

E-TOOLKIT FOR USAID MISSIONS:

Best Practices on How USAID Missions Can Work Effectively with Parliamentarians and Staff in Africa to Apply Evidence to Policy Making

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ACRONYMS

APNODE	African Parliamentarians' Network on Development Evaluation
AFIDEP	African Institute for Development Policy
ACEPA	African Center for Parliamentary Affairs
AEN	African Evidence Network
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
CLEAR-AA	Center for Learning on Evaluation and Results Anglophone Africa
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DG	Democracy and Governance
DOs	Development Objectives
DRS	Department of Research Services
DOC	Development Outreach and Communications
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EIDM	Evidence-Informed Decision-Making
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
INASP	International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications
IPU	International Parliamentary Union
IRB	Institutional Review Board
MDAs	Ministries, Departments, and Agencies of Government
MPs	Members of Parliament
MPSI	Malawi Parliamentary Support Initiative (MPSI)
NES	National Evaluation System
NIMES	National integrated M&E strategy
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PBOs	Parliamentary Budget Offices
PC-EIDM	Parliamentary Caucus on Evidence-Informed Oversight and Decision-Making
PRS	Parliamentary Research Service
RDOs	Regional Development Objectives
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TSUE	Assessment, Analysis, And Development of Tools To Strengthen The Use of Evidence in Policies And Legislation in Africa
USAID	United States Agency For International Development

INTRODUCTION

TOOLKIT OBJECTIVES

Welcome to the USAID Missions Toolkit, which is a resource to USAID leadership and technical staff on how to work effectively with parliamentarians and staff. This serves against the necessary backdrop on the growing recognition of the importance of evidence in national decision-making and the crucial role of parliamentarians and their staff in ensuring that evidence-based approaches are used for strengthening oversight, budgeting resource appropriation, legislation, and policy making across all sectors. Parliamentarians and their staff need data and evidence to make decisions that effectively, equitably, and justly allocate resources and meet people’s social and economic needs. However, they face major technical and political challenges related to the generation and the use of evidence to inform policies. This challenge is acute in Africa given the dearth of information and analysis about the conditions, problems, and solutions of social and economic development. Parliaments in Africa lack the capacity to compile and use evidence in the design, oversight, and evaluation of legislation and policies on the critical economic and social issues facing various countries on the continent. In view of this, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and its implementing partners University of Rhode Island (URI) and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana (KNUST), under the “Assessment, Analysis and Development of Tools to Strengthen the use of Evidence in Policies and Legislation” (TSUE) project conducted a study to assess the current use of evidence by parliamentarians as well as their capacity to generate, access, and use evidence in their work.

The study utilized a face-to-face questionnaire targeted at participants in selected African countries. A study instrument was developed and submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at KNUST for approval. The field work started on February 15, 2022, after IRB approval and was completed in May, 2022. To administer the face-to-face questionnaires, 10 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa were selected as sample countries. In each country, 10 MPs and five parliamentary staff were targeted as participants, bringing the total number of participants to 15 per country, and an overall total of 150 participants from the 10 countries. The research team also travelled to Malawi, Nigeria, and Ghana and 12 MPs were interviewed to gain in-country insights and local context to ensure a wide range of perspectives and some level of objectivity and representation among participants. There were various factors taken into consideration: political party affiliation, gender, years of experience in Parliament, committee leadership, and leadership position in Parliament.

The findings and recommendations from the study will be disseminated to several targeted stakeholders – Parliaments and their members, USAID and other interested actors working in the field of evidence informed policy making. This document outlines the importance of supporting parliaments in evidence-based and data-driven legislation and policy making to ensure government transparency, accountability, and effectiveness. In addition, the recommendations emanating from the study provided 10 best practices that include the following:

1. Establish relationships with individual Members of Parliaments (MPs) from all political parties and staff within their first year of office.
2. Develop or build upon effective capacity building initiatives particularly in USAID Missions that do not have DRG parliamentary activities.
3. Establish strategic partnerships with regional organizations that work with Parliaments and local actors across Africa that are leaders in sustainable monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks, which have the capacity to support staff on how to strengthen evidence-based legislations and policies in public decision-making.
4. Strengthening Parliamentarians' connections with citizens and civil society organizations to ensure inclusion of local voices are a part of parliamentary processes, which can help identify gaps and weaknesses that are not visible in government reports or national statistics.
5. Empower parliamentarians to embrace modern technology to move from traditional practices of utilizing libraries as knowledge management repositories of information to digitizing knowledge assets for searchability and easy accessibility.
6. Encourage the establishment of a Parliamentary Caucus on Evidence-Informed Oversight and Decision-Making (PC-EIDM) to institutionalize evidence champions.
7. Develop partnerships and lead gender equality initiatives with parliaments to advocate and support the passing of legislation and quotas to increase the representation of women in parliament.
8. Create incentives and outreach programs that reward parliamentarians and publicize staff who are proactive in championing evidence.
9. Support parliamentarians on how to demystify the use of evidence to increase the value of using evidence.
10. Support parliamentarians in engaging community radio broadcasting for effective parliamentary leadership.



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Evidence is not politically neutral and you need to realize that evidence is also currency and how you spend it also has its own impact. So, sometimes there's this assumption that evidence is just numbers and statistics, but when you're making laws that affect policy, that influences different interest groups, that evidence itself can be very, very political as the case may be. And you can just ask any bureau of statistics, the kind of pressures they face in terms of trying to make that link between evidence and policy. But I think in the Nigerian context, we also have to bear in mind that these things have to also be locally stimulated, locally demanded, they can't be imposed from outside. So if you're saying that evidence should drive policy, well, it's a democracy. What if the people are not asking for that evidence? Politicians will respond to what the people are requesting

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& Interparliamentary Affairs
to the Speaker of the House
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I. EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICY MAKING

WHAT IS EVIDENCE?

Articulating the meaning of evidence in the context of evidence informed policy making and legislation is critical to understanding the current state of evidence use in African parliaments (INASP, 2016a; INASP, 2016b Shaxson & Datta, 2016). A common and acceptable definition of evidence for both users and producers of evidence is necessary and should be at the heart of any discourse on evidence informed policy making (Sutcliffe & Court 2005). Although evidence is portrayed as an a-political, neutral, and objective policy tool, it is neither neutral or uncontested (Nutley, 2003 as cited in Sutcliffe & Court, 2005).

In a white paper issued in 1999, the UK Cabinet Office defined evidence as ‘expert knowledge; published research; existing research; stakeholder consultations; previous policy evaluations; the Internet; outcomes from consultations; costings of policy options; output from economic and statistical modeling’ (Cabinet Office, 1999: 33). This interpretation of evidence was supported by Marston & Watts (2003), who provided a catalog of possible sources to include photographs, literary texts, official files, autobiographical material such as diaries and letters, newspaper files and ethnographic and observer accounts. Shaxson (2005) contended that evidence is, therefore, wide and dynamic, and went on further to define evidence as, “any information that helps policymakers make decisions and get results that are concrete, manageable and achievable.” This view of Shaxson is shared by Oronje & Warira (2018), that what constitutes ‘evidence’ is a contentious issue’. According to Newman, Fisher & Shaxson (2012) evidence is one of the many different factors that informs policy making alongside other factors such as political realities and public debates. This is attributed to the broader understanding of ‘evidence-informed policy,’ which moves away from a narrow focus on research and methodological rigor to a more inclusive understanding of the evidence that recognizes diverse forms of knowledge and information, such as citizen knowledge, practical experience, and administrative data (Jones et al., 2012 & Draman et. Al., 2017).

Among Parliamentarians, as with the academic community, there is no agreed definition of evidence. The TSUE project video interview conducted with a total of 12 MPs in Malawi, Ghana, and Nigeria revealed that establishing a common understanding of what evidence means among African parliamentarians is an arduous task. Almost all respondents have a different understanding and interpretation of what evidence means even if they all underscored the use of facts/evidence to inform policies and legislation.

The TSUE 10 country study adopts a working definition based on an appreciation of the varied definitions in the literature as well as perspectives from Parliamentarians. It defines evidence as one of the many factors, occurring externally or internally, to inform policy making and takes into account the timing as well as the social and political context of the parliament.

WHY DO WE NEED IT?

There is power in using evidence to inform decisions about development programs, parliaments have a constitutional obligation to represent the people by articulating the views of citizens in decision-making processes. In short, evidence-based decisions can transform lives and communities. African governments spend a large share of their public funds on policies and programmes aimed to support socio-economic development. In addition, donors and the international development community provide funding for humanitarian programs. It is paramount that these scarce funds achieve their maximum impact and are not wasted on policies and programs that fail in their development objectives. Being transparent about how and why such programs were chosen or bills being passed based on evidence, also enhances the public trust in decision-making processes and fosters transparency and public sector accountability.

WHY SUPPORT PARLIAMENTARIANS?

In the last two decades, with the democratization process that has been embraced by most countries in Africa, Parliaments have become central to the continent's development. In addition, Parliaments can play a key role in supporting the implementation of USAID's Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCSs), which are grounded in development theory, practice, literature, and experience from utilization, and support USAID's mission to promote and demonstrate democratic values abroad, and advance a free, peaceful, and prosperous world. USAID set forth a high-level goal supported by Development Objectives (DOs) or, in the case of a regional strategy (RDCS), Regional Development Objectives (RDOs), that each Mission, in collaboration with its development partners, will work to address during the strategy period. Missions use portfolio reviews and midcourse stocktaking to adapt strategies to changes in country context, development needs, new priorities, and evidence from implementation and development literature.



Hon. Bertha Mackenzie Ndebele, Member of Parliament in Malawi reinforces the importance of gender policies for greater development outcomes after a sit-down interview with USAID's TSUE project Communication team. (Photo Credit: USAID, Enock)

II. BEST PRACTICES ON HOW USAID MISSIONS CAN WORK EFFECTIVELY WITH PARLIAMENTARIANS AND STAFF TO APPLY EVIDENCE TO POLICYMAKING

- I. **Establish relationships with individual Members of Parliaments (MPs) from all political parties and staff within their first year of office to gain a better understanding of the composition and working methods of parliament, as well as the political context in which it operates** — USAID Missions Democracy and Governance (DG) offices with parliamentary programs are in a great position to work with evidence champions who will be influential in improving the role of evidence use and advancing joint agendas that include USAID’s CDCS and development goals.

TIP:

- Educate parliamentary committees on the CDCS and the role they can play to ensure current laws and new legislation aligns with CDCS goals to support greater development outcomes.
- Identify evidence producers, strengthen understanding of their responsibilities, and support evidence champions in promoting good practices on how to increase the uptake of evidence to improve legislative decision-making.
- Develop a series of roundtable meetings with Parliamentary committees, they are in the best position to raise widespread awareness of evidence champions.

2. **Provide and strengthen linkages between the research and the policy world for MPs to increase information support systems and accessibility to diverse sources of evidence to inform policies** — Parliamentarians and their staff are in search of skills related to accessing, generating and packaging evidence as well as increase the uptake of evidence to improve legislative decision-making. As USAID-funded programs have time limits it is important to engage local organizations with the expertise to provide peer-to-peer learning opportunities that promote effective practices for longer term impact when projects have ended.
3. **Establish strategic partnerships with regional organizations that work with Parliaments and local actors across Africa that are leaders in applying evidence to decision-making** — Key organizations include the [CLEAR Network](#) of six regional centers, [APNODE](#), [ACEPA](#), [AFIDEP](#) and [AEN](#) to name a few. Regional organizations provide opportunities for MPs to strengthen their ability to value, source, evaluate, and synthesize evidence. These opportunities may be in the form of formal or informal training courses, peer-to-peer learning events, [and dedicated research weeks](#).

4. **Strengthening Parliamentarians' connections with citizens and civil society organizations to ensure inclusion of local voices are a part of parliamentary processes, which can help identify gaps and weaknesses that are not visible in government reports or national statistics** — USAID's implementing partners represent and have direct linkages to CSOs. USAID/Malawi Mission has implemented this well in particular in the agricultural sector.



Malawian farmers and CSOs advocating for a stop to seedling malpractice in Malawi. (Photo Credit: USAID/Malawi)

TIP:

- Public hearings provide a platform for parliaments to receive citizens' input on draft or existing legislation. This provides a great opportunity to champion issues related to vulnerable and marginalized groups.
- Organize local forums where citizens and parliamentarians can discuss and learn about the CDCS.
- Connect Parliamentary Committees with CSOs implementing USAID funded projects (e.g education, health, agriculture etc.) in the same sector.
- Invite MPs and Parliament's leadership to the groundbreaking/commissioning of USAID funded projects.

5. Empower parliamentarians to make use of innovation to source information digitally and move from traditional practices of utilizing libraries as repositories of information —

The COVID-19 pandemic underscores the need for MPs and their staff to embrace modern technology. Digital information presents insights in real-time and observations in contrast to the scientific or technical evidence that takes time to digest. The Malawi Parliament transitioned to garnering evidence responsively and interactively from digital outlets.

TIP:

- COVID forced Parliaments to adapt to innovation and technology and USAID’s DOC teams can provide support to MPs on how to use social media in the following ways:
 - Source evidence, develop relationships with civil society organizations, and expand reach in different geographical locations to connect with citizens who lack the means to participate in parliamentary processes in-person.
 - Educate citizens on how bills are passed and allow feedback to parliamentarians on draft legislations, and submit questions to elected representatives in a public forum.
 - MPs learn how to utilize a range of social and multimedia platforms to present immediate insights in real time.

6. Support parliamentarians in engaging journalists and community radio broadcasting for effective parliamentary leadership —

In Sub-Saharan Africa radio is one of the most effective mediums of mass media and community communication. In a democracy, the activities of community radios could give further meaning to decentralization and local governance where an appropriate medium is created to facilitate an interface between duty bearers and rights holders. It is not enough to simply set up democratic institutions and processes; better governance requires creating opportunities for the people to improve their quality of life— and must be held accountable. USAID with our partners continue to support the democratization of parliament practices to monitor, evaluate, and generate evidence to achieve greater development outcomes. In Malawi, engagement of the [media](#) on the review and passing of the Seed Bill in 2022, helped disseminate an evidence based policy to the general public on issues that matter such as agricultural transformation, a key driver of Malawi’s economy.



Malawian farmers outside of Parliament present a petition in support of the Seed Bill. (Photo Credit: USAID/Malawi)

TIP:

- USAID has experience funding DRG programs that utilize community radios and with the support of the US Embassy Public Affairs team can support national parliament to provide radio opportunities for interactive sessions for local authorities and representatives in government to explain government policies and programmes, thereby promoting accountability and transparency.
- Community radio is a key agent of democratization for social, cultural and economic development. It allows the constituents to question certain actions and commissions of the authorities and gives the members of parliament the opportunity to collate feedback, which keeps them on their toes.
- Radio listening groups have emerged as powerful agents of change in perceptions on gender and accountability in government.



In Sierra Leone's Bombali District, USAID's Democracy and Governance Women for Economic and Leadership Development (WELD) radio listening groups have emerged as powerful agents of change in perceptions on gender and accountability in government. (Photo Credit: Michael, USAID)

Community radio remains the dominant medium for the dissemination of information in Sierra Leone. In addition, radio listener groups have created a healthy and safe environment to challenge gender equality perceptions and discuss ideas and concerns. In the Bombali District, this type of interchange opens opportunities for the recognition of women by their husbands and communities as partners in development. Radio listening groups have emerged as powerful agents of change in perceptions on gender and accountability in government.

- 7. Encourage the establishment of a Parliamentary Caucus on Evidence-Informed Oversight and Decision-Making (PC-EIDM) to institutionalize evidence champions** —The Parliament of Kenya has created a culture of evidence champions through the establishment of their “first of its kind” caucus in 2015, which was supported by the Speaker of the National Assembly. This is an indication of political will by leadership to ensure evidence use in decision-making within parliament.



Evidence Champion, Sande Marale Senior Research and Policy Analyst, Parliament of Kenya (Photo Credit: Kevin Eze, USAID/Sierra Leone)

PC-EIDM provides a platform to promote effective linkages and external relationships. As an example, in 2017, the caucus hosted a policy café to explore how Kenya can achieve Universal Health Coverage and the outcomes led to provisions of the emergency services in the Health Act 2017.

8. **Develop partnerships and lead gender equality initiatives with parliaments to advocate and support the passing of legislation and quotas to increase the representation of women in parliament** — An estimated 78% of the parliamentarians who participated in the TSUE study were males and 22% were females. This reflects the reality supported by IPU data of low women’s participation and the need for aggressive interventions in supporting women aspirants at the grass roots level and increasing male gender champions.



USAID's Democracy and Governance cross-cutting Women for Economic and Leadership Development (WELD) project focused on strengthening women's skills and reducing cultural barriers to women's participation in politics (Photo Credit: Michael, USAID)

Historically, there has been national, regional, and local challenges to peaceful elections in Sierra Leone. The lack of appropriate legislation for quota representation, corruption, high nomination fees charged by some political parties, and a focus on regional rather than national issues have all led to dividing the population rather than unifying it. The elected government in 2018 had a long list of goals and greater participation of women in politics was one of them. Other ways to encourage more inclusive representation than outright quotas, include USAID's DG cross-cutting the Women for Economic and Leadership Development (WELD) project focused on strengthening women's skills and reducing cultural barriers to women's participation in politics. In the area of politics, WELD supported 289 women to run in local and parliamentary elections in 2018. This support took the form of network linkages to social groups and processes, mentorship, and the formation of a female caucus. This resulted in large numbers of women that ran for office and a number of them won. Freetown has its first female mayor and Kono District has its first female member of parliament.

TIP:

- The passing of gender quotas and equity bills in parliaments across Africa like in Benin and Rwanda has served as the primary approach to work towards and achieve a 50-50 representation of electing more women into the lower and upper chambers of national parliaments.
- USAID Missions and DG programs such as WELD are gender programs that have a great opportunity to sensitize parliaments on understanding that good governance without women's representation is poor governance.
- Establish a Diversity Equity and Inclusion initiative with parliaments.
- Increase the representation of male gender champions to have regular peer-to-peer learning dialogues with members of the Female Caucus and Parliament's leadership on gender issues.

9. **Support parliamentarians on how to demystify the use of evidence to increase the value of using evidence** — In developing economies there are different levels of understanding of what is “evidence,” the various forms and how it can be applied to drive policy, ensure credibility and legitimacy. This requires a need to make statistics and analysis interesting and accessible to people. The organization [BudgIT](#) is an example of a best practice on how to simplify the Nigerian budget and public data, making it accessible to the general public to aid participatory governance.

TIP:

- The uptake of evidence in USAID's health sector is robust where data, statistics and analysis are essential for transforming our understanding of population, health and nutrition issues around the world. USAID has the expertise in pioneering the Demographic and Health Surveys Program (DHS Program), which provides technical assistance for the implementation of more than 320 household and facility-based surveys in 90 countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America/Caribbean and Eastern Europe.
- Governments, donors, researchers, and civil society (such as faith-based organizations and other domestic and international organizations) use the information from these surveys to inform health-related programming, policies, funding priorities, and research.

10. **Create incentives and outreach programs that reward parliamentarians and publicize staff who are proactive in championing evidence** — Different strategies can be used to motivate policymakers to use evidence in decision making, ranging from financial performance incentives to less resource-intensive award and recognition programs that are publicized in the media. Parliaments can use these strategies to promote and reward desired behavior, and pressure policymakers to shift their actions to align with values for the country's development.

TIP:

- Partner with organizations like the [African Evidence Network](#) based in South Africa to provide an opportunity for collaboration to enhance mutual learning and the development of new ideas about supporting evidence-informed decision-making.
- AEN has 3,773 members across 224 countries that celebrate the use of evidence across Africa and offers annually well branded evidence exhibitions, publicized competitions and competitive leadership awards with winnings that recognize proactive evidence champions to increase political will.
- Expose MPs and parliamentary staff who are evidence champions to regional and international conferences on the use of evidence and data in decision making.

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III. USAID DG PROGRAM IMPACT STORY - FOCUS MALAWI

PRACTICAL EXAMPLES OF PUTTING KEY TIPS INTO ACTION



Former USAID/Malawi Democracy and Governance specialist. (Photo Credit: Enock, USAID)

Over the years, select USAID-funded DG programs with parliamentary activities have applied some of the recommended key tips to strengthen the use of evidence, good governance and accountability in national parliaments across Africa. These best practices can be replicated to strengthen evidence-based decision making. USAID’s former Malawi Governance Specialist, Andrew Mpesi highlighted the impact of Malawi Parliamentary Support Initiative (MPSI) by stating, “One of the most important things that came out of the MPSI program, is that we assisted parliament in the budget and fiscal space oversight’. A first of its kind Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO), was created to provide economic data to members of parliament. In addition, when debating on the budget, they were able to use evidence and make meaningful contributions to the budget process.” Instead of the budget process being the monopoly of the treasury; parliament is now able to have the capacity to scrutinize the budget because of the evidence that is generated by staff in the PBO. “We hope to build on this success,” said Andrew Mpesi.

Following USAID Administrator Samantha Power’s visits to Malawi and Zambia this year, USAID announced a \$11.7 million new five-year Strengthening Parliament's Role in Malawi's Development project that will help Malawi’s Parliament strengthen its legislative, oversight, and representative functions. The project will provide technical expertise in legislative analysis and drafting, and support Parliamentary oversight actions, such as independent inquiries, depositions, and public hearings. It will leverage the full expertise of Malawi’s public service by facilitating stronger coordination between parliament and statutory oversight institutions to better combat corruption and further empower civil society and media to demand accountability. “This parliamentary support program that we have just started implementing empowers parliament to operate independently and be able to evaluate business. They should be able to say, after this quarter, “what it is that we have achieved to make decisions that actually benefit them and the evaluation should be central to that,” said Andrew Mpesi.

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