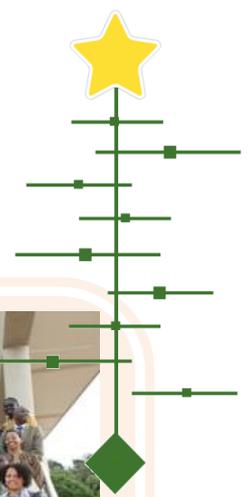


Africa Evidence Network

NEWSLETTER || December 2014
The year that was.



The 1st Africa Evidence Network Colloquium

In Johannesburg, 2014 ended with the event of the year – **the first AEN colloquium**. Over the course of one week, 122 representatives of the African evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) community came together to discuss theoretical and practical issues on evidence generation and use in the region.

This dynamic event included decision-makers from government, researchers, and knowledge brokers. Delegates traveled from 14 countries from four

continents including ten African countries. The colloquium saw 26 presentations from both producers and users, as well as six learning sessions and two networking events. It proved to be a valuable event to build new relationships, explore the nature of EIDM in Africa and formalise the AEN as an emerging community of practice. Delegates departed keen to return for AEN2016.



The **UJ-BCURE programme in South Africa** experienced an eventful first year. Together with our partners in government, we have developed capacity-building resources for EIDM, conducted a **landscape review** of the EIDM community in the country, and piloted evidence-to-policy workshops. We confirmed that relationships are at the center of any efforts to support EDIM and that building mutual trust and confidence in working with each other is a pre-condition for capacity building.

UJ-BCURE in Malawi celebrates a successful year too. We have developed a strong working relationship with PACHI and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. Through this collaboration, we conducted a **landscape review** of EIDM in the country and detailed needs assessments. District-focussed capacity building is scheduled to commence in February 2015.

The **Africa Evidence Network** in 2014 has grown into a community including 312 professionals interested in EIDM in Africa from 21 countries. We have hosted the first AEN colloquium, the largest gathering of individuals and institutions interested in EIDM that has ever been staged in South Africa. We also run a vibrant twitter account (@Africa_evidence) and new **website!**

Evidence events 2015

9-12 February: [ResUpMeetUp conference in Nairobi, Kenya](#)

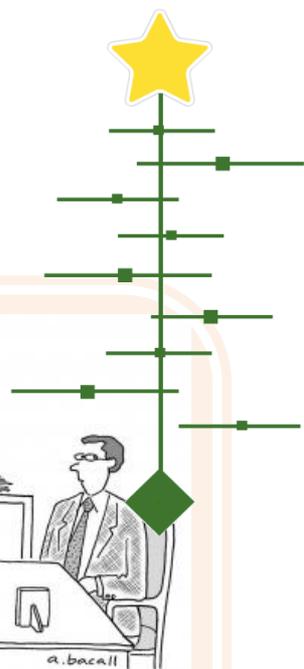
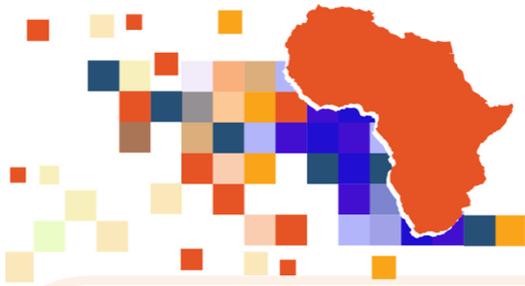
17-18 March: [EPPI Systematic Reviews for Policy & Practice course](#)

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

Announcements

- For an amusing festive season have a look at Cochrane's [Evidently Advent!](#)
- We thank Howard White for five wonderful years leading 3ie and evidence-based development and welcome Emmanuel Jimenez as 3ie's new executive director.
- We wish UJ-BCURE's director Ruth Stewart and Kirsty Newman, Head of Evidence into Action Team at DFID all the best and joy for her maternity leave and welcome Sunet Jordaan as UJ-BCURE's acting director.





A manifesto for evidence-informed public policies in Africa

Picture a world in which development debates center around the effectiveness of public policies and programmes in Africa, rather than aid effectiveness. Imagine an institutional culture that incorporates rigorous and relevant evidence into the design and implementation of these policies. Think of a society of citizens, of practitioners such as nurses and teachers, who exercise and innovate policies and programmes on a daily basis, supported by a flexible system of governance that feeds back this information to decision-makers. Such an evidence-literate society and adaptive system of government nurtures learning, promotes accountability and improves programme efficiency and effectiveness in the context of scarce public resources. Now, lastly, envisage a professional network bringing together decision-makers in government, researchers and civil society organisations to make this dream come true – a happy new year from the Africa Evidence Network!



Development as baby steps, trial-and-error and tweaks.

The desire of international and national development communities to create and scale up magic bullet interventions does not take into account the complex realities and diversities of actors involved in social development. However, the last 50 years have seen about the biggest explosion of prosperity in human history. Yet, most of these gains were built up in a slow process. As Michal Hobbes explains: 'This is how social policy works, in baby steps and trial-and-error and tweaks, not in game changers'. Evidence-informed development supports this process by generating knowledge of which of these social policies work relatively better than others, how, why, and in which contexts.

Some practical ideas on evidence-informed development in 2015:

The data revolution is changing the way we frame and understand social problems. Mere access to more rigorous data allows for a much more detailed understanding of the underlying causes of poverty and inequality (for example). Payment by results is fast becoming an accepted funding mechanism for social programmes (see here). Policymakers increasingly express an appetite for evidence and capacity building to use evidence (see here & here).

A plea to move on. If in 2015 we still think randomistas exist and that systematic reviews are a positivist tool to rule the world, then let us have a look Kirsty Newman's baby panda or Cochrane's X-mas forest plot above – do they look like tools to divide and conquer?

Evidence of the year (aka holiday reading list)

R. Stewart: 'A theory of change for capacity building for the use of research evidence by decision makers in southern Africa'

K. Newman: 'What is the evidence on the impact of research on international development?'

C. Valters: Theories of change in International Development – communication, learning, or accountability?

R. Chambers: Into the unknown – explorations in development practice

