

VakaYiko Strategy for Policy Dialogues and Knowledge Cafes in Zimbabwe



Jan Liebnitzky, Clara Richards

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Background

In Zimbabwe, VakaYiko works with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce; The Ministry of Youth, Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment and the Parliament of Zimbabwe to improve the use of evidence in response to departmental priorities.

In order to enable a wider range of voices (including the media, civil society, academia and think tanks) to contribute to the policy-making process, VakaYiko will conduct policy dialogues (PD) and knowledge cafes (KC). PDs are organized together with the ministries, whereas KCs are conducted independently by VakaYiko consortium member ZeipNET (Zimbabwe Evidence Informed Policy Network) and/or in cooperation with the Parliament of Zimbabwe.

The following is a general strategy for PDs and KCs that will help guide the planning process and preparation of the events as well as the communication with partner ministries.

Policy dialogues and knowledge cafes

PDs focus on policy issues and each one debates a particular policy problem. The event convenes the relevant stakeholders, i.e. people affected by the problem and/or people who are in a position to change it. The aim of PDs is to open discussions and have balanced engagement around key national policy issues, bringing government together with relevant members of the society such as the private sector, journalists, researchers, social leaders, etc.

KCs, on the other hand, are targeted at the general public. These events aim to discuss the importance of using evidence in policy making. They can either discuss evidence-informed policy making (EIPM) in general or focus on a specific topic. KCs are informal events where content and language is made relevant for anyone interested in civic/public issues. Held in an informal setting, these events are open to everyone and will usually have approximately 40-70 participants.

Rationale of policy dialogues and knowledge cafes

In the short term, public engagement in the policy-making process through PDs and KCs creates a new space for the exchange of knowledge, concerns and perspectives in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, these events aim to increase consideration of research evidence by policy makers. In the long term, institutionalized and sustainable PDs and KCs promote transparency and accountability in policy making, leading to improved policies.

It is therefore important that PDs are jointly planned and implemented with partner ministries and, if possible, other stakeholders too. This is to ensure that these events address partner's and stakeholder's needs and therefore increase engagement with the process.

Specific objectives of policy dialogues and knowledge cafes

There are three main objectives of policy dialogues and knowledge cafes. **Objective a** is primarily targeted at PDs; **objectives b and c** are important for both PDs and KCs.

a) To discuss relevant policy issues by involving a balanced range of relevant stakeholders in an inclusive and participatory environment

As a prerequisite for successful PDs, all parties should acknowledge the potential benefits that the event provides to the policy-making process. Among other benefits, the sharing of perspectives on a policy or problem can shed light on new solutions based on locally contextualized research evidence.

PDs therefore provide a platform for an interactive exchange of knowledge, ideas and concerns of different stakeholders feeding into policy making. Ideally, this process should include a variety of relevant stakeholders and should not be dominated by a particular group. Relevancy can refer, for instance, to stakeholders who might be affected directly or indirectly by the policy. This emphasizes the importance of inviting the right stakeholders and the right number of each stakeholder group, as well as providing professional and impartial facilitation to build an atmosphere of mutual trust and understanding.

b) To improve policy makers' processes for engaging with research evidence

PDs provide policymakers with a unique opportunity to engage with different stakeholders to timely identify, review and integrate available research evidence.

KCs provide a platform where researchers and wider sectors of the society can discuss and engage actively with policymakers by sharing evidence. This exchange helps to demystify research and the concept of evidence-informed policy making (EIPM) as well as raise awareness of the value of using research evidence in policy making.

c) To increase the visibility of ZeipNET and VakaYiko

PDs and KCs provide ZeipNET (with the support of the VakaYiko consortium) with an opportunity to promote its work and prove its credibility, which will help the organisation to improve Zimbabwe's policy-making processes by engaging researchers and policymakers. Consequently, after the series of events, assuming their usefulness, PDs and KCs will become institutionalized and ZeipNET will become the best placed organization to organize them. ZeipNET will also be seen as the organization that works towards linking research and policy.

Expected outcomes

If PDs and KCs are institutionalized or included in policy makers' processes they can promote transparency and accountability in policy making. This will ultimately lead to better policies and create an enabling environment where evidence is valued.

Methodologies for the PDs and KCs

VakaYiko plans to conduct a total of six PDs; two organized with each institution (ministries and parliament). Three KCs will be organized independently by ZeipNET. The following methodology is especially important for PDs as they are, by nature, more sensitive.

1) Identification of PDs and KCs topics should be approached in a participatory manner that includes all relevant stakeholders

The guiding criteria are:

- High national priority issues
- Relevance to ministries' strategic plans
- Alignment to the national economic blue print, the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Social Economic Development (Zim-Asset)
- Gender (50% of the policy dialogues have to be on topics that address gender issues)

And, additionally for the KCs:

- Topical scientific issues with a bearing on high-priority policy areas

PDs in particular should provide opportunities to discuss a problem, options to address a problem (including implementation challenges and opportunities) and ensure an equal representation of those involved in, or affected by, future policy options related to the issue (see also point 3).

2) Facilitation

The PDs should be facilitated professionally in order to foster an inclusive and participatory environment that is consensus- rather than conflict-oriented. Facilitation should emphasize the production of outputs and follow-up activities to the event.

3) Identification of relevant stakeholders

The identification of relevant stakeholders should be done collaboratively with partner ministries and ZeipNET on the basis of a stakeholder analysis. Potential stakeholders are directly or indirectly affected by the discussion topic and/or have a say in the policy formulation process.

Analysis of stakeholders includes identification and categorisation into:

- Key stakeholders: These are capable of significantly influencing the reform effort and are also pivotal to the policies' success or failure
- Primary Stakeholders: These are either negatively or positively affected by the policy directly
- Secondary Stakeholders: These may have an interest/stake in the topic or might indirectly be affected.

Monitoring and evaluation

It is acknowledged that six PDs and three KCs will only be one of many factors on the journey to achieving a more transparent and accountable policy-making process and, as a result, better policies. It will be crucial to sustainably institutionalize the PDs in the policy-making process.

Although current PDs and KCs set the precedent, effectiveness can only be evaluated in the long run and is subject to many different external economic and political risks. Furthermore, as PDs in particular are planned and conducted in a cooperative manner with the ministries and perhaps other stakeholders, it is possible that objectives of each individual PD are adapted and/or added. The aforementioned constraints may undermine a coherent and reliable monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework for the PDs and KCs.

For each of the six PDs and three KCs, however, we will try to evaluate their success with regards to the different objectives validating the rationale behind the events. By the end of the VakaYiko programme we will then be able to evaluate the success of the PDs and KCs and forecast the expected outcomes if such events were institutionalized.

In considering the three objectives discussed earlier in this document, the M&E process will take the following approach:

a) To discuss relevant policy issues by involving a balanced range of relevant stakeholders in an inclusive and participatory environment

An observational rubric containing measures for interaction, facilitation, power dynamics and the use of research evidence will be used to address this objective regarding the inclusive and participatory environment. A list of participants with institutional affiliation will provide evidence concerning the participation of relevant stakeholders. In addition, minutes and concrete event outputs may indicate success regarding this objective.

b) To improve policymakers' processes for engaging with research evidence

The observational rubric will be used to address this objective. In addition, minutes and concrete event outputs may indicate success regarding this objective.

c) To increase the visibility of ZeipNET and VakaYiko

A range of evidence will be used to address this objective from an M&E perspective, including descriptive google alert statistics, clicks on website, presentation of ZeipNET during the KC/PD and different event communication products.