worst case, this could lead to a collapse of the economy and the suffering of the people.

3.1.3 Identified needs in the group discussion

Specific capacity-building programmes and other interventions that the participants identified to address capacity problems included the following:

- Analytical skills
- Writing of policy briefs
- Research methodology communication and making recommendations
- Statistical data analysis
- How to access and manage information (databases, paying for articles)
- Developing good-quality policy-concept papers
- Pairing or collaborations with experienced researchers

Overall, the problem tree group exercise proved that participants are aware of the need of using evidence in the policy-making process and potential causes that prevent its use.

Participants identified a number of different areas where they see capacity gaps and which are considered crucial for future training.

3.2 Needs assessment survey

3.2.1 Sample description

All of the 15 participants (six male and nine female) belonged to the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. Most of them were from the department of Research Policy and Domestic Trade (eight), with the other from the Enterprise Development Department, International Trade Department and Research and Spatial Development Department. 10 participants had Masters Degrees and four had undergraduate degrees. The majority of the participants said that they had only worked in the Ministry for a couple of years.

Main roles and job functions were described as:

- To carry out economic research and provide policy advice for different departments of the Ministry of I&C such as sector-wide surveys
- To formulate, implement, monitor and review policy, for example on industrial development and preparing memorandums, briefs, economic papers and reports for management
- To prepare national positions on the respective multilateral trade agreements after holding consultative meetings with relevant stakeholders. In addition, to analyse and make recommendations on trade agreements
- To coordinate ZimAsset Value Addition and Beneficiation Cluster
- To communicate by preparing newsletters, websites, presentations, journals and speeches
- To benchmark Zimbabwe wholesale and retail business developments with those of regional markets

Only two participants indicated that they have been involved in prior EIPM capacity-building training by WTO (advanced training programme course on databases for trade statistics) and UNCTAD (Virtual online lea23). Half of the respondents said they share a computer with a colleague and the other half said they have their own internet-connected computer.

Overall, the participants correspond to the targeted population for the EIPM courses in the MIC. This is because the sample represents a good mix of staff from different hierarchy levels, departments, roles and job functions.

3.2.2 EIPM knowledge

There is **very limited capacity** among respondents around the different sources that can best inform decision making. As an example, more than half of the participants (69%) indicated that they did not know of any website with good-quality information on industry and commerce topics. Only one participant pointed out the value of peer-reviewed journals, whereas the others said they rely mostly on information from policy briefs by the World Bank or independent think tanks. There was also very limited capacity among respondents for using search engines and search methods in literature databases. They expressed the need to improve these skills.

Regarding research methods, there is **some capacity** among some of the respondents and very limited capacity among others. As such, differences between qualitative and quantitative data are not clear and the rigour of research designs could not be properly assessed.

There is **sufficient capacity** on the importance of informing decisions with evidence and they are familiar with the term “evidence-informed policy making”. However there is room to strengthen and expand the knowledge; participants clearly expressed the need and will to improve it.

Although there is an appreciation of research to inform policy, there is, in some cases, distrust of research. Respondents have a clear understanding that bias, for example institutional affiliations, can

be an issue for evidence-informed policy making. Participants clearly expressed the need and will to take part in future EIPM courses.

Overall, while participants knew about the importance of EIPM, knowledge gaps were identified, especially in the field of research methods and the evaluation of information sources. The motivation for and interest in training on EIPM was widely expressed.

3.2.3 Self-assessed needs in the survey

When asked which EIPM capacity-building activities are most successful and appropriate in promoting the use of evidence in policy making within the ministries, participants answered the following:

- Training in research methodology
- Interpretation of research findings
- Communication of research findings
- Report and policy brief writing
- Statistical modelling
- How and where to access relevant data
- Data collection, analysis and presentation to policy makers

Among the platforms used to share information with peers, Facebook was the most popular, with Skype, twitter and blogs sharing second place.

Overall, participants expressed interest in a variety of EIPM topics.

4. Discussion

The participants correspond to the targeted population for the planned EIPM course in the MIC. This is because the sample represents a good mix of staff from different hierarchy levels, departments, roles and job functions.

The problem tree group exercise proved that participants are aware of the need to use evidence in the policy-making process and of potential causes that prevent its use.

While participants knew about the importance of EIPM, knowledge gaps were identified especially in the field of research methods and the evaluation of information sources. These gaps correspond to the self-identified capacity gaps in the group discussion and self-assessed needs in the survey. These self-identified capacity gaps go even further, mentioning a variety of needs in data collection, analysis and communication.

The motivation for training in EIPM was widely expressed in the survey as well as the group discussion.

The findings of this needs assessment will feed into the development of the EIPM training materials.