Dr Rose Oronje
AFIDEP
(Kenya)
Use of Evidence in Parliaments: Contribution of a regional network of committees of health

Rose N. Oronje, PhD; Eliya Zulu, PhD
African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP)
Quick Update

This paper has now been published in the *Evidence and Policy* journal in July 2018

We make evidence matter in Africa’s development

Study contributes to filling the knowledge gap by investigating the contribution of a regional network, the Network of African Parliamentary Alliance of Committees on Health (NEAPACOH), to the evidence ecosystem in African parliaments.
Network of African Parliamentary Alliance of Committees on Health (NEAPACOH)

Loose, regional network established in 2005

To **strengthen** the role of parliamentary health committees in Africa to more **effectively tackle health challenges** in their countries through oversight of budgets, legislation, & representation

More than 20 parliaments participate in network’s activities

*AFIDEP We make research evidence matter in African-driven development*
Network’s Activities

1. **Annual forums** for committees of health since 2008:
   - Share information – Experts present evidence on neglected health issues; parliaments share best practices
   - Generate commitment
   - Hold committees to account
   - Link committees with development partners

2. Conducts **capacity building** workshops for MPs & staff

3. Provides country-specific **technical support** to committees
Design & Methods

• Qualitative case study

• NEAPACOH Network selected purposively:
  o AFIDEP involved in the network’s operations since 2011
  o Authors involved in network’s activities since inception in 2005

• Data collection:
  o Document review
  o 34 key informant interviews with MPs, staff & development partners (from 11 member countries)
  o Observations, reflections

• Reflexivity – dealing with potential analytical bias

We make evidence matter in Africa’s development
Results
“I am an accountant by profession and when I joined parliament back in 2003, I didn’t know much about health issues in Zambia. I joined the health committee in parliament out of interest. All that I know about health and population issues, I have learned from NEAPACOH meetings that I have participated in since 2005. I have even become a champion for health issues and women’s issues back home because of what I have learned through NEAPACOH. I now engage the Ministry of Health and demand for information on health challenges because of what I have learned through NEAPACOH meetings.”

- (Zambian MP)
Generating demand & supplying evidence

• Annual forums act as “focusing events” that:
  – Generate demand for evidence
  – Supply evidence

• Linkages that MPs establish with technical experts facilitate demand & provision of evidence

• Strengthening capacities of MPs & staff in finding & using evidence generates demand for evidence
Stimulating Parliamentary action on the basis of evidence

• Advocacy with min. of finance to increase budgets to health

• Advocacy with min. of health to increase budgets to neglected health issues

• Steering legal reforms to provide a supportive environment for tackling health issues

• Using parliament’s *resource appropriation function* to force government to allocate more resources to health/health issues

*We make evidence matter in Africa’s development*
“Government brought a bill to parliament for a World Bank loan for mining. But we said that we were not allowing that loan before we can have a loan for health and one focused on maternal health. ... We stood up for this bill on maternal health having been given information from the NEAPACOH meetings. The ministry of health came up with a loan request for a hundred million for general health, but we said we want part of it focused on issues of reproductive health. That’s when they added the thirty million for maternal health.”

- Ugandan MP
Malawi

• Introduction of a budget line for family planning by MoH

• Subsequent monitoring of the family planning budget that ensured annual increments

• Passage of the Marriage Law that increased the legal age at marriage from 15 to 18 years
Providing an accountability platform for parliamentary committees

• Annual forums require committees to report on achievements against their previous commitments

• Platform is instrumental in driving actions by committees to ensure they have some progress to report

“Do you start tilling the land when there is no rain? No. That’s what NEAPACOH does to us. It gives us the impetus to work on our commitments because we know that we have to report at the next meeting.”

- (Kenyan MP)
Challenges that undermine NEAPACOH’s efforts

- Lack of sustained technical support & provision of evidence
- Lack of financial resources to implement commitments
- No legal tools or power to enforce accountability on committees
- Lack of continuity when new MPs come into parliament
- Unsupportive political contexts within countries
Conclusions

• NEAPACOH was not set up to strengthen evidence use

• But through its activities, it responds to some of the key barriers to evidence use in African parliaments

• Results point to:
  – Need for regional efforts to link with national institutions & actors
  – Need for contextualised & action-oriented evidence to enable committees to translate commitments made at NEAPACOH into action at home

• Network’s sustainability is a challenge
Acknowledgements

• Leadership & staff of the NEAPACOH Network

• NEAPACOH Member MPs who participated in interviews

• Hewlett Foundation