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 AFRICAN CENTRE FOR
PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS

Evidence
in African
parliaments

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Evidence in African parliaments

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Acronyms

ACEPA	African Centre for Parliamentary Affairs
ACU	Association of Commonwealth Universities
ADB	African Development Bank
AFIDEP	African Institute for Development Policy
APPG	Africa All-Party Parliamentary Group (in UK Parliament)
AU	African Union
BCURE	Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence
CSO	civil society organization
CODESRIA	Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DRUSSA	Development Research Uptake in Sub-Saharan Africa (under ACU)
EAC	East African Community
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EIPM	evidence-informed policy making
GINKS	Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IFLA	International Federation of Library Associations
IPU	Inter Parliamentary Union
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PAC	Public Accounts Committee
PBO	Parliamentary Budget Office
POST	UK Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology
QMUL	Queen Mary, University of London
RAPID	Research and Policy in Development programme (at ODI)
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UNAS	Uganda National Academy of Sciences
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFD	Westminster Foundation for Democracy
WHO	World Health Organization
ZeipNET	Zimbabwe Evidence-Informed Policy Network

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Executive summary

Information is the lifeblood of parliaments. It is fundamental to their three core functions of scrutiny, representation and oversight; without quality evidence, parliaments cannot hold the government to account. Despite this, however, the systems that shape how parliaments gather, appraise and use evidence, and the parliamentary staff who are at the forefront of these activities, have too often been overlooked in parliamentary strengthening programmes.

In the evidence-informed policy making (EIPM) sector, there is increasing interest in the factors that shape evidence use within a public institution, from the external political and social drivers to internal institutional behaviours, processes and systems. This has so far largely taken a broad view of public institutions, and, to the extent that specific studies exist, they tend to focus more on ministries. There is, however, an increasing body of practical experience within the EIPM sector working with African parliaments, as well as demand and interest from parliaments themselves.

These new developments come against a backdrop of significant democratic and governance reforms across the continent. African parliaments are evolving rapidly as part of dynamic social, political and technological developments. Their information support systems are faced with a number of challenges, from navigating the global 'information explosion' to contending with Executive branch dominance that is continually re-inscribed by an asymmetry of information. They are responding to these issues in different ways, introducing a range of new strategies and approaches to strengthen evidence use.

In this paper, we draw on literature and experience, both from the parliamentary strengthening sector and the evidence-informed policy sector, to explore information support systems in African parliaments and the factors that shape their work. There is an enormous diversity of parliamentary models across the African continent and our limited scope does not permit a full investigation into each of these. Our aim is not to generalize but to share some emerging impressions that we believe merit further exploration in each of the continent's varied political, linguistic and economic contexts.

The first part of this paper describes the key features of information support systems in African parliaments and highlights some of the main external and internal factors that influence them. We explain how a parliament's capacity and performance with regards to information is linked to its ability to perform its key functions of legislation, representation and oversight, and we identify some of the main institutional factors that influence that capacity. These range from strategic and leadership-level commitment to evidence, to parliamentary research capacity and links with external research institutions. The accompanying *Parliament in focus* papers consider the institutional factors in more detail in three parliaments: Uganda, Zimbabwe and Ghana, highlighting key barriers and opportunities for strengthening evidence use in each.

1. Introduction: what is EIPM and how does it apply to African parliaments?

Information and evidence are fundamental to the execution of a parliament's three core functions of representation, scrutiny and oversight. Without a range of different sources and types of timely and accurate evidence, parliaments cannot meaningfully hold the Executive to account nor represent the citizenry. This is of particular note in emerging or fragile democracies, where governance institutions are evolving against a backdrop of rapid social, economic and political change. There are myriad national and international stakeholders that together form the architecture of relationships, narratives and structures that shape how national parliaments use evidence. Parliaments' own internal information systems, made up of the people, processes and behaviours that shape their approaches to evidence, are central to this space.

So what exactly does a parliamentary information support system look like, and how does it function? What kinds of evidence does a parliament need, who gathers it and how is it processed to inform decision making? In this paper we use the concept of evidence-informed policy as a way to begin exploring information systems in African parliaments and some of the factors that shape them.

Our understanding of evidence-informed policy making (EIPM) takes a broad view of both evidence and policy. In order to understand what is often called the 'demand side' of the evidence-policy interface, we start with the users of evidence themselves. Our view of 'policy' and 'policymakers' is not restricted to high-level political actors, but also includes civil servants and parliamentary staff who are involved in the complex and far-reaching process of policy

“Parliament is an information intensive and information demanding institution. Therefore, acquiring, organizing, managing, distributing and preserving information is fundamental to its constitutional mandate. Parliament creates and requires information from many external sources including the government, the judiciary, civil society, experts, the media, academicians, international organizations and other legislative bodies and citizens.

To ensure that both Parliament and the citizens are properly informed in today's fast-evolving environment, it is increasingly important to have a comprehensive approach to identifying, managing, and providing access to critical resources that will enhance connectivity among citizens on the one hand and parliaments on the other. The use of ICT to enhance these processes cannot be over emphasized in the work of all parliaments. Consequently, there is the need to strive to find new technologies to foster openness, transparency and accountability between parliaments and the citizenry.

Joyce Adeline Bamford-Addo, former Speaker of the Parliament of Ghana, addressing the World e-Parliament Conference 2009. Quoted in Global Centre for ICT in Parliament (2010)

making, from defining and scoping problems to developing policy content and approving legislation. Therefore, in exploring the use of evidence in parliaments we cannot look at parliaments in isolation but must be mindful of the relationships between Parliament and the Executive. We know that parliaments use many forms of evidence, from statistics to citizen evidence, practice-informed knowledge, and research, to inform debate and decision making. This comes from a range of sources, including but not limited to the Executive branch. We look at how all of these different types of evidence interact with other factors such as political realities and budget constraints, to inform decision making.

We draw specifically on the experience of the VakaYiko Consortium (2013-2017), led by INASP and funded under DFID’s Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence (BCURE) programme. BCURE supported public institutions in low and middle-income countries to develop skills, knowledge and systems to improve the use of evidence in decision making. As part of this, VakaYiko partners worked with the parliaments of Ghana, Uganda and Zimbabwe to strengthen capacity for evidence use. For evidence to routinely and systematically inform policy making, the programme worked towards ensuring that three key factors are in place. Programme activities aimed to support each of these strands (see page 9).¹

Individual level



Individuals in public institutions with the skills to access, evaluate and use evidence

Organizational level



Processes, systems and cultures in public institutions for systematically handling evidence

Connections between supply and demand for evidence



An enabling environment of engaged stakeholders such as citizens, media and civil society

1. The EIPM Toolkit, which was used in the programme to strengthen individual skills of information support staff in parliaments, is available here: www.inasp.info/EIPMToolkit
A full report on the whole VakaYiko programme is available here: www.inasp.info/en/publications/details/244

VakaYiko in parliaments



In **Ghana**, in partnership with the Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS) and the African Centre for Parliamentary Affairs (ACEPA):

- Training for information support staff (Library, Hansard, IT, Research, Committees) using the EIPM Toolkit: how to find, assess and communicate evidence to inform decision making
- Organizational-level work to pilot a strategic approach for these departments to work together to anticipate and respond to evidence needs
- Participation in a learning exchange initiative with the parliaments of Uganda and Zimbabwe, including a visit to Uganda to observe Parliamentary Research Week

More information:

www.inasp.info/GhanaEIPMLRI

In **Zimbabwe**, in partnership with the Zimbabwe Evidence Informed Policy Network (ZeipNET):

- Training for information support staff (Research, Hansard, ICT, Library, Committees) using the EIPM Toolkit: how to find, assess and communicate evidence for decision making
- Mentoring support to the Research Department, including support for the establishment of its Parliamentary Evidence Series of roundtables connecting researchers and policymakers
- Participation in a peer exchange programme with the parliaments of Ghana and Uganda, including visits to Uganda to observe Parliamentary Research Week and to Ghana to take part in a learning exchange workshop

Watch: Evidence and Policy Making in Zimbabwe: a short film from ZeipNET www.youtube.com/watch?v=O64OoTIV3Cc

In **Uganda**, in partnership with the Uganda National Academy of Sciences (UNAS):

- Training for the Department of Research Services staff using adapted material from the EIPM Toolkit: focusing on using evidence to analyse policy, and communicating evidence for decision making
- Review and update of key manuals and policies affecting evidence use, including the Research policy, Policy Analysis manual
- Support to a series of Knowledge Cafés and a Research Week held in partnership with the Uganda National Academy of Sciences
- Participation in a peer exchange initiative with the parliaments of Ghana and Zimbabwe, including a visit to Ghana to take part in a learning exchange workshop

Watch: Research Week at Parliament of Uganda: a film from the Department of Research Services www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1VfR0tcNFo

Rationale and objectives

Scope and limitations

In this paper, we draw on experience from INASP, ACEPA and partners to reflect on the role of evidence in African parliaments. There is an enormous diversity of parliamentary models across the African continent and our limited scope in this paper does not permit a full investigation into each of these. We take a broad lens, drawing on insights and experience from across the continent² as well as global perspectives such as from the Inter Parliamentary Union. Our focus is on national legislatures and we do not consider sub-national legislatures or assemblies, nor do we look at regional bodies such as the East African Legislative Assembly or the Pan African Parliament. Our aim is not to generalize but to share some emerging impressions that we believe merit further exploration in each of the continent's diverse political, linguistic and economic contexts.

Aims

The aims of this paper and the accompanying focus papers are to:

1. Consider how the concept of EIPM applies to African parliamentary contexts, including identifying some broad factors shaping evidence use in parliaments on the continent
2. Demonstrate the need for greater attention to evidence and information issues in the parliamentary strengthening sector, *and* to a more nuanced understanding of parliaments in the EIPM sector
3. Explore the factors affecting evidence use and information support in the specific contexts of the parliaments of Ghana, Zimbabwe and Uganda

Methodology

This paper was produced using a desk review of EIPM and parliamentary strengthening literature, as well as relevant VakaYiko programme documentation. Additional insights to complement these findings were gleaned through interviews with key informants (see Appendix 1). Interviews were conducted with two types of key informants: senior staff (especially from research and other information units) from the three parliaments; and external experts in the EIPM and parliamentary development sectors.

The main paper addresses Aims 1 and 2 by discussing the development and present role of information services in African parliaments and their importance to democratic governance. We trace a number of emerging insights concerning the use of evidence in parliaments.

- In Section 1 we begin with a brief overview of the concept of EIPM, noting how this has evolved over the years and how it can be applied to parliaments
- In Sections 2 and 3 we cover the development and present configuration of information support in parliaments, including the key staff involved in gathering evidence and the types of evidence they use
- Reflecting on our own experiences and drawing on frameworks from the EIPM and parliamentary development sector, in Section 4 we consider some of the key macro-level factors affecting evidence use in African parliaments
- In Section 5 we consider how, in response to these, the purpose and role of information provision has shifted. We identify a number of key institutional-level factors affecting evidence use within parliaments

The three focus papers address the third aim by providing a more in-depth discussion of factors affecting evidence use in each of our three partner parliaments: Ghana, Zimbabwe and Uganda. Here we elaborate on some of the institutional factors mentioned in Section 5 by considering them in each specific country context.

2. Members of ACEPA have worked with more than 50 parliaments around the world over the past two decades. In Africa these have included legislatures in a wide variety of contexts including: Senegal, Gambia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Niger, Tunisia, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Egypt, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Namibia, Zambia, Botswana, South Africa and Lesotho, as well as regional bodies and networks including the West African Association of Public Accounts Committees (WAAPAC), ECOWAS Parliament and the Pan African Parliament.

2. Evidence in parliaments

The concept of EIPM provides a useful lens through which to examine the role of research in parliaments, which, as we will demonstrate, is gaining increasing attention globally. EIPM provides an opportunity to connect technocratic approaches to information and research support to the political and democratic function of parliaments. To consider evidence in the context of parliaments, we need to see it as only one element of a complex and non-linear policy-making process, and appreciate that policymakers use multiple different kinds of evidence, from citizen knowledge to statistical data. In this section we explain our understanding of EIPM and outline some of the tools we have drawn on in this analytical paper.

Background: the evolution of 'evidence-informed policy making'

Modern debates about the use of evidence to inform policy have their roots in discussions of evidence-based medicine from the 1940s onwards. The approach has since spread beyond medical practice to policy, with the concept of 'evidence-based policy' gaining popularity with New Labour in the UK from 1997. This was marked by a growing focus on the need for robust decision making, accountability to funders, and pressures to ensure taxpayers' money is spent on policies that 'work'. For a more detailed summary of the history of 'evidence-informed policy', see Head (2015), Parkhurst (2016) and Punton (2016). The concept has since broadened to include a wider definition of evidence as well as a more complex view of policy. This is reflected in the shift from the term 'evidence-based policy making' to 'evidence-informed policy making', which sees evidence as only one of many factors that informs policy making within a complex political landscape.³

In recent years, the intersection between research and policy making has continued to gain attention and has evolved into an interdisciplinary area of research and practice encompassing elements of strategic communication, governance, adult learning and capacity building, information management and others (Newman *et al.*, 2012; Young *et al.*, 2015; Parkhurst, 2016). Key themes include the importance of relationships across the research to policy system, the governance structures that shape evidence use, the politics of evidence itself, and the relative merits and influences of different types and sources of evidence.

In our analysis, we borrow a working definition of evidence from Newman, Fisher and Shaxson (2012). In this conceptualization, evidence-informed policy is based on a complex and non-linear model of policy making, with evidence seen as one of many different factors that informs the policy-making process, alongside other factors such as political realities and public debates. This broader understanding of 'evidence-informed policy' therefore moves away from a narrow focus on research and methodological rigour to a more inclusive understanding of evidence that recognizes diverse forms of knowledge and information such as citizen knowledge, practical experience, and administrative data (Jones *et al.*, 2012). It emphasizes the importance of systematic organizational processes for identifying and addressing these evidence needs.

“Evidence-informed policy is that which has considered a broad range of research evidence; evidence from citizens and other stakeholders; and evidence from practice and policy implementation, as part of a process that considers other factors such as political realities and current public debates. We do not see it as a policy that is exclusively based on research, or as being based on one set of findings. We accept that in some cases, research evidence may be considered and rejected; if rejection was based on understanding of the insights that the research offered then we would still consider any resulting policy to be evidence-informed.

(Newman, Fisher and Shaxson, 2012)

3. For a more detailed summary of the history of EIPM, see Head (2015), Parkhurst (2016) and Punton (2016).

Why parliaments?

While much EIPM literature to date has largely focused on the role of evidence in ministries, departments and agencies (for example, Court and Young, 2003; Cislowski and Purwadi, 2011; Shaxson 2014; Wills et al. 2016a; Results for America 2017), there is also an emerging body of interest and practical experience focusing on the complex information landscape of parliaments.⁴ At the international level, this is evident in the demand from the members of the Inter Parliamentary Union for a new set of guidelines on the role of research in parliaments (produced in 2013) as well as a growing interest in the new opportunities provided through ICT expressed through conversations around “e-Parliaments” hosted biennially by the IPU since 2007. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has a lively sub-section on parliamentary libraries and research services which provides regular opportunities for peer learning between parliamentary information support staff. International platforms and networks such as the African Parliamentarians Network on Evaluation and the Global Network for Parliamentary Budget Offices are generating interest and momentum around the role of particular forms of evidence in parliament. Individual parliaments are also strengthening their focus on evidence, with the Parliament of Kenya launching an Evidence Caucus in 2015 (AFIDEP 2015) and the Parliament of Uganda featuring the strengthening of research for informed debate as a key strategic priority.

A number of national and international agencies support this work, notably those involved in the DFID-funded BCURE programme (2013-2017). BCURE consortia led by INASP and AFIDEP between them worked with five African parliaments to strengthen capacity for the use of evidence in decision making. The Westminster Foundation for Democracy also works with research and information support staff in a number of African parliaments, as does the UK Parliament’s Office of Science and Technology, and McGill University in Canada offers training programmes for parliamentary staff on the role of research in the legislative process.

As we detail below, emerging insights suggest that it is necessary to adopt a particular approach to the meaning and application of evidence, and most importantly to recognizing the political realities and interests of the public, when exploring evidence use in parliaments. This is reflective of the more general move in the sector away from a narrow view of evidence and policy towards a more complex and messy picture with broader understandings both of ‘evidence’ and of ‘policy’. Three underpinning principles are fundamental to exploring the use of evidence in parliaments:

- **A complex view of policy making:** Parliaments are inherently political institutions, characterized by contestation and debate. Our view of evidence-informed policy making sees evidence as one of many factors that feed in to policy making, including political realities, budget constraints, and societal and cultural issues. Policy making is complex and non-linear, involving multiple different actors including the executive, legislature, civil society, international agencies and others. Evidence is intertwined with this political landscape, and in parliaments the role of party politics is of course especially potent.
- **A range of evidence:** Policymakers need a wide range of different kinds of evidence to inform decision making. These include citizen knowledge gathered through stakeholder consultations; expert practice-informed knowledge; administrative statistics; and research (Newman, Fisher and Shaxson (2012)). Parliaments have many different evidence mechanisms and actors at their disposal, from public hearings to commissioning internal and external research. They also need evidence on a wider range of issues than ministries, since the same research team in parliament supports all of the different sector committees.
- **A focus on the process:** The process that evidence goes through, from the point of gathering to the presentation to the decision maker, is as important as the evidence itself (Shaxson, 2005; see also Head, 2016). Even the best evidence, if not provided at the right time, interpreted in a rigorous way, or appropriately matched to the policy question, will not be of use to policymakers. Parliamentary information support units are at the forefront of this process, operating within the complex environment described above.

In the next section, we outline our approach to identifying the factors that affect evidence use in parliaments.

4. Broadbent (2012) examined evidence use in four African policy debates; the case study on Uganda’s HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Bill contains a particular focus on Parliament. There are a number of forthcoming research papers which promise to add nuance and depth to our understanding of evidence use in parliaments. University College London’s Science, Technology, Engineering and Public Policy (STePP) department in and the UK Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology (POST), are collaborating on [a study on the use of research evidence in the UK Parliament](#) (“The use of research in Parliament”, POST). Dr Kerry Holden of Queen Mary, University of London is leading an [ESRC-funded project](#) exploring health evidence in the Ugandan Parliament (ESRC project ES/L010704/1). The African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP) is producing a paper drawing on its experience with the parliaments of Kenya and Malawi in the SECURE-Health Consortium.

The complexity of political realities: factors affecting evidence use

The work of the VakaYiko Consortium and others have renewed interest in understanding the contextual factors, both within and outside public institutions, that shape how evidence is used. A number of tools have been produced in order to assist policymakers as well as practitioners to analyse contextual factors affecting evidence use and identify windows of opportunity for change. Among these are the Politics & Ideas/INASP 'Context Matters' framework ("Knowledge into policy", 2016) and ODI-RAPID's paper 'Understanding the organizational context for evidence-informed policy-making' (Shaxson et al., 2016) both of which were developed in connection with the VakaYiko programme's work in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Ghana and Uganda. In addition, ITAD's 'Capacity Development 2' approach, which views capacity development through dimensions of change, has influenced our thinking around capacity for evidence use in public institutions (Punton 2014; see also Newman et.al. 2012).

In this paper, we draw on these emerging evidence-informed policy frameworks, as well as parliamentary assessment tools, to explore the main contextual factors affecting evidence use in parliaments.

Macro-level factors

Parliaments are public sector institutions with the fundamental role of ensuring open and free political deliberation and the representation of citizens. As a result, their performance, like most public-sector institutions, is conditioned by the wider social, political and historical context - the relations between the state, the market and civil society, the extent of political space and support for active citizenship, and the impact of the global economy.

There is a very strong relationship between the macro environment and the performance of parliaments in all aspects of their work. Macro-level factors relate to a nation's political and economic context and the impact this has on the contemporary politics and the policy-making process. They illustrate the "bigger picture" at the national level, constituting the political, economic, social and cultural factors that act as either opportunities or dangers to public institutions in their use of evidence to inform policy making. Macro-level factors are either structural - in which case they rarely change in a significant way - or circumstantial - in which case "they emerge with particular weight every once in a while, and open up very specific windows of opportunity for change". (Court and Cotterell, 2006; Weyrauch et al., 2016)

Some of these macro-level factors include:

- Extent of democracy/political freedom
- Extent of academic freedom
- Extent of media freedom
- Extent of development commitment of ruling elite
- Extent of culture of evidence use
- Extent civil society groups have an input into the making of policy
- Extent of political volatility
- Extent of conflict or insecurity

“Within public policy discussions, it is axiomatic that reliable information and expert knowledge are integral to sound processes for formulating and implementing policy; **however, the processing of this information and expert knowledge is problematic and highly variable across organizations.**

(Head 2016, p472, drawing on Radaelli 1995. Emphasis added)

ODI-RAPID: *Understanding the organisational context for evidence-informed policy-making*

Since 2008, South Africa's Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) has made a concerted effort to enhance its systems for using evidence to inform how it diagnoses, develops, implements and reports on policy. This working paper synthesizes the organizational issues that influence these interactions. It is based on the findings of five studies that were conducted as part of a programme of support to DEA between 2014 and 2016.

Informed by good practices identified in DEA, a second paper proposes five guidelines that could underpin a systematic and phased approach to improving evidence-informed policy-making within a government department.

www.odi.org/publications/10602-understanding-organisational-context-evidence-informed-policy-making

Politics & Ideas/INASP: *'Context Matters' Framework*

The Context Matters Framework outlines a series of six interrelated dimensions that affect the use of evidence in policy making.

Drawing on an extensive literature review as well as interviews with policymakers in more than 20 countries, the framework and associated practical paper constitute a detailed description of organizational factors affecting evidence use, from resource allocation to relationships with the research community, as well as insights from public institutions around the world on how these have been addressed in practice. The interactive web tool assists users to explore the different dimensions.

www.politicsandideas.org/contextmatters

Organizational-level factors

Parliaments are also influenced by their own organizational cultures, processes and capacities - the set of motivating and constraining beliefs and practices that shape the everyday life of the institution. These organizational-level factors are concerned with the bureaucratic tiers of public institutions as well as the myriad internal and external, vertical and horizontal relationships that shape these. Parliamentary performance is also dependent on the organizational capacity of parliament, including the strengths and weaknesses of the political and administrative sides of parliament.

Organizational factors identified in detailed studies by Politics & Ideas and ODI-RAPID that shape how public institutions use evidence have been synthesized by INASP into a summary framework (Table 1). These interrelated factors speak to how public institutions think and behave and how this behaviour enables or hinders the use of evidence in policy:

Table 1: Organizational factors affecting evidence use

1. Culture	2. Organizational capacity
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Values and beliefs• Openness to change and innovation• Incentives• Motivations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership and champions• Senior management• Human resources• Legal capacity
3. Management and processes	4. Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Degree of systematic planning• Existing formal processes to access, interpret and use evidence in policy making• Positions, including divisions of work, roles and responsibilities• Communication processes• Monitoring and evaluation• Reporting• Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Budget committed to evidence• Technology• Knowledge infrastructure• Time availability• Tools

Organizational capacity refers to the ability of an institution to use its resources to perform its core functions – in the case of parliaments, perform its constitutional functions.

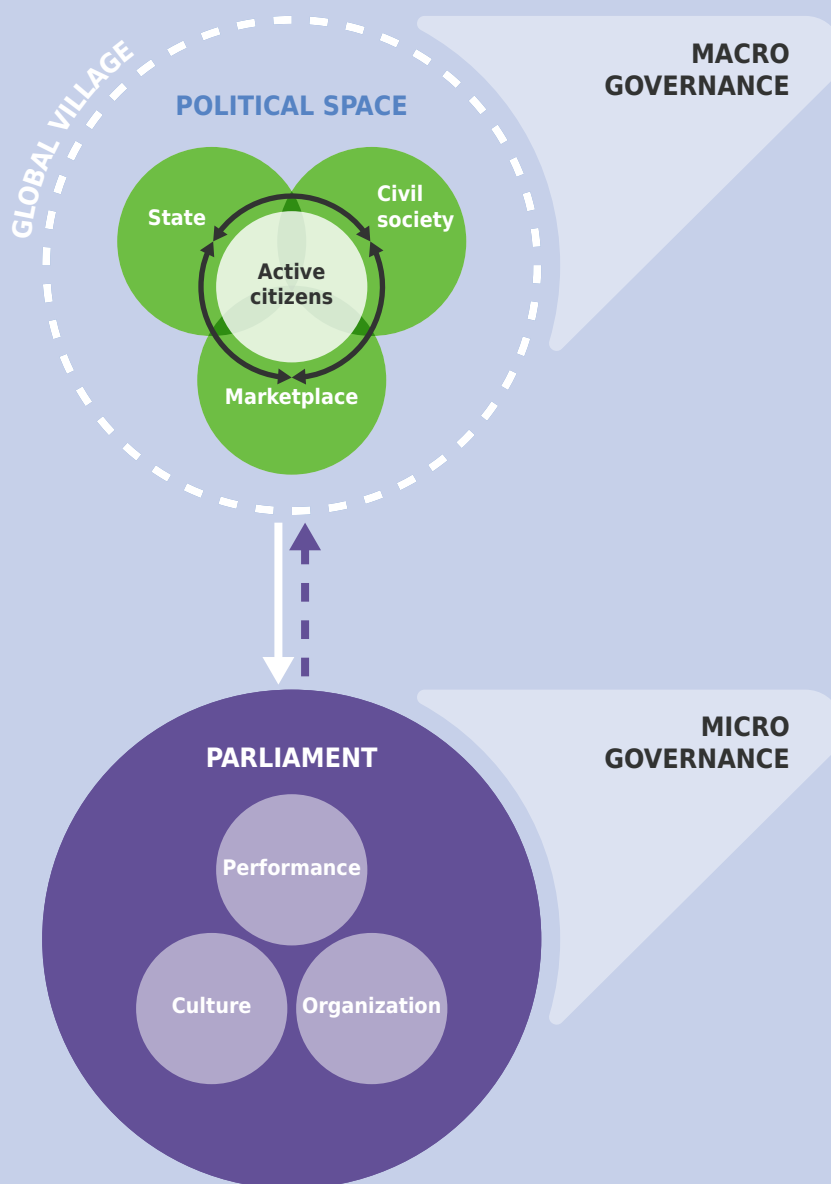
Organizational management and processes deal with how institutions organize their work to achieve their mission and goals, from planning to evaluation.

Resources refer to the set of variables an institution relies on to achieve its goals – these could include people, budget and technology.

Organizational culture refers to the set of shared basic assumptions through which people in an organization perceive organizational problems. It creates the daily context for practice, including incentives and motivations that affect what research can mean for policy processes.

Figure 1 illustrates the importance of both the macro and micro (organizational-level) factors in our analysis of parliaments and how they use evidence. Parliaments influence and are influenced both by wider developments in civil society, the market and the broader political space and by their own institutional culture, organizational arrangements and performance.

Figure 1: Determinants of parliamentary performance: the external environment matters⁶



6. Diagram drawn from Parliamentary Centre (unpublished).

3. Information: the ‘life blood of parliaments’

Through their core functions of legislation, representation and oversight, Parliaments “sit at the centre of a web of domestic accountability” (Menocal and O’Neil, 2012). They hold the government to account on behalf of the people, ensuring that government policy and action are both efficient and commensurate with the needs of the public. Their role is crucial in checking excesses on the part of officials that have the mandate to disburse state resources and power. In executing their mandate, parliaments:

- **Ensure transparency and openness of Executive activities:** Parliaments shed light on the operations of government by providing a public arena in which the policies and actions of government are debated, scrutinized, and subjected to public opinion.
- **Hold the Executive branch accountable:** Parliamentary oversight scrutinizes whether government’s policies have been implemented according to legislative intent and whether they are having the desired impact.
- **Provide financial accountability:** Parliaments approve and scrutinize government spending by highlighting waste within publicly funded services. They aim to improve the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of government expenditure.
- **Make laws:** Parliaments themselves create new legislation as well as amending, approving or rejecting laws put forward by the government.
- **Uphold the rule of law:** Parliaments protect the rights of citizens by monitoring policies and examining potential abuses of power, arbitrary behaviour, and illegal or unconstitutional conduct by government officials.
- Represent the citizens via elected Members of Parliament. As the World Bank Institute notes, MPs “are responsible for representing the differences in society, and for bringing those differences into the policy-making arena” (World Bank Institute).

A short history of information support in parliaments

The provision of information in parliaments is relatively recent. For example, one of the early legislatures to set up an information division was the French Parliament. Campbell and Laporte note that “in 1963, the (French) assembly created a parliamentary and administrative information division (within the parliamentary library) for the purpose of collecting and synthesizing administrative and governmental information relating to particular questions. This was only the beginning of an effort which was not completed until 1970, when the office of research and documentation was created” (Campbell and Laporte, 1981 p. 537). According to Miller, Pelizzo and Stapenhurst (2004), the effort by the French led to similar developments in Germany, Britain and Canada.

When parliaments were established in many developing countries during the post-colonial era efforts were made to set up information units such as libraries, research offices and Hansard to support the work of MPs. In Africa, growth and development of these services has been variable. Some information support services remain in their infancy while others are rapidly expanding and innovating.

As the IPU notes, “The capacity for parliamentary research in parliaments around the world varies greatly. At one end of the spectrum, comprehensive services are offered in nations that have built their parliamentary research services over many decades. At the other end, many parliaments aspire to establish or expand such a function within their institutions but struggle to identify the path forward, often due to lack of resources, challenges in establishing democratic institutions, or both.” (IPU and IFLA, 2015).

Access to and use of information is fundamental to parliamentary performance in all three core areas of legislation, representation and oversight. As the IPU notes, “MPs’ ability to perform [their] roles all along the policy and legislative cycle [is] shaped by their access to authoritative and reliable information⁷” (IPU and IFLA, 2015). Both individual MPs and parliamentary committees require a wide range of evidence in order to effectively scrutinize the government, hold informed debates, and make decisions which are reflective of the needs and realities of citizens’ experience while taking into account budgetary and other considerations (see below). As Cunninghame (2009) highlights, by supporting parliament’s role, research and information support also serves the wider purpose of democratic governance: “the lifeblood of parliaments is information, so parliaments need information services to help them to manage the information flows that sustain democracy across the world”.

How can information support services contribute to the key functions of parliaments?

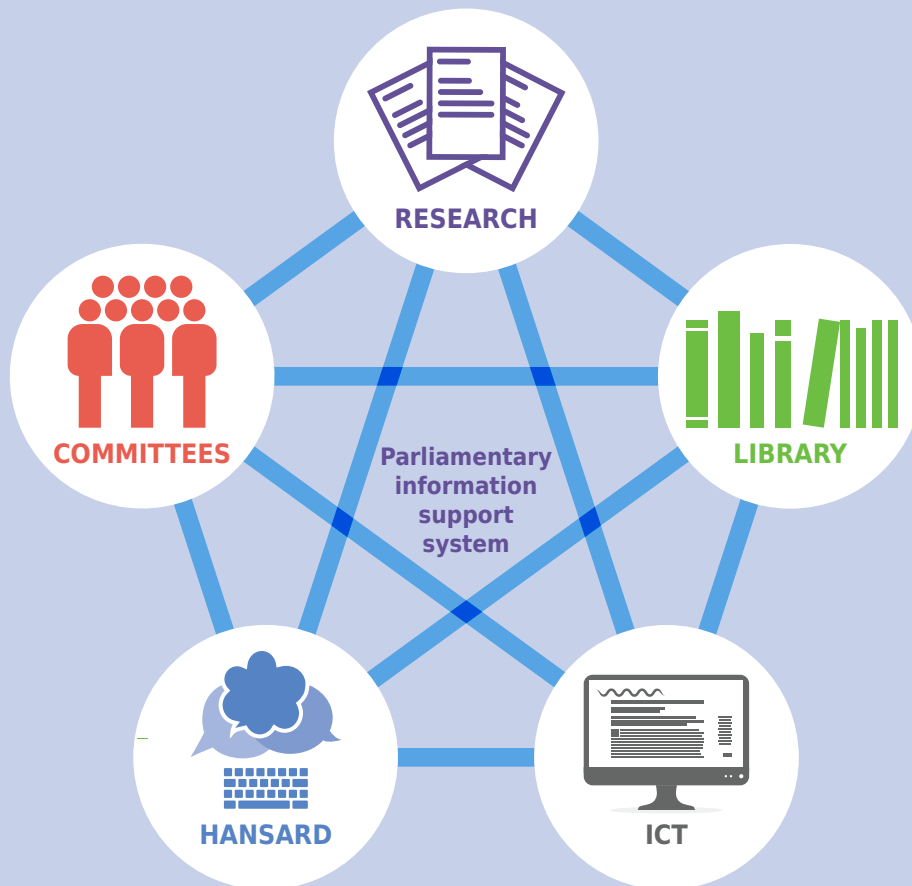
- Improve decision making by strengthening MPs’ understanding of problems and help them reach more realistic and effective legislative solutions
- Strengthen oversight by helping parliamentary committees effectively scrutinize legislation, finance and activities of government
- Contribute to redressing the imbalance between the powers of parliament and the executive, which sometimes tries to monopolize information
- Improve quality of debate by providing quality analysis to MPs
- Enhance public perceptions of parliament, when it is under close scrutiny by citizens
- Offer Members the collective memory and experience of those who work in parliament
- Support effective representation by providing accurate constituency profiles and statistics to MPs

(Authors, based on Global Partners Governance, 2017)

7. It should be noted that there were Legislative councils that preceded Legislative Assemblies in the 1800s, particularly in British colonial Africa but they were not to promulgate legislation. Rather, their task was limited to providing feedback for the colonial administration. See, for instance, Barkan (2009).

What does a parliamentary information support system look like?

Figure 2: What does a parliamentary information support system look like?



Parliaments are made up of specialized administrative units, all of which must interact and collaborate in order for parliamentary business to be performed. A parliamentary service includes a number of linked departments which support information and research provision as well as generate the parliament's own evidence and public record.⁸ Models and sizes vary across countries,⁹ but the IPU notes that the key departments involved in the provision and synthesis of evidence in parliaments typically are:

- **Library (or libraries):** These serve both MPs and parliamentary staff and respond to requests for information and assists users to find relevant evidence
- **The Research department (sometimes integrated within the library):** This responds to research requests from individual MPs as well as committees, and in some countries also performs a proactive 'horizon scanning' role¹⁰
- **Committees department:** These staff provide direct support to parliamentary committees and as part of this are often involved in research

8. Unlike the Executive branch, legislatures typically do not benefit as directly from the input of networks of expertise and external consultants, and thus information services are largely responsible for the delivery of evidence.

9. For an example of the UK parliament model see Dommert *et al.* (2017)

10. In many European countries this proactive 'horizon scanning' role is either separated from support to MPs and committees (as in the UK Parliament, where the library handles day to day queries and the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology conducts more in depth research), or is outsourced to partners in the national research system, as with the European Parliamentary Technology Assistance Network

Other related departments which can play a key role in evidence in parliaments are:

- **Hansard:** As the official parliamentary record of deliberations, Hansard is often used by MPs for debates but also published publicly for transparency and accountability to citizens
- **ICT:** This often plays a key role in storing, referencing and sharing information in digital formats. This is of particular relevance as many parliaments begin to move away from paper-based systems (IPU, 2016) and are increasingly exploring, for example, the use of iPads for MPs, paperless information request and delivery systems
- **Public Affairs department:** In many African countries this department is involved in conducting public consultations and gathering citizen evidence
- **Specialized evidence units such as Parliamentary Budget Offices (PBO):**¹¹ These units provide support on particular issues of high complexity and technical detail
- **Accountability units,** such as the Department of Corporate Planning
- **Monitoring and evaluation units:** In many countries these units have been strengthened in recent years through governance programmes¹²

What kinds of evidence are used and for what?

The types of evidence that inform parliaments are varied and range from statistical data to testimonials from citizens. This reflects the complexity and scale of the issues that parliamentarians are required to work on. Frantzich's (1979) useful guide to understanding information needs outlines the basic types of information that parliaments require to perform their constitutionally mandated functions. These include:

- Information that will help parliament and its individual members to coordinate and plan their work schedule and that of their clerks
- Information that will help individual MPs track constituent demands, improve their efficiency in dealing with them, and develop means for following up constituent interests in both the legislative and non-legislative realm
- Information that can assist MPs in their legislative, monitor problems, develop solutions, predict consequences, and facilitate influence strategies. This is because in their oversight role, parliaments need to monitor the success of ongoing programmes and to identify areas of weakness (Frantzich, 1979)

What Frantzich's guide demonstrates is that parliamentarians need both issue-led and managerial information. They need to know about an issue they are deliberating and legislating on, and this may contain significant technical content. They also require information that supports them in managing their role and that holds them accountable to citizens. In supporting the information needs of parliamentarians, information services draw of a diverse range of evidence, generated through different methodologies and representative of diverging forms of knowledge.¹³

In the following section, we shed light on the types of knowledge made available to information services from both internal and external sources.

11. For example, Parliamentary Budget Offices have been established in Kenya and Uganda, with Ghana also aiming to establish a similar office in the near future.

12. These have been the specific target of strengthening in recent years through governance programmes. For example, in the Ugandan parliament the Department of Corporate Planning and Strategy ensures the availability of managerial and benchmarking information about the activities and competences of parliament. This type of information, often presented in quantitative form, can help MPs to understand and manage the demands of their role better.

13. While there is an understanding of the kinds of information parliamentarians require; there is no absolute classification of what counts as evidence as since methodologies and epistemologies are continually evolving and adapting to contextual factors.

Sources of evidence used in parliament

Parliaments cannot rely solely on information provided by the Executive. To function effectively they must also draw on external sources in order to understand what alternatives exist. This enables them to explore contrary arguments, which can be useful in anticipating criticisms of a given policy and ensuring that it is robust. It is also crucial in helping MPs to predict the impact of policies before parliament assents. Reliable information can ultimately enhance the legitimacy of the legislature. It enables MPs to draft and amend legislation based on reliable facts; understand government choices, decisions and policies; assess whether decisions and policies are valuable or not; and, when required, criticize and propose policy alternatives.

Parliaments rely on evidence from a wide range of sources that passes through many formal and informal channels. This includes but is not limited to their own information support services.

Government sources

Parliaments have powers to formally obtain information from government sources, although the methods used vary from one legislature to another. Standing Committees have powers to summon witnesses and documents from the government departments they oversee, through which they gather information for their work. Parliament and its committees request annual departmental reports, audited annual reports of each Ministry, independent Auditor-General reports and many other relevant executive documents to ensure proper oversight of the executive's performance in its roles and responsibilities.¹⁴

In the Parliament of Ghana, for instance, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) summons government witnesses and official documents during its Public Hearings.

The Standing Orders of most parliaments also give members powers to demand information from duty-bearers, particularly from Ministers and senior government officials.

Non-government sources

In addition to information generated from within parliament and from government sources, parliaments rely on a plethora of other wide ranging non-governmental sources. These include civil society organizations (CSOs), independent media, think tanks and international organizations, academic institutions and citizens. This information can reach parliament via various different formal and informal channels, ranging from hearings and expert testimonials to informal expert advice provided directly to staff or MPs themselves through networks. In Uganda, for example, the Department of Research Services has brokered a formal agreement between Parliament and the National Academy of Sciences to provide support on evidence.

International and multilateral organizations are often highly trusted sources of research reports and synthesized data. For example, the World Bank, WHO, OECD, as well as bilateral funders such as DFID, USAID, and NORAD, provide comparative and benchmarking data across countries and regions. In addition, Pan-African organizations such as the East African Community, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Development Bank and the African Union are valued sources of regional data and research evidence.¹⁵

Parliaments require many different types of evidence in order to perform their mandates effectively. The models of support established to meet these needs vary.

The complexity of policy issues and the communicative infrastructures of governing institutions have changed significantly over the last half-century since most parliamentary information support services were established. In the next section, we examine some key issues that have encouraged the growth of information services in parliaments, but also presented challenges that include understanding and meeting the needs of parliamentarians as they handle increasingly complex issues and manage a tension between straightforward information provision and the use of evidence.

“The linkage between research and learning institutions and the policy-making community is fundamental and requires capacity – NEPAD

(“Promoting Africa’s Capacity Development Priorities”, NEPAD)

14. To promote the free flow of information between the Executive and Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, for example, has a protocol that spells out exactly how information from the Executive must be communicated to parliamentary committees. The protocol sets out clear guidelines on how the committees and the executive should work together. In particular, the protocol provides guidelines on how to ensure an open flow of information between parliament and the executive for a productive working relationship and the promotion of good governance.

15. For more on links between legislators and researchers in African contexts, see IDRC-CDOESRIA and Datta & Jones (ODI). With regards to civil society relationship with African parliaments, a submission to the APPG by Action Aid International and CARE makes an important observation: “The weakness of [national parliaments] may in part explain why NGOs ...have stepped in to breach this gap and adopted a watchdog function, supported by...donors. The question is then whether CSOs in filling this gap, might have inadvertently detracted attention from the roles and functions of national parliaments” (APPG 2008, p35).

4. Key issues affecting evidence use in African parliaments

In Africa, the onset of democratic governance from the 1990s as part of the global ‘third wave’ of democratization witnessed a great number of countries move to democratically elected governments premised on multi-party democracy. In these nascent democracies, parliaments began to exert new constitutional powers. These powers enabled parliaments to grow and professionalize as autonomous institutions charged with exercising greater oversight and scrutiny of government. Across African countries, legislatures currently wield more power than they have since independence (Barkan *et al.*, 2004).

As the 2012 Global Parliamentary Report pointed out, “the existence of a parliament is not synonymous with democracy, but democracy cannot exist without a parliament” (Power 2012, p4). The growth and strength of parliaments is therefore inextricably bound up in the complex, messy and often volatile emergence of the continent’s broader social, economic and institutional markers of democracy itself. This dynamic and rapidly changing political backdrop gives rise to several key macro-level issues shaping evidence use in African parliaments in recent years.¹⁶

Executive dominance

In many African countries, despite developments since the 1990s, parliaments remain weak, ineffective and marginalized (Menocal and O’Neil, 2012). As Barkan *et al.* (2009) observes, “in terms of raw power, most African legislatures, like legislatures worldwide, remain weak in relation to the Executive”. In these parliaments, there is a huge ‘information asymmetry’ and what has been described as an “Executive Monopoly” of information (IPU, 2008). The IPU observes that: “when government is the only source of information, or when available information is not transparent, parliamentarians are limited in their ability to hold governments to account, and an imbalance of power between the legislature and the executive may result” (IPU, 2008).

As Barkan (2009) notes,

“Once the rubber stamp of the executive, or nonexistent during periods of military rule, [African parliaments] have begun to assert their independence as players in the policymaking process, as watchdogs of the executive, and as organizations that respond to demands by civil society. Put simply, they are becoming institutions “that matter” in the politics of African countries – still weak, but increasingly significant” (Barkan, 2009).

While many African parliaments have worked hard to transcend the “rubber stamp” label and are beginning to play a more active role in policy making, the legacy of the “pervasive presidentialism of the authoritarian era” remains a key feature of many political systems across the continent (Mustapha and Whitfield, 2009, p7). An exploration of parliaments’ legislative performance and the extent to which they are able to exercise oversight over the Executive is one of way of tracing this legacy. The conclusion drawn by Barkan and his colleagues is instructive: “The common findings from our case studies [in Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya and Uganda] is that legislative performance is highly uneven – across legislatures, but also within them. Even the best performers have much to improve” (Barkan, 2009).

16. For examples of how these and other macro-level factors have manifested in specific public policy debates in Sierra Leone, Zambia, Uganda, and Ghana, see Broadbent (2012).

In particular, according to Barkan, a majority of parliaments struggle with one of the most important constitutional duties - the “Power of the Purse”. This power is widely regarded as fundamentally important for democratic governance. It refers to parliament’s ultimate authority to authorize public expenditure and it is inextricably tied to parliament’s role in oversight and scrutiny. In many African legislatures, the demand for evidence to support budgetary oversight is low. This is in part because of the dominance of the Executive over budget decisions and in part because major aid donors continue to dictate the allocation of resources. The Parliaments of Kenya and Uganda have been found to perform extremely well when it comes to oversight because they have a Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) that provides specialized information to MPs for oversight purposes.¹⁷

Party politics

National parliaments act as the central arena for party politics, and this has a fundamental bearing on their use of evidence. As African democratic institutions and models have been evolving over the past several decades, so have political parties and their techniques of political mobilization. There is an extensive literature considering the ways that factors such as electoral systems and reforms, identity politics, and the historical legacies of nationalism and independence are manifesting themselves in changes in political parties in African countries.¹⁸ The strength of political parties is found by Barkan (Legislative Power in African Democracies) to be one of the main variables affecting parliamentary reform on the continent, and reforms around research and information are no exception.

The growth of multipartyism has also seen the expansion of the role of the opposition. In some countries, including some of the continent’s most well-regarded democracies, the same ruling party has been in power throughout recent democratic history (for example Botswana, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Mozambique). In other countries there has been transfer of power between parties (most notably Ghana; also Nigeria, Senegal and Kenya) and parties have gained experience both in government and in opposition. As Shija notes, “the transition to multi-party politics was a challenge both for those who had to play the opposition role and for those who had to face opponents across the floor of their Houses. Members on both sides...are now actively developing ways...to strengthen their roles” (Shija, 2001). The growth of multipartyism therefore has implications both for the parties themselves and for Parliament as an institution.

The knowledge society

Amongst many African governments, the ‘knowledge society’ is seen as a potential solution to long-standing social and economic stagnation (see for example African Union Commission, 2015; EAC 2015; Castells, 2011; World Bank 2007; UNESCO 2005; OECD, 1996). African governments are showing renewed interest in the relationship between knowledge and society, emphasizing the development of ICT infrastructure and generating home-grown technological solutions to problems that beset sectors such as banking, agriculture, health and the environment. Knowledge societies are promoted as a pathway to middle-income status by raising education levels amongst the population and encouraging circulation of skilled workers and technologically intensive industries.

“We aspire that by 2063, Africa shall be a prosperous continent. [with] Well educated and skilled citizens, underpinned by science, technology and innovation for a knowledge society.

“Young African men and women will be the path breakers of the African knowledge society and will contribute significantly to innovation and entrepreneurship.

“A Call to Action, Build and expand an African knowledge society through transformation and investments in universities, science, technology, research and innovation...

(Quoted from Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, African Union Commission, 2015; sections 10, 58, 72)

17. For case studies from Ghana, Benin, Uganda, Ethiopia and Nigeria featuring experience of reforms around public financial management ,see Draman, Stapenhurst et al (2011).

18. Collections such as the Routledge Handbook of African Politics (ed. Cheeseman, Anderson and Scheibler) and Turning Points in African Democracy (ed. Mustapha and Whitfield) provide insights from across the continent. See also www.politics.ox.ac.uk/research-projects/the-impact-of-elections-voting-political-behaviour-and-democracy-in-sub-saharan-africa.html.

Interest in the concept of the 'knowledge society' has been accompanied by what UNESCO calls an 'explosive' growth in higher education across the African continent (UIS Fact Sheet No. 10, 2010), with enrolments more than doubling between 2000 and 2010 (McCowan, 2014) and a plethora of new universities being established. Demand outstrips public financing capacity (Experton and Fevre, 2010), however, and significant challenges remain before the continent's higher education sector can realize its potential as a key driver of a knowledge-based development pathway (Friesenhahn, 2014). A number of initiatives and agencies are working supporting African research institutions, including some such as the Association of Commonwealth Universities' recent Development Research Uptake in Sub-Saharan Africa (DRUSSA) programme, which supported universities to strengthen research uptake in policy, industry and practice.

The common aim of a 'knowledge society', and the growth trajectory of higher education as one of its fundamental contributing sectors, has the potential to radically change the quantity, quality and availability of local research to decision making in parliaments and other public institutions.¹⁹ It also highlights the importance of relationships across the national research-to-policy system which can enable parliaments to more systematically leverage the potential of this growing sector.

Information overload?

According to IPU/IFLA, the global 'information explosion' has introduced a new challenge of information overload (IPU and IFLA, 2015). The rapid growth of information spans multiple types of evidence. For example, a 'data revolution' (UN Data Revolution Group) is underway in the international development sphere, and the growth of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) has meant a new wealth of information around policy and programme implementation. In the context of the aforementioned growth in the research and higher education sector, and alongside the proliferation of new information producers and users in the civil society and media sectors, this is a significant development which public institutions can at times struggle to keep up with: "Parliamentarians can be deluged with information, but the quality of that information is very variable. They often lack the time or the resources to scrutinize or assimilate what they receive" (Global Partners Governance, 2017).

In emerging African democracies where many legislatures are weak, this raises particular challenges in accessing and processing available information and in exercising oversight (African Parliamentary Index, 2011, 2013). If the legislature is unable to gather, synthesize or understand the available information, then it inhibits the ability of parliamentarians to question in any substantive way the content of government choices, decisions and actions. However, the growth of media-savvy fact-checking and watchdog organizations such as Africa Check, OpenParlyZw and Parliament Watch Uganda²⁰ means that such gaps in scrutiny can be quickly identified and shared with a wide public audience. As Stapenhurst and Draman note (2011 p3, drawing on Barkan 2009), "the presence of a large and talent-ridden civil society that sees the imperative of improving parliamentary performance as a key component of democratic development" is a key variable in driving change in parliaments across the African continent.

Linked to the 'information explosion' has been the foregrounding of the role of ICT as a key element of a parliamentary information support system. ICT provides important opportunities to store and manage the burgeoning plethora of information, but it is also a key conduit of the 'information explosion' itself, with important implications for how parliaments function internally but also how they liaise with citizens, the media and others. With many African parliaments now moving towards 'e-Parliaments', the process of gathering, synthesizing and communicating evidence is fundamentally changing (IPU, 2016; Kingham 2003).

19. The extent to which this research informs decision making in Parliament is dependent not only on demand within Parliament but also on incentives within the research sector. In the UK, for example, the Research Excellence Framework puts pressure to on academics to demonstrate impact on policy, which is a facilitating factor in strengthening Parliament's relationships with the research community (Chandrika Nath, personal communication, 21 July 2017).

20. These organizations present different models for citizen engagement with and scrutiny of evidence in decision making. Africa Check: africacheck.org Parliament Watch: parliamentwatch.ug Open Parly: openparly.co.zw

Complexity of policy issues

The growth in volume and complexity of information has been accompanied by increased complexity of policy issues themselves. According to Bradley (1980), “legislatures, (...) are faced with increasingly complex and technical issues. The widening scope of government and the closing circle of societal interconnectedness have made increased information demands on legislatures”. The intersectionality and technical complexity of policy issues means that parliaments are often called upon to legislate at the cutting edge of research.

Complex policy issues fall across all sectors. In discussing the “overwhelming legislative workload” of many African parliaments, Stapenhurst and Draman (2010) point to “trade and investment issues, climate change, scrutiny and approval of budgets and taxes, and economic policy”, noting that these “are key areas, and yet these are areas where parliamentary capacity is most limited”. Additional examples which have been of interest recently in many African countries include legislation around genetically modified organisms, biosafety and biosecurity. Such pieces of legislation often see long delays in Parliament, but there are some notable success stories. For example, on climate change Kenya’s Parliament has been able to draw on expertise from its national research sector to become a regional leader in legislating on this topic (Asiti and Ochieng, 2015). As parliamentary research teams need to be able to cover a wider range of topics than their counterparts in ministries, such highly specialized and technical issues pose a challenge. In many African legislatures where resources are limited, research teams comparatively small, and the latest scientific journals are not available, the challenge is compounded.

Donor support for parliaments

There is increasing donor interest and support for parliamentary development, with USAID, DFID, NORAD and Sida featuring among the key donors. Imlach (2011) finds that international involvement by aid agencies is a key common feature of parliamentary reform across the continent. However, Menocal et al. note that “despite steady growth in interest in and engagement with parliaments, support to parliaments...has remained a relatively small component of international democracy assistance”, adding that “an important reason for this has been that, in general, parliaments (as well as political parties) are considered too politically sensitive to engage with” (Menocal and O’Neil, 2012).²¹

Parliaments and aid effectiveness

Parliaments were perceived to have widely been excluded from the Paris process to develop a more effective aid system, just as they were left at the margins of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) framework.

In an attempt to correct this oversight, the Accra Agenda highlighted the principle that all donor activity should seek to strengthen domestic institutions and forms of accountability rather than working exclusively with the executive branch in partner countries (OECD DAC, 2012b).

The importance of parliaments was rearticulated at the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan in 2011 – though to a lesser extent.

(Menocal and O’Neil, 2012)

Many African parliaments are nevertheless involved in a number of different aid-funded programmes and projects, with different donors and scope, at any one time. Much of the work carried out by donor-funded programmes involves strengthening skills and processes for evidence use, whether through building M&E systems within parliament, offering technical support to the budget scrutiny process, or supporting relationships with CSOs. However, this is rarely framed with an evidence lens, and our experience suggests that researchers, librarians and other information support staff are often overlooked in donor-funded parliamentary strengthening programmes. In addition, donor support to parliaments and to other governance institutions is not apolitical; writing about Ghana, Whitfield finds that aid practices can “accentuate the role of the Executive and sideline parliament... the complexity of the aid system makes it harder for Parliament to provide oversight of the donor-government relationship” (Whitfield, 2009). Therefore, trends in parliamentary development assistance, and the degree to which information support is seen as a fundamental part of parliamentary strengthening, will likely continue to affect evidence systems in African parliaments in future.

21. For a more specific look at DFID’s work with African parliaments, see Africa All Party Parliamentary Group (2008).

5. Changes and challenges: the shifting roles of parliamentary information support

In the previous section, we outlined several key macro-level factors affecting evidence use in African parliaments. In this section, we explore how parliaments are responding to these, discussing some of the tensions and questions these pose for parliamentary information support units. Parliaments in Africa are changing rapidly; as Stapenhurst and Draman (2011, p.2) note, “parliamentary reform in Africa is perhaps more rigorous than in any other continent”.

Information use and Executive dominance: a typology of parliaments

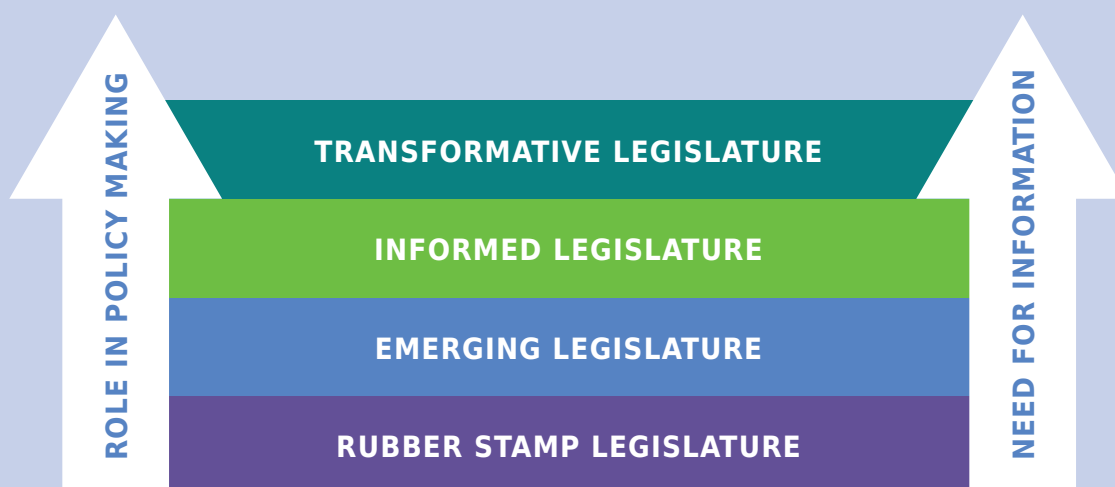
As outlined above, the dominance of the Executive in many emerging democracies, particularly in Africa, is a key factor shaping the demand and use of evidence within parliaments. Here we discuss how the strength of a parliament can be correlated to the capacity and strength of its information support services. Miko and Robinson (1994), drawing on the work of Nelson Polsby (Greenstein and Polsby, 1975), developed a typology of parliaments that links their information needs to their policy-making roles, which we find instructive as a starting point for reflection on this correlation.²² They argued that the desired level of parliamentary functioning will have an important bearing on the need for information and research. They categorized parliaments into four types:²³

- **The rubber stamp legislature:** Parliaments in this category have very little need for information other than the time and place to vote. They essentially meet to endorse the ruling party’s programme of work. Independent research and analysis have very little value to them.
- **The emerging legislature:** Parliaments in this category need information in order to participate effectively in the legislative process. They will normally have a parliamentary library with some minimal reference materials; a research service may be created; and permanent staff provided for parliamentary committees. There is also very minimal demand for and use of information by MPs and committees.
- **The informed legislature:** Here, there will be a parliamentary library and research service which provides reference services, produces reports, offers a clipping service that is distributed to all members and may track the progress of key legislation. At this level, the parliamentary information service is providing a full array of services and is distinguished from the next level only by the scale of resources and the fact that it stops short of providing substantial research and analysis services that identify policy options and their impacts. Here, there is an increased level of demand and use of information by MPs and committees as compared to the situation with emerging legislatures.
- **The transformative legislature:** The transformative legislature has substantial resource requirements and typically has a generous allotment of personal staff, strong and well-staffed committees and large research groups capable of developing policy options (see Figure 3). Here, MPs and committees are ‘hungry’ for and use information in all aspects of their work.

22. Notable exceptions include the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, which has a specific interest in research and information support, and DFID’s BCURE programme (2013-2017), which funded VakaYiko and the Kenya-based SECURE Health Consortium which worked on research and evidence in the parliaments of Kenya and Malawi.

23. The four types are not exclusive, and one parliament can fit into several different categorizations at different times or on different policy issues. In the VakaYiko programme, this typology was used to stimulate discussion among parliamentary staff about the roles their parliament played under different circumstances and how this shaped their use of evidence.

Figure 3: Legislative roles and information needs



Source: (Miko and Robinson, 1994)

The key message from Figure 3 above is that parliaments’ role in policy making and, by extension, the use of evidence is variable depending on their position in the continuum of *typology of parliaments*. A rubber stamp parliament exercises little autonomy from the executive, which limits its oversight and scrutiny function in policy making. At the opposite end of the scale is a transformative parliament, in which the institution and its members exercise degrees of independence. Internal structures and mechanisms facilitate a proactive approach to the use of evidence and, thus, ensure that parliamentarians have oversight and influence over policy making. In a transformative parliament, there is an insistence on the separation of powers, even if not absolute, to enable the autonomy and efficacy of parliament in strengthening democracy. In such parliaments there is a strong demand for evidence, resulting in a relationship with evidence which is shaped more by ‘pull’ for evidence from policymakers than ‘push’ of evidence from researchers. In our experience these designations are overlapping, and many parliaments will operate simultaneously at different ends of this scale – for example, even in democratic parliaments, in many cases the ruling party dominates and can use its majority to get bills, loan agreements and even the annual budget ‘rubber stamped’ with little or no deliberation.²⁴

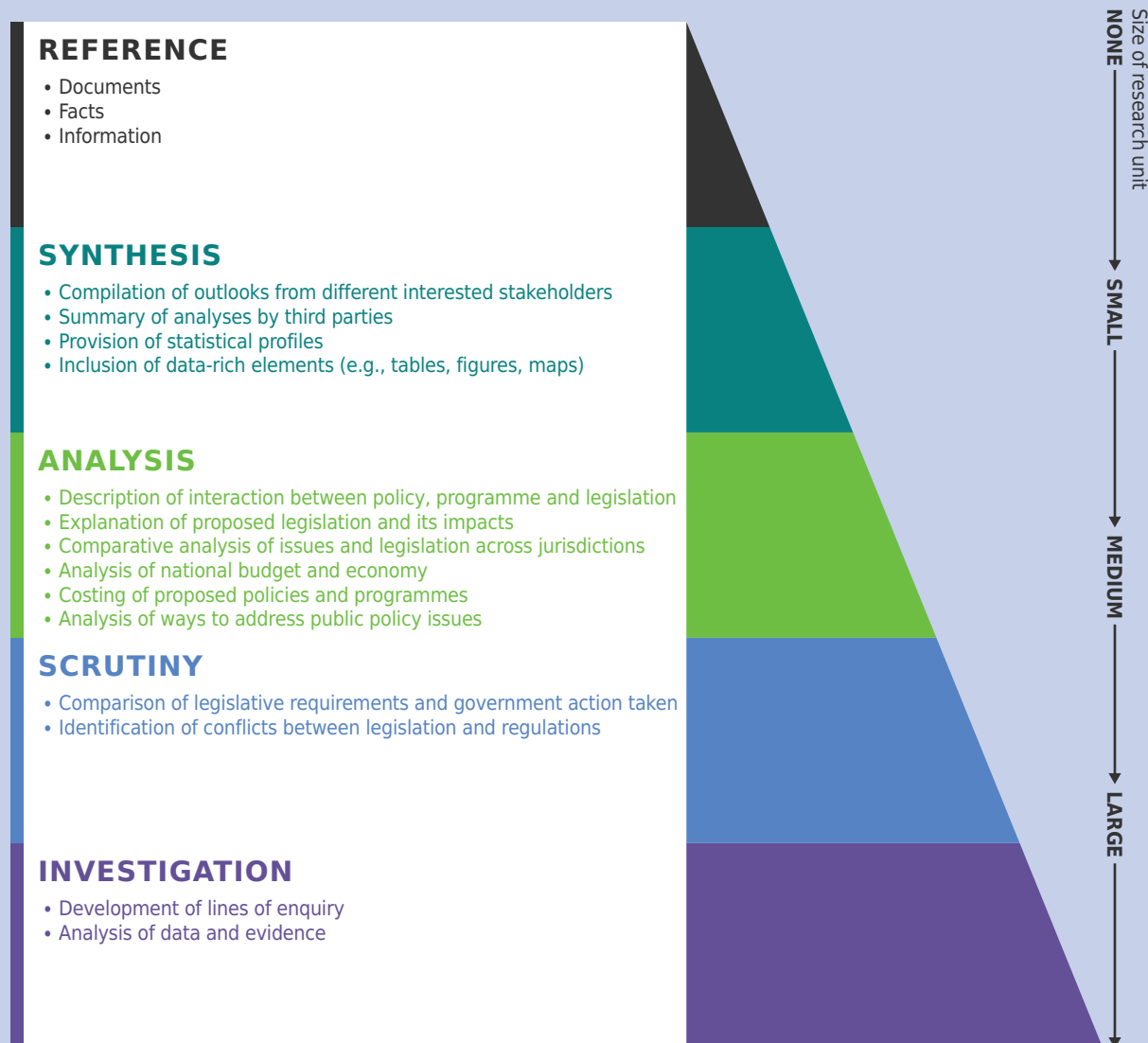
From information provision to evidence synthesis and knowledge translation

Figure 4 shows the range of support provided by different size research units. In its most basic reading, this diagram offers a scale ranging from small and basic to large and well-developed information-support functions. In parliaments that have very small information support units, the information available to MPs is simple, reference information. In a medium-sized support structure, there is capacity for more analysis. In a well-developed, large system, information for scrutiny and investigation is provided. There is an inherent tension in the diagram, as in the era of information explosion and in the context of the ‘knowledge-based economy’ there is an increasing stimulus to perform these more analytical roles, but the most appropriate institutional arrangements to meet these needs are unclear, given that many African parliaments have smaller sized information support structures. As Global Partners Governance (2017) notes, “only the largest research services can aim to cover, in any depth, most of the subject areas in which they may need to work”; this is a particular challenge for the increasingly technical and complex policy issues highlighted earlier in this paper, such as biotechnology or climate change.

24. This situation found expression in the assessment of Ghana sixth Parliament by the then Minority Leader - Hon. Osei-Kyei Mensa-Bonsu when he lamented that the sixth Parliament, led by Speaker Edward Doe Adjaho, failed to do due diligence in the passage and approval of some loans and international agreements; they simply approved whatever came from the Executive. See “Minority Leader criticises Adjaho’s Parliament” (2017).

Parliamentary researchers, in particular, occupy a critical juncture in knowledge translation to decision makers. They play a vital role as transmitters, interpreters and synthesizers of information (Miller, Pelizzo and Stapenhurst, 2004; IPU and IFLA 2015). However, in the context of the limited resources of many African parliaments where research departments – where they exist – range in size from three researchers (Malawi) to 10 (Ghana) to over 30 (Kenya, Uganda),²⁵ moving from an ‘information provision’ to a synthesis and analysis role is challenging. In addition to ‘traditional’ information units such as the research department, some African parliaments have responded to this challenge by creating units to provide specialized information and analysis to MPs, particularly around the budget through the establishment of Parliamentary Budget Offices (PBOs). Recent studies of African parliaments have shown that, where such specialized units exist, the performance of MPs, particularly in terms of oversight, improves significantly.²⁶

Figure 4: Range of analytical support offered by parliamentary research services



Source: (IPU/IFLA, 2013 p.20)

25. By contrast, the US Congressional research services has a staff strength of 675; Germany has 85; and the UK has about 100 research staff.

26. See Draman (2016). See also Parliamentary Centre (2011, 2013).

In this section, we have charted the complex terrain of moving from information supply to evidence synthesis and knowledge translation, demonstrating that this is not a linear progression, but is contingent on the form and structure of parliamentary information services as well as the role of parliament itself in relation to the Executive. In addressing these challenges, parliaments around the world have implemented programmes designed to strengthen information support systems, centralize parliamentary information repositories, and build clear paths of communication between information support units. Parliaments are also recognizing the need to adapt their service models to reflect a shift from their traditional function as information providers to a new role as facilitators and synthesizers of knowledge and information. Accordingly, some parliamentary services are now developing anticipatory and strategic research services that not only respond to individual requests, but proactively research key topics in anticipation of upcoming parliamentary issues or debates.²⁷

Key issues for parliamentary information support units

High levels of MP turnover

High turnover of MPs is a key issue affecting many newer parliaments around the world (Power, 2012), but particularly in Africa where typically between 60 and 75% of MPs do not win re-election. This results in a significant loss of institutional memory with each election, meaning that each new parliament sees another cycle of MP orientation and training programmes. “In this context”, notes the APPG, “the contribution of the Officers of the Speaker, the Clerk, research services and committee clerks is all the more crucial, not least because they can be better placed than MPs to take a longer-term perspective of the institutional interests of parliament” (APPG, 2008). For research and information services, a key opportunity to raise awareness among MPs around the role of evidence is therefore often seen to be the orientation period of a new parliament. Research services might organize exhibitions, sensitization meetings or awareness-raising events as part of orientation to explain to MPs the services they offer and how to use them.

A number of organizational factors within parliaments affect their information services' capacity to navigate this landscape. The key organizational factors include:

- **Human resource capacity:** This remains a key issue for most parliaments on the continent. Some parliaments (such as Gambia and Sierra Leone) do not have any research staff. Others have small research services, such as Malawi, which has three researchers. Even in larger research services, there are capacity constraints. Staff skill levels in gathering, appraising and communicating evidence are an important factor.²⁸
- **Academic engagement and links with external research institutions:** This is a fundamental issue, as even the largest research departments cannot fully meet all of the evidence needs of a parliament internally and need to be able to draw in external expertise.
- **Interdepartmental collaboration:** With so many different departments involved in the generation, synthesis and sharing of evidence, the clarity of the role of each of them, and the degree to which they are able to collaborate effectively is an important factor shaping how Parliament as a whole uses evidence.
- **Support for research and information services in the leadership:** Leadership is fundamental in influencing organizational culture as well as resource provision around evidence use. In parliaments, the key leaders with influence over change processes are the chief presiding officer (Speaker) and the head of the administration (Clerk) (Barkan, 2009).
- **Role of MP ‘champions’:** Our experience and interviews show that MPs who have particular interest and commitment in the issue of evidence can be important influencers of organizational culture around evidence use. The extent to which they are able to work with staff to drive this change is a key factor.²⁹ (Barkan, 2009).

27. Parliament of Uganda’s Department of Research Services occasionally carries out specific pieces of proactive research, a recent example being a piece of work on child marriage. INASP recently piloted an approach to strategic planning for evidence use in the parliamentary context with Parliament of Ghana www.inasp.info/GhanaEIPMLRI.

28. “Adequate and highly skilled staff and research support” is a key indicator of institutional capacity on the African Parliamentary Index, which contains details of self-assessments of this indicator from the parliaments of Benin, Senegal, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia (Parliamentary Centre, 2011 and 2013).

29. The role of the leadership and the role of key ‘reformers’ among MPs are also discussed by Barkan (Legislative Power in Emerging African Democracies) as key factors affecting parliamentary reforms.

- **Access to research in the library:** Many African parliamentary libraries, which serve as a main source of information for staff and MPs, do not have access to up-to date journal subscriptions. This can make it difficult to inform debates with the latest research, especially in the content of increasingly complex and highly specialized policy issues.³⁰
- **Timing and planning:** The legislative calendar in many parliaments is released just a week in advance, so information support departments have a very short period to gather evidence to respond to debate. The degree to which information support units are able to anticipate key issues for debate, and plan in advance for evidence, is important.
- **Mechanisms for requesting and processing evidence:** These systems are important to ensure that the right evidence is provided at the right time. Parliaments have many different channels through which they gather evidence, but often the systems for systematically identifying and responding to MPs' evidence needs are limited. While some parliaments have attempted to put in place mechanisms for feedback from MPs on products presented by research and information staff, these are often not systematically implemented, and the extent to which the evidence provided has met MPs' needs remains difficult to gauge.
- **MPs' education, awareness and attitudes towards evidence:** The high turnover of MPs (see page 28) means that with each election, research and information support departments are working with mostly new MPs who have diverse educational backgrounds as well as attitudes to research. This has implications for how evidence is communicated to decision makers by support staff.
- **Quality assuring evidence:** There is no single agreed quality-assurance mechanism for evidence in the parliamentary context. Some research services are beginning to put in place standards, handbooks and templates for key evidence products, but most do not have formal peer-review structures in place for the evidence they synthesize and present to decision makers.³¹

In the three focus papers accompanying this paper, we explore how these and other factors shape evidence use in the parliaments of Zimbabwe, Ghana and Uganda. These countries have some broad macro-level factors in common. Like many other African countries, they have each experienced some disruption to the democratic order since independence,³² and as a result have seen significant change in their governance institutions since the 1980s and 1990s. While their current political systems are very different, the issue of Executive dominance remains relevant in different ways for each of the parliaments. All three countries have historically robust higher education and research sectors, but the strength and independence of the civil society landscape is variable across the contexts. In all three contexts, overarching national development planning processes are influential in setting strategic and operational priorities at institutional level, including in Parliament.

In terms of parliamentary structure, Ghana and Uganda are unicameral structures, with one legislative chamber while Zimbabwe is bicameral, with two legislative chambers. The scale of information support in the institutions varies considerably, ranging from eight to 10 researchers in Zimbabwe and Ghana to 35 in Uganda. Overall, the focus papers present snapshots into how some of the factors and issues we have identified manifest in different ways in specific country contexts.

30. INASP conducted an investigation into this issue in 2016-2017. See "Enabling access to research in public institutions" (2017).

31. In a programme with Parliament of Uganda (2008-2012), POST and the Uganda National Academy of Sciences piloted a peer review initiative to quality assure evidence. See Nath and Holden (2015).

32. All three countries were colonized by Britain and are Anglophone. Ghana attained independence in 1957, Uganda in 1962 and Zimbabwe in 1980.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we have considered how the concept of EIPM applies to African parliaments. We have shown that national legislatures on the continent are enmeshed in a complex and rapidly changing set of social, political and technological changes which are fundamentally affecting the way they gather and use evidence. We have tried to make the case for greater attention to evidence and information issues in the parliamentary strengthening sector by demonstrating the links between evidence and accountability, and we have also tried to show that a nuanced understanding of African parliaments is needed in order to work on EIPM in African parliamentary contexts. Our investigation is by no means exhaustive and we hope that colleagues in both the parliamentary development sector and the EIPM sector will continue to explore and add to our emerging observations.³³

We have taken a broad view of evidence and of the multiple factors, both internal and external, that shape how it is gathered and used in parliaments on the continent. We have identified some of the major macro-level factors shaping evidence use in African parliaments, including Executive dominance, donor support, and the growth of the 'knowledge society'. We have outlined what a typical African parliamentary information support system looks like and some of the tensions and challenges it faces as a result of these macro-level factors. We have also highlighted a number of key institutional level factors shaping evidence use within parliaments, some of which are more technical and others more behavioural. They include the degree of collaboration between the different units in the information support system, the institutional culture around knowledge and evidence, the support from leadership, and the processes and systems which structure the identification of evidence needs and the gathering and synthesis of evidence to meet those needs.

33. INASP has partnered with the UNDP Portal on Parliamentary Development (AGORA) to create a global online resource base on research and information support in parliaments, to be launched late 2017. Please contact ehayter@inasp.info for further information.

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Appendix 1: List of interviewees

Interviews were conducted by ACEPA. In addition to individual interviews, our analysis is also informed by comments made during workshops held with staff from the three parliaments under the VakaYiko Programme. Workshop notes and reports are available upon request from INASP.

Name	Title & Institution	Date of Interview
Interviewee	Research Department, Parliament of Ghana	24 March 2017
Stapenhurst, Rick	Professor of Practice, McGill University, Montreal Canada	3 February 2017
Staddon, Anthony	Professor, University of Westminster, London	14 January 2017
Musandu, Nyasha	Training Unit Manager, Comms Consult, Zimbabwe	13 January 2017
Fraser, Moira	Former Parliamentary Librarian, New Zealand Parliament	12 January 2017
Nath, Chandrika	Ag Director, Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST), UK House of Commons	11 January 2017
Interviewee	Department of Research Services, Parliament of Uganda	6 October 2016 23 December 2016
Interviewee	Parliament of Ghana	16 December 2016
Interviewee	Research Department, Parliament of Ghana	5 October 2016 30 November 2016
Inusah, Ibrahim	Executive Secretary, GINKS, Ghana	25 November 2016
Interviewee	Research Department, Parliament of Ghana	23 November 2016
Interviewee	Research Department, Parliament of Zimbabwe	16 November 2016
Interviewee	Research Department, Parliament of Ghana	20 October 2016
Munatsi, Ronald	Executive Director, ZeipNET, Zimbabwe	5 October 2016
Ndongwe, Gilchriste	Programme Manager, ZeipNET, Zimbabwe	5 October 2016



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