



# Introduction: Research Capacity for Evidence-Informed Policy Making in Africa

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There is global movement advancing the use of evidence in public policy making. Donors and international institutions continue to support the use of evidence in policy making. This is because it is believed that the use of evidence will improve the quality of policy decision making and the implementation of policies. The extent of the use of evidence varies across countries and across issue areas within countries.

In many countries there are persistent issues militating against the uptake in the use of evidence in public policy making and practice. Some government leaders are not committed to it. Some countries do not have a history of using evidence because they do not interact with producers of evidence, be they in the universities, think tanks, research institutes, and so

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on. The relationship between evidence producers and the policy communities is often weak.

Within the policy processes in Africa, there are no clearly defined standards that demand a push for the search for evidence. With little or no tradition of using evidence in policy making, the capacity for and consciousness of the use of evidence does not sufficiently exist to make it a culture of the policy process. Thus, policy makers often do not have the knowledge, skill and motivation to find, appraise, synthesise and use evidence routinely. Weak partnerships between the policy community and evidence producers reflect in the absence of timely and relevant evidence to inform debate and enable the building of consensus for policy and programme choices. Poor interface between government and university research is pervasive with dire consequences for the use of evidence in policy making and implementation. In many institutions, processes or structures to ensure routine evidence use in policy and practice are non-existent or grossly inadequate.

While many countries have become dependent on international institutions for policy initiatives, such policies' implementation suffers from weak capacity for public policy analysis, policy evaluation, monitoring and review. These partly account for poor performance in economic management and social development. The one-size-fits-all tendency in global policy intervention sometimes has been blamed for the poor performance of such policies. There is therefore a need to address these deficiencies.

One major initiative designed to address the issues is the establishment of the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR). Since its inception in 2011, PASGR has promoted policy analysis and research initiatives, developed research and policy interface structures and processes and intervened in higher education to support training in policy-engaged research and to advance evidence-informed policy making. It has developed a set of programmes and activities to promote and build capacity around policy analysis/research and to improve the use of evidence in policy making in Africa

One of its flagship activities in the effort to bridge the gap between research and public policy in Africa is the Master of Research and Public Policy (MRPP) programme. This unique collaborative graduate programme offered in multiple universities in Africa from 2014 has a dual focus on social science research and public policy. The programme is currently being offered in 14 African universities for those who wish to be researchers, future academics or policy analysis practitioners. The Doctoral programme in Public Policy (DPP) began in 2019 in three of the universities to enhance interdisciplinary grounding in the practice of public policy

and to deepen research competencies. It seeks to provide graduates with the advance knowledge, skills and competencies that will enable them to lead policy-relevant research, and improve the practice and scholarship in public policy. The programme will also impart knowledge and skills in research communication, scholarly publishing as well as leadership in pedagogical practice for next-generation academics, researchers, policy practitioners and leaders. Graduates will be highly motivated and adequately equipped to contribute to economic development and social transformation at the national and global levels.

African scholars and policy stakeholders were parts and parcel of the process of developing the curriculum for the two programmes. It is considered vital that materials such as textbooks, teaching and learning aids, and strategies for the programme substantially draw on the African experience. The programme implementation in several universities in Africa showed that there is need for quality textbooks that address the issues that make up the content of the curriculum. Many of the available textbooks on public policy and policy analysis either are authored by non-African scholars or are country specific when they are from within the continent. Experience from the execution of these programme across 13 universities shows that there is a dearth of policy analysis textbooks with deep African flavour. Most of the available texts are either written for universities in north or authored by scholars in universities in the north. Most of these illustrate the issues discussed with cases based on experiences in policy from outside Africa. Thus, African students are unable to effectively engage the cases used because they are alien to the practices of policy processes in Africa in significant ways. The few textbooks informed by African experiences, often are based on experiences of single countries, are written for students in those countries where the scholars are domiciled. There is need for a textbook that can provide the content drawn from experiences of the African context which effectively speaks to the curriculum of the MRPP, that at once captures the global outlook of the programme and the continental focus of the programme.

The master's in Research and Public Policy (MRPP) and the Doctoral Programme in Public Policy (DPP) have been designed collaboratively and are delivered using a common architecture, course content and teaching practices across the universities. This textbook is conceived to cover important aspects of the course content and targets the students on the programmes across the participating universities. Indeed, it is hoped that it will be the first in a series of book of readings for teachers and students in the MRPP and the DPP programmes. The book covers selected content of the MRPP and DPP curricula and therefore is expected to serve as the

prime reference material for both teachers and students alike on the programmes. The textbook will also be useful for similar and related courses in public policy in universities across Africa and beyond. Importantly too, contributors of chapters to the textbooks are scholars and teachers who have been involved in developing the curriculum or teachers who have been engaged in the delivery of the content in the various universities offering the programmes. It is hoped that it will help equip the students in policy knowledge and to advance policy-focused research, support a learner-centred teaching and cover diverse issues from a policymaking perspective.

Apart from the introduction and conclusion, the book consists of ten chapters covering a wide range of issues relating to the interface between policy and research with an African flavour. The chapter following the introduction is on policy analysis and innovation in the humanities and social sciences and their role in ‘shaping the self-understanding of peoples and societies, and thereby giving meaning to life’ and in addressing ‘divisive globalism, environmental crisis and the uncertain horizons of rapid scientific and technological development’. We are witnesses to the growth in scale, complexity and urgency of public policy problems in our globalised world which has made the context of policy making increasingly uncertain, characterised by rapid and widespread changes. Policy making occurs in the context of uncertainty and variability. Expert knowledge in the form of evidence that can inform policy making is increasingly sought and utilised in the policy process to achieve sustainable development. This need has been epitomised by the devastating impact of the Corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic, with record deaths world-wide and devastating economies. This chapter underscores the importance of the humanities and the social sciences ‘not only in understanding, making sense and making meaning of our current human condition but also in contributing to the design of policies that address those conditions’. The chapter examines the nature of social science research as it has evolved historically in Africa within the colonial context and the linkages between social science research institutions and the policy processes. It draws on research to map the debate around these connections and the ongoing quest to promote innovation and achieve an uptake in evidence-informed policy making across Africa.

Chapter 3 focuses on the Social Science Foundations of Public Policy. It presents and discusses the social science basis of public policy. It briefly presents the history, epistemological thoughts (theories) and science of

public policy, disciplinary paradigms and influences on public policy, and cross-disciplinary dimensions in social science-oriented public policy research. Chapter 4 explores the nature of public policy and role of policy analysis in the policy process. It examines a variety of research methods and their use in public policy engagements and analysis for evidence-informed policy making. It explains qualitative methods, quantitative methods, multiple and mixed methods research. Other issues addressed include causal research in public policy, report writing and communication and related issues in public policy research. The fifth chapter is devoted to governance issues and the politics of public policy in Africa. Analysing the interconnections among the concepts of 'public policy', 'politics' and 'governance' and their inter-relationships, it surveys the political and governance issues around policy making in Africa. It then elaborates the main features of the governance context of policy making, the formal governance institutions of policy making: the arms of government and the models and systems of government. It also describes policy roles of the party and electoral systems as frameworks of democratic governance. It explores public policy instruments and actors in the policymaking process as well as the informal dimensions of politics and public policy making.

In the sixth chapter, the book outlines the debates around policy paradigms in the study of the changing context of public policy making and policy change. It recognises that policy ideas are embedded in policy paradigms and that these paradigms form the basis for framing, articulating and implementing public policy. It examines such concepts as pluralism, internationalisation and globalisation, and polycentricism in the study of public policy. Furthermore, it examines the changing focus and locus of policy, discussing such issues as the state versus market, the growing complexity and scale of government, and the special concerns of Africans relating to the debate around the issues. Based on the above theoretical debates, certain issues and the competing tools for addressing them are identified for closer scrutiny. These contextual issues relate to the economy, health, security, environment and natural resources, governance, exclusion and vulnerability. The chapter concludes by drawing out the implications of policy paradigms on policy change and policy performance.

Chapter 7 explains public policy making and implementation from a political economy perspective. It examines the concepts of political economy and public policy, and discusses some of the variants of political economy and how each conceives of public policymaking process and

implementation. It argues that the making and implementation of public policy is enveloped in contestations and bargaining between interest groups with competing claims over rights and resources. Oftentimes the use and control of political power shape the direction and class character of public policy. In some circumstances, policy outcomes help to further reproduce the position of the ruling class in control of the state apparatus. The chapter further discusses the role of political economy in problem-solving and how political economy uses evidence in public policy analysis.

One of the major challenges confronting public policy in Africa is how to overcome overt and subtle discrimination in the art of governance, economic and social development. The promotion of social diversity and the eradication of exploitation of one group by others remains a major focus. Explaining the political and civil rights of different social classes, as well as their economic, social and cultural rights, provides the basis for the chapter on social diversity, gender, equity and public policy. The chapter examines the discourse on social differences, and how state and society have responded over time to the growing demands for inclusive growth and social justice in development. It shows how evidence from reflective research is contributing to the unfolding paradigm, a shift towards embracing social diversity and equity with special reference to race, gender, ethnicity and disability, to name a few. The chapter highlights how policy instruments influence the process of income distribution across different social groups; how public policy can be used to advance people's freedoms across different social groups.

Chapter 9 argues that leadership has a direct link to good governance, economic and social development. Underscoring the idea that it provides the guide to achieving these objectives, this chapter examines great leadership skills as intertwined with a deep understanding of the policymaking process. It examines the concept of leadership broadly and leadership in Africa specifically. It focuses on traditional and modern leadership features and roles in Africa. It explores the concepts of accountability, participation, deliberation, division of power and freedom of expression as they relate to leadership and governance of public policy making in Africa and the accompanying challenges.

The tenth chapter is devoted to exploring the global context of public policy making, especially the influence of globalisation on public policy making in Africa. It provides a precise and conceptually focused definitions of globalisation and public policy. It addresses the emergence of global institutions of governance, international conventions, global policies and

their diffusion and influence on national policy making around the world. It takes us around the debates around policy paradigms in the study of the public policy choice and policy change. It examines influence of global policy paradigms on national public policy making in Africa, with illustrations drawn from Republic of Kenya. It therefore identifies and discusses the competing forces of both internal and external factors that influence public policy making in Africa.

The eleventh chapter underscores the importance of policy communication and engagement with policy makers and other stakeholders in the effort to promote the use of evidence in the public policymaking process. Recognising that there are two dimensions, the demand and supply sides to the use of evidence in policy making, it discusses the various instruments and platforms for communicating research to make it accessible to a variety of stakeholders.

The concluding chapter establishes and underscores the salience of the central claims of the chapters of the book, the skills and abilities the readings support as part of the research and public policy programmes. It begins by examining the travails of the effort to promote evidence-informed policy making from the 1950s in the build-up to independence, through the period of central planning, fiscal crisis and recession, structural adjustment, and the entrance and proliferation of independent think tanks. It shows that after a lull during the periods of dictatorship and the shrinking of the democratic space, the liberalisation and democratisation process from the 1990s onwards has rekindled consciousness and interest in promoting evidence-informed policy making. African countries have become part of the evidence revolution indicated by the establishment of national policy evaluation systems across the continent. The chapters together constitute essential materials for understanding various aspects and dimensions of policy making in Africa with emphasis on quality research and excellence in both teaching and learning of the graduate programmes in public policy.

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