

# Strengthening International Evidence-Informed Policymaking: *Lessons from the Global South*

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## Abstract

This article was born from a policy imperative – to provide recommendations to Member States of the United Nations General Assembly looking to strengthen evidence use within UNGA process. Whilst EBP and EIP literatures are useful, their direct contribution to the practicalities in the policymaking processes in international organisations appears limited by their focus on a discreet and generally local level of governance and administration. This paper seeks to redress this by applying a new analytical lens to existing scholarship. We subscribe to the assumption that policy processes are by nature transboundary, and there are therefore lessons from local and national processes which can be teased out and have relevance at the international level. Furthermore, we identify an acute bias in the literature, with the majority of EIP studies derived from countries in the Global North. To partially redress this, we produce four new national case studies which reflect upon current, live policy processes in four Sub-Saharan African countries and identify replicable practices that may inform other scales of decision-making. Insights derived from the case studies emphasise integrating diverse stakeholders in research for policy generation, through a more inclusive approach that would allow more meaningful participation of underrepresented forms of knowledge within national and international EIP mechanisms. The case studies underscore the importance of understanding the political economy and context of evidence use and the necessity to advocate for structured evidence-demand, communication, and integration practices within both national and international institutions. Strong emphasis is placed on setting guidelines on evidence categories and enabling entry points for more inclusive EIP practices.

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## Background

Evidence-informed policymaking (EIP) and evidence-based policymaking (EBP) have been extensively studied at the national level and documented in research literature. Despite this abundance, the integration of evidence and policymaking at the international level remains a complex and often opaque process. Within international deliberative spaces, such as the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), there appear to be two main challenges. First, the ways in which evidence, and especially ‘scientific evidence’, informs policymaking is often un-institutionalised, reliant on narrow consultative bodies or informal dialogues (Espey 2023). Currently, the only institutional, regular opening for scientific engagement in the UNGA is through the Scientific and Technological Major Group, which frames science – an evidentiary practice – as a stakeholder group and requires academics and technicians from highly diverse fields to prepare short, collective input statements that inevitably lack specificity or nuance. Furthermore, policy-making practices in multilateral bodies like the UNGA remain largely traditional, with policy decisions reached through managed deliberation, in which member states take turns to present national statements on the issue at hand with minimal opportunity for external, expert inputs (Espey 2023). Strengthening processes for scientific engagement and dialogue is crucial and yet there is little international literature to guide the relevant reforms. To overcome this, we examine national EIP studies, and additional case study research from Sub-Saharan Africa, seeking to tease out insights and practices that may be applicable in the international setting. We subscribe to Stone et al.’s (2000) argument that policy processes are not uniquely bounded spaces; people and processes transfer across scales. Accordingly, there are transferable lessons to be learned from closer examination of existing national practice.

A preliminary review of existing EIP literature underscores the paucity of relevant international studies and the relevance of taking this bottom-up approach. Despite the increasing focus on mechanisms such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the more recent Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, the literature highlights significant gaps. In the field of global public health research, for example, the literature stressed the need for an ‘upstream public health approach’ that extends beyond problem identification to solution-oriented research capable of informing policy decisions (Ding et al., 2020: 467). Similarly, the importance of ‘bottom-up approaches’ that foster collaboration between researchers and evidence consumers has been emphasized (Tan et al., 2022). Babu (2015: 132) points out that to effectively collate evidence relating to food and nutrition ‘require[s] better understanding of [the] political economy of policy making and [the] role of various actors and players’ involved, so that insights can be tailored to suit key policy audiences and to ensure maximum utility. These studies suggest that how national-level EIP processes inform international policymaking remains a gap to be filled.

The existing body of EIP research predominantly focuses on national or subnational scales, resulting in understanding and recommendations that are deeply rooted in their contextual setting and are not extrapolated to different governance scales. A preliminary literature review revealed a disproportionate emphasis on EIP in the Global North, particularly in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and the United States. Analysis of 75 academic papers published since 2015 indicated that 65 were focused on Global North contexts, while the remaining 10 considered 19 Global South countries. Most commonly considered within this EIP literature were policy processes relating to climate change (including pollution, environment, desertification, marine science, conservation, biodiversity) (Böcher, 2016; Wan et al., 2020; Kyriakopoulou et al., 2023), food/agriculture (Babu, 2015), healthcare (Jarman et al., 2022; Aryeetey et al. 2017; Dodd et al., 2019), whilst some literature considered cross-sectoral evidence-policy interfaces (Stewart et al., 2018). Insights mostly pertained to the generation of knowledge, and mechanisms/platforms of knowledge communication and translation to make it appropriate for policy purposes. From healthcare to agriculture and climate change policies, national case studies point out the crucial role of policy-driven evidence production (Goldman and Pabari, 2021) as well as the importance of involving policymakers and government professionals in the early phases of scientific research (Dodd et al., 2019; Culyer and Chalkidou, 2021) or in the design of monitoring systems (Babu, 2015). It is suggested that such consultation between knowledge actors and policymakers can help the ‘streamlining’ of information and ‘reduce [the] duplication of evidence’ (Babu, 2015: 132).

A common concern relating to these mechanisms and echoing across the limited international literature was knowledge colonialism and lack of equity in the use of evidence within multilateral and international contexts, with a particular predominance of Global North studies and inputs. Knowledge colonialism was not only investigated with reference to written inputs but also with regards to the role of Knowledge Translation Platforms (KTPs) (Lester et al., 2020; Partridge et al., 2020) and science-policy interfaces (SPIs) (Akhtar-Schuster et al., 2022; Stone, 2003). Concerns were raised within academic literature that the majority of these are Northern-based and focused on Western academic science, marginalising other forms of evidence and knowledge. The traditional assumptions that you can have government and non-government actors collaborating as equal participants in well-resourced networks that generate technocratic knowledge to inform policymaking are increasingly questioned today (Draude, 2017). Stone et al. (2020) argue that contemporary policy development and transfer is characterized by an expanding cohort of policy actors (‘policy ambassadors’) operating within complex transnational networks. This is reordering global governance through new norms and development cooperation practices, the emergence of alternative global policy venues, and a shift from technocratic policy processes to more diverse and contested exercises of power and resistance. In response to Stone et al.'s (2020) call for a more innovative approach to investigating these dynamics, we draw experiences of EIP processes from four understudied contexts in the Global South seeking to understand the wide range of actors and diverse forums within which evidence informs policy dialogues.

Another key issue emerging from the preliminary literature review is the absence of a unified understanding of what constitutes evidence. While the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasizes the significance of a robust "science–policy interface" to support high-level decision-making and provide "a strong evidence-based instrument to support policymakers in promoting poverty eradication and sustainable development" (UN, 2015: para. 83), the document lacks explicit definitions of "science" and "evidence" and their relationship to other forms of knowledge. Science and evidence normally mean different things in different sectors (see, for example, Oliver and de Vocht, 2017), with the former often used as short-hand for hard earth and biological sciences and the latter emphasising a more diverse range of practitioner-based insights.

Also a challenge is the question of scales; what is clear from limited international literature and policy transfer studies is that EIP processes at regional and international levels are seldom confined by single, sectoral or other limited scales, rather they are interconnected within a multi-scalar system of relations. As identified by Stone and Ladi (2015: 842) with the use of the term ‘transnational administration’, ‘scales of ‘local’ and ‘global’ are not neatly bounded (...) spaces’, instead – in contrast to a ‘Westphalian political imaginary’ they are part of the same articulated process (Stone and Ladi, 2015: 847). This is especially true in the EIP practices among international organisations, where policymaking relies on a set of interactions among different stakeholders, including member states acting within the relevant forum, their colleagues engaging from capitals, domestic non-governmental actors, international non-governmental actors, UN and other international policy bureaucrats, and many more who do not necessarily share the same definition of “evidence”.

Global and local dynamics of decision- and policymaking are increasingly complex and interdependent, especially if we consider ‘global environmental disruption (or protection) and the role of global economic activities in a broader context of social, cultural, and ideational globalization’ (Orsini et al, 2020: 1012). As is pointed out by the literature on policymaking across polycentric and non-hierarchical governance systems (Haas, 2020; Stone and Ladi, 2015; Snashall and Poulos, 2021; Lubell and Morrison, 2021), the study of evidence-informed policymaking ought to mirror such complexity and needs, therefore, to be investigated concurrently, from multiple levels of analysis. As such, the study of EIP must employ a multi-level analytical approach that accounts for these interdependencies. The paper will explore these dynamics through an examination of four country case studies, drawing on the analyses and narratives of four distinct think tanks (and policy ambassadors) whose daily work is deeply embedded in the EIP processes of the selected Global South countries.

## **Aims and objectives**

This paper seeks to enhance the analysis of evidence-informed policymaking (EIP) by examining four distinct case studies of cross-sectoral EIP practices from the Global South. Our intention is to tease out insights and replicable practices that may inform other scales of decision-making. Guiding our research have been three sets of primary research questions:

- (1) What are national-level EIP practices across different sectors? And, in light of there being a bias in the existing literature towards Global North countries, what insights and transferrable knowledge can be uncovered on national-level EIP practices in countries of the Global South?
- (2) Recognising the multiscale and highly integrated nature of national and international governance, what transferable insights can be gleaned from national and sub-national-level EIP scholarship and practice for international policy processes?

In addition to addressing the research questions, this study aims to explore two key issues outlined in the introduction. First, it seeks to conceptualize EIP as a holistic process. Given the complexity of transnational and multiscale EIP dynamics, we argue that EIP should be understood holistically—where defining 'evidence' is secondary to understanding how information and ideas circulate among diverse actors. Second, the study engages with non-traditional policy actors from the Global South, particularly emerging non-governmental think tanks and independent researchers. These actors actively participate in the co-production of evidence in EIP processes and play a crucial role as 'ambassadors' in policy diffusion and EIP practices. Understanding their roles and drawing insights from country-level experiences is essential to assessing the broader applicability of EIP practices at the international level.

## Methods

Following our preliminary literature review, we adopt and adapt Langer et al.'s (2020) analytical framework for EIP case study analysis into a framework comprising four parts: evidence demand, generation, communication and understanding, and evidence use.

1. *Demand (including context)*: First, we recognize the importance of there being a clear demand for evidence, either through an established, institutional process or through motivated and interested policy individuals stimulating that demand for a specific process.
2. *Generation*: Next is an understanding of how policy-relevant evidence is produced, by whom, where, and to what and whose standards.
3. *Communication and understanding (including interventions to encourage uptake)*: Third, is evidence communication, dissemination and understanding specifically what actions have been taken to distribute policy-relevant evidence to policymakers, in what formats and how, and concurrently, what efforts are being made by policymakers to seek that evidence out and to communicate it to peers and senior government officials.

4. *Use*: We understand evidence use to refer to both instrumental or mechanistic use of evidence and behavioural change (Goldman and Pabari, 2021; Weyrauch, 2016; Langer et al., 2021). The first category refers to activities that might facilitate the uptake and exchange of information between producers and users of evidence, fostering awareness, agreement, access. The second category relates to policymakers' capabilities, motivations, and opportunities to use that evidence as demonstrated through individual behaviour change, institutional change or campaigning for broader change in their local, national or international policy context.

This framework is applied to the analysis of four Sub-Saharan African country case studies (Benin, South Sudan, Tanzania, and South Africa) to gain a deeper understanding of the localized meanings of evidence and the local experiences of evidence-to-policy institutionalisation. We decided to focus upon Sub-Saharan Africa considering the dearth of EIP literature from the Global South (only 10 of the 75 academic papers on EIP published since 2015 were from Global South countries) and various recent studies that have questioned the relevance of the EIP concept across the continent (Aiyede and Muganda 2023). The subsequent selection of cases was primarily determined by the availability of think-tanks in the respective countries. We were eager to identify local researchers and think-tank partners with capacity to engage in the project, previous experiences with national-level EIP practices, involvement in international EIP practices, and an interest in multi-scale EIP-related knowledge production. Our intention was to provide insights from previously understudied policy processes and observe alternative evidence-practices, which can complement, and augment existing literature and resulting proposals for the international community. The country case studies also serve as a tool to examine the North-South divide in the EIP literature and the transferability of the analytical structure, as well as the EIP practices, from national level to international level.

The four case study partners were identified in consultation with the international think-tank group; *On Think Tanks* which works to support the emergence and development of research institutions, including think tanks, and to promote evidence informed policymaking. Through their network, as well as author connections, eight potential partners were identified who had expertise in evidence informed policy studies and were actively engaged in an ongoing policy development process in their respective national context, either as active observers or as formal partners providing evidence inputs to the government. These were then shortlisted down to four. Whilst the partners and the case studies are highly heterogenous, covering very diverse topics and policy processes, each research team adopted the same guiding research questions, developed in partnership with the Principal Investigator's team at Bristol and each other, based on Langer et al. (2020), above.

Table 1: Case studies and their research focuses.

| <b>Country</b>      | <b>Research Lead</b>                            | <b>Research focus</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Benin</b>        | African Center for Equitable Development (ACED) | Explores the Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) policy ecosystem in Benin, focusing on challenges and opportunities in agriculture policymaking, and analyzes the use of evidence.                                                                                                            |
| <b>South Africa</b> | New South Institute                             | Examines public service reform and the 'National Implementation Framework towards the Professionalisation of the Public Service'. Analyzes the influence of four epistemic communities: academic representatives, government officials, non-state actors, and National School of Government. |
| <b>South Sudan</b>  | Samahi Research                                 | Studies measures taken by the South Sudanese government (2017-2021) to promote evidence-based budgeting via the Open Budget Survey (OBS). Focuses on improving public financial management (PFM) with local CSOs' evidence contributions.                                                    |
| <b>Tanzania</b>     | African Centre for Cities                       | Investigates the role of the Tanzanian Urbanisation Laboratory (TULab) as a CBO comprised of specialists from various sectors in identifying urban challenges and proposing urban policies during an unfavourable governance period (Aug 2017 - Feb 2020).                                   |

Whilst each case study was informed by literature review, policy document analysis, and key informant interviews, they each adopted a slightly different conceptual approach to their methods. The Benin case follows an ecosystemic approach to analyzing the EIP process in Benin's agricultural sector. The study employed structured data collection, utilizing surveys and in-depth interviews with representatives from a diverse range of institutions. Key governmental actors included the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries (MAEP), particularly its Department of Agricultural Statistics (DAS) and the Department of Planning and Forecasting (DPP). The National Institute for Agricultural Research in Benin (INRAB) and the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences (FSA) at the University of Abomey-Calavi represented academic and research institutions, contributing expertise in agricultural policy and innovation. International development partners, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Bank, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), were also included to assess their role in influencing evidence production and use. Civil society organizations, including the National Platform of Civil Society Organizations in Benin (PASCIB) and the National Platform of Agricultural Farmer and Producer Organizations (PNOPPA), were engaged to explore their advocacy and brokering roles in the policy process. Data collection focused on three key dimensions: (1) organizational characteristics, including formal status, sectoral focus, and policy engagement; (2) perceptions of roles in the evidence-policy ecosystem, capturing the extent to which institutions viewed themselves as

evidence producers, brokers, or consumers; and (3) institutional ties, mapping the nature, intensity, and direction of relationships among stakeholders.

The South African case study offers a critical historical reflection, examining a period of intense administrative change during which time a bureaucratic model of the state gave way to one where the ‘manager’ and ‘politician’ came to figure as the *personae dramatis* of administration. In doing so it looks at the political and evidentiary bases for these governmental evolutions. The case draws on the notions of an ‘epistemic’ policy community and a ‘deontic’ policy community to describe this movement. An ‘epistemic community’ refers to a network of professionals leveraging their expertise and consensus on policy matters to advocate for evidence-informed policy changes (Haas, 1992). In contrast, a ‘deontic community’ is chiefly preoccupied with the pursuit or reproduction of party-political power, and where decision-making is based on anecdotes, tradition, or mimetic practices without a strong foundation in causal evidence. The distinction between an epistemic and deontic community draws attention to the policy process as a dialogue based on making claims and asserting propositions.

The South Sudan case study is based on extensive observations and actions undertaken by Samahi Research as the national partner for the Open Budget Survey (OBS). It derived from the research team’s experiences whilst conducting four rounds of the OBS between 2017 and 2023. The researchers carried out a questionnaire-based survey besides conducting a series of policy engagement sessions with legislators, civil society, and the public to communicate the findings of the OBS. Numerous informant interviews are carried out from within the public finance management sector, including government officials and representatives from development partners and local civil society organisations as well as from a specialist committee within the legislature.

The methodology of the Tanzania EIP case study is centered around the Tanzanian Urbanisation Laboratory (TULab), which functioned between 2017 and 2020 as an think-tank convenor, facilitating discussions on evidence-informed policymaking in urban development. The study employed a multi-strand evidence approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative research, stakeholder engagement, and policy deliberation. The TULab was hosted by the Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF) in Dar es Salaam and convened key stakeholders, including government officials, researchers, civil society organizations, development partners, and private sector representatives. The studies that TULab conducted incorporated literature reviews, policy document analysis, and primary data collection through 117 focus group discussions. TULab provided a platform for deliberative policymaking, fostering cross-sectoral dialogue and evidence co-production which informed Tanzania’s Urban Policymaking.

## Findings

### Insights from four African case studies

Before assessing the cases using the four previously presented frames, we provide an overview of each case; the country and sectoral background and key features and characteristics identified in our analysis.

#### *Benin (ACED): Evidence-Informed Policy Making in Benin's Agriculture, Food Security, and Nutrition Ecosystem*

The National Agricultural Research System (SNRA) is an inter-institutional mechanism that includes research institutions, training institutions, and NGOs active in agricultural research, and is coordinated by the National Institute of Agricultural Research of Benin (INRAB), which has a dedicated program on agricultural policy – the Agricultural Policy Analysis Programme (PAPA). Civil society organizations and development partners play a critical role in shaping the food security and nutrition (FSN) policy landscape, providing technical assistance, financial support, and advocacy efforts. A wide diversity of evidence is used in support of FSN policymaking, including data, research, evaluation, and expert knowledge. Challenges persist in generating new evidence and in the quality of that information, specifically quantitative data. National universities and INRAB partners are actively involved in generating relevant research on the agricultural sector, however university-based researchers report that their work is not driven by a well-defined research agenda or by the policy imperatives expressed by the government but rather by external funding opportunities. Furthermore, many academic informants expressed frustration that their work is not taken up by policymakers, who express a preference for practical, socially grounded evidence such as citizens, leaders, or experts' knowledge generated from rapid appraisals. Others noted that it was common for policymakers to employ 'advisors' to guide decision-making processes. Positively, the Benin experience suggests that intermediaries, including Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), consultancy firms, and other brokering organizations such as think-tanks, can help bridge the gap between evidence producers and policymakers, fostering evidence-based decision-making and assisting policymakers in effectively using evidence. Intermediaries can work, for instance, to build trusted relationships with policymakers to raise their awareness about the national evidence available and thereby raising the prospect of lasting demand. Institutional frameworks are also important, to generate formal requirements for regular evidence production and use in policy design.

#### *South Africa (New South Institute): Evidence, Policymaking and Epistemic Communities, The case of Public Service Reform in South Africa*

The study observes that, in 2020, following years of political instability and extensive state capture, the National School of Government (NSG) made a first step towards the institutionalisation of a meritocratic, depoliticised, and non-partisan public service. Whilst this step was widely welcomed

by academics and public policy scholars across the country, the evidence-base informing the reform agenda and its implementation remains unclear. Although there is an extensive academic literature on public service reform in South Africa prior to 2020, little to none of it was cited in documentation accompanying the National Framework, nor were relevant academics consulted on the reform agenda. The case study highlights the selective nature of government evidence use in South Africa, noting that who decides what evidence counts is at the heart of the policymaking problem in South Africa. Generalisable insights from the case study include: the necessity to forge joint academic and policy-making communities that can mutually support policy-making processes; the need for more stable, and less occasional, links between knowledge producing communities and decision-makers fostered through personal outreach and relationship building, and/or by working in coalitions with other parties that can help to increase findings' visibility (creating evidence-informed environments); a recognition of the political barriers and roadblocks that might require more overt advocacy and politics, rather than behind-the-scenes coalition building.

*South Sudan (Samahi Research): Institutionalising Evidence Use in the South Sudan National Budget Process. Lessons from the Open Budget Survey (OBS) Research in South Sudan*

Between 2017 and 2021 the government of South Sudan implemented measures to promote evidence-based policymaking in the national budget process through the Open Budget Survey. The objective of the initiative was to improve public financial management (PFM) thereby helping to ensure that funds are allocated and utilised effectively, efficiently, and transparently. CSOs, such as national non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations, faith-based organisations, and others, play a crucial role as evidence brokers, reaching out to and representing communities and citizens that neither international actors nor the national government can easily reach. The study finds that evidence inputs and requirements vary considerably across the stages of the budget process (including (i) planning for the budget, (ii) reviewing the budget and (iii) evaluating and auditing the budget), from statements and proposals to review reports and evaluations. Overall, bureaucrats were found to favour quantitative information and were most inclined to work with international institutions including the IMF and the World Bank to collate data. On the other hand, Parliamentary oversight committees, who were often not specialists in PFM, were more open to longer-form qualitative reports and assessments, with synthesized evidence findings prepared by both government agencies and third parties such as national CSOs. Whilst there are acute evidence and information gaps across government relating to PFM, government officials are often hesitant to partner with local CSOs and universities for technical assistance, instead appealing to international firms contracted by international partners. Despite apparent technical skills, national actors are predominantly considered civic engagement partners rather than providers of technical research support.

Whilst formal institutional arrangements for non-governmental engagement are important in the budgetary process, the case study also reveals the importance of more informal modes of influencing through interpersonal relationships and stresses the importance of building trust and cultivating relationships between evidence providers and government officials.

*Tanzania (African Centre for Cities and Economic and Social Research Foundation): Developing climate resilient National Urban Policy in Tanzania midst unfavourable political conditions: reflection on the Tanzanian Urbanisation Laboratory 2017-2020*

The study was prepared by Anton Cartwright, founder of the TULab, drawing on his own personal experiences, alongside the experiences of colleagues involved in the TULab, peer reviewed research produced by the TULab, and the international literature on knowledge-policy interactions and citylabs. The Lab commissioned research, encouraged collective reviews of evidence, and attempted to infuse these evidentiary inputs into local and national governance discussions. Moreover, the Lab organized the Urban Innovation Competition which sought to collate new research on Tanzania's primary city, Dar es Salaam, and to invite discussion of innovative ideas to address the city's urban challenges. Unlike more formal government workshop spaces, the TULab offered a non-governmental space for open deliberation, and to think creatively, propositionally, and generously about urban challenges and opportunities.

The experience of the TULab suggests that while evidence is necessary for policymaking, it is equally important to consider how this evidence is collected and reviewed, bringing in as broad a diversity of actors as possible. Whilst convening a wide variety of in-country researchers to gather and review multiple strands of evidence was important, so too was bringing in international actors and facilitating a conversation about how international policy agendas and research could support domestic policies, decisions, and, ultimately, local communities, thereby helping to strike a balance between domestic inputs (drawing widely on national skills and capabilities) and international support. Another lesson is the importance of combining qualitative and quantitative evidence, because it is impossible to understand a city or a sector based only on either type of data alone.

## Common lessons

Although using different modalities, all the case studies highlight the importance of integrating multiple, diverse, and local stakeholders in research for policy generation, as well as the necessity to help forge and/or support multi-stakeholder epistemic communities around key policy topics. They place a strong emphasis on evidence communication, cross-fertilisation of fields and disciplines, the forging of trusted relationships, and the power dynamics between and across stakeholder groups. By utilizing the framework established in the literature section and applying comparative analysis to the case studies, we can observe the significance of:

- a) Understanding the *political economy* of evidence use in each context.

As highlighted in South Africa and Tanzania, government demand and receptiveness to external evidence is often tied to pre-existing policy and political interests. Any evidence which pushes for a reform in one or other direction, and which is contrary to existing government policy, will be contested in proportion to the stakes of the change for powerful players. Understanding this political economy in advance and managing language and presentation of evidence to appeal to political interests (without compromising research integrity) can oftentimes help to navigate complex political landscapes.

- b) Fostering the *demand* of tailored policy-relevant evidence.

In Benin and South Africa, academic evidence was often considered inaccessible due to complex language and terminology and/or verbosity which did not give easy responses to policymaker's daily challenges and as such other evidence sources were prioritised. In South Sudan academic and technical inputs were often very heavy on quantitative information and lacking in qualitative insights and personal detail, which Parliamentarians noted was important to them. All the cases highlight the importance of academics and other technical evidence generators working with policymakers to better understand their needs, and to moderate their language and research formats to better appeal to policy requirements. Alternatively, researchers and policymakers can work with brokers such as well-capacitated NGOs or think-tank groups, to curate and synthesise evidence for specific policy processes and opportunities.

- c) Enabling inclusive deliberative spaces for evidence *generation*.

The TULab experience in Tanzania provides a valuable example of how forums, or critical, deliberative spaces which are open to local and diverse stakeholders can support policymaking processes. Working together, stakeholders helped to consolidate disparate evidence strands and make it relevant for urban policymakers. The citylab framework contrasts with more formal government workshop practices and suggests that inclusive and critical evidence production processes have the potential to encourage greater evidence-uptake and ultimately greater evidence impact within public policy processes. Such spaces are also crucial for fostering interpersonal relationships between knowledge actors and policymakers, creating trust, building social capital, and the potential for partnerships.

- d) Recognising the significance of CSOs as knowledge-brokers in the *communication* of evidence.

CSOs have a crucial role to play brokering information between citizens, academics, and policymakers. Whilst in nearly all the cases CSOs were not considered appropriate partners for technical evidence generation, there were considered purveyors of practical knowledge and insights which policymakers highly valued. In the South Sudan context, the study by Samahi Research highlights the critical role played by CSOs in the preparation of the Open Budget Surveys, conveying insights from remote or inaccessible communities and/or synthesizing diverse sources of practice-based information. In Benin,

CSOs also played a crucial role facilitating connections between a well developed but disconnected academic sector and the government. PASCIB, PNOPPA, and ACED have helped to bridge the gap between evidence producers and policymakers in the agricultural ecosystem - notably by building trusted relationships with policymakers, facilitating communication, and assisting them in effectively using evidence.

- e) Formal institutional openings for external *evidence inputs and use*.

Effective and sustained EIP practices require institutionalization; the creation of spaces and formal processes for non-governmental consultations and inputs, including from academics and technical experts. In Benin, the SNRA and INRAB provide platforms for researchers to showcase research relevant for national policy and (whilst informants expressed frustration about the take-up of their evidence) when working with intermediaries and brokers it is possible to use these official conduits to ensure regular communication of evidence to policymakers. Another advantage to the establishment of an institutionalised platform for science compilation and communication is that it can help to weather political turmoil. As demonstrated by the case in Tanzania, governments can oftentimes ignore, reject, or actively discredit non-governmental evidence when it does not serve their political interests, but the ability to hold this evidence within institutional processes and amongst epistemic communities until political conditions are more favourable can be valuable. In Benin, having a formalized consultative and communicative process for external evidence inputs has not only ensured consistent evidence practices, but it has helped to foster trusted relationships with key stakeholders in government over time, thereby helping to maintain regular communication between evidence producers and policymakers irrespective of changing political dynamics.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

The findings of this paper contribute to the literature on EIP by showing the value of insights from national and local processes for international evidence-informed policymaking. To address EIP comprehensively and consistently across various scales of analysis (international/transnational, national, and regional), this paper considers policymaking as a set of institutionally interconnected processes, aligning with recent EIP literature that acknowledges the importance of the political economy and context within and across which evidence is used (Stone and Ladi, 2015; Lubell and Morrison, 2021; Snashall and Poulos, 2021). It highlights the necessity for careful institutional assessment to identify formal and informal entry points for evidence producers, across processes and scales. Both the Sub-Saharan African case studies and international literature indicate that these institutional entry points are vital to overcoming the pragmatic and erratic nature of knowledge uptake by politicians when faced with uncertainty (Jones, 2009).

Based upon our preliminary literature review, we argue that EIP literature is predominantly informed by studies from the Global North. Consequently, we employ case studies from Sub-Saharan African countries to examine diversified EIP practices in the Global South. The demand-generation-communication-use framework detailed in the methodology section aids in synthesising these diverse practices. Our analysis suggests that at the international level, to foster inclusive and more effective EIP practices, emphasis should be placed on the *demand* and *communication* aspects of cross-level EIP practices, with a particular focus on institutionalising measures to foster these elements.

**Fostering demand** is critical, and understanding the political economy behind this demand is key to success. This is evidenced in case studies such as those from South Africa and Tanzania, where evidence challenging existing policies encounters contestation. In Benin, platforms like SNRA and INRAB facilitate regular evidence communication, fostering trusted relationships despite political changes. At the international level, establishing guidelines on evidence categories and principles for evidence generation could ensure that diverse inputs are given due consideration and treated equitably.

Effective **communication and understanding** of evidence involves cross-fertilisation of fields, trusted relationships, and managing power dynamics. As observed in Benin, South Africa, and South Sudan, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) play a crucial role as knowledge brokers, providing practical insights. This role should be recognised and represented at the international level.

The paper was motivated by the need to address institutional gaps in international level policymaking. The literature review has directed our focus towards the case studies, which, in turn, shaped the study's key findings. These findings provide valuable insights into the evolving landscape of international EIP, especially the growing emphasis on incorporating non-traditional actors and venues of EIP practices. The case studies' cross-sectoral analysis – situated in diverse contexts and examined through a shared process framework – offers a critical perspective on how evidence circulates across policy communities, levels of government, and geographical scales. Although this study focuses on Sub-Saharan African case studies, further research should explore regional and multilateral processes to deepen understanding of cross-level evidence integration. The findings advocate for a polycentric approach to EIP, fostering inclusivity, equity, and efficacy across governance scales.

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