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# Parliament in focus *Uganda*





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# Executive Summary

The Parliament of Uganda, from the point of view of its information needs as well as its role in policy making, could be classified as an “Emerging Legislature”. Of particular note in the Parliament of Uganda is the strong leadership and strategic focus on research and evidence, which translates into a large, innovative and well-resourced research team and a positive organizational culture around evidence. This team is able both to carry out its own proactive research, and to collaborate with Uganda’s vibrant research and higher education sector. However, a number of common challenges remain, including limited interdepartmental collaboration between information support units, technical issues around information gathering and storage, and an absence of systematic feedback and quality assurance mechanisms. Overall, we conclude that a combination of strong strategic direction and leadership and human and financial resources have contributed to a high level of motivation and organization around evidence use in Parliament of Uganda, but that internal and external barriers remain.

The VakaYiko programme at Parliament of Uganda was implemented in partnership with the Uganda National Academy of Sciences and included:

- Training for the DRS staff using adapted material from the EIPM Toolkit, focusing on using evidence to analyse policy and communicating evidence for decision making<sup>1</sup>
- Review and update of key manuals and policies affecting evidence use including the Research policy and Policy Analysis manual
- Support to a series of Knowledge Cafés and a Research Week held in partnership with the Uganda National Academy of Sciences
- Participation in a learning exchange initiative with the parliaments of Ghana and Zimbabwe, including a visit to Ghana to take part in a learning exchange workshop<sup>2</sup>

Watch: Parliament of Uganda’s Research Week  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1VfR0tcNFo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1VfR0tcNFo)



1. Training materials were adapted from the VakaYiko Evidence Informed Policy Making Toolkit (INASP 2016).

2. This consisted of two peer exchange meetings in Kampala and Accra, as well as an online information sharing platform and a videoconference. See INASP, 2016b for further information.

# Introduction

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In this Parliament in Focus paper, we explore some of the main institutional-level factors we identified through our ‘Evidence in African Parliaments’ paper in the context of the Parliament of Uganda.<sup>3</sup> We draw on our experience working with Parliament over the past several years, which has been documented through multiple needs assessments, surveys, workshops, events and reports. Complementing this with interviews with information support staff, we describe Parliament’s information support system and identify some of the key constraints and opportunities within this. While an exhaustive investigation into all the factors is far beyond the scope of these ‘Parliament in focus’ profiles, it is our intention to draw attention to some of the most predominant issues that have emerged from our research and experience. This may provide some initial insights to inform future research or capacity development programmes.

## What is evidence-informed policy making?

*“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)*

For evidence to routinely and systematically inform policy making, our view is that at least three interlinked elements should be in place:

- **Individuals** in public institutions with the skills to access, evaluate and use a range of types of evidence (including citizen knowledge, administrative data, practice-informed knowledge and research)
- **Processes, systems and cultures** in public institutions for systematically identifying and meeting evidence needs
- **An enabling environment** of engaged stakeholders such as citizens, media and civil society that links evidence producers and users
- The **Context Matters Framework** outlines a series of six interrelated sets of factors that affect the use of evidence throughout these levels.

It can be accessed online at [www.politicsandideas.org/contextmatters](http://www.politicsandideas.org/contextmatters) (Weyrauch et al., 2016)

## About the Parliament of Uganda

Uganda practises a presidential system with a President (Yoweri Museveni of the National Resistance Movement since 1986) who is the Head of State and Head of Government. There are periodic presidential and parliamentary elections. The 1995 constitution of Uganda empowers the Parliament to make laws on any matter for the peace, order, development and good governance of Uganda. The Parliament is also guided by its own Rules of Procedure in the performance of its functions.

The 10th Parliament of Uganda was elected in 2016 for a five-year term, which expires in 2021. The Parliament is a unicameral (one chamber) legislature with 445 members comprising representatives from different groups and demographics. These are: Constituency, District Woman Representatives, Uganda People’s Defence Forces, Youth, Persons with Disabilities, Workers and Ex- Officio Members. This makes it one of the most diverse parliaments on the continent.

Parliament is administered by a Parliamentary Service, headed by the Clerk and comprising three managerial arms. These are: Parliamentary Affairs Directorate, Corporate Affairs Directorate, and Offices/Secretariats. Each of these divisions contain several departments.

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3. In line with the Context Matters framework approach (Weyrauch et al., 2016), our full analysis (ACEPA, 2017) explored both macro-level and institutional-level factors affecting evidence use at the Parliament. In this paper we share our findings from the institutional-level analysis. Our scope did not permit a full systematic investigation into each of the factors; rather we highlight some particular factors we find relevant, especially those concerned with organizational leadership and culture as well as capacity, management and systems.

# Organizational strategy and leadership

Building on clear recognition of the role of research and evidence in legislative strengthening at national levels of development planning (see box on the right), the Parliament of Uganda has systematically planned towards increasing the use of research to inform debates and parliamentary scrutiny. Parliament's current Strategic Plan notes that "insufficient research capacity for Parliament constrains presentations of researched debates by MPs", and outlines several measures to strengthen and embed the systematic use of research and information services in the everyday work of parliament (Parliament of Uganda (2016)). The Plan also has a focus on enhancing parliamentary accountability systems by establishing effective systems for monitoring and evaluation that track performance at all levels of the institution – from personnel to outputs of parliamentary business, bill tracking etc. By integrating accountability procedures, Parliament can increase its demand for evidence. In this way, the Parliament aims to align its administrative and technical support with the aims and objectives of the National Development Plan II.

The Parliament of Uganda benefits from strong leadership on the theme of research and evidence. The Speaker, the Clerk and the Parliamentary Commission have all been supportive not only of the expansion of technical capacity around research and information support, but also of Parliament's growing role as a regional and international influencer around issues of evidence in the parliamentary context as well as a participant in open and reflective dialogue and collaborations. The Director of the Department of Research Services has a personal interest in and commitment to evidence issues; for example, he was the only representative of an African parliament involved in the Working Group to produce the IPU's new Guidelines for Parliamentary Research Services (IPU, 2015), and he was also involved in the development of the Context Matters Framework (Weyrauch et al., 2016). This high-level leadership and support has contributed to an enabling organizational culture for the development and expansion of research and information services in Parliament, and the visibility of these services within the institution is increasing, particularly in the wake of Research Week (see page 7).

*“Parliament will promote a culture of acquiring, utilizing, sharing and storing knowledge materials for guiding decision making processes.*

Parliament of Uganda (2016)

## Parliamentary research capacity and national development in Uganda

The role of research and evidence in Parliament is recognized in Uganda's national development planning architecture.

National Development Plan I (2010/11-2015/16)

Section 8.1 (Legislature), specifies several strategies for strengthening the use of evidence in Parliament.

Strategy 1 **“improve the quality of research and support services to MPs”**

Strategy 2 **“Promote researched, informed and knowledge-based debate in Parliament”**

Strategy 3 **“increase advocacy for stakeholders involved in the legislative process”** (including legislators participating in meetings for sharing research designs and findings)

(Government of Uganda, 2010)

Uganda National Development Plan II (2015/16-2019/20)

Under 'Strengthening the institutional capacity of Parliament' one of the key interventions listed is

**“introduce measures to strengthen the availability and visibility of evidence based support to legislative processes”** (p221)

(Government of Uganda, 2015)

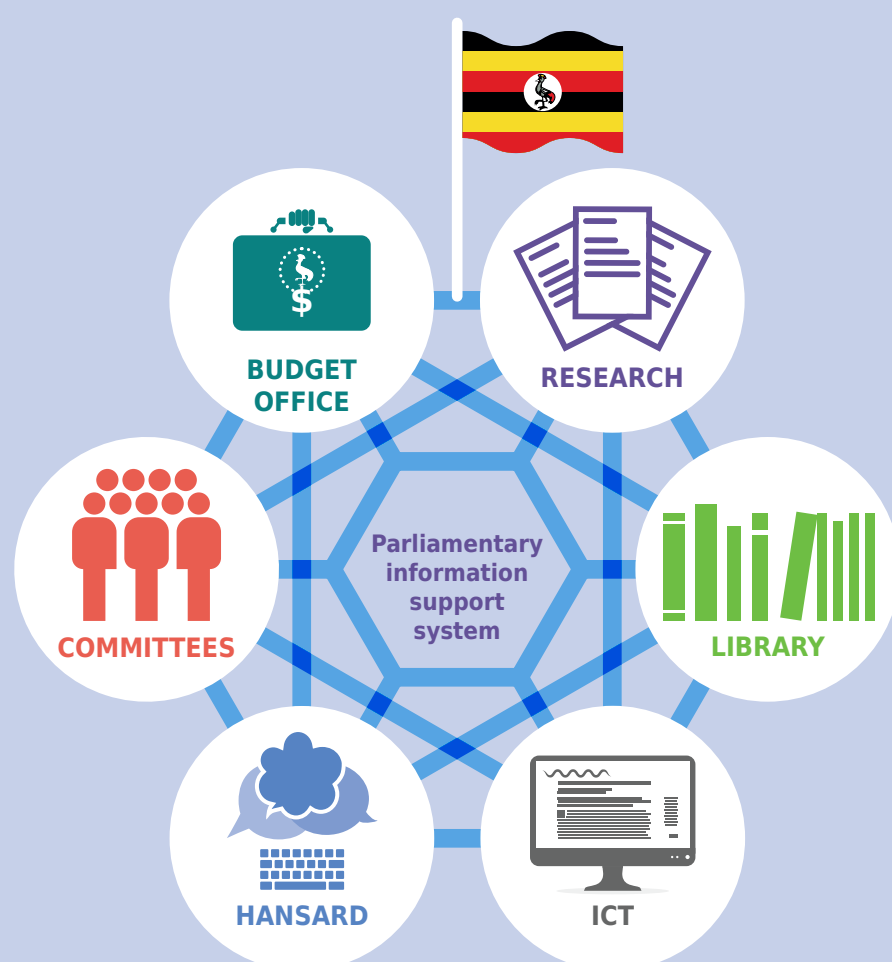
*“Evidence-based legislation, oversight and representation is required for effective parliamentary business across Commonwealth Parliaments.*

Parliament of Uganda Department of Research Services (2015)

# Information support resources in the Parliament of Uganda

The Department of Research Services (DRS) is the key unit charged with providing research, analysis and technical advice to the Parliament. The DRS has expanded steadily in recent years, having grown from being a Section of the Library, Research and ICT Department in 1999 (known at the time as Uganda Parliament Research Service), to being a Division in the Library and Research Department in 2004 and then to its current state as a full Department in 2012.<sup>4</sup> It has 34 staff (with approved staffing level of 39) servicing 28 committees of the Parliament. Just over half the DRS staff have Masters degrees, and their expertise is multidisciplinary, drawn from various fields including law, economics, statistics, social science, and natural and physical sciences. The department is divided into five sections: Social Development, Legal & Political, Finance & Economy, Statistics, and Science & Technology, the last of these being the newest addition. Each of these sections supports relevant committees – for example, the six staff in the Social Development Section support committees on HIV, gender, labour and social development; education and sports; health; and equal opportunities, in addition to responding to individual requests from MPs on these subjects.<sup>5</sup> The DRS budget is around \$600,000 annually.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 1:** Ugandan parliamentary information support system



4. Key donors and partners who have supported this growth include USAID, DFID, the Democratic Governance Facility, the Gatsby Foundation, and the UK Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST).

5. VakaYiko Needs Assessment: Parliament of Uganda. INASP, 2015 (unpublished). See also DRS Strategic Plan.

6. Director of DRS during interview (2016).

Several other units are also involved in information and research support to Parliament, often through collaboration with the DRS. The Department of Library Services is charged with the provision of information services to committees, individual MPs and Staff. The committees, ICT and the Institute of Parliamentary Studies (IPS) all serve the information needs of parliament through a strong collaboration with the DRS. Other units which provide information for the use of MPs but operate independently and have a more limited relationship with the DRS include Hansard, Legal Services and the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO). The PBO supports the work of Parliament by providing Parliament and its committees with in-depth analysis including of local revenue, foreign inflows, expenditure, and economic indicators.<sup>7</sup>

While Parliament of Uganda has a strong information support architecture, one challenge is that the various departments are largely independent and have no formal collaborative working arrangements. The lack of interdepartmental linkages, and in some cases a sense of competition between them, was noted staff during interviews, and has also been highlighted in several programme documents and evaluations (Parliament of Uganda 2016; Hayter & Liebnitzky 2015; Nath & Holden 2015). An insightful observation from Birungi and Huxley (2011) is that the generous financial and infrastructural resources which Uganda's Parliamentary Budget Office enjoys, and its status as a 'super department', have caused problems in its relationship with other parts of the administration. Our experience in Uganda and other countries suggests that rapid growth of individual units within the information support system, without an accompanying mechanism for coordination and collaboration, can lead to rivalries among units in the system.

## Research Week at Parliament of Uganda, August 2016<sup>8</sup>

Research Week was organized by Parliament's Department of Research Services in partnership with the Uganda National Academy of Sciences, with support from the VakaYiko programme.

The aims of the week were to raise the visibility of research within Parliament, strengthen Parliament's networks with the national research system, and increase MP demand for evidence.

### Activities

- Four-day exhibition at Parliament featuring 18 exhibitors from across Uganda's research and higher education landscape showcasing research and evidence. This included the DRS, which had used VakaYiko communications and data visualization training to produce new fact sheets, infographics and other visually compelling evidence products to share with MPs
- Breakout sessions led by internal and external researchers on topical policy issues including biosafety and biosecurity
- Half-day Symposium, featuring panel discussions and debates between researchers, MPs and other stakeholders on the role of evidence in Parliament of Uganda

### Results

Attendees at Research Week included 242 MPs, 107 members of parliamentary staff, the Deputy Speaker of Parliament and the Prime Minister. The event was also covered in national print, radio and television news. The DRS received more than its usual monthly target of research requests from MPs during Research Week alone; records show a sustained increase in demand for evidence during the year after the event as well as heightened visibility of the DRS within Parliament. New collaborations have since emerged between Parliament and the research community, including a formal partnership with the National Academy of Sciences to strengthen research and evidence within Parliament.

As a result of the parliamentary peer learning exchange scheme led by ACEPA during the final months of the VakaYiko programme, Parliament of Ghana was able to observe Uganda's Research Week and learn from the DRS about their experience of running it. The Parliament of Ghana successfully adapted and replicated the model in July 2017.

7. Uganda's Parliamentary Budget Office was established by an Act of Parliament in 2001 and has attracted interest from other countries in the region who are in the process of developing their own PBOs. For more information see Birungi & Huxley (2011).

8. For more information including a short documentary produced by the DRS about Research Week, see Hussain (2016).



## Systems and processes shaping evidence use

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A range of policies and procedures influence evidence use in the Department of Research Services. Developing and updating internal tools such as the Policy Analysis Manual and the templates that guide researchers in producing different types of products has been a key area of work for the DRS in recent years and has been supported to some extent by the VakaYiko programme, which enabled the DRS to work with local experts to conduct participatory reviews and revisions of key documents such as the Policy Analysis manual. An overarching Research Policy for Parliament is also in development, as is a workflow management system which will assist the department to assign and monitor research requests.

The DRS produces various different evidence products to guide MPs and committees, including research reports, factsheets, committee reports, bill and policy analysis, and policy briefs.<sup>9</sup> Information requests can be made by completing a request form, via email or in writing to the Director of Research Services, asking that research be carried out on a particular issue of interest to an MP or committee. After receiving a request, DRS management assesses the request and assigns it to a researcher or a team of researchers, under a supervising principal research officer. The major challenge with this stage of the system is timing; many requests are marked 'urgent' which affects the capacity of researchers to produce high-quality outputs. As in many other parliaments, once the research is complete there are also no formal external quality assurance processes for research products, and the resultant report is reviewed through internal peer review and submitted to the client.<sup>10</sup>

Unusually among the parliaments we profile, the DRS also performs a limited amount of proactive primary research, where it anticipates the research information needs of committees and MPs and conducts research to meet those needs. Research officers develop proposals and concept papers on topical issues, based on a keen following of debates and proceedings in the House. These proposals are reviewed and then teams of researchers are assigned to begin investigating the area and producing a final report. The reports from these studies are disseminated to committees, MPs and staff.

### Gathering evidence

Researchers gather evidence from government sources (MDAs) and from internal parliamentary offices, such as the library and Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO). Online sources, databases and search engines are also key sources of information, and the library has benefitted from membership of the Consortium of Uganda University Libraries, which provides free or discounted access to thousands of journals (Hussain, 2017). Limited computer stations in the library can pose a challenge to accessing such online sources of evidence, however. Another challenge that the Department faces in gathering evidence is the lack of a centralized information repository which would enable it to store its own research and avoid duplication.

The Parliament of Uganda is developing its networks with the country's extensive research and higher-education community in order to leverage external expertise to meet its the burgeoning research and evidence needs. The DRS has established working relationships with the Uganda National Academy of Sciences (UNAS), universities and other institutions, and has in recent years participated in pairing schemes with external researchers, joint events and other collaborations. Some of these relationships were developed under the VakaYiko programme, particularly through Research Week, which has resulted in a formal Memorandum of Understanding between Parliament and UNAS, as well as various other links between the DRS and external research institutions.

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9. Its current target for policy briefs is 600 per year.

10. External peer review processes were trialled as part of a collaboration between the UK Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) and the Parliament of Uganda which ran from 2008-2012. The final evaluation document (Nath & Holden, 2015) contains reflections on this process including the results of an independent quality assessment of a selection of science and technology briefings.



## Conclusion

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Our typology of parliaments in the main Evidence in African parliaments paper noted that demand for and use of evidence is affected by a wide range of internal as well as external factors, including Parliament's relationship with the Executive and the broader national political context. The Parliament of Uganda can be classified as an "Emerging Legislature". In recent years there has been rising interest around the theme of research and evidence within Parliament. Commitment at top levels of leadership has been complemented by a large and active research team which enjoys good visibility within the institution and has been able to stimulate increased demand for evidence from MPs and committees. Parliament has conducted a number of analyses and reviews to identify and act on its areas of weakness, and has demonstrated leadership and innovation in its approaches. This encouraging institutional context is of particular note given some of the more challenging features of the broader national governance context.

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