

# Africa Evidence Network

NEWSLETTER || March 2015

## Featuring the Africa Evidence Network Colloquium

This month the spirit of our November colloquium was revived thanks to an excellent feature of the event crossposted at the [3ie](#) and the [World Bank](#) websites. The feature outlines the colloquium events and provides ten video interviews with a range of colloquium delegates. Ruth Stewart speaks about the origins of the AEN, before Isaac Choge introduces some of the evidence-informed policy initiatives in Africa. Ed Barney then describes DFID's commitment to research evidence as a tool for more effective policies, a sentiment that local policymaker Walusungu Kayira from Malawi shares. The feature also presents insightful input from Shanil Haricharan, Matodzi Amisi, Taryn Young, John Lavis, Collins Mitambo, and Ekwaro Obuku.



The Great Systematic Review debate is in full swing. Started by [Evans and Popova](#) who laid out a strong challenge for advocates of systematic reviews in international development, the debate has since seen detailed responses from both [3ie](#) and the [AEN](#) highlighting the value proposition of systematic reviews in international development. Potential debaters are invited to submit a blog piece via the AEN blog.

If you specialise in research uptake in Africa, you probably made your way to the [ResUpMeetUp event](#) in Nairobi last month. For everybody who could not, the ResUpMeetUp website features a number of resources such as [blogs](#) and [multimedia](#) to give you a feel for the vibrant discussions and exchange that took place on questions of research uptake on the continent.

The importance of policymakers' demand for research evidence was stressed as one of five key recommendations when aiming to [connect the "islands"](#) of research, policy, and practice in development. The recommendations are part of a conference report compiled by the Researchers in Development Network and can be accessed in full [here](#).

FHI 360's Knowledge for Health programme has developed an online [research utilization toolkit](#). Presented as not just your common knowledge translation platform, the toolkit hopes to address a unique gap in the evidence-to-policy interface. Mind you it even includes one study that identified 29 different terms that refer to research utilisation!

## Evidence events

20-24 April: [IDS Impact evaluation Design course](#)

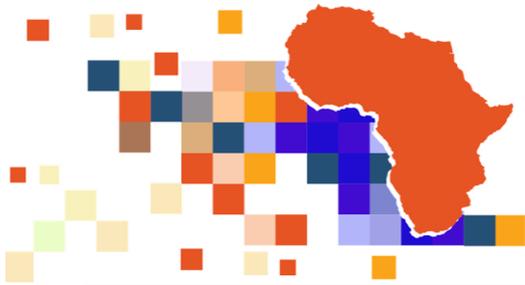
03-07 October: [Cochrane Colloquium](#)

12-16 October: [South African Monitoring & Evaluation Association meeting](#)

## Announcements

- Sign up for the free [e-Learning course on Advocating for Evaluation](#) which includes a number of modules facilitated by leading South African evaluators.
- Interested to work as a survey data analyst for development? The University of Cape Town is offering [a number of short courses](#) related to data collection and analysis.

[Policies matter, but so do people](#) – whom should donors target first? This important question is raised by Ruth Levine who argues that we need both. While she presents support for policy as a more effective way to influence the life of a large number of people, she also urges the evidence-informed policy community to not neglect the people as the ultimate users of these policies.



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### Introducing the Effective Institutions Platform

We would like to introduce the Effective Institution Platform (EIP) as an exciting initiative that network members might want to share and join. The EIP serves to strengthen the effectiveness of public sector institutions to support the delivery of better public services. The platform is committed to strong and inclusive international partnerships to facilitate mutual learning on how institutions can help deliver better development results. For network members the EIP provides an opportunity to engage in dialogue, peer learning and the exchange of good practice in the area of public sector reform. The EIP, for example, is in the process of setting up an [Evidence and Resource Library](#) on public sector reform that members are invited to contribute resources to. Relevant organisations and institutions can request to join the existing 64 EIP members (e.g. the AFDB; UNDP; and World Bank) [online](#).



### Effective Institutions Platform

### INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE

**Evidence matters:** Howard White and Radhika Menon put out this strong call for the new Indian government to base its ambitious social policies on evidence from rigorous evaluations. They show, for example, how the Indian government has built a vast number of toilets but that evaluations have found this supply-side approach to be insufficient to alter the issue of open defecation. Smart policy designs would use this insight gained from evaluations to ensure more effective policy outcomes.

Linked to the above, there are signs that the Indian government is placing a stronger emphasis on research evidence in the design of its social programmes. [The NITI Ayong](#) was inspired by the [UK's nudge unit](#) and is meant to "serve as a state-of-the-art resource centre for research on policy innovations, propagate a culture of high-quality monitoring and evaluation in India as well as promote collaboration between policymakers and researchers."

**Part 2** of last month's popular ['What is wrong with evidence-informed decision making'](#) blog follows up on how the failure of programmes to scale albeit being cleared as effective in efficiency trials implicates evidence-informed decision makings' theory of change. The blog leaves researchers to pay more attention to external validity and to rather assess programmes at scale, while urging policymakers to consider the "fine print about the programme design and implementation of pilots going to scale."

### Evidence from academia

[E. Masset](#): 'Northern Ghana Millennium Villages Impact Evaluation: Preliminary Report on the Second Round of Data'

[Strassheim et al](#): 'When does evidence-based policy turn into policy-based evidence? Configurations, contexts and mechanisms'

[Epstein et al](#): 'The value of words: narrative as evidence in policy making'

[Walter et al](#): 'What works to promote evidence-based practice? A cross-sector review'

**What works? The rise of experimental government**  
Just as in medicine, a restless form of empiricism has taken hold of the public policy and practice profession. The potential of experimentation of and variation in policy design is currently transforming the art of policymaking and governments in the UK and USA have established special units to test a small number of experimental policies. The blog communicates the first results of one such unit – the UK What Works centers.