An overview of current training tools and resources on evidence-informed decision-making

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1. Introduction

The Africa Evidence Network (AEN) aims to bring together the evidence community across Africa in the belief that together we can increase evidence-informed decision-making for the benefit of our region. This includes acting as an information-informed hub for our community to enable easy access to relevant resources, events and more. To contribute to this goal, we set out to collate capacity-building resources on evidence-informed decision-making to provide an up-to-date online searchable database for those working in this field.

1.1 History

In 2014, a partnership run by the University of Johannesburg (UJ), managed by Prof Ruth Stewart, organised and carried out the “Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence” (BCURE) programme. It had an overall goal of increasing the effectiveness of pro-poor policy by increasing a decision-making across sectors at national level in South Africa and Malawi. The study partners included the national governments of South Africa and Malawi, and a consortium of Malawian and South African delivery partners. As a component of this larger project, a database of existing training and guidance resources centred on evidence-informed decision-making (primarily related to policy-making and implementation) was compiled in 2014. In 2017, the Africa Centre for Evidence, which provides the ongoing secretariat for the AEN, committed to updating this 2014 resource for the benefit of AEN members.

The aim was to update the existing database to promote information sharing and easy access to capacity-building resources that support the use of evidence in decision-making.

1.2 Methodology

Our general approach was to contact individuals asking them to send us any capacity-building resources that support evidence-informed decision-making. These included training or guidance resources to support or teach decision-makers (in policy and practice) to incorporate research evidence in their work. The resources we sought ranged from courses in evidence-informed decision-making to resources on how to write a policy brief. They included online resources and hard copy materials. We edited the 2014 database by adding the new material that we received from emails, as well as checking and updating all the content in the 2014 database. Our results are included in this report, as well as the updated database. The updated database is available on the AEN website via the Resources tab (www.africaevidencenetwork.org).

Our starting point for our email contacts was the existing information from the 2014 report and database, the latest AEN membership list, as well as respondents to the AEN’s 2017 survey on capacity in Africa (Stewart, Nduku and Langer, 2017). These contact lists assisted us in identifying the potential organisations that specialise in evidence-informed decision-making, and their websites. Access to websites enabled us to check the accuracy of our contact information for individuals, as well as searching for online resources.

We sent out emails to the two hundred and twenty-nine subject experts and stakeholders identified in the field of EIDM. Follow-up emails were sent two weeks later.
In addition, we did a online search to identify organisations with capacity-building resources. We used search strings that combined the concepts of ‘evidence-informed decision-making’ and ‘training resources’. These online searches were not designed to be comprehensive, but to enable us to double-check that we had not missed any major providers.

Once we had collated all the resources that were either sent to us or identified online, we created one master list incorporating new and old content. All resources listed were then checked for inclusion in the final database and all links double-checked. Duplicates, out-of-date links, redundant resources (e.g. where a course is no longer offered) and publications not in English were excluded from the database.

We acknowledge that this database is not fully comprehensive due to time and funding limitations. It does however, represent an up-to-date online searchable database that we hope will be of value to the AEN membership and others interested in supporting evidence-informed decision-making. Whilst the resource has an African bias, it is not limited to African content.

An overview of the final database, which has 347 capacity-building resources and tools, is provided in the following section.

1 We acknowledge that our exclusion of resources based on language is a weakness in this database. However, we do not currently have capacity for translation of non-English resources.
2. Descriptive analysis of the resources within the database

We had 51 responses to the 229 email requests for resources (ten emails bounced). The total number of resources received from the 51 emails was 154 documents. Some resources were attached as PDFs on the emails (n=47). However, most of the people sent through links to the resources.

2.1 Description

The database offers three hundred and forty seven tools and resources relevant to supporting evidence-informed decision-making, with a particular emphasis on content from Africa. It is not comprehensive, given time and resources constraints as well as our exclusion of material on general research capacity. We have categorised the resources into three broad themes as summarised in the table below:

Table 1: Tools and resources themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of resource/tool</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Publications and reports</td>
<td>Total publications: 81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framework/strategy documents</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-reviewed papers</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reports/case studies</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviews</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training and capacity-building materials</td>
<td>Total materials/tools: 198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Databases/portals/networks</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidelines/manuals/tools</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online materials (audio/visual)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses and events</td>
<td>Total training sessions/events: 68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences/events</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online courses/training</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face courses/training</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of resources/ tools</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 above shows that training and capacity-building materials form the majority of the resources in the database. We found that much of the information on courses and events in the first iteration of this database had become out of date, hence we have included fewer in this update.

The courses and events (conferences/events and online courses/training) ranged from half-day to week-long events. The content of materials covered a wide range of topics, which were categorised into different fields. The majority of the resources were on utilisation of evidence in decision-making. We also found more general resources, which did not specialise on EIDM but had certain aspects relevant to EIDM. There were fewer resources on appraising evidence. The table below (Figure 1) provides a summary of the content areas for the tools and resources.
2.2 Providers

The resources came from across one hundred and fourteen providers globally. These institutions work in different sectors and disciplines. In some cases, the institutions are part of larger networks promoting evidence use. Organisations include academic institutions, think tanks, journals, government departments, advocacy organisations, and non-governmental / civil society organisations.

2.3 Discipline or field

The tools are designed to support researchers, policy-makers and practitioners across various fields (see Figure 2). These are not necessarily discrete categories. The majority of resources fall under the research (23%) and health (20%) fields.

Figure 2: Disciplines and fields for which tools and resources were designed
2.4 Target audiences

The target audiences were specified on some of the websites but not others. We scanned the resources to identify target audiences (see Figure 3). Categories are not necessarily discrete.

*Figure 3: Target audiences for tools and resources*

2.5 Availability

Ninety percent of the resources are available online. The eight percent that is not available include face-to-face training sessions and resources that you have to register for to access further. In addition, some materials are partially available, meaning that some have limited access, and users may be required to either sign up for the materials or pay to access more content.

2.6 Location of institutions

Despite focussing our search in Africa, the majority of resources is from the UK (32%), the USA (22%), or international organisations (21%) (see Figure 4). 14% of materials and resources are from Africa. This is a slight decrease from the 2014 database, in which 18% percent of resources were published by African institutions. Seventy five percent of the organisations in Africa are in South Africa (see Figure 5).
Figure 4: Distribution of institutions that have produced resources in the database

- International: 21%
- USA: 22%
- UK: 32%
- Africa: 14%
- Canada: 6%
- Other: 5%

Figure 5: Distribution of institutions in Africa showing the dominance of South Africa

- South Africa: 75%
- Rest of Africa: 25%
3. Conclusions

This update reflects growing interest in this important field. The number of links from the 2014 database which needed updating, and our ability to include more recently produced resources in this 2017 edition, highlights the importance of regular updates of online resources such as this.

The tools and resources listed in this database provide information that is helpful towards assisting the various audiences to engage, understand and use evidence in their fields. The resources (guidelines/manuals and training courses) have been designed to allow actors to adopt them or tweak them to relate to their context so they can better understand how to use this knowledge in their respective fields. The Africa Evidence Network acts as a bridge between the supply and demand for high quality evidence relevant to policy makers. The database is one way of connecting different stakeholders within the evidence ecosystem in Africa.

We encourage readers to access the database, make use of the resources there, and let us know if there are additional sources that we should include.

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Reference