

Creating space for evidence based policy debate in Peru

Network supports discussion on better use of evidence in public policy

A VakaYiko grant is helping the Alianza Peruana para el Uso de la Evidencia in Peru create and maintain a safe space for debate on evidence-informed policy making issues. Enrique Mendizabal discusses how it also meets a growing demand for reflection, and for developing new skills for a growing number of young professionals working in and outside government and in various disciplines and sectors.

The Alianza Peruana para el Uso de la Evidencia (Peruvian Alliance for the Use of Evidence) is a practitioner-led network founded in Peru in 2014. It aims to support the development of a public space for policymakers, civil servants, researchers, practitioners, journalists, and other policy actors interested in promoting the use of evidence in policy making.

Based on its first two years' experience, the Alliance offers lessons on network formation and on the opportunities for greater and better use of evidence in public policy.

Brought together, these two sets of lessons offer important insights into how to promote the use of evidence in other contexts – at a relatively low cost and with a high chance of sustainability.

The Alliance: a quick and affordable start

The Alliance was founded as a spin-off of the Evidence based Policy and Development Network (ebpdn) in



A panel at the recent Global Development Network conference was organized by the Alliance and included INASP Executive Director Julie Brittain

Latin America. It was inspired by the Alliance for Useful Evidence in the United Kingdom.

In 2014, the Alliance organized six small meetings and public events for its members to discuss mechanisms and experiences in Peru on the use of evidence for public policy. This generated interest among potential members to join the network. All the meetings were hosted by the members themselves.

Over the course of the first year, the membership grew, slowly but steadily. The meetings often involved a few members attending a brief presentation on a method or approach associated with the use of evidence in public policy. For instance, in the first meeting, Aníbal Velásquez Valdivia, who later became the Minister of Health for Peru, presented an approach for using evaluations developed at the Ministry of Development and Social

Protection. The same year, Juana Kuramoto from CONCYTEC, Peru's Science and Technology Research Funding Agency, outlined the institution's strategic plans.¹

The meetings provided a safe and dynamic place for the exchange of ideas in which organizations could present their work while the members of the Alliance asked questions and offered advice. The Alliance ensured that there would be one meeting every month at the same time and date. The reason for doing this was to create a rhythm among the members and so build trust in the Alliance.

Social networks can be inexpensive to create but expensive to maintain. With new communication technologies, forming them has become cheaper still (any one can join a network at the click of an icon). With multiple networks (professional and personal) to attend





Education Minister Jaime Saavedra at the Global Development Network conference, which was supported by the Alliance

to, only those that promise to deliver in the long turn are likely to be given our full attention.

A self-sustained model

Over time, the Alliance built its name and gained trust among core members of the group by organizing monthly events. Its members knew that the network was here to stay.

Another important element of this network was that it organized free public events without any financial support from any donors; it was a self-sustained network in 2014. All expenses related to hosting the meetings were covered by the hosts (these were negligible). In addition, communications were simple (a Google Group; a free Mixcloud account to share the audio of the meetings; and a free Issue account to share any presentations or documents). Facilitation, which involved scheduling meetings, recording them, uploading them and sharing any other documents through the Google Group, was led by Enrique Mendizabal of On Think Tanks.

Towards the end of 2014, Enrique Mendizabal was joined by three

other members who were active in the meetings and the Google Group: Pedro Martín Ochoa de la Cruz, a consultant and former civil servant, Jessica Loyola, who at the time was working in the Ministry of Health, and Carlos Frias, from Soluciones Prácticas Perú (Practical Action).² Together they formed a group of Curators for the Alliance, which went on to develop a plan for 2015.

Consolidating the network

With the support of VakaYiko grant, the Alliance was able to organize nine internal meetings and five public events in 2015 and two workshops and an international panel at the Global Development Network's Annual Conferences in February and March 2016.

The internal meetings followed the same model as those organized in 2014 and served to introduce new members to the network: The Ministry of Finance, the International Potato Centre, Videnza (a behavioural economics think tank), Ipsos, UNOPS, etc. it also provided a safe place for the members of all sectors

including ministries and other public institutions where those that

“The Alianza is a relevant focal point for professionals and academics interested in evidence use to meet with the providers of research and evaluations. Sharing evidence among both groups creates a lively space to discuss what are the best uses of evidence and therein have greater impact on policy changes.”

Omar Narrea, Ministry of Economy and Finance and Chevening Scholar



generate evidence to discuss with others.

The public events, on the other hand, made it possible to reach out to a much broader audience by addressing topics not usually associated with evidence-based policy discussions. These included for example the value of the testimonies of victims of political violence in policy or new challenges (e.g. the role of women in research and policy) and encouraging a public discussion.

To manage these, the Alliance set up a Facebook page, a Twitter account, and a free Eventbrite page. Eventbrite was used to manage all the meetings (private and public), including invitations and reporting. It became the main website for the Alliance and produced a number of accompanying materials for the events such as videos, presentations, and case studies. Facebook and Twitter compliment the Google Group with more up-to-date discussions and make it easier to share resources publicly.

Over the course of the year, the meetings and events also contributed to a growing contacts' database, which constitutes the broader membership of the network.

In addition, the Alliance organized workshops developed in response to the demands from the participants of the meetings and public events. They were well attended as a consequence of the various meetings and events organized in 2015. Jessica Loyola, one of the curators, re-worked content from a module on systematic reviews developed for a post-graduate diploma and Enrique Mendizabal adapted a session on research communications developed for a series of think tanks over the course of the last two years.

By the end of 2015, the curators were joined by other active members to help develop a plan for 2016 and onwards. This plan includes

continuing with the activities delivered in 2015 plus carrying out new research on the subject of the role of evidence in policy, organizing some of the meetings outside the capital Lima, increasing the number of workshops and training for the members, and hosting the first Evidence Week in Peru in 2016.

It didn't all go as planned

In 2015, the Alliance sought to emulate its first year of existence in which it had organized six internal meetings hosted by its own

“We organized an event on independent evaluations. The event provided an important opportunity to exchange experiences related to public policy management and the Alliance helps consolidate the concept of ‘evidence utilization in decision making’. The Alliance provides a space for the exchange of experiences from different sectors.”

Alfonso Gutiérrez
Aguado, Ministry of
Economy and Finance

members. Without a budget, it had relied on its members' voluntary efforts. Hence, it's proposed plan was to organize six private meetings and two public events.

Early on, however, demand for hosting private meetings and the opportunity for organizing public events, turned out to be higher than expected. This prompted the curators to re-focus the network's attention away from producing all the outputs that had been proposed per event and instead attempt to organize more events. However:

- Each private meeting was accompanied by a brief note of the event, a recording of the presentations (audio), and the publication of any Power Point presentation or related documents
- All public events also included a video of the event (and the panellists) and a longer event report.

All these activities were uploaded to the Alliance's Eventbrite page, which now works as its main website, and incorporated into the Alliance's First Annual Report (which includes the network's activities in 2014 and 2015).³

The network also took advantage of some fantastic opportunities. For instance, the public event on the value of the testimonies of the victims of violence as evidence for policy making was organized to support the effort of the Lugar de la Memoria (Peru's newly inaugurated museum focused on the political violence of the 1980s and 90s). Other events, such as on the role of think tanks, women in research, and the challenges faced by ministerial research teams were hosted by local universities who offered the venues and catering for free.

Similarly, in March 2016 the Alliance put together a panel at the Global Development Network's Conference in Lima that presented



“The events didn’t just contribute to me professionally but also reaffirmed by appreciation for the inter-disciplinary work that is needed to contribute with the country’s development, particularly in relation to decision making and public policy formulation. I attended several events where various ideas, public-policy and methods were presented from the public and private perspective – for instance a workshop on Systematic Reviews. I do not think I am mistaken in saying that the Alianza fulfils a very useful and necessary role in our country.”

Wilson Sagástegui, Sociologist and Independent Consultant

a series of initiatives to generate evidence for different education policy actors in Latin America and the UK and was supported by the British Council in Peru.

These opportunities allowed the Alliance to reach out to new audiences, address new topics, and deliver more activities with fewer resources.

Challenges for network development and evidence-informed policy

There are a number of challenges faced by the Alliance. The following are among the most important:

Leadership: Changes in the leadership of the network can cause concern. The Alliance currently has a six-person leadership group that is slowly expanding to incorporate new members. It has been important to ensure that the group of Curators grows on top of a strong foundation and understanding of the network’s purpose and functions.

Membership: The network’s membership remains diverse –with researchers and practitioners from different sectors and disciplines. This could be a challenge to manage. So far, the network’s rather informal status has made it possible to “be something for everyone”. While this may work for another year or so,

there are already questions about whether or not the Alliance should formalize its membership.

A diverse membership also presents challenges due to the prevailing culture of Peru’s policy research community which, as in other places, tends to be rather compartmentalized. While the network’s events have managed to create safe spaces for discussion for new members, some people, particularly those coming from public bodies or academia, can be wary of open and public discussions that cut across disciplines and sectors.

Funding: Funding from VakaYiko has made it possible to deliver more than what was planned for 2015. Before the VakaYiko grant, the Alliance had learnt to function without funds and, as a consequence, the network faces 2016 and beyond in a very good situation. Still, fundraising remains a critical aspect of the network and this is something that must be prioritized now that it has found a comfortable rhythm of work.

Hosting: The Alliance is currently hosted by Universidad del Pacífico. This relationship has been extremely valuable and useful. However,

About Alianza Peruana para el Uso de la Evidencia

The Peruvian Alliance for the Use of Evidence hosted by Universidad del Pacífico is inspired by the UK Alliance for Useful Evidence. The Alliance is a Peruvian initiative and is made up of a group of individuals and organizations interested in promoting debate on the necessary methods, tools and capacities that generate a public culture that prioritizes critical use of evidence in policy making.

The curators of the Alliance are:

- Enrique Mendizabal – On Think Tanks
- Pedro Martín Ochoa de la Cruz – Consultant
- Jessica Loyola – Ministry of Health
- Carlos Frías – Soluciones Prácticas Perú
- Brenda Bucheli – Evaluations consultant
- Luis Eduardo Cisneros – Communications consultant



About VakaYiko

The VakaYiko consortium is a three-year project managed by INASP and funded by DFID under the Building Capacity for Use of Research Evidence (BCURE) programme. As part of the project, grants have been awarded to seven organizations in low and middle income countries to build capacity for research use through projects that enhance our understanding of how policymakers can be supported, through practical measures, to make more effective use of evidence.

These organizations are the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines, the Center for Public Policy Alternatives (CPPA), the Gender Centre for Research and Training (GCRT) in Sudan, Jimma University in Ethiopia, Politics & Ideas in Argentina, and the Universidad del Pacifico in Peru. For more information, see www.inasp.info/vakayiko.

we are yet to strengthen the opportunities for mutual benefit. A strong and willing host is critical for the network's capacity to attract funding in the future.

Members have considered the possibility of a rotating hosting agreement or sharing responsibilities in the network's leadership.

Lessons learnt

In this process, we have had the opportunity to learn a few lessons about how evidence is understood in the policy-making process in Peru:

1. There are different definitions of evidence. Different hierarchies of evidence affect how different actors access and use it. We have learnt from our discussions that there is not one single definition of evidence used in public policy. On the contrary, evidence can range from hard quantitative data to subjective opinions and perceptions captured by the qualitative method. These experiences may be personal (held by individuals and based on their academic and work experience or beliefs) or institutional (enforced by organizational cultures and mandates). The debate on the merits of qualitative versus quantitative is real but slightly overrated – mandates and organizational expectations may bias institutions towards the use of one type of evidence but this does not mean that they do not value others.

2. There are many different producers of evidence. Producers are both public and private, international and local. The idea of separate producers and users of evidence reflects a false dichotomy. Of particular interest is that the Peruvian Government has established evidence units at different levels in almost every ministry. They are in charge of generating evidence as well as managing evaluations. But they are also, by their nature, part of the policy-making process. The private sector emerges as a key player. The field of evidence for policy is increasingly influenced by the role of consultancies, public opinion companies and even large corporations such as telecoms companies.

3. Not all evidence is used. This is for different reasons including politics, personal capacities, opportunities, and hierarchies of evidence. The reasons often relate to the nature of the source of the evidence; public producers face different challenges from private ones, often attempting different strategies to maximize the uptake of their ideas. However, the government can generate opportunities for evidence as it strengthens its policy-making capacity. In Peru, the Ministry of Finance is implementing a results-based budgeting policy. This policy demands evidence to inform any

resource allocation decisions. It also incorporates process and impact evaluations right from the start.

Not all researchers and sectors are treated in the same way. A particular interest for the Alliance was the role of women in the research community in Peru. A public event was dedicated to the role of women in research and policy-making who, as is the case in other countries, are under-represented in the sector – more so in some than others. Similarly, some sectors attract great interest from researchers and there is sufficient evidence to support decision making. Other sectors, on the other hand, are under-studied. This can be explained by a number of factors including demand, funding sources' interests, and researchers' own interests.

Given all of this, we find that the Alliance has been successful in creating and maintaining a safe space for debate on public policy issues. It also meets a growing demand for reflection and for developing new skills from a growing number of young professionals working in and outside government, in various disciplines and sectors.

¹ For a full list of events visit: alianzaevidencia.eventbrite.com

² Two more curators joined in early 2016: Brenda Bucheli and Luis Eduardo Cisneros

³ See: https://issuu.com/onthinktanks/docs/reporte_de_actividades_ape/1

