Assessing the potential value and pathways to establish an evidence alliance in Africa

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Innovia Research Consulting
Opiyo Makoude and Doreen Othero (PhD)

African Population and Health Research Center
Alex Manyasi, *Advocacy and Knowledge Management Specialist*
Moreen Nkonge, *Communications and Knowledge Translation Officer*

IDinsight
Natasha Siyumbwa, *Africa Chief of Staff*

International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)
Etienne Lwamba, *Senior Research Associate*

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ACRONYMS

AAP	Alliance for Africa Partnerships
ACE	Africa Centre for Evidence
ACED	Actions pour l'environment et dévelopment durable
AEN	Africa Evidence Network
AfrEA	Africa Evidence Associates
AFSH	Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa
AGRA	Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa
AIRA	Africa Infodemics Alliance
ATTN	African Think Tanks Network
APHRC	African Population and Health Research Center
BMGF	Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
BLF	Big Lottery Fund
CLEAR	Centre for Evaluation, Learning and Results
CDC	Centres for Disease Control
DFID	Department for International Development
EIDM	Evidence-Informed Decision-Making
EviPNET	Evidence Informed Policy Network
EPHI	Ethiopia Public Health Institute
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
IDS	Institute for Development Studies
IEA	Institute for Economic Affairs
IFDC	International Fertilizer Development Centre
INGSA	International Network for Government Science Advice
ISSER	Institute of Statistics, Social and Economic Research
KII	Key Informant Interviews
KIPPRA	Kenya Institute of Public Policy Research and Analysis
MSU	Michigan State University
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
PIATA	Partnership for Inclusive Agricultural Transformation in Africa
ReNAPRI	Regional Network of Agricultural Research Policy Institutes
SADC	Southern African Development Community

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although Africa's evidence-to-policy organizations are responding to demands within policy systems to provide evidence that is useful and utilizable, a relatively large number of them are vying for the same talent, the same policy-maker attention, and the same external funding. Likewise, the potential social impact of high-quality evidence generation and use remains high and may even be more acute as countries increasingly mobilize and use domestic resources to respond to citizens' needs. The formation of a multi-organization alliance with greater potential for social impact would probably facilitate a more coordinated focus on strengthening a broad range of evidence-related capabilities in the region.

This report provides highlights obtained from desk reviews and key informant interviews focusing on evidence alliances and networks in the international development sector. It similarly reveals key evidence actors in Africa, including their complementarities, gaps and challenges. The report further presents perspectives and recommendations by evidence-to-policy experts on the potential value and pathways to establishing an evidence-to-policy alliance in Africa.

Methodology

Our design focused on a rapid desk review and key informant interviews. The desk review focused on gathering and synthesizing the existing literature on key topics namely: Evidence alliances in international development, African ecosystem of evidence for policy and existing evidence alliances and initiatives in Africa. The desk review was based on internet searches of academic journals and gray literature focusing on the relevant topics. Key findings from the literature were synthesized in themes and sub-themes to inform the overall findings of the report.

With the help of Innovia Research Consulting firm, the findings from the desk reviews were used to prepare a semi-structured key informant interview (KII) guide that was employed virtually to collect in-depth data from a total of 14 key informants. These interviewees included senior management from the three partner organizations behind this report, African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC), IDinsight and the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation. Also interviewed were evidence-to-policy experts and practitioners with knowledge of the African evidence-to-policy ecosystem. Three major themes were explored:

1. *The Africa evidence-to-policy landscape:* current trends in linking research to policy and decision-making and opportunities that exist in the evidence-to-policy ecosystem.

2. *Evidence generation and use in policy processes:* gaps in the utilization of research evidence; quality, timeliness and relevance of evidence generated, capacity constraints and other factors impeding the use of evidence.

3. *The need to form an evidence-to-policy alliance:* the value add of such an alliance, areas

of policy where the alliance would be most useful, governance issues, mistakes to avoid, and risks to watch out for.

Both the desk review findings and interpretations from the key informant interviews were used to prepare the report. Themes and sub-themes generated from interviews were triangulated with desk review data to arrive at a nuanced picture of the existing practices on the evidence-to-policy landscape in Africa, the major stakeholders, opportunities and constraints. Similarly, reflections on whether or not to set up an evidence alliance were arrived at using both sets of data, including how the governance structure of how such an alliance might look.

Findings

Desk review findings

i) Evidence alliances and networks in the international development sector

Despite the consensus around its added value, ensuring that scientific knowledge is used in the making of public policies is a long aspiration in different parts of the world (Hanna et al. 2010; Reimers et al. 2000). This discrepancy between evidence production and use can partly be explained by the different values attached to evidence: what counts as evidence for a policy-maker might not be the evidence produced by the researcher and may be different from the evidence needed by the practitioner. Secondly, the high volume of evidence produced makes it difficult for policy-makers to filter what evidence is relevant for addressing their specific question in the maze of all the information available. Thirdly, policy-makers are faced with a high degree of uncertainty and complexity, and an environment that requires rapid decision-making. They typically have little time and resources for evidence-informed decision-making (Mayne et al., 2018). Lastly, evidence producers might lack resources and capacities to translate the evidence into accessible formats and language for users (Court et al., 2004).

Through evidence alliances, researchers, practitioners and, more generally, development professionals come together to fulfill one common purpose: supporting the use of evidence for informed decision-making. By coming together, they build on a community of practice to drive impact. Building an alliance can be costly, but an alliance has inherent value through its series of functions. Evidence alliances are seen as a resource to improve decision-making and have an impact on international development. By strengthening the capacities of its members, the impact of the alliance can be greater than the sum of its members. Ruth Stewart, Chair of the Africa Evidence Network, describes the value-add of evidence networks thus: "they make a difference by building our shared understanding across the evidence ecosystem, enable growth in our shared capacities, and enable a potential and readiness for change" (Stewart, 2018, p. 1). In her view, the main added-value of alliances is their ability to enable a better understanding, an increased capacity, and a greater potential for change.

Evidence alliances offer the opportunity to bring together practitioners with a common interest and complementary capabilities. The evidence alliance breaks the silos of academics, NGOs, or other stakeholders, bringing them and their ideas together (Fransman & Newman, 2019, p. 524). By bringing the different actors together, evidence alliances have the potential to break the barrier of currency of exchange (DFID, 2014). Working together enables members of an evidence alliance to enhance their skills and influence through shared capacities. Joining forces allows the development of new ways of understanding and addressing more complex situations. SImilarly, the shared strategies and resources allow members to deliver in situations where they would not have the capacity to do it on their own both financially and technically (Cummings & Zee, 2005, p 15).

Alliances are not a magical recipe: building an alliance is not enough to ensure impact. An alliance needs to be managed and maintained to be efficient. Typical challenges faced by alliances include inconsistencies in vision and aim within an alliance; and the challenge posed by informal power relationships and interests to the overall collaboration of an alliance. A successful alliance requires the managment of formal and informal relationships to build trust and collaboration amongst members. A second challenge is how the research product delivered by the alliance is communicated. The timing of the research product (e.g. report, event, campaign) needs to target the right audience at the right time. This requirement might pose a challenge, where members differ in their definitions of the outputs, their visions and their timelines.

ii) Challenges hindering evidence-informed decision-making in Africa

The number of organizations and individuals working to strengthen evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) on the African continent (listed below) expanded rapidly over the past decade, with the number of African institutions involved in evidence synthesis growing from 31 in 2008 to 521 in 2019 (Pan et al, 2019). These organizations perform diverse roles including working as brokers of policy knowledge, centers of research, and incubators of new ideas. Their ultimate goal is to inform policy and to maximize social impact (CIPE, 2022).

Despite the upsurge in the number of evidence-to-policy organizations in Africa, there remains a gap in getting a clear understanding of what is useful evidence to different policy-makers. Sweeping statements of what African countries need remain common among development experts and practitioners alike. Additionally, differing expertise across actors in the evidence space contributes to the volume of evidence recommendations but, at the same time, limitations in what evidence institutions can generate (Sutcliffe and Court, 2005). Establishing networks and alliances on the African continent could allow members to collaborate and leverage the various expertise across organizations.

Another major challenge in the evidence ecosystem in Africa is that of funding. Funding for evidence synthesis and use is mainly provided dby large bilateral organizations such as USAID, DFID, GIZ, Hewlett Foundation and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), among others (ImpactPool, 2022). Evidence actors face the risk of becoming agents for the promotion of a funder's special interests, especially where funders dictate the type of evidence that

is generated and the focus of research, even when local experts recommend otherwise. Secondly, foreign funding tends to be geared towards only certain parts of Africa, serving as a bottleneck for organizations that do not operate in those regions (Mendizabal, 2015). Thirdly, funding is sometimes dependent on the methodologies that research organizations prefer to use, where funders have set perceptions of what counts as comprehensive, representative, robust, and scientifically sound and rigorous research (Uzochukwu et al, 2016).

Policy reforms and implementation in African countries tend to be politically-motivated, and this poses a major challenge. To make a positive impact, research organizations need integrity and credibility. But in highly politicized environments, these can be tough to maintain. Governments may try to co-opt researchers or use more forceful methods to mute unwelcome messages (McGann et al, 2017). Organizations are frequently branded as pro- or against government, exacerbating the distrust for their work.

Changes in government might lead to additional challenges for organizations to rebuild and/or maintain relationships with policy-makers. Shifts may either lead to lack of ownership by policy-makers of the evidence generated or conflicting priorities in policy by different government parties (Sutcliffe and Court, 2005).

Evidence actors, therefore, have a tough role to play if they are to gain wider credibility with decision-makers, and to build and maintain relationships. To navigate this minefield, evidence actors can reassure and try to rebuild relationships with politicians behind the scenes, while being as transparent and accountable as possible.

iii) Mapping of complementarities and gaps of existing evidence initiatives in Africa

Africa's research community is increasingly responding to demands within policy systems to provide evidence that is useful and utilizable. Within the African evidence ecosystem, there are several alliances and networks developed internationally and nationally to produce and use evidence for decision-making (Stewart R, and Ngcwabe S, 2021).

Organizations such as the Africa Evidence Network (AEN), Africa Centre for Evidence (ACE), Alliance for African Partnerships (AAP), Evidence Informed Policy Network (EviPNet), Alliance for Useful Evidence (Alliance4UEvidence) and Africa Infodemics Alliance (AIRA) and many others have focused their efforts on enhancing collaboration amongst actors engaged in or supporting evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) in Africa. Ultimately, this results in increasing knowledge and understanding of EIDM, sharing capacities across the EIDM ecosystem and advocating for Africa's full voice and participation in the national, regional and global movements to increase EIDM. The alliances and networks also influence decision-making by governments through policy dialogues with policy-makers and other key stakeholders responsible for policy implementation.

Despite the above complementarities, evidence alliances and networks face important gaps. For instance, evidence-based decision-making requires that actors have access to evidence

and are empowered to act on that evidence. This, in turn, requires alignment between those who collect data, those who analyze and interpret the data, and those who make and implement decisions. Investments in individual, organizational, and systems capacity to use evidence are needed to foster practices of evidence-based decision-making (Inguane et al.2020).

- Maneuvering evidence within policy-making bureaucracies
- Reconciling evidence generated by a multiplicity of players in the evidence field.
- Ensuring that evidence remains accessible over the longer term and that lessons learned are not lost, given the huge investments made in generating evidence.
- Short-termism in decision-making - policy-makers usually make decisions in a complex environment with limited time for reflection. Ministers want to demonstrate progress quickly and are usually rewarded for spending public funds on today's visible problems rather than reducing future risks. Challenges such as public health and climate change, are long-term and have to be addressed across parliaments and cannot benefit from short-termism in decision-making.

Key informant interview findings

Key informant interview findings are presented under three thematic areas namely:

1. The evidence-to-policy landscape.
2. Evidence generation and use.
3. Need for forming an evidence-to-policy alliance.

The themes have sub-themes that were interrogated and synthesized.

i) The evidence-to-policy landscape

On Linking research evidence-to-policy-making processes, many stressed the mismatch between research evidence generation and use. Research in Africa is academically focused and not aligned to the needs of policy-makers; the interface between evidence generation and evidence use remains weak, and this is worsened by bureaucratic hurdles in accessing policy-makers.

Current trends in the use of research evidence for policy processes point to an increase in use of research evidence in policy in the coming decades. Africa now has a more educated workforce, there is emergence of more practitioners in the evidence space, citizens are agitating for relevant policies, and there is increasing caliber and breadth of good African research institutions.

Furthermore, opportunities exist in the evidence ecosystem. For example, in many African governments, technocrats are increasingly occupying key decision-making roles. Some African governments are becoming more appreciative of the value of research evidence for their policy decisions, there is an increase in the number of African research organizations producing good quality research evidence, while some funders have sustained an interest in supporting networks of organizations working at the interface between evidence production and evidence use in policy processes.

ii) Evidence generation and use

The key informants shared intriguing perspectives on gaps in utilization of research evidence generated. They singled out the weak producer-user interface noting that evidence producers set the research agenda that is not necessarily driven or informed by policy needs. This lack of co-creation of the research agenda results in generation of evidence that cannot influence immediate decision-making. Further, there is a lack of a clear link between universities and governments on conducting policy-oriented research. Additionally, often, research ideas are conceived by the funders in the global north. Respondents underscored the need for government representatives to be co-PIs of policy oriented research.

Defining quality and relevance of evidence is relative. It is prudent to reconcile evidence generated by different players in the evidence field to minimize the risk of confusing policy-makers with diverse evidence and the different standards used in evidence generation.

All respondents agreed that there are capacity constraints both on the part of evidence producers and the users. Major capacity gaps identified for evidence producers were conceptualization of policy development processes, the ability to generate legislative evidence as well as thinking through the relevant theories of change. For evidence users, it was observed that governance teams and structures keep changing in successive electoral cycles and the new entrants may not have the incentives, nor the requisite capacity to prioritize policy needs and develop policies informed by evidence.

On utilization of research evidence, respondents noted that countries and regions are at different levels. COVID-19 visibly increased evidence use because governments urgently needed to make policy and service delivery decisions most of which depended on evidence. However, there is still a lack of synergy between researchers and policy-makers. Governments feel that researchers do little to engage policy-makers when identifying their research priorities but they expect governments to make use of their research findings. The volatility of evidence may also be a barrier to utilization. Evidence may be relevant today but obsolete tomorrow.

iii) Need for forming an evidence-to-policy alliance

Discussions around the need for an Africa evidence alliance, and what value it would add elicited mixed reactions. Some of those interviewed were skeptical about what value the alliance might add, noting that several such evidence networks already exist, and previous attempts at creating a similar alliance had floundered. Some wondered whether the alliance would not be duplicating the work of existing evidence networks.

A large majority of those interviewed, however, felt that the existing gaps in the evidence-to-policy ecosystem would best be served by an alliance of established research organizations pooling their institutional strengths, and using this to leverage evidence generation and engagements with policy-makers. This was seen as efficient – isolated individual efforts at linking policy may succeed, but at a scale too small to have any meaningful systemic impact on policy outcomes. Besides, existing networks like the Africa Evidence Network (AEN) focus on many policy issues, which limits their ability to have meaningful impact on policy outcomes. In addition, the majority of the respondents affirmed that there is value in such an alliance but they cautioned against it being led by the global north organizations. They emphasized the need for a thorough review to identify gaps, strategies, focus and resources of the existing evidence-to-policy alliances so that the proposed alliance can curve a niche and address issues that have not been addressed by the existing alliances.

Regarding the governance structure, the majority of the respondents pointed out that the alliance should be non-profit making and should promote use of research evidence in the global south. It should consider having a secretariat, a technical board, a high-level executive committee and governance board. The secretariat will be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the alliance; the technical board will be responsible for convergence around training and knowledge management; the high-level technical committee will be responsible for resource mobilization and utilization, while the governance board will have veto power to make financial and administrative decisions for the alliance, including general oversight. The alliance will be required to set up rules and practices for peer review and how the partners will learn from one another. Subsequent discussions amongst the three partner organizations have further concretized these proposals with a graduated structure and a proposed governance model contingent on the availability of funding.

In setting up the alliance, respondents stressed the need to be cautious about some mistakes to avoid. These include: focusing on too many issues; failure to co-create policy priorities with relevant stakeholders; failure to create dialogue platforms for sharing and learning with researchers and policy-makers and leaving behind local researchers and institutions.

On risks to watch out for, the interviewees mentioned the following most often: the Alliance being an exclusive club of a few; duplicating and crowding out local research organizations and networks, and being method-centric rather than diverse in its membership and orientation; the risk of the Alliance not obtaining funding; finally, the risk of dominance of the global north institutions in the partnership.

Conclusion

The inescapable conclusion is that an evidence alliance is needed to bridge the existing gaps in evidence-to-policy in Africa. Such an alliance needs to be focused, lean and efficient in its operations and should aim at addressing gaps in order to avoid duplication.

Recommendations

The authors propose three options for consideration in the establishment of an evidence alliance.

Option 1: A facilitative and supportive institutional structure to drive linking of evidence into policy processes. The structure established will be lean, with potentially two or three more strong and well established regional research organizations joining the three existing members in the consortium. The alliance so formed would need to be proactive in its engagement with governments. A model that seems to work is the help-desk, or joint commissioning and execution of research with policy-makers. The alliance can also facilitate intermediary organizations working at the interface of evidence and policy-making to be more effective in synthesizing complex or highly technical research evidence into formats that are utilizable in policy decision-making processes.

Option 2: A fully-fledged autonomous institutional structure to link evidence-to-policy. Such

an institutional structure would be registered in one or more countries in Africa, with possible regional representation across Africa's main regions. It would initially be dependent on the core partners constituting the alliance but eventually gain autonomy, and operate as an autonomous institutional structure.

Option 3: A loose network of like-minded research organizations with cascading levels of membership. This institutional structure would probably have a core group of members, affiliates and general members. The institutional structure would enable drawing in large and diverse numbers of African research organizations, thereby ensuring that it is representative of the continent's diversity.

After discussions with senior leadership from APHRC, 3ie and IDinsight, option 1 was unanimously adopted as the most realistic and suitable for the proposed alliance. Nevertheless, the remaining two options have inherent institutional forms or structures that could be adopted as the Alliance deepens its work. Specifically, the alliance's main activities will focus on providing evidence production and synthesis services to policy-makers to inform their decisions, and providing technical support to governments to develop institutional frameworks for evidence-based policy-making.

KEY MESSAGES

The contexts in which policy processes unfold in Africa are complex and diverse. The constraints to development are equally diverse. No single organization has the capacity or institutional reach to deal effectively with the development challenges and the constraints to effective achievement of policy outcomes. Building complementarities across research organizations, epistemic and methodological orientations is therefore imperative.

The interface between evidence generation and the use of evidence in policy processes remains weak across most countries, and across sectors in Africa. While there is an increase in the generation of good quality research evidence in Africa by increasing numbers of authentic Africa-based research organizations and researchers, challenges with funding, the bureaucratic policy-making processes, and a general suspicion by governments of less well known evidence generators stifle the extent to which relevant quality research can inform policy processes.

The growing number of organizations and researchers in the evidence-to-policy ecosystem has spawned stiff competition for limited funding resources available. Evidence is also produced in methodologically diverse ways. Poor coordination among research organizations and competition is likely to further impede, rather than facilitate the use of good quality evidence in Africa's policy processes.

An alliance of research organizations is needed to build complementarities and leverage their institutional capital in generating evidence, and strengthening the interface between evidence generation and policy processes. This could provide the impetus and act as an incentive for other research organizations to adopt more collaborative, coordinated approaches to evidence generation and knowledge translation.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Many organizations in the "evidence-to-action" ecosystem compete for the same talent, the same policy-maker attention, and the same external funding. This is particularly challenging in the East and Southern Africa sub-regions in the backdrop of total funding levels dropping or declining due to shifts in UK aid priorities and the pressure on budgets because of COVID and its aftermath. Many actors within the evidence-to-policy landscape are weakly coordinated, yet the demand for timely, relevant evidence by policy and policy-maker seems to be on the rise. The formation of a multi-organization alliance with greater potential for social impact would facilitate a more coordinated focus on strengthening a broad range of evidence-related capabilities in the region.

APHRC, IDinsight, and 3ie are seeking support to develop an elaborate pathway proposal that clearly outlines the implementation strategies that, if fully executed, will develop structures for the creation of a multi-organizational evidence-to-policy alliance. As a first phase of this assignment funded by the New Venture Fund of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the consortium has explored the existing literature and initiatives of like-minded evidence-to-policy organizations in Africa to better scope the need for any form of evidence-to-policy alliance in Africa. The goals outlined for this project are to:

Undertake a process to learn about existing evidence-to-policy models and document existing alliances or similar platforms, and map out potential partners' expertise and geographic reach.

Develop selection criteria for membership, map potential members and select future members of the proposed alliance by:

- Developing a governance structure and governing instruments for the Alliance.
- Developing a theory of change as well as a strategic framework for the Alliance.
  - Defining partnership execution models for the Alliance.
  - Developing a promotion strategy for the Alliance, while working with professional entities that would support branding.
  - Developing a comprehensive report on findings.
  - Developing a coherent funding proposal that outlines the implementation strategies, key milestones, staffing needs, and budgets.

This report aims to address the following research questions:

- What can we learn from existing literature on the added-value, characteristics, challenges and facilitators of alliances for evidence production, synthesis and use in the international development sector?
- What is the current status of evidence-to-policy action in Africa? Is the ecosystem suitable for evidence alliances?
- What can we learn from current initiatives and key stakeholders on the need and requirements for a new evidence alliance in Africa?

All these research questions will contribute to the overall interrogation of this report: is a new evidence alliance needed in Africa? If yes, what form should it take?

Our consortium

The phase 1 of the African Evidence Alliance is driven by three organizations:

- **The African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC)** is the continent's premier research institution and think tank, exploring questions of population health and wellbeing. The Center seeks to drive change through policy-relevant research led by a growing cadre of research leaders from across sub-Saharan Africa. Our teams orient their research agendas to global and continental development priorities, driven by the belief that Africa and African-generated evidence must be at the forefront of decisions supporting improved growth and development. In its 20 years of existence, the Center has worked in over 30 African countries, with a regional office in Senegal and its headquarters in Kenya. APHRC is the lead organization on this project.

- **IDinsight** is a not-for-profit (501c3) research and advisory organization that helps government and development leaders combat poverty and maximize their social impact. We leverage a large analytical toolkit to help clients design better policies, rigorously test what works, and use evidence to implement programs effectively at scale. We emphasize using the right tools for the right question and tailoring our rigorous methods to the real-world constraints of decision-makers. IDinsight has over 170 staff in offices in seven countries, as well as teams embedded within government partners. We have conducted at least 13 landscape & evidence review projects throughout Africa and Asia across a range of sectors, including health, nutrition, education, and social protection. IDinsight's work has helped improve more than 16.8 million lives in the last ten years.

- **The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)** supports the production, synthesis and uptake of high-quality evidence. 3ie's full suite of evidence products includes impact evaluations, evidence syntheses, evidence gap maps, evaluability assessments, policy briefs, quality assurance, capacity building and more. 3ie brings a global reach, with more than 70 research staff in our New Delhi, London and Washington DC offices, in addition to our worldwide member network. Established in 2008 by DFID and partners, 3ie has a mission to improve lives through evidence-informed action in developing countries and adopt rigorous and innovative approaches to address the development needs of international partners.

Our approach and methodology

This report combines two complementary approaches (desk review and KIIs) to scope the need for an evidence alliance in Africa and the key considerations to take into account for its successful establishment and implementation. It updates the findings of a previous version delivered by Oxford Policy Management (OPM) in July 2022. The OPM report revealed certain methodological and findings limitations that necessitated carrying out additional desk reviews and key informant interviews (KII) to deepen the understanding of the African evidence-to-policy ecosystem.
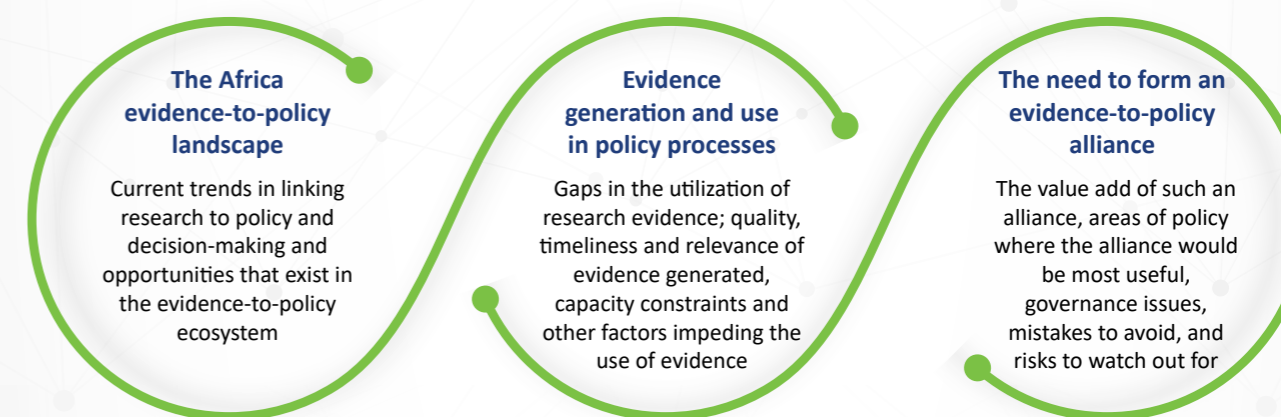
The rapid desk review

The rapid desk review focused on gathering and synthesizing the existing literature on the following topics:

- Evidence alliances in international development.
- The African ecosystem of evidence for policy.
- Existing evidence alliances and initiatives in Africa.

The desk review was based on internet searches of academic journals and gray literature focusing on the relevant topics. Each desk review topic was handled by individual researchers drawn from APHRC, 3ie and IDinsight, and then the findings consolidated to inform the writing of this report. Key findings from the literature review have then been synthesized in comprehensive themes and sections to inform the interviews and overall findings of the report. Findings on evidence alliance characteristics have also been used to develop a matrix to analyze the gaps and complementarities of existing initiatives in Africa and to better assess the need for additional coverage of evidence production, synthesis and/or use.

The key informant interviews

The findings from document review were used to prepare a key informant interview (KII) guide. Semi-structured Key Informant Interview were used to explore three major themes:

The Africa evidence-to-policy landscape
Current trends in linking research to policy and decision-making and opportunities that exist in the evidence-to-policy ecosystem

Evidence generation and use in policy processes
Gaps in the utilization of research evidence; quality, timeliness and relevance of evidence generated, capacity constraints and other factors impeding the use of evidence

The need to form an evidence-to-policy alliance
The value add of such an alliance, areas of policy where the alliance would be most useful, governance issues, mistakes to avoid, and risks to watch out for

The Innovia Research Consulting team worked with technical staff at APHRC, 3iE and IDinsight to identify potential respondents from a list of potential interviewees developed in the early phases of the study. The list was updated and a purposive sample of respondents generated based on their knowledge of the Africa evidence-to-policy landscape, expertise in themes relevant to the study, and experience working on the issues of interest to the study. The sample included experts from research organizations focusing on the African evidence-to-policy ecosystem, researchers, funders and senior management of the three partner organizations, who were included to offer insights on preferred governance structure for the proposed evidence alliance. In total, 14 Key Informant Interviews were held. Respondents were approached and requested to grant interview opportunities. A list of organizations interviewed is annexed to the report.

All interviews were conducted virtually on internet-enabled platforms, mostly Zoom. The interviewers explained the purpose of the interviews, then requested informed consent to interview and record from respondents. Each interview lasted for about one hour. The interviewer in each case gave the respondent a chance to ask any questions or seek clarification before ending the interview.

Both the desk review findings and interpretations from the interviews have been used to prepare the report. Themes and sub-themes generated from interviews have been triangulated with desk review data to arrive at a nuanced picture of the existing state of practice on the evidence-to-policy landscape in Africa, the major stakeholders, opportunities and constraints. Reflections on whether or not to set up an evidence alliance have similarly been aided by both sets of data, including how the governance structure of such an alliance might look, were it to be established.

Structure of the report

The report is structured into three sections:

1 Section 1 presents the findings of the rapid desk review and the mapping of existing evidence initiatives in Africa to assess the need for an evidence alliance in the region and its what form it might take.

2 Section 2 presents the insights of academics, practitioners and donors involved in evidence production, synthesis and/or use in Africa to better understand what works and what needs to be done in the region.

3 Section 3 presents the overall conclusions and recommendations with regard to the establishment of an evidence alliance in Africa and provides a first theory of change.
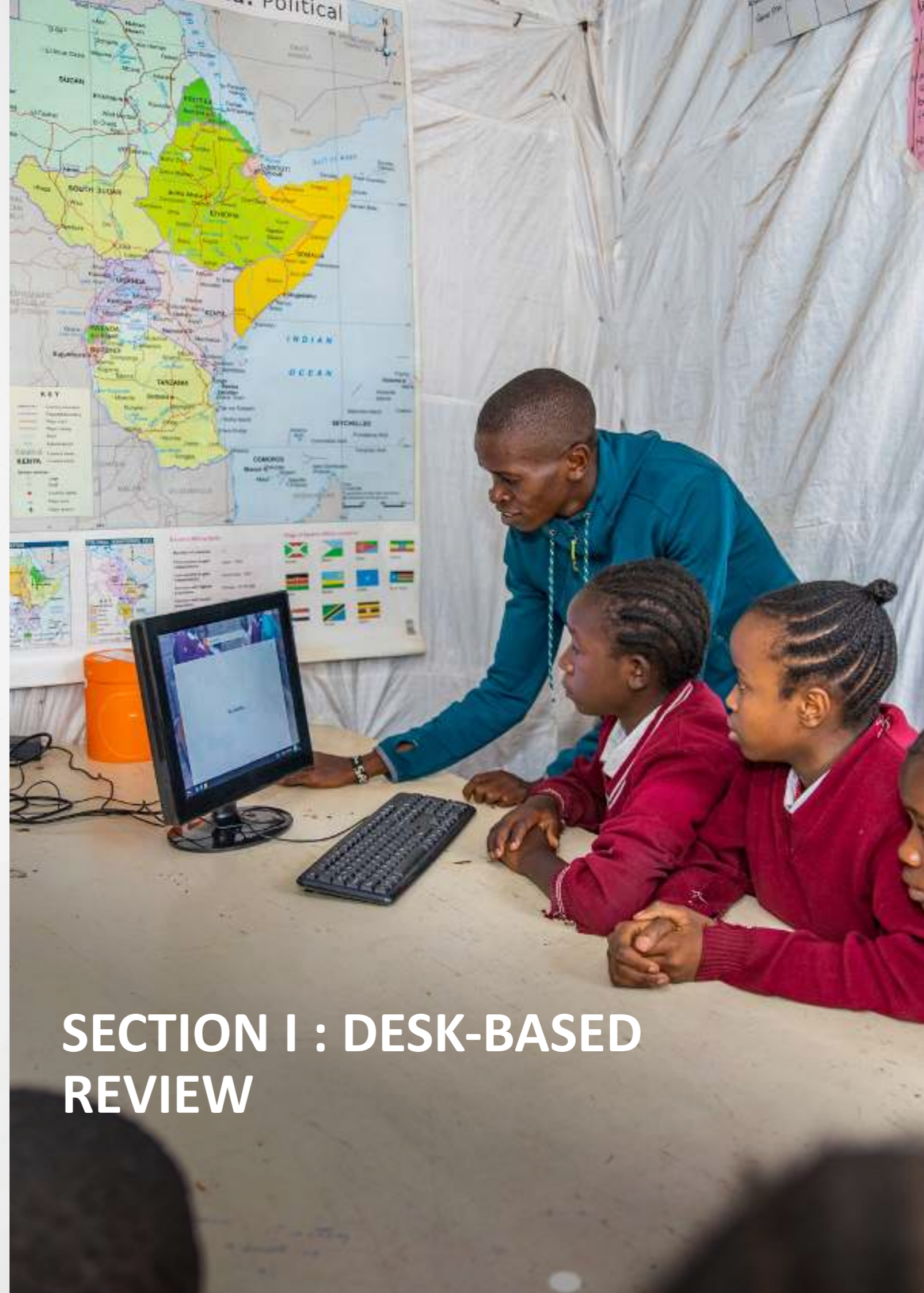
SECTION I : DESK-BASED REVIEW

State of the literature on evidence alliances and networks in the international development sector

Building alliances for evidence for informed policy-making and intervention design

Alliances for evidence were born from an admission of failure in the evidence-for-policy world: the expectation that evidence flows from experts to policy-makers and implementers is more of a myth than reality (DFID, 2014).

The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) recently published a typology of seven ways that policy-maker can use evidence: change policies or programmes, close a programme, improve the culture of evidence use, inform discussions of policies and programmes, inform global guidelines and policy discussions, inform the design of other programmes, and scale up a programme (Rao, 2021).

Despite the consensus around its added value, the use of evidence for policy-making is still relatively low (Savedof et al., 2006). This discrepancy between evidence production and use can partly be explained by the difficulty of defining evidence: what counts for evidence for the policy-maker might not exactly be the evidence produced by researchers and could also be different from the evidence needed by the practitioner. Secondly, high volumes of evidence produced in methodologically diverse ways make it difficult for policy-makers to identify what evidence is available, adequate and relevant to address their specific policy questions or needs. Thirdly, policy-makers are confronted to a high degree with uncertainty in dynamic policy contexts, requiring them to make rapid decisions, and hence leaving less time and resources for evidence-informed decision-making (Mayne et al., 2018). Lastly, evidence producers might lack resources and capacities to translate evidence to users (Court et al., 2004).

Researchers need to develop new approaches to engage effectively with policy-makers and facilitate the use of evidence for policy-making. These approaches can take multiple forms including, identifying the right venues, engaging with the right actors, stimulating interest on a topic, learning from existing evidence, curating existing evidence, and influencing policy agendas (Mayne et al., 2018). Development challenges transcend organizations and sources of evidence, working collaboratively with others increases the potential for evidence to be used for policy and decision-making processes. By sharing knowledge across sectors and/or regions, evidence alliances can link actors from different backgrounds around evidence use (Cummings, n.d.).

Communities of practice as drivers of impact in international development

Through evidence alliances, researchers, practitioners and, more generally, development professionals come together to support the use of evidence for informed decision-making. Through collaboration, they create a community of practice to drive impact. Ruth Stewart in Do evidence networks make a difference? (Stewart, 2018, p1) summarized this idea as follows:

"We are part of a larger whole. When we work in isolation or in silos, we risk blockages in the smooth running of our ecosystem. When we share information, engage, get to know one another, and collaborate, we are forming what you might call evidence networks within the evidence ecosystem."

Etienne Wenger-Trayner defines communities of practice as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. They engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2022, p. 11). Applied to the development and evidence sector, communities of practice facilitate connections between practitioners from different parts of the world by bridging different skill sets and can act as a bridge between knowledge, policy, and practice (Cummings, n.d., p8). Evidence alliances are based on a community of practice that, as per its definition, is characterized by three structural elements (see table 1): a domain, a community, and a practice.

Structural element	Question	Evidence alliance examples
Domain	What is the community about? What do people identify with?	• Women's empowerment • Education • Access to water • Tax policy reforms • Innovative agricultural practices
Community	Who should be at the table? What relationship should they form?	• NGOs • Academics • policy-makers • Independent researchers • Think tanks
Practice	What should they do together? How can they make a difference in practice?	• Sharing knowledge • Advocacy • Co-delivery of services • Convening events and meetings • Training and sharing skills

Table 1. The structural elements of the community of practice of an evidence alliance

Communities of practice are action-learning spaces where the production of knowledge and evidence also provides a basis for taking collective actions (Johnson, 2007, p279). They promote, anchor, and innovate on evidence and development approaches (Bicchi, 2022, p24).

From the community of practice to the evidence alliance: a typology

Evidence alliances, just as any other form of network, do not just appear, they are built by practitioners for a specific purpose. The alliance cycle is based on three main steps (ODI, 2014):

1. **The Birth:** through the emergence of a community of practice comes the need for a more formal network around common areas of interest
2. **The Development and Growth:** building on the institutions and processes defined in the early stages of the network, members contribute to the activities of the evidence alliance.
3. **The Closure:** there are multiple reasons for the closure of an evidence alliance including the end-point of the purpose, the fragmentation of the members, and the shift to another common area of interest.

The alliance's cycle shows the importance of the definition of the characteristics, mission and processes that will form the basis for the developed alliance. An alliance can be defined through four pillars (Hearn & Mendizabal, 2011, p2):

1. **The Purpose:** what is the objective of the alliance and what justifies its existence? This relates to the mission the alliance seeks to achieve, which justifies its birth, its work, and its closure once it is achieved.
2. **The Role:** what will the alliance do to work with its members? An alliance can have an agency or a support role. In the support, members are independent and receive support from the alliance. In the agency, members work together to act as a single agent through the alliance.
3. **The Function:** what does the alliance do? This activity is not directed towards the members but toward the external audience of the alliance impacted by its activities.
4. **The Form:** how is the alliance structured to maintain its activities? This includes the scope, membership eligibility, governance, processes, coordination and communication.

In the four pillars of the alliance's characteristics, function is of major importance as it forms the basis of what the alliance does to achieve its purpose. As presented in table 2 below, the analysis of existing alliances reveals five types of functions delivered by alliances (Hearn & Mendizabal, 2011, p. 4):

Function	Description	Evidence alliances examples
Knowledge management	• Identify, filter and share important people, events, facts and stories • Stimulate learning • Mitigate information overload	*Solutions Exchange* is an initiative from the UN in India that provides a moderated mailing group where members could share development challenges around the Millennium Development Goals and get support from the rest of the community (Cummings, n.d.)
Amplification and advocacy	• Extending the reach and influence of constituent parts (members, ideas, initiatives)	The *Alliance for Useful Evidence* by Nesta collaborated to advocate for better use of research, evidence and data to inform policy decisions. (NESTA, 2022)

Function	Description	Evidence alliances examples
Community building	• Building of social capital through bonding, building relationships of trust • Consensus and coherence • Collective learning and action among homogeneous actors	**The African Think Tank Network (ATTN)** is a continental platform dedicated to African think thanks. The Network supports African think tanks in sharing information, exchanging ideas, creating and disseminating knowledge, and creating partnerships in order to individually and collectively develop evidence-based solutions to the pressing development challenges facing Africa.
Convening	• Building social capital through bridging • Stimulating discourse, collective learning and action among heterogeneous actors	The *Africa Evidence Associate's Conference* brings together evaluation professionals throughout Africa around an annual theme and facilitate discussions between practitioners (AfrEA, 2022)
Resource mobilization	• Increasing the capacity and effectiveness of members, stimulating knowledge creation and innovation • Providing financial and technical resources to members	The *Matasa Fellow Network* is an initiative from the MasterCard Foundation and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) supporting early career researchers to develop translational and communication skills not included in their PhD programmes. (Ramsey, 2018)

Table 2. Typology of alliance's functions

Analyzing the core characteristics of alliances shows a large spectrum of identities an alliance can take and the multiple entry points an alliance can represent for evidence-informed policy-making. The analysis also shows the complexity raised in the birth of an alliance and the definition of its identity. Finally, it explains why alliances are resource intensive due to the high transaction costs and the administrative work it requires to maintain their functions (Hearn & Mendizabal, 2011, p. 6).

Impact and value-added of evidence alliances

Although building an alliance comes with costs, the alliance also brings value-added through its functions. Evidence alliances are seen as a resource to improve decision-making and have an impact on international development. By strengthening the capacities of its members, the impact of the alliance can be greater than the sum of its members. Ruth Stewart, Chair of the Africa Evidence Network, describes the value added of evidence networks thus: "they make a difference by building our shared understanding across the evidence ecosystem, enable growth in our shared capacities, and enable a potential and readiness for change" (Stewart, 2018, p. 1). In her view, the main added-value of alliances is their capacity to improve understanding, increase capacity, and the greater potential they offer for change.

Improved understanding

Evidence alliances are the opportunity to bring together practitioners with a common interest and complementary capabilities. The evidence alliance breaks the silos of academies, NGOs, or other stakeholders and brings them and their ideas together (Fransman & Newman, 2019, p. 524). The alliance can be intra-disciplinary (e.g. an alliance of universities) or interdisciplinary (e.g. a network of universities and NGOs), it can be intra-sectoral (e.g. an alliance in WASH sector) or inter-sectoral (e.g. an alliance in WASH and Agriculture sectors), it can be national, regional, or international. All these possibilities are opportunities for a better understanding between practitioners. By bringing the different actors together, evidence alliances have the capacity to break the barrier of currency of exchange (DFID, 2014): "the academic is worried about publishing and only publishing. The politician is worried about electoral cycles and only electoral cycles. The practitioner is focused on implementing and meeting funders' demands". Bringing them together in the alliance allows knowledge exchange and better understanding.

Shared capacities

Garett Richards identified seven potential short-term benefits to research-policy partnerships (Richards, 2017):

1. Necessary information is gathered more efficiently
2. Greater access to academic sources and interpretation
3. Building capacities through coalitions and literacy
4. More relevant framing of research findings
5. Opportunities for feedback
6. Greater ability to convene stakeholders
7. Research for joint projects

By coming together, members of an evidence alliance increase their skills and influence through shared capacities. Joining forces allows the development of new ways of understanding and addressing more complex situations. The shared strategies and resources also allow members to deliver in situations where they would not have the capacity to do it on their own both financially and technically (Cummings & Zee, 2005, p15). Perkin and Court complement this analysis by listing three.

Cs where alliances bring added value (Perkin & Court, 2005):

Communication	Creativity	Consensus
Better communication within the alliance and outside the alliance.	Enabling innovation and providing resources to test and implement.	Bringing actors together to take common decisions and bring consistency in the approach.

Potential for change

Evidence alliances have a common goal: the use of evidence for decision-making. Through the alliance, members want to increase their impact and influence the agenda or decision at the policy or implementation level (Cummings & Zee, 2005, p. 15). Although it is hard to measure the direct impact of evidence alliances, they contribute to the use of good-quality evidence in the policy-making process, they catalyze decision-making by providing the evidence needed, bring resources and expertise to policy-makers, and they shed the spotlight on the priorities for the development agenda (Perkin & Court, 2005). As presented in the table below, an evidence alliance can have an impact in all the steps of the project cycle as presented by Perkin and Court (2005):

Project Cycle	Alliance's added value
Agenda Setting	Convince policy-makers that the issue requires attention
Formulation	Inform policy-makers of the options and build a consensus
Implementation	Complement government capacity

Table 3. The added value of the evidence alliance across the project cycle

Barriers and facilitators of evidence alliances

Building an alliance does not necessarily result in impact. An alliance needs to be managed and maintained to be efficient. Typical challenges that confront alliances include inconsistencies in the vision and aspirations of the members, most vividly exemplified in situations in which informal power relationships and interests within the formal alliance threatens harmonious collaboration and coherence in vision.

Within the alliance, there might be a discrepancy between formal roles and actual practices and relationships. Similarly, motivations of the members might not be consistent: the goal of the alliance might not be in total harmony with the goal of its members, and the goal of some members might not be in synchrony with the goal of other members (e.g. monitoring against advocacy) (Fransman & Newman, 2019, p. 535). A successful alliance then requires the managment of formal and informal relationships to build trust and collaboration amongst members.

A second challenge is how the alliance communicates its evidence products. The timing of the research product (e.g. report, event, campaign) needs to target the right audience at the right time. Where members have divergent expectations and definitions of the outputs, their vision, and timelines, communication within the network might be a challenge. The spatial aspect also needs to be taken into account, as the time and resources required to produce the output might be challenged by the physical distance between members. A successful alliance then requires strong internal and external communication skills to optimize efficiency and effectiveness (Fransman & Newman, 2019, p. 540).

A third challenge is the coordination of the activities of the alliance. To maintain its activities the

alliance needs to build on administrative, support, and management staff that coordinate the day-to-day relationships. This effort raises human and financial costs that need to be covered through external or internal funding (Hearn & Mendizabal, 2011).

Key Evidence Actors in Africa and Challenges

The African continent continues its trajectory of being the least developed region in the entire globe, containing over 70% of the least developed countries, with continued overdependence on foreign aid (Wale-Oshinowo, et al, 2022). Less than half of the African population has access to the healthcare that they need (Cullin, 2021) and approximately 40% of the population live under the poverty line of US $1.90 per day (Scoch and Lakner, 2020). Owing to this, there has been emergence of a large number of evidence actors in the African continent. This is based on the view that evidence-based policy approaches have the potential for greater impact on policy outcomes, with huge development benefits for Africa and other developing nations where efficient evidence use in policy and practice could reduce poverty and improve economic performance on a large scale.

Key Actors of the Evidence Sector in Africa and their roles

Governments

Governments play a dual role in the African evidence ecosystem. First, owing to research evidence being a global public good, the government has a major stake in the generation and proper management of evidence. Ideally, this would be achieved through the public funding of research. Secondly, governments are usually the largest potential users of research evidence, as different levels of governments work in collaboration to set policy goals and implement policies (Bullock & Lavis, 2019). However, despite notable efforts in recent decades, African governments still struggle to generate accurate data for governance. Independent research and policy organizations play a crucial role by providing empirical data and evidence to support strategic and results-based policy-making (Handy, 2020).

Evidence generating organizations

The number of organizations and individuals working to strengthen evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) on the African continent expanded rapidly over the past decade, with the number of African institutions involved in evidence synthesis growing from 31 in 2008 to 521 in 2019 (Pan et al, 2019). The role of these organizations is to act as: brokers of policy knowledge; centers of research; and incubators of new ideas, with the ultimate goal of informing policy to maximize social impact (CIPE, 2022).

There are four main types of institutions:

1. Independent not-for-profit organizations (e.g. APHRC, African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP), IDinsight)
2. Independent for-profit consultancy companies (e.g. Laterite, In On Africa)
3. Research centers linked to academic institutions (e.g. African Center for Evidence (ACE), Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER))
4. Units within government bureaucracies, or arm's length bodies receiving substantial core funding from government (e.g. Kenya Institute of Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA), Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI)
5. Academic Institutions

External donors and funding organizations

In addition to the direct funding from African governments, which is often limited, substantial support for organizations in the African evidence ecosystem is provided by external funding agencies, including both bilateral and multilateral funding from western governments and philanthropic support from private foundations. Some of the largest and well known bilateral organizations/agencies in Africa include: the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), DFID and GIZ; and private foundations include the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) and The Hewlett Foundation (ImpactPool, 2022).

Challenges and Barriers to the Emergence of Evidence in Africa

The following section outlines some of the key challenges and barriers to the emergence of evidence in Africa.

Complexity and diversity of African policy contexts

Sub-Saharan Africa as a region boasts of over forty-nine independent states, which differ in terms of socio-economic and cultural variables, as well as in terms of regime type and political stability. Oftentimes, evidence experts are not experts on the entire continent, but rather only on certain groups of countries, individual countries, or regions within countries (Basedau, 2020). This in turn leads to varying understanding and recommendations of what evidence would be most relevant and useful to policy-makers. Sweeping statements of what African countries need remain common among development experts and practitioners alike. Additionally, differing expertise across actors in the evidence space (education, health, tax reform etc.) contributes to a huge volume of evidence, recommendations and limitations in what evidence institutions can generate (Sutcliffe and Court, 2005). Establishing networks and alliances on the African continent would allow for members to collaborate and leverage diverse expertise across organizations.

Political, systemic, and cultural barriers associated with working with governments

Many national governments hesitate to work with African independent organizations and think-tanks, mostly due to a poor understanding of the nature of these organizations, and a deep-seated mistrust of the motives of evidence generators by some governments (Handy, 2020). There exists a hierarchy in the evidence ecosystem where quite often, it matters less whether an idea is good, but rather on who has the good idea (Mendizabal, 2015). Some organizations have direct lines to decision-makers, but others struggle to be heard by unresponsive policy-makers (Wan, 2018).

Policy reform and implementation in African countries tends to be politically motivated. To make a positive impact, research organizations need integrity and credibility. But in highly politicized environments, these can be tough to maintain. Governments may try to co-opt researchers or use more forceful methods to mute unwelcome messages (McGann et al, 2017). Organizations are frequently branded as pro- or against government, exacerbating the distrust for their work.

Changes in government tend to lead to additional hurdles for organizations to rebuild and/or

maintain relationships with policy-makers. Shifts may either lead to

1. Lack of ownership by the new breed of policy-makers of the evidence generated and
2. Conflicting priorities in policy by different government parties (Sutcliffe and Court, 2005).

Evidence actors therefore have great obstacles to surmount if they are to gain wider credibility amongst decision-makers, and to build and maintain relationships. To navigate this minefield, evidence actors can reassure and try to rebuild relationships with politicians behind the scenes, while being as transparent and accountable as possible. However, challenging assumptions and value systems is a long-term, and often difficult, process. Forging partnerships within the African continent may allow for organizations that are viewed as "trustworthy" to cosign and affirm the work that is conducted by organizations that are less trusted.

Lack of funding for increased competition

Though there has been promising growth in the number of evidence generation actors in Africa, this has led to increased competition across organizations for funding that is already limited. Funders of economic and policy research in Africa are mostly international agencies –bilateral, multilateral and foundations (Mendizabal, 2015). Funding is often uncertain, irregular, insufficient, and unequally distributed in the evidence space (McGann et al, 2017).

First, quite often, funding by international donors is dictated by foreign visions of what is development and what type of evidence will lead to the said development (Mendizabal, 2015). Evidence actors face the risk of becoming agents for the promotion of a funder's special interests. This tends to dictate the type of evidence that is generated and the focus of research, even when local experts recommend otherwise. Secondly, foreign funding tends to be geared towards only parts of Africa, serving as a bottleneck for organizations that do not operate in those regions (Mendizabal, 2015). Thirdly, funding is sometimes dependent on the methodologies that research organizations use, where funders have set perceptions of what passes for and is counted as comprehensive, representative, robust, and scientifically sound (Uzochukwu et al, 2016). This means that funding is skewed away from organizations that conduct research that is not perceived as rigorous (e.g. RCTs) even when their expertise generates rich and informative evidence. Finally, in some cases, organizations are unaware of what funding is available and is best suited for their work (Butler, Garg & Stephens 2020). Partnerships with other organizations across Africa may allow for information sharing on what types of funding are available and/or funding across organizations, with less reliance on foreign donors.

Mapping of complementarities and gaps of existing evidence initiatives in Africa

Evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) values research as a public good. It is based on the premise that the function of research is to contribute to improving the lives of citizens in general, and of service users specifically, to inform the decisions that affect all (Stewart et al., 2017a). EIDM has an important track record of improving policies and practices ranging across different sectors, including within the international development arena (Oronje and Zulu, 2018). EIDM requires connections between a wide range of actors, institutions and systems, giving rise to the terminology of 'evidence ecosystems'.

Africa's research community is a front runner in developing evidence-informed decision-making.

Across the continent, evidence teams are responding to demands within policy systems to provide evidence that is useful – and used. Within the African evidence ecosystem there are several alliances and networks developed internationally and nationally to produce and use evidence for decision-making (Stewart R, and Ngcwabe S, 2021). The table below shows some of the evidence alliances and networks in Africa regionally and nationally while descriptions and complementarities of some major ones are provided in the sections that follow.

• Africa Evidence Network	• African Parliamentary Network on Development Evaluation
• African Academy of Sciences	• Centre for Democratic Development, Ghana
• Alliance for African Partnerships	• Centre for Evaluation, Learning and Results (CLEAR), South Africa
• Alliance for Useful Evidence (Alliance4UEvidence)	• Economic Policy Research Centre, Uganda
• Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA)	• Evidence-Informed Policy Network (EVIPNet)
• Actions pour l'environnement et dévelopment durable (ACED), Benin	• Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration
• Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA)	• INGSA Africa
• African Centre for Evidence, University of Johannesburg	• Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA), Kenya
• African Centre for Economic Transformation, Ghana	• Jimma University, Ethiopia
• African Centre for Parliamentary Affairs, Ghana	• PACKS Africa, Ghana
• African Centre for Development Policy, Kenya	• Regional Network of Agricultural Policy Research Institutes (ReNAPRI)
• African Centre for Systematic Reviews and Knowledge Translation, Makerere University, Uganda	• The Africa Centre for Evidence
	• Uganda National Academy of Sciences
	• Zimbabwe Evidence Informed Policy Network

Table 4. Evidence alliances and networks in Africa

i) Africa Evidence Network (AEN)

AEN is a coalition of nearly three thousand people across 46 countries working to produce and use evidence for decision-making. It is unique in its inclusivity and diversity in six broad dimensions: (

- All countries in Africa;
- All sectors across the Sustainable Development Goals;
- All spheres, including government, academia, civil society and all intermediaries;
- the full diversity of roles within these spheres from members of parliament to program managers to researchers;
- All elements of the evidence production and use cycle, from the generation of evidence to its integration into policy and implementation; and

- All types of evidence from administrative data, to evaluations of all kinds, to experimental research, to citizen experiences and systematic syntheses of primary studies.

AEN fosters collaboration among those engaged in or supporting evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) in Africa, hence increasing knowledge and understanding of EIDM, sharing capacities across the EIDM ecosystem and advocates for Africa's full voice and participation in the national, regional and global movements to increase EIDM.

The AEN organizes its work strategically according to three workstreams:

- *Network relations:* It seeks to understand, document and share what individuals and organizations are doing to support evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) in Africa.

- *Capacities:* It seeks to ensure that there is improved access to and use of resources to advance capacity in the field of EIDM.

- *Understanding EIDM:* It seeks to generate accurate, reliable, clear information about what evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) is as it relates to the African continent and why it matters.

Challenges

The AEN supports members active in the EIDM but does not engage directly with policy-makers. This is done by some of its members, and in a less systematized or structured manner. Being a large network, it lacks the focus and efficiency required at the interface between evidence generation and evidence use in policy processes.

ii) The Africa Centre for Evidence (ACE)

Another major actor in the evidence ecosystem is the Africa Centre for Evidence (ACE),a research organization based at the University of Johannesburg that was founded at the end of 2016. ACE aims to contribute to the reduction of poverty and inequality in Africa and South Africa through the use of evidence. All of ACE's work is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and the National Development Plan of South Africa. ACE focusses on four strategic goals:

- Greater understanding of the art and science of using evidence
- Stronger evidence capacities
- Meaningful evidence communities
- Rigorous and relevant evidence synthesis

ACE supports decision-makers to navigate the uncertainty of large bodies of evidence in systematic and reliable ways. For example, they systematically collated a large number of evidence hubs dedicated to COVID-19 response across all sectors which are being produced around the world. This hub of hubs provides decision-makers and researchers with a one-stop-shop portal to navigate the large number of available evidence databases and repositories related to COVID-19.

ACE also plays a role in methods-specific networks, for example advancing systematic review approaches, including the Global Evidence Synthesis Initiative and the informal network of South African synthesis organizations, and those focusing on specific topics such as environmental management, e.g. the Collaboration for Environmental Evidence. This gives them access to a large body of information on individuals and organizations supporting the evidence ecosystem across the continent, including an understanding of some of the localized ecosystems of some of their members.

iii) Alliance for African Partnerships (AAP)

Founded by Michigan State University (MSU) in 2016 in collaboration with African colleagues, the Alliance for African Partnership (AAP) is a consortium of MSU, ten leading African universities, and a distinguished network for African research institutes. AAP members are committed to working in equitable partnership to transform lives and address global challenges. The AAP builds on MSU's long-term engagement in Africa, building on the foundation laid by the African Studies Center and evolving models of engagement in line with AAP's guiding principles of accountability, equity, inclusivity, sustainability and transparency.

AAP takes a cooperative approach to addressing global challenges by building networks across all sectors—including universities, NGOs, government, and the private sector— to partner around core thematic areas including agri-food systems; water, energy, and the environment; culture; youth empowerment; education; and health and nutrition. AAP has also identified three program pillars focused on 1) building bridges across sectors, disciplines, and continents; 2) transforming institutions so they are better able to engage in equitable and sustainable partnerships; and 3) transforming lives on the ground through engaged research and scholarship that address shared challenges. Gender and inclusion, and policy are both cross-cutting themes of the AAP and are woven into all AAP-sponsored and implemented activities. AAP catalyzes, supports, and mobilizes its multidirectional partnerships in such a way that the resulting activities positively transform institutions and livelihoods in Africa and beyond.

AAP influences decision-making by governments through policy dialogues with policy-makers and other key stakeholders responsible for policy implementation. For example, AAP and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) held a Policy Dialogue on 4th and 5th April 2022, Gaborone, Botswana. The dialogue was about Youth Employment through Employment and Entrepreneurship Development in the SADC Region.

iv) Regional Network of Agricultural Policy Research Institutes (ReNAPRI)

ReNAPRI is a network of 12 recognized national agricultural policy research institutes based in 11 African countries, established to generate evidence in support of policy-making in Africa. ReNAPRI and University of Pretoria are implementing partners and members of Alliance for African Partnerships. Formed on November 16th, 2012, ReNAPRI was created at the initiative of the national agricultural policy institutes to enable them to effectively coordinate with each other, share data, collaborate in providing solutions to the common challenges facing the ESA region, and enable national policy-makers to learn from the experiences of other countries within the region. It operates in the Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) region (ReNAPRI, 2012).

ReNAPRI plays an active role in transforming Africa's agricultural sector by developing the capacity of national agricultural policy research Institutes in the continent, strengthening and nurturing dynamic collaboration towards providing objective and innovative policy advice to national, regional and continental level stakeholders, through effective outreach (UIA Global Society Database, 2012)

The specific objectives of the network are to:

- Provide more effective policy guidance to national policy-makers through collaboration on strategic issues where cross-country learning is particularly relevant through facilitating the sharing of national data and information amongst the national policy institutes;

- Assist the national institutes in building their own capacity to carry out high quality policy analysis and outreach through collaboration and coordination of activities through development and undertaking policy training programmes, targeting researchers, policy-maker, and students;

- Promote peer learning and sharing of skills amongst the researchers, associate researchers and students in the region.

ReNAPRI works closely with the Alliance for African Partnerships (AAP) and the Michigan State University (MSU). ReNAPRI participates in the SADC-APP policy dialogues and also takes on leadership roles, including its selection by the African Union Commission to lead the next African Fertilizer and Soil Health (AFSH) Summit in collaboration with the AAP, MSU and the International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC). The summit will be held in June 2023.

v)   The Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA)

AFSA is a continental platform for consolidation of evidence pertaining to food sovereignty and for marshalling a single and louder voice to policy and policy-maker to influence policy formulation and workable solutions. It is a broad alliance of different civil society actors that are part of the struggle for food sovereignty and agroecology in Africa. These include: African farmers' organizations, African NGO networks, specialist African NGOs, consumer movements in Africa, international organizations which support the stance of AFSA, and individuals (AFSA, 2017).

vi)   Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA)

AGRA seeks to transform African agriculture from a subsistence model to strong businesses that improve the livelihoods of the continent's farming households. It was established in 2006 as an African-led and Africa-based organization to put smallholder farmers at the center of Africa's growing economy (AGRA, 2006).

It works on three strategic intervention areas:

1. Policy and State Capability (P&SC),
2. Systems Development and
3. Partnerships.

AGRA has its operations in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. State partners set national and local priorities, policies, investments and may also play a coordinating role. Private sector partners provide agribusiness linkage for smallholder farmers to access yield-enhancing inputs, post-harvest management, logistics and markets while funders mainly the Partnership for Inclusive Agricultural Transformation

in Africa (PIATA) provide financial support and partly oversight. PIATA is comprised of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, USAID, the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

In order to drive impact at farmer level, AGRA works on changing systems - building downstream delivery systems closer to farmers, while providing support to local private sector, to scale technologies and services which deliver better productivity and incomes. On building connections, AGRA works with Governments to improve the enabling environment and the private sector response, thereby connecting smallholder farmers to better opportunities.

Despite AGRA's initiatives, 35 organizations from the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) and 165 allied organizations in 40 countries around the world wrote to their donors calling on them to cease funding AGRA and other Green Revolution programmes and to support African-led efforts to expand agroecology and other low-input farming systems (Open letter to PIATA, 2021). Some of the key weaknesses pointed out are:

- AGRA pursues an ill-conceived approach promoting monocultural commodity production heavily reliant on chemical inputs at the expense of sustainable livelihoods, long-term soil fertility, climate change resilience, and human development.

- AGRA uses its financial leverage to encourage African governments to focus on boosting agricultural yields at the expense of hunger and poverty on the continent, including centuries of exploitation of the continent's people and natural resources that have not benefited Africans.

vii) Evidence-Informed Policy Network (EVIPNet)

The Evidence-informed Policy Network (EVIPNet) is one of the key mechanisms introduced by WHO to reduce the research-to-policy gap using a systems approach and to address the barriers to translating evidence, with the initial focus on low- or middle-income countries. It aims to promote a network of partnerships at the national, regional and global levels among health system policy-makers, researchers and civil society. Taken together, these are expected to strengthen health systems and improve health outcomes through regular access to and assessment, adaptation and use of context-specific research and evidence generation.

The network works towards:

- Production of policy briefs and other user-friendly formats for research synthesis and discussions of policy options

- Establishment of priority-setting mechanisms for policy-relevant research syntheses and primary research;

- Production of research syntheses;

- Organization of 'safe haven' deliberative forums involving policy-makers, and researchers and citizens to stimulate context-specific, evidence-informed local action;

- Investigation of the potential of clearinghouses, observatories and rapid response mechanisms that might provide timely, high-quality research syntheses and research

relevant to policy.

- Capacity strengthening and empowerment of policy-makers, researchers, representatives of civil society to enable them to make better use of evidence in policy-making and advocacy;
- Interactive learning processes building on experiences to improve evidence-to-policy methods;
- Monitoring and evaluation processes that document the lessons learned.

Despite the above, an evaluation of the performance and achievements of EVIPNet revealed the gaps below in the network's evidence and policy processes (Lester et.a., 2020):

- EVIPNet is an amorphous alliance that is not well understood by all member countries and partners.
- It lacks adequate resources to meet the evidence and policy needs of the member countries.
- It demonstrates rapid horizontal growth with inadequate staffing and financial resources.
- It has failed to link with other key WHO programmes globally.
- There is lack of adequate training for new alliance entrants.
- There is lack of a clear sustainability strategy.

viii) Africa Infodemics Response Alliance (AIRA)

AIRA is a WHO-hosted network launched to coordinate actions and pool resources in combating misinformation around COVID-19 pandemic and other health emergencies in Africa. AIRA alliance members are: WHO AFRO, Africa CDC, UNICEF, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, UNESCO, and UN Global Pulse. The alliance also brings together governmental and intergovernmental operational agencies as well as non-State actors/entities to mobilize in response to the COVID-19 Infodemic and to the infodemic threat in general. The WHO uses the term "infodemic" to refer to the overabundance of information, especially false or misleading information, that occurs during a public health crisis. An infodemic leads to confusion and ultimately mistrust in the public health response, and can cause deaths among populations if not checked in time (https://www.afro.who.int/news/landmark-alliance-launches-africa-fight-covid-19-misinformation).

More broadly, the alliance was formed to lay the foundation for a sustainable collaboration for promoting fact-based health information and limiting the harmful impact of health misinformation in Africa. AIRA spots misinformation with social media "listening tools" and tracks it as it goes viral. Immediately, a video is created debunking the rumor and providing accurate information.

An evaluation of the alliance's work revealed some challenges (Nguyen T, and Cecchini, S 2021) outlined below:

- Tracking the focus of misinformation circulating on social media is difficult.
- The health systems in Africa are inadequately prepared to tackle infodemics and the latter is not on their priority list.
- Responses are slow and do not match the magnitude of the fake news.

- Social media is too advanced and serves majority of the populations faster.

The alliance has to review the above challenges and refocus its strategies.

ix) Alliance for Useful Evidence (Alliance4UEvidence)

The Alliance for Useful Evidence (Alliance4UEvidence) is an open access, virtual network and global community of individuals and organizations - from academia, government, third sector, think tanks, service providers, funders, and more - with a commitment to developing the evidence base to ensure decision-making across public services draws upon the most effective approaches and solutions. It was created by a partnership between Nesta, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Big Lottery Fund (BLF) and launched in October 2012. The Alliance believes that despite decades of producing excellent research evidence, there are still problems of getting this integrated into decision-making. Through events, publications, research and debate, the Alliance explores what is needed to strengthen the evidence base in different social policy domains to improve the connections and collaborations between research, policy and practice.

The Alliance4UEvidence has championed and supported smarter use of evidence in social policy and practice through three core activities:

1. Research Ideas: produced research, discussion papers, guides and case studies, and monitored evidence use by governments and politicians. Convened small groups on specialist topics in roundtables as well as large conferences and summits to encourage debate, discussion, collaboration and innovation, and to share insights on what works and what does not.

2. Training and skills: Delivered a range of training courses and workshops, from their flagship Evidence Masterclass, to more bespoke strategic support such as theory of change workshops. Also offered free downloadable resources, including the heavily downloaded Using Research Evidence practice guide.

3. Advice and advocacy: Works with others – with champions, partners and allies. Collaborates to campaign for the better use of research, evidence, evaluation and data to inform social policies and programmes

Despite the above achievements, an evaluation of the alliance's work by Nutley S, et.al, (2013) dubbed "What Counts as Good Evidence? Provocation Paper for the Alliance for Useful Evidence" revealed a number of gaps:

a. The main gap has been how to define good evidence and how policy-makers and decision-makers decide what is working and what isn't, when it comes to deciding where public money is spent and how

b. The 2nd gap is how to reconcile evidence generated by different players in the evidence field. For example: The spotlight, often driven by the media, will shine on one hot policy issue

c. The 3rd gap is how to ensure that the diversity of evidence standards don't risk creating

confusion among policy-makers and policy-maker

d. The 4th gap is how to ensure that evidence remains accessible over the longer term and that lessons are learned given that a lot of money is used to generate it.

- Maneuvering evidence within policy-making bureaucracies
- Research evidence might require some changes in the organization and it is usually very difficult for any organization to easily accept change
- From the governments' perspectives, policy-making is linear. This makes it very difficult to use evidence effectively to inform policy decisions throughout the policy-making cycle
- The volatility of evidence is also a barrier. Evidence may be relevant today but obsolete tomorrow. This requires knowledge and skills on the part of policy-maker.
- There is lack of synergy between researchers and policy-makers- Governments feel that researchers do little to engage policy-makers when identifying their research priorities – but they expect governments to make use of their research findings.
- How to define good evidence and how policy-makers and decision-makers decide what is working and what isn't, when it comes to deciding where public money is spent and how
- How to reconcile evidence generated by different players in the evidence field.
- How to ensure that the diversity of evidence standards don't risk creating confusion among policy-makers and policy-maker
- How to ensure that evidence remains accessible over the longer term and that lessons are learned given that a lot of money is used to generate it.

Table 5. challenges that evidence-to-policy networks face (Hayter E (2019); Nutley, S et.al., (2013)

SECTION II: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS: ANALYSIS

This section provides a synthesis of the findings from Key Informant Interviews. The information contained in this section complements desk review findings. A general observation is that perspectives obtained from Key Informant Interviews closely mirror those from desk review – partly because the focus in both endeavors is the evidence-to-policy landscape in Africa, and partly because most of those interviewed are actively involved either in linking evidence-to-policy, or in the discourse on the subject.

The evidence-to-policy landscape

The African evidence-to-policy landscape is changing rapidly. While a few years ago, the bulk of research evidence was produced mostly by researchers based outside of the continent, there is a growing trend of researchers and research organizations or networks based in Africa contributing to the pool of evidence available to policy-makers.

There was unanimity and optimism among respondents that the evidence-to-policy landscape will change for the better in the coming decades. Evidence use is likely to increase; increasing numbers of Africans are educated, some of whom are finding their way into public service and into research or policy advisory roles. Many African governments are increasingly becoming receptive to research evidence for solving development problems and for informing their policy decisions. Moreover, a more educated citizenry is beginning to demand better quality of public services and greater accountability by government on the use of public resources. In all this, evidence is needed both by government – to plan, implement and justify its actions; but also by citizens to hold government to account.

There has also been a commendable increase in the number and caliber of authentic African research organizations and evidence networks, a trend which, the interviewees postulated, will increase rather than diminish. A number of these are coming up with innovative ways of linking evidence to research. Besides, the continuing presence of major international organizations, international researchers and consultants, as well as the research done by African think-tanks and by civil society have contributed to an increase in the level and quality of evidence available to policy-makers. Governments in Africa have also established research institutes and research bodies, further contributing to the pool of policy evidence available. Most respondents also observed that even though funding for research in Africa seemed to be on the decline, donors are still interested in funding initiatives which show promise of improving the use of evidence in policy processes at scale.

Africa is diverse and the picture painted above is neither uniform across the continent nor generalized across sectors. There are regions and sub-regions where countries are becoming more accepting and appreciative of the value of research evidence in informing policy design, formulation, implementation and in evaluating the impact of government policies and programs. Countries like Rwanda, South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda and Benin were mentioned repeatedly during interviews. These are by no means the only countries where the use of evidence

in policy processes is on the rise. It is equally important to note that the experience and practice in countries are not uniform – variations exists across sectors, and within specific sectors, and on particular issue areas. The choice of which sectors or issue areas to focus on depends first, on issue salience for the public or government, and secondly, on the interest of external funding agencies. COVID-19 was cited severally as one area where its salience as a pressing public health issue coincided with global interest in containing the pandemic. Studies on suitable response mechanisms sought to provide evidence, for instance, on whether to make cash transfers or provide direct supplies to the vulnerable, with evidence favoring the former.

Despite wide agreement that evidence-informed policy is both desirable and feasible, the rhetoric seems to be stronger than the practical application [Head, 2016]. Respondents enumerated a number of barriers that deter use of adequate use of evidence. These included weak engagement between researchers and policy-makers, poor communication of relevant research, absence of supportive organizational systems, and a lack of capacity among decision-makers to access, appraise and apply research evidence. However, they also underscored strategies which look promising in the evidence-to-policy ecosystem. Some of the strategies are outlined below:

- *Systematic capacity building for policy-makers:* Increasing governments' capacity for an evidence-informed approach to policy-making is a critical part of fostering good public governance to achieve broad societal goals, such as promoting sustainable development or improving well-being. This requires both investing in skills for the use of evidence by policy-makers and senior officials working at the political-administrative interface and taking systemic approaches to building capacity for evidence-informed policy-making in the public sector.

- *Participation of evidence-to-policy organisations in government Technical Working Groups (TWGs)* - embedding researchers in government technical working groups gives researchers a foothold into the policy-making process, and allows them to either directly or indirectly influence policy processes. This will enable meaningful involvement of the alliance in government processes and approaches to evidence generation and use, leverage resources and build synergies. The only limitation mentioned here was that technical working groups tend to be sector-based, or issue based (i.e. HIV&AIDS, Ending Open Defecation, etc.).

- *Involving government officials or policy-makers as co-principal investigators:* This allows them to be involved in framing policy research questions, in the design of the research, and its analysis and interpretation, with a high likelihood that the policy-maker will promote and defend the use of the evidence generated in policy processes.

- *Longitudinal multisector, multi-country studies as opposed to cross-sectoral studies* to avoid short-termism and address challenges/needs that roll over the administrative phases e.g. climate change, public health etc. policy-makers usually make decisions in a complex environment with limited time for reflection. Ministers want to demonstrate progress quickly and are usually rewarded for spending public

funds on today's visible problems rather than reducing future risks.

- **Mainstreaming evidence-to-policy or EIDM into university curricula** to lay early foundation for researchers and users of evidence. As attention to Evidence-Informed Decision-Making (EIDM) and Knowledge Translation (KT) in research, policy and practice grows, so does a need for capacity enhancement amongst evidence producers and evidence users. Recognizing that most researchers enter the professional sphere with little or no appreciation of the importance and power of EIDM.

- **Establishing platforms between universities and policy-makers for legislative research priority setting, sharing evidence and learning:** Throughout the world there is a general consensus that a huge gap exists between policy-makers and researchers. This undeniable gap is known to be responsible for the problem of translating research evidence into policy. To address this challenge, there is need to strengthen institutions and mechanisms that can more systematically promote interactions between researchers, policy-makers and other stakeholders who can influence the uptake of research findings.

- **Private Sector engagement to enhance use of evidence in their policy processes and leverage resources for evidence generation:** The private sector plays a significant role in all development sectors including health, environment, agriculture among others. Although essential information on private sector models is limited, a review of the available evidence of private sector interventions (such as franchising, contracting, accreditation, and regulation), has been conducted to understand lessons and transitions emerging to inform how governments can potentially develop more effective private sector interventions that are aligned with their development goals.

- **Working with and through established international funding bodies, or international research networks:** brings in invaluable institutional capital in dealing with governments and policy-makers. These organizations ride on their reputation and profile, have a bigger voice at the decision-making table, and policy-makers tend to be more attentive to them than smaller organizations

- **Setting up help-desks** where governments or policy-makers can make their evidence requests is similarly gaining currency. The help-desk allows policy-makers and public officials to ask questions or seek answers for pressing policy problems, and researchers respond by providing the evidence needed.

Notwithstanding the increase in the use of evidence in policy decisions and policy processes, most of the interviewees observed that much remains to be done in linking evidence-to-policy. A number of limitations were cited. These include a general mismatch between research evidence generation and use. Researchers and research organizations are often driven by different incentives from those of policy-makers. Most researchers – especially those in the quantitative research tradition – tend to be motivated by methodological rigor, with publishing in academic and/or peer reviewed journals as the end goal. On the other hand, public officials and policy-makers typically prefer synthesized evidence that is directly and often immediately utilizable for decision-making priorities at hand. Bridging this mismatch requires either the presence of intermediary

organizations with the capacity to synthesize complex research findings into simplified technical or policy briefs, or large research organizations or networks with the capacity to synthesize and simplify available research evidence.

Another major limitation is how researchers package the outputs of their research. Research findings are often presented in technical articles and reports, written largely for an academic or research audience. Where quantitative methods have been used, research reports usually have complex statistical analyses which might be difficult for policy-makers with no training in these research methods to grasp or make sense of. Respondents noted that while rigor was important for credibility and for improving the quality and soundness of policy decisions made, presenting research evidence in technical, sophisticated ways limited how far the evidence could be taken up and used by policy-makers.

The other limitation mentioned severally was the belief among researchers that once good compelling research evidence is available, it will somehow find its way into policy decisions. Most respondents saw this as a fallacy. In the view of one respondent:

> *"Research evidence is just one among many other inputs that compete for a policy-maker's attention. The problem we have as researchers is that once we are done with analysis and preparing the research report, we send it out there, hoping it will be read and used by policy-makers. Having worked in this space for a number of years now, I can tell you that policy-makers do not have time for long technical research papers. Less so, most of those I know rarely go out of their way to look for and read research papers. Let's assume they do get to read them, it is not always automatic that the evidence will be the only consideration they have when making their decisions. The path from evidence-to-policy decisions is not always straight, especially in Africa."*

Another limitation is the timing of research findings. Good quality research takes long to conceptualize, plan, and execute. By contrast, policy-makers work with shorter timeframes and turnarounds. They might not have the patience to wait for 2 to three years until complex sector studies have been completed. A number of proposals were made to deal with this limitation.

First, it is not always necessary to commission fresh studies to answer pressing policy questions. Syntheses of existing research, systematic reviews and expert opinions can answer some or most questions that policy-makers may have. Moreover, good baseline data can be used across the continuum of the policy process, if it is robust and rigorous enough. Methodological pluralism coordinated through an alliance or networks of research organizations is yet another strategy. Using this approach, research organizations can coordinate and synergize their efforts in the design and analysis of complex sector or cross-sectoral studies by leveraging and building complementarities across research traditions and designs, with each research organization capitalizing on its core research or methodological strengths. Finally, building partnerships with universities and public/private research institutions could bridge the evidence-policy gap, especially where universities have active research centers in relevant departments linked to relevant government ministries

or public sectors.

Fluidity of the African policy context was also highlighted as a major limitation. It takes time to build relationships with policy-makers, and to win their trust and confidence. In most policy-making contexts in Africa, personalized, rather than institutionalized relationships and contacts are predominant. Frequent changes of personnel across government functions or departments imply that relationships built with policy-makers are often tenuous and temporary. When certain officials are moved from one docket to the other, there is no guarantee that those who replace them will harbor similar incentives for using evidence in their decision-making. Moreover, change of government after successive electoral cycles implies that building relationships becomes cyclic, contingent on who comes to power, and the officers the government works with in implementing its policies. The picture painted above becomes more complex in undemocratic regimes where accountability and transparency are not entrenched institutional cultures, and where policy decisions tend to be more discretionary and capricious.

Perhaps the greatest limitation observed by most respondents is the absence of organizations working at the interface between research evidence generation and policy-making across multiple sectors or countries, with enough capacity and leverage to exercise systemic influence over policy direction and content. Existing evidence networks either focus too widely – influencing policies across many development sectors across Africa – or too narrowly – influencing sector-specific policies in a single sector within a country. While focusing broadly across many sectors and several countries generates useful policy lessons, it nonetheless leads to spreading too thin to have meaningful impact at sector level. Focusing too narrowly on a single sector enables depth, but it limits cross-sectoral learning and building complementarities. Building coalitions amongst research organizations with specific sector expertise across several countries and leveraging on the institutional networks they have with governments and policy-makers has the potential for improving learning across a broader policy spectrum, strengthening synergies across related sectors in several countries, and enhancing efficiency in evidence production and utilization on a much wider scale. It has the potential to trigger systemic change, and for solving complex policy problems that straddle several sectors or national borders.

The evidence-to-policy landscape	
Linking research evidence-to-policy-making processes	• There is a mismatch between research evidence generation and use • Research in Africa is academically focused and not aligned to policy needs • There is no adequate interface between research generation and policy • Researchers are constrained by the policy bureaucratic processes
Trends in use of research evidence for policy processes	Use of research evidence will increase in coming decades because: • Of the presence of a more educated workforce • Citizens agitating for relevant policies • Upsurge of practitioners in the evidence space, an aspect that will attract more funding for research • Increasing caliber and breadth of good African institutions

The evidence-to-policy landscape	
Opportunities that exist in the evidence ecosystem	• Technocrats taking up positions of authority e.g. in Kenya • Some African governments are becoming more appreciative of the value of research evidence for their policy decisions • Increase in number of African research organizations producing good quality research evidence • Funders still interested in networks of organizations working at the interface between evidence production and evidence use in policy processes • Different government authorities and agencies that aspire to use evidence to develop policies

Table 6. Summary findings- The evidence-to-policy landscape

Evidence generation and use

The increase in the number of African research organizations and African researchers is yet to drastically change how research is funded and produced in Africa. Funding for research is largely dominated by major Northern funding bodies. To some extent, these organizations have their priorities and preferences in what they can fund or not. Consequently, what gets funded may not always reflect the priorities of African governments or policy-makers. Moreover, much of this research tends to be conducted without the involvement of policy-makers. The exception are cases where the help-desk approach is employed. In such cases, research priorities emanate from policy-makers, and the research question and the actual execution of research is done in close collaboration with policy and policy-maker.

In view of the mismatch between researchers' agenda and the priorities of police-makers, the majority of the respondents underscored the need for strengthening the producer-user interface. Respondents alluded to the need for co-creation of the research agenda. Some key questions were raised: how do we ensure governments have an increased opportunity to determine the research agenda? How best can researchers be embedded in the various government technical working groups? What are the implications of having policy-makers from government work as co-principal investigators in research? Can universities and governments develop clear linkages on doing research that is driven by policy needs?

Regarding quality and relevance of evidence generated, the respondents felt that quality is relative and people have different notions of what amounts to quality evidence. A generalized one-size-fits-all definition which is applicable across all contexts is impossible. Terminology such as relevance and evidence use face similar challenges – the definitions tend to be loaded with subjectivity in their interpretation and application. What really matters is how far researchers, policy-makers and decision-makers agree on the meanings they attach to quality, relevance, or evidence use, and whether or not the resulting policy outcomes merit the public resources spent on producing the evidence. It is also important to understand how to reconcile evidence generated by different players in the evidence field. For example: the spotlight, often driven by the media, will shine on one hot policy issue. Issues around quality, salience, relevance and value for money discussed above may not necessarily be considerations in what the media chooses

to publicize. Ensuring diversity in the types of evidence generated, the level of rigor invested in producing the evidence, and the extent to which it addresses salient public policy issues should be a major consideration. Moreover, ensuring that the amount of evidence available and the standards of quality attached to the evidence do not obfuscate policy-makers is similarly critical. The final consideration is ensuring that evidence remains accessible over the longer term and that lessons are learnt.

Capacity gaps exist on both sides of the policy divide. Producers of evidence need to better understand the needs of users of evidence, while also ensuring that rigor is employed in evidence production. The consequences of decisions made because the evidence was generated through faulty methodological design, and/or wrong inferences were made from research can be extremely costly, and may erode confidence in the quality of research being produced. On the user side, capacity gaps exist both at the individual and institutional levels. Few policy-makers combine training in public policy with a solid research background. Those trained in research might lack capacity in policy analysis. The much bigger challenge is at the institutional level. Most government departments lack an institutionalized culture of evidence use. It is common to find departments where the research function exists, but it is very thinly staffed and grossly under-resourced. There tends to be an exception where researchers or policy analysts transition from universities or research institutions into government. Such officials, if they join government at senior levels, tend to institute a culture of evidence based decision-making within their ministries, departments or units.

As highlighted above, research evidence utilization presents a mixed picture. In some governments, the trend points towards increased evidence use, even though it tends to be more localized in pockets within various sectors of the same government. However, compared to a few years ago, the advent of COVID-19 invariably increased evidence use because countries urgently needed to make policy and service delivery decisions most of which depended on evidence. That said, there is still a lack of synergy between researchers and policy-makers. A typical complaint by government officials is that researchers make little effort to engage policy-makers when identifying their research priorities, but they expect governments to make use of their research findings. Public officials not trained on policy analysis perceive policy-making as linear, even though in reality they acknowledge the complexity of the policy-making process. The disjuncture between how government officials perceive the process and how it actually works out in practice makes it hard for those outside the decision-making processes to intervene at critical points of the policy-making cycle. Additionally, the volatility of evidence is also a barrier to utilization. Evidence may be relevant today but obsolete tomorrow. This requires knowledge and skills on the part of policy-maker.

Evidence generation and use	
Gaps in utilization of research evidence, generated.	• Lack of producer-user interface • Evidence producers set the research agenda that is not necessarily driven or informed by policy needs. Funding by global north where the research ideas are conceived • Lack of co-creation of the research agenda • Failure of governments to determine the research agenda • Researchers not sitting on various government working groups • Government representatives not co-PIs • Lack of clear link between universities and governments on conducting policy oriented research
Quality and relevance of evidence	• Quality is relative and people have different definitions of quality evidence • Relevance is subjective to the different sectors and policy priorities • The main concern is how to define good evidence and how policy and decision-makers decide what is working and what isn't • How to reconcile evidence generated by different players in the evidence field • How to ensure that the diversity of evidence standards don't risk creating confusion among policy-makers and policy-maker • How to ensure that evidence remains accessible over the longer term and that lessons are learned given the enormous resources invested to generate it.
Capacity constraints	• Capacity building is necessary for both the producers and users of research evidence. • This is important because governance teams and structures keep changing with changing electoral cycles. • Capacity of policy-makers should be enhanced on priority policy needs and policy development processes. • Evidence producers, capacity building should focus on legislative and tailor-made research, as well as thinking through the Theories of Change.
Utilization of research evidence	• Countries and regions are at different levels of evidence utilization. • COVID-19 invariably increased evidence use because countries urgently needed to make policy and service delivery decisions most of which depended on evidence. • However, there is still a lack of synergy between researchers and policy-makers. • Governments feel that researchers do little to engage policy-makers when identifying their research priorities but they expect governments to make use of their research findings. • Complexity of policy-making is still not fully understood. • From the government's perspective, policy-making is linear. This makes it very difficult to use evidence effectively to inform policy decisions throughout the policy-making cycle. • The volatility of evidence is also a barrier to utilization. Evidence may be relevant today but obsolete tomorrow.

Table 7. Summary findings - Evidence generation and use

Need for an evidence-to-policy alliance

Discussions around the need for an Africa evidence alliance, and what value it would add elicited mixed reactions. Some of the interviewees were skeptical about what value the alliance might add, noting that several such evidence networks are already in existence, and that previous attempts at creating a similar entity floundered due to lack of interest and commitment. Some wondered whether the alliance would not be duplicating the work of existing evidence networks.

A large majority, however, felt that the existing gaps in the evidence-to-policy ecosystem would best be served by an alliance of established research organizations pooling their institutional strengths, and using this to leverage evidence generation and engagements with policy-makers. This was seen as efficient – isolated individual efforts at linking policy may succeed, but at a scale too small to have any meaningful systemic impact on policy outcomes. Besides, existing networks like the Africa Evidence Network (AEN) lack the requisite focus and specificity to be able to have any meaningful impact on policy outcomes.

The need for an evidence alliance is appreciated, but defining its precise value add remains elusive. Many feel a new evidence alliance's greatest value add would be to inject efficiencies in generating evidence, to expand the scope of evidence being used in policy processes, and to provide a learning platform for both generators of evidence, and those who use it. It could offer a convergence platform for epistemologically diverse research traditions to build complementarities across methodological orientations for tackling complex policy problems which require multi-disciplinary, or even trans-disciplinary approaches to solve. An alliance that enables the partners to draw on their institutional strengths, building synergies, and strengthening complementarities was seen as filling a major gap in the existing ecosystem. There is a generalized feeling that having a very broad mandate would dilute the alliance's effectiveness, but being too narrowly focused would also reduce the impact it could have on linking evidence-to-policy, and its impact on policy outcomes. Finding a balance in the midst of these competing, and, at times, diametrically opposed aspirations, remains the greatest challenge.

Many interviewed for this study cautioned that the evidence alliance should avoid the trap of being methods-centered, i.e. focused mainly on promoting certain ways of conducting research to the exclusion of other methods. It must also not crowd out existing organizations and networks already working in the evidence-to-policy ecosystem. The emphasis here is that the proposed alliance should be complementary, rather than focused on supplanting existing evidence networks. Moreover, the risk of the evidence alliance being elitist and exclusive was mentioned recurrently in conversations with respondents. For it to gain the trust and confidence of African policy-makers, the proposed evidence alliance must not be dominated by Northern research organizations.

There is no unanimity on which sectors or how broad the evidence alliance should cover. Preference seems to point to work on health, agriculture, and education, with in-built cross-cutting themes around gender and youth. Many ruled out broadening the scope of the Alliance to cover all of Africa, even though others opined that working through and with strong regional research organizations would obviate the need for the Alliance being present in each country or most countries on the continent. The preferred governance structure is that which is constituted by the heads of core organizations forming the alliance.

Some respondents proposed that at its establishment, the alliance should consider having a secretariat, a technical advisory board and governance board. The secretariat should ideally be hosted by one of the alliance partners, be kept lean, and should help the Alliance in both its technical and administrative operations. The idea of the Evidence Alliance being hosted by one of the core members is preferred because the Alliance can use existing operational structures and systems without necessarily having to develop these from scratch, which might take time and distract the Alliance from its mission. It was also felt that since many funders recognize the core partners and not the Alliance, it would be easier to fundraise for the Alliance within existing organizational structures, rather than through an entirely new entity which is unknown to major funders.

The technical advisory board would be responsible for resource mobilization and utilization while the governance board will have veto power to make financial and administrative decisions for the alliance. The board would provide general oversight and will also be the custodian of research funds. This could be tried for five years and reviewed. While considering the operations of the partners, it will be important to set up rules and practices for peer review and how the partners will learn from each other. Operationally, the alliance may focus on multi-country projects but with clear criteria on what makes sense.

Some of the risks to be avoided include lack of focus, the Evidence Alliance just being 'another talk-shop' and the fact that after investing so much time and effort in establishing an alliance, it may fail to pick up due to lack of funding, loss of interest by one or some of the core partners, or loss of inertia by the core partners.

Need for forming an evidence-to-policy alliance	
Value add	• A few respondents – forming an alliance not a priority because this would risk duplication of efforts • Instead, the focus should be on identifying gaps in the work of existing alliances and creating a platform for addressing them. • Majority of the respondents affirmed that there is value but cautioned against such an alliance being led by the global north organizations • Majority emphasized the need for a thorough review to identify gaps, strategies, focus and resources for the existing evidence-to-policy alliances • Proposed alliance will curve a niche and address issues that have not been addressed by the existing alliances. • Alliance partners will draw on each other's strengths especially when working on sectors. • Alliance partners will not set up offices in all countries and resources will therefore not be thinly distributed.
Areas of policy the alliance would be most useful	• Evidence generation, building synergies across sectors and countries, capacity strengthening for generators and users of evidence, and bolstering methodological complementarities across complex policy issues

Need for forming an evidence-to-policy alliance	
Governance structure	• The alliance should be non-profit making and should promote use of research evidence in the global south. • The alliance should consider having a secretariat, a technical board, a high level executive committee and governance board. • The secretariat will be responsible for the day to day operations of the alliance • the technical board will be responsible for convergence around trainings and knowledge management. • The high level technical committee will be responsible for resource mobilization and utilization • the governance board will have veto power to make financial and administrative decisions for the alliance including general oversight • This could be tried for five years and reviewed. • Set up rules and practices for peer review and how the partners will learn from each other.
Mistakes to avoid	• Failure to co-create policy priorities with relevant stakeholders • Failure to create dialogue platforms for sharing and learning with researchers and policy-makers • Leaving behind local researchers and institutions
Risks to watch out for	• Dominance of the global north institutions in the partnership • Competition for resources by partners • Unclear criteria for inclusivity and exclusivity especially for smaller local evidence and research organizations: question: "who will be in and who will be out?" • Limited financial resources- few funders care about alliances and collaborations. • Unclear resource mobilization mechanisms • Reversals in democratic governance. New administrations in some countries may not favor use of evidence in policy-making.

Table 8. Summary findings - Need for forming an evidence-to-policy alliance

SECTION III: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section pulls together the main conclusions from desk review and key informant interviews. It presents the authors' reflections on the evidence and what it implies for the proposed Africa Evidence Alliance. It ends by making recommendations on the possible structures the Alliance could adopt.

Summary of findings

The inescapable conclusion is that an evidence alliance is needed to bridge the existing gap in evidence-to-policy in Africa. Such an alliance needs to be focused, lean and efficient in its operations. From the analysis of the evidence from the review, the following broad conclusions can further be made:

1. The African policy landscape is diverse. It has a multiplicity of actors both within the evidence generation and evidence utilization domains. In the evidence generation sub-system, for instance, actors are spread across a broad spectrum of local researchers, think-tanks, international research organizations and consultants working for government, inter-governmental agencies, the private sector and civil society. These actors carry out research on national or multi-country policy issues, sector-based research and very confined issue-based research, i.e. malaria, youth unemployment, etc. The diversity of evidence generators is spread out across the continent. It is hard to generalize how far evidence is being used by specific countries, in particular sectors, or by a set of actors. Broad and general statements on the state of use of research evidence by countries or sectors in Africa are bound to be misleading. The discussion needs to focus more on general trends, and how far these can be seen as illustrative of practice in countries or particular sectors.

2. The available evidence points to an emergent trend in increasing acceptance and demand by African governments and policy-makers for credible, timely research evidence. Concomitant with this trend is a general mismatch between how the evidence that is produced is packaged and its timeliness, vis-à-vis the needs and priorities of policy-makers.

3. A major gap exists at the interface between evidence generation and evidence utilization in the policy process. The absence of strong, well-established knowledge/evidence brokers who can synthesize and amplify the research for the attention of policy-makers accentuates the problem. The role of policy entrepreneurs and evidence brokerage is often left to the media, with the potential that key policy messages or proposed policy solutions may be distorted.

4. On a more promising and positive note, there is an upsurge of African research organizations and African researchers generating evidence and seeking to link the evidence produced to policy processes. A major drawback is that these organizations rely on donor funding, which, of late, is declining and tends to be discretionary and short-term. This has spawned competition for funds. One of the unintended consequences of this is that it stifles institutional growth of African research organizations, curtails the breadth and scope of the research they can do, and severely erodes their capacity to engage over sustained periods of time with policy-makers. In sum, short term-funding and competition for available funds might lead to inefficiencies at the interface between evidence generation and evidence utilization.

5. The organizations with large resource bases typically engage for sustained periods of time with governments and policy-makers. Most of them have voice and clout, and do get the ear of key policy-maker in government. However, most of these tend to be Northern-based research organizations, or those funded by Northern-based grant making organizations. There is a high probability that the donor priorities and preferences filter through into the choice of issue areas for research, and at times, even into the preferred methodologies for evidence generation.

Recommendations

The authors proposed three options for consideration in the establishment of the the proposed Africa Evidence Alliance.

01 A facilitative and supportive institutional structure to drive linking of evidence into policy processes. The structure established will be lean, with potentially two or three more strong and well-established regional research organizations joining the existing (three) members of the consortium. The individual members constituting the proposed structure should bring to the alliance complementary institutional strengths, with good and extensive networks across sectors in more than one country in a sub-region, or across a number of countries. Ideally, these should be Africa-based research organizations or networks, from West Africa, Southern Africa or North Africa. The institutional structure should ideally be housed by one of the consortium partners, operate as a project or program in its initial phases and be staffed by a multi-disciplinary team of technical experts. The main focus of such an alliance would be strengthening the interface between research evidence generation and evidence utilization. It could commission and conduct research on a pertinent policy issue, support other African research organizations to conduct research on an area of interest, or either lead synthesis of research evidence, or support other organizations to synthesize research for use by policy-makers.

The alliance so formed would need to be proactive in its engagement with government. A model that seems to work is the help-desk, or joint commissioning and execution of research with policy-makers. The alliance can also facilitate intermediary organizations working at the interface of evidence and policy-making to be more effective in synthesizing complex or highly technical research evidence into formats that are utilizable in policy decision-making processes. In sum, such an alliance would be facilitative and supportive, working at building complementarities across the actions of several actors without duplicating or unnecessarily competing with other initiatives of its core partners, or other players in the evidence-to-policy ecosystem.

02 A fully-fledged autonomous institutional structure to link evidence-to-policy. Such an institutional structure would be registered in one or more countries in Africa, with possible regional representation across Africa's main regions. It would initially be dependent on the core partners constituting the alliance but eventually gain autonomy, and operate as an autonomous institutional structure. Such an institutional structure could enter into short and long term partnerships with other research organizations or research networks to push particular policy agenda, work with governments on joint research projects, and support universities and African research organizations to produce relevant, timely research in partnership with government or policy-makers. In its initial phases, it could have its board of directors drawn from the core partners, but as it becomes more autonomous, the governance structure could be broadened and made more decentralized.

03 A loose network of like-minded research organizations with cascading levels of membership. This institutional structure would probably have a core group of members, affiliates and general members. The institutional structure would enable drawing in large and diverse numbers of African research organizations, thereby ensuring that it is representative of the continent's diversity. Such an institutional structure would ensure inclusivity, allowing members who have weaker institutional networks or technical research capacity to benefit from stronger partners in the network. Its structure would allow members to work with other members on sector-based or regional research projects under the bigger institutional umbrella provided by the wider alliance. It would require setting up a lean secretariat for coordination purposes, and probably a hub or platform for members to share their experiences.

The options presented above are not the only ones available. They however represent possible institutional forms or structures for consideration. Aspects of the institutional structures are not mutually exclusive. They can be blended to form an ideal institutional structure for the proposed alliance.

In the deliberations subsequent to the production of the draft report, staff and senior management of the three organizations unanimously settled on Option 1. Most views expressed in the key informant interview conversations also tended to point towards Option 1. It seems to be the more suitable approach to take, given the landscape of the evidence-to-policy ecosystem in Africa, and the opportunities and inherent gaps within it.

The next section further explores Option 1 in terms of the governance structure, potential operational modalities, and programmatic focus.
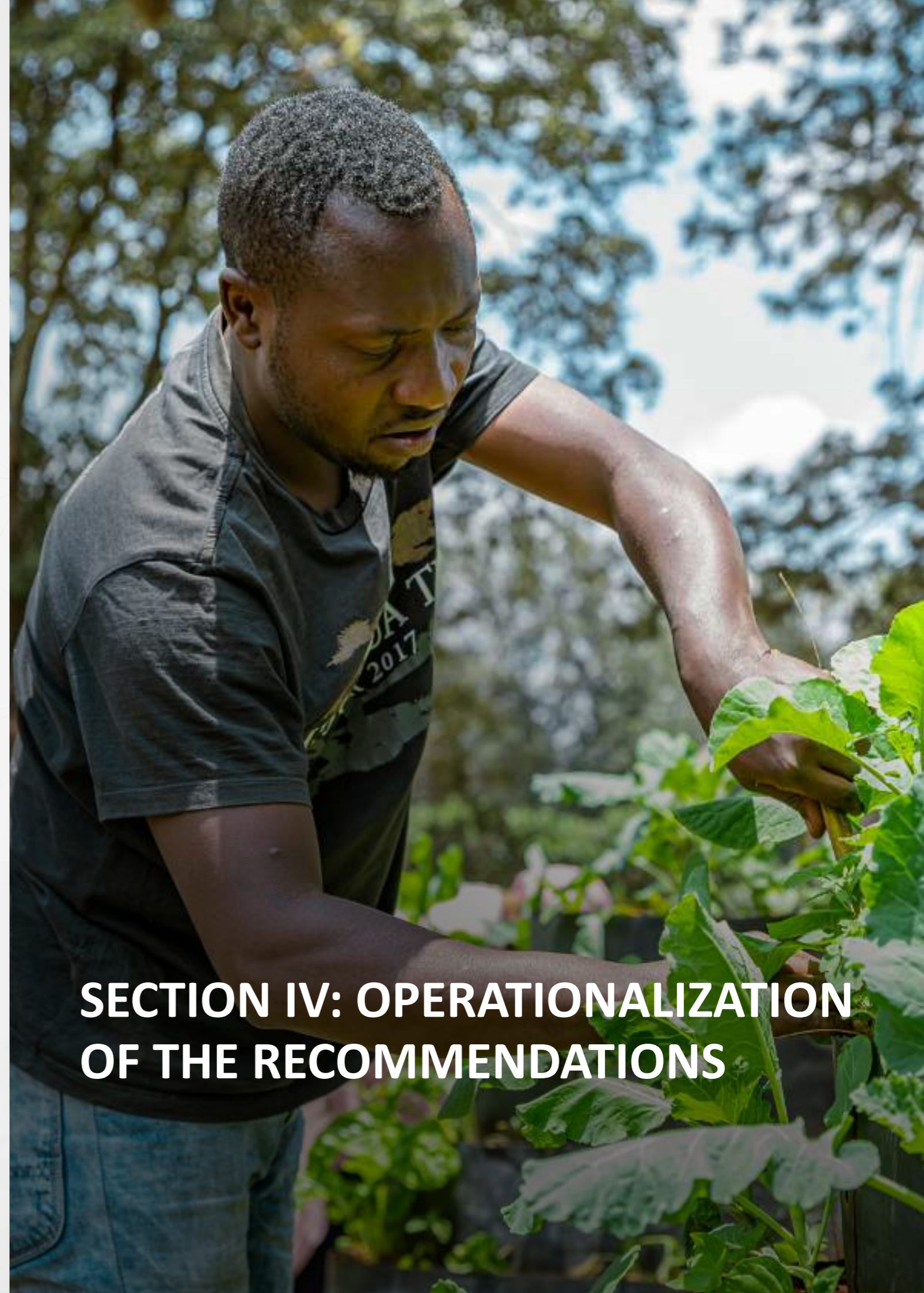
SECTION IV: OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Representatives from the alliance organizations (APHRC, IDinsight and 3ie) held a workshop from November 21st to 23rd 2022 to discuss the draft findings from the scoping study and consider options for the alliance. The key outputs from the workshop were a draft theory of change, proposed membership guidelines, options for a governance structure, and potential funding strategies. The Senior Leadership from the alliance organizations had a follow-up meeting to align on a clear way forward based on the outputs from the workshop. The following section provides an overview of the key elements that the alliance organizations have aligned on to operationalize the Evidence-to-Policy Alliance.
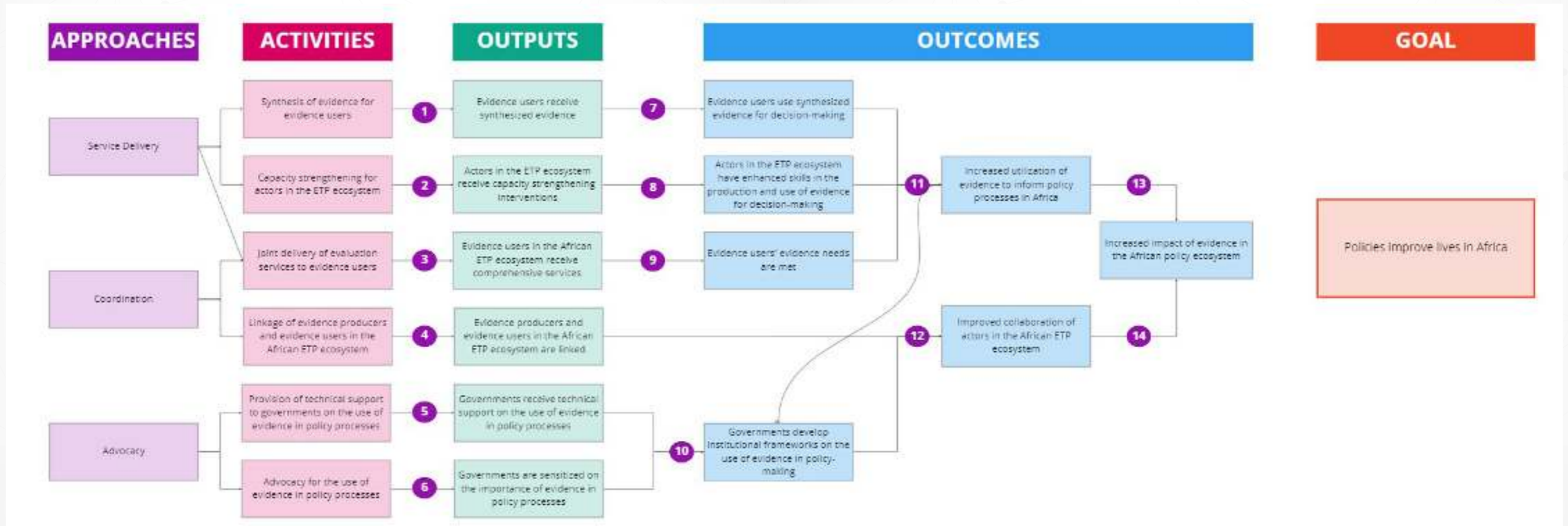
Theory of Change

The alliance organizations agreed that the main outcome and goal of the alliance will be to contribute to policy-makers developing a culture of evidence-use in policy-making, in order to ensure that policies improve lives in Africa. The theory of change (ToC) illustrated herein maps out all the activities, outputs, and outcomes the alliance needs to achieve the goal. The ToC will likely evolve over time as new evidence emerges and the assumptions are tested. However, for its inception phase, the alliance has aligned on the following approach to achieving its goal.

The alliance will implement two main categories of activities to achieve this goal. The first set of activities will focus on evidence production and synthesis services to policy-makers. This will include conducting process and impact evaluations on large programmes that are multi-country or multi-sector and where there is value in doing the evaluation jointly instead of individually. It will also include the provision of monitoring services, synthesis of evidence into actionable formats, and the delivery of capacity strengthening sessions on Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) to policy-makers.

The second set of activities will focus on the provision of technical support to governments to develop institutional frameworks for evidence use. This will include participating in government technical committees, co-hosting events with governments to foster a dialogue on the importance of having frameworks for evidence-based policy-making, and delivering capacity-strengthening workshops on developing institutional frameworks for evidence. The alliance will also disseminate findings and outputs from all the activities to actors in the ETP ecosystem, where possible.

These activities will ideally lead to policy-makers using evidence for decision-making, attaining and applying MEL skills, and developing and enforcing institutional frameworks for evidence use. This will lead to the development of a culture of evidence use in African governments, which will contribute to the overall goal of formulating policies that will improve lives in Africa.

APPROACHES | **ACTIVITIES** | **OUTPUTS** | **OUTCOMES** | **GOAL**

Service Delivery

Coordination

Advocacy

Synthesis of evidence for evidence users — 1 — Evidence users receive synthesized evidence — 7 — Evidence users use synthesized evidence for decision-making

Capacity strengthening for actors in the ETP ecosystem — 2 — Actors in the ETP ecosystem receive capacity strengthening interventions — 8 — Actors in the ETP ecosystem have enhanced skills in the production and use of evidence for decision-making

Joint delivery of evaluation services to evidence users — 3 — Evidence users in the African ETP ecosystem receive comprehensive services — 9 — Evidence users' evidence needs are met

Linkage of evidence producers and evidence users in the African ETP ecosystem — 4 — Evidence producers and evidence users in the African ETP ecosystem are linked

Provision of technical support to governments on the use of evidence in policy processes — 5 — Governments receive technical support on the use of evidence in policy processes

Advocacy for the use of evidence in policy processes — 6 — Governments are sensitized on the importance of evidence in policy processes

10 — Governments develop institutional frameworks on the use of evidence in policy-making

11 — Increased utilization of evidence to inform policy processes in Africa — 13

12 — Improved collaboration of actors in the African ETP ecosystem — 14

Increased impact of evidence in the African policy ecosystem

Policies improve lives in Africa

Membership Guidelines

The large number of stakeholders and potential members in the African ETP ecosystem indicates the importance of defining clear guidelines for the inclusion of new members in the alliance. During the inception phase, the alliance will have a lean structure (this is discussed further in the following section). With a lean structure, the new members of the alliance will ideally have competencies that compliment those of the existing alliance organizations. The alliance will determine these complementarities using the matrix in **Appendix 1**.

The identification of these complementarities will also help the alliance to identify priority sectors and services. In the first phase of its operationalization, the alliance will focus on areas in which members have a great deal of experience. Therefore, based on the matrix, the alliance will prioritize the following sectors (and potentially refine them based on funders' requirements):

- Poverty alleviation
- Food and nutrition
- Health
- Education
- Gender
- Water and Sanitation
- Agriculture

To build a robust partnership, the alliance will take the complementarities into account as well as ensure potential members are vetted along the following membership guidelines:

1. They are Africa-based with at least five years of experience in programming in Africa with projects in more than one African region OR more than three countries in a given region.
2. They work in at least three of the following sectors: poverty alleviation, food and nutrition, health, education, gender, water and sanitation, and agriculture.
3. They have expertise in specific scientific methods and approaches e.g systematic reviews, qualitative or quantitative research, or monitoring, evaluation and learning
4. They are willing to contribute financial and human resources to the alliance.

By applying these guidelines, the alliance will ensure the consistency and coherence among its members to nurture harmonious collaboration within the ETP ecosystem in Africa.

Governance Structure

The governance structure of the alliance needs to be in line with the level of integration of the members. It should facilitate the smooth and sustainable delivery of the activities listed in the ToC. The governance structure is not fixed and may evolve with the size and scope of the alliance.

In the first phase of its activities, the alliance will adopt a lean structure including:

- **A Board of Directors** composed of senior leadership from the member organization who will make strategic decisions for the alliance and will meet quarterly or bi-annually.
- **A Secretariat** composed of a Team Leader, Project Management Unit (PMU) and Human

Resource, Finance, and Communications teams. The Team Leader will work closely with the PMU. This Secretariat is in charge of the day-to-day activities of the alliance.

- **A Delivery Team** composed of staff from the member organizations who are called upon based on project needs. They will work under the leadership and coordination of the Secretariat. The staff are not engaged full-time but perform the network's tasks and activities as and when required to do so.
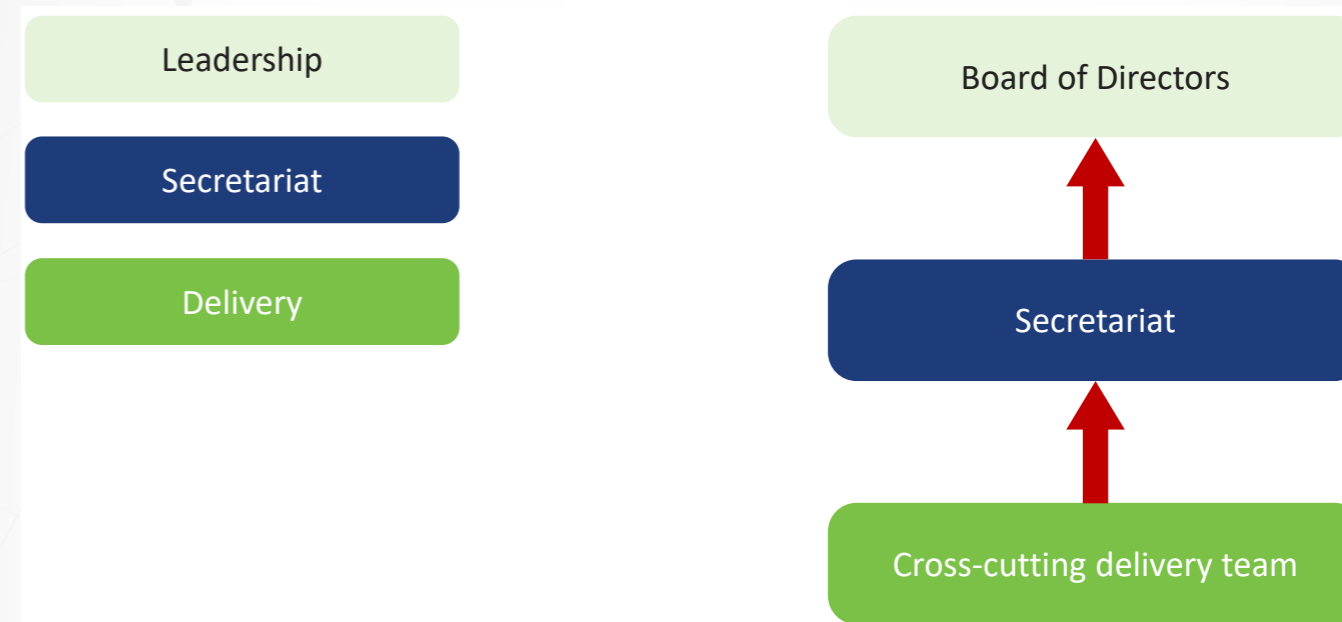
This lean structure may be a better fit for the early phases of a new and relatively small alliance. A lean alliance can eventually evolve into a more complex structure over time through the integration of programmatic leads that link the Secretariat to the delivery team(s), and/or a Board of advisors (see **Appendix 2** for detailed versions of the options considered).

In any governance model, the Secretariat is at the core of the activities of the alliance. Its role in the day-to-day operationalization and coordination of the activities of the alliance makes it the cornerstone of the alliance. It is then important to provide the right amount of technical and financial resources to the Secretariat to empower its team in their management role. We identify two forms of Secretariat:

1. *The Centralized Secretariat:* in this model, the Secretariat is hosted and managed through the lead organization of the programme. The staff would be drawn exclusively from the lead organisation and the Team Leader would either be a staff member of the lead organization or contracted through the lead organization.

2. *The Decentralized Secretariat:* in this preferred model , the Secretariat is hosted by one of the organizations but it is staff is drawn from all the members. In that sense, the roles of coordination, support (e.g. HR, Communications, Finance etc.), and Leadership can be shared between members contributing through their staff and the areas where they have more capacities.

In any of the forms of the Secretariat, the Team Leader will play an important role both in the collaboration between the members but also in the engagement with governments and institutional bodies.

Funding Strategy

All the aspects of the governance structure and the sustainability of the alliance depend on the amount of funding received by the alliance. Therefore, the senior leadership from the alliance organizations considered different scenarios into account in case that the alliance receives no funding, some funding, or is fully funded by external funders (see **Appendix 2** for detailed scenarios).

The alliance has agreed to develop and share a concept note to acquire external funding to pilot the evidence alliance. Once the concept note is shared with potential funders, all alliance activities will be paused until funding is secured. In the event that funding is not secured, the alliance members will decide whether or not to continue the project. However, if funding is secured, the alliance will proceed to the pilot phase to test the assumptions in the theory of change. New members will be required to make a financial contribution to join the alliance to fairly contribute to the scoping work done. If only partial funding is secured, all members will also invest their own funds to supplement the external funding.

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Appendix 1. Skills matrix

		APHRC	IDinsight	3ie	Consortium	Score
Alliance Programmatic Approaches	Provision of evidence production and synthesis services to policymakers	3	3	3	9	Very High
	Provision of technical support to governments (working groups, steering committees, etc.)	3	2	2	7	High
Technical capabilities	Impact Evaluation	2	3	3	8	High
	Process / Performance Evaluation	3	3	2	8	High
	Value for Money Evaluation / Cost-benefit analysis	3	1	2	6	Medium high
	Portfolio evaluations	2	1	2	5	Medium
	M&E system	3	3	1	7	High
	Monitoring	3	3	2	8	High
	Learning and evidence dissemination	3	2	3	8	High
	MEL Capacity building	3	3	3	9	Very High
	Political economy analysis	1	0	1	2	Low
	Policy review and knowledge analysis	3	3	3	9	Very High
	Needs assessments	3	3	0	6	Medium high
	Preference elicitation	1	3	0	4	Medium low
	Quick turnaround surveys	1	3	1	5	Medium
	Data science	3	3	2	8	High
	Synthesis of evidence	3	3	3	9	Very High
Geographic experience	North Africa	0	3	1	4	Medium low
	West Africa	3	3	2	8	High
	Southern Africa	3	3	2	8	High
	Central Africa	0	1	1	2	Low
	East Africa	3	3	1	7	High
	Local offices location	Nairobi, Dakar	Lusaka, Lilongwe, Nairobi, Dakar, Rabat	WACIE secretariat, Cotonou	N/A	#N/A
Policy & Advocacy	Consortium/Organisations' network management	3	1	1	5	Medium
	Network/Alliance development	3	2	0	5	Medium
	Organisation of regional/international conferences and events	3	1	3	7	High

		APHRC	IDinsight	3ie	Consortium	Score
Managerial experience	Grant management	3	0	3	6	Medium high
	Mobilisation of researcher and research assistant for the production of high-quality research	3	3	3	9	Very High
	Mobilisation and convening of national stakeholders (including government actors)	3	2	2	7	High
Sectoral experience	Poverty alleviation	3	3	3	9	Very High
	Food and nutrition	3	3	3	9	Very High
	Health	3	3	3	9	Very High
	Education	3	3	3	9	Very High
	Gender	3	3	3	9	Very High
	Water and sanitation	3	3	3	9	Very High
	Energy and environment	1	3	2	6	Medium high
	Business and trade	0	1	1	2	Low
	Industry and services development	0	1	1	2	Low
	Agriculture	2	3	3	8	High
	Urban development	3	1	1	5	Medium
	Governance and peace	0	1	3	4	Medium low

Appendix 2. Governance options and funding scenarios

Structure: ensuring efficiency and close collaboration of members

Depending on the level of integration of the alliance, the governance structure can take different forms:

Option #1 - The lean structure

The lean structure would comprise three groups within the alliance:

- The Board of Directors: takes the strategic decisions and meets quarterly or bi-annually

- The Secretariat: composed of a Team Leader with support from the HR, Finance, and Communications teams. The Team Leader works closely with a Project Management Unit for the whole alliance. This Secretariat is in charge of the day-to-day activities of the alliance.

- A Delivery Team: composed of staff from the member organizations and drawn on based on project needs. They work under the leadership and coordination of the Secretariat. The staff are not engaged full-time but perform the network's tasks and activities as and when required to do so.

This lean structure may be a better fit for the early phases of a new and relatively small alliance. A lean alliance can eventually evolve into a more complex structure over time.

Leadership

Secretariat

Delivery

Board of Directors
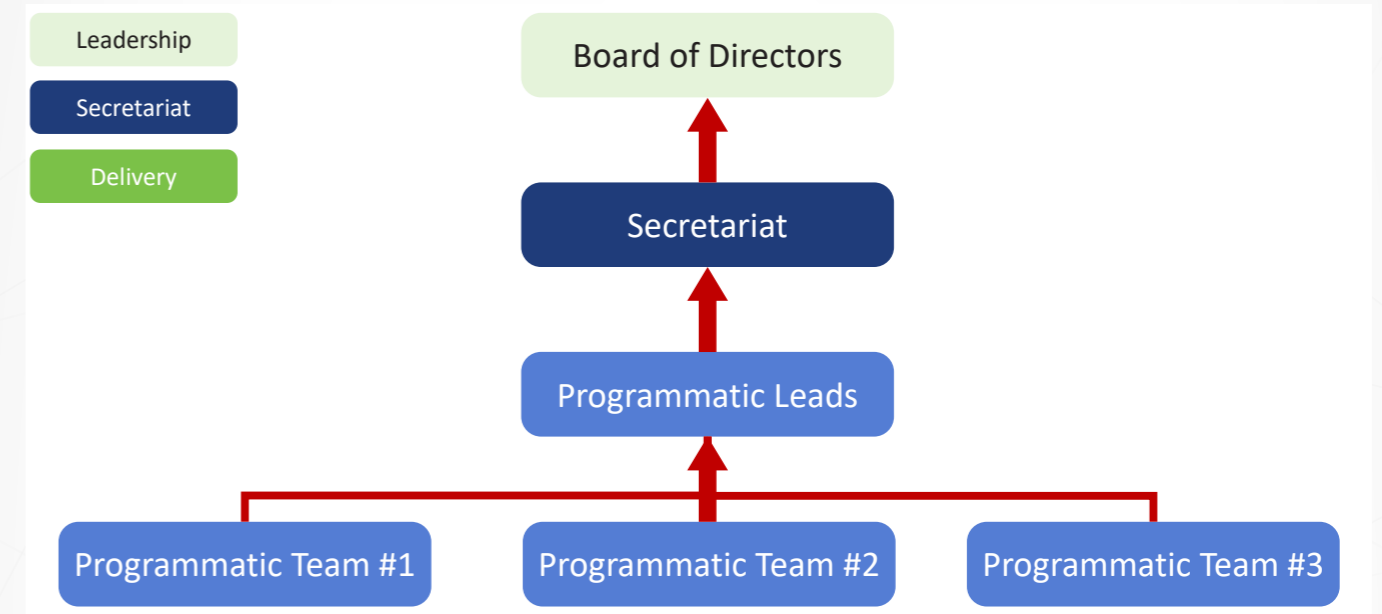
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Secretariat

↑

Cross-cutting delivery team
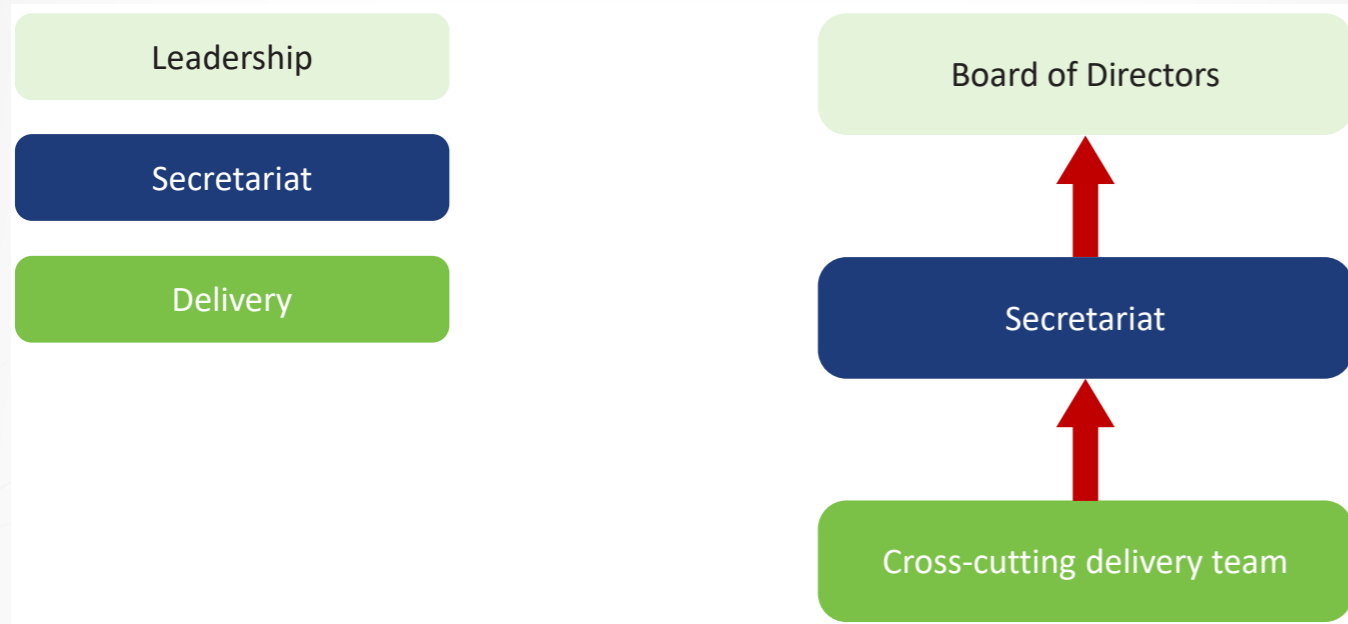
Option #2 - The integration of programmatic leads

The second option includes Programmatic Leads between the Secretariat and the Delivery Team. As the amount of work grows, the need for closer management of the Delivery Team might require the integration of Leads from the member organizations with a portfolio of work based on regions, methodologies, services or sectors. These Leads would then be full-time on the alliance and manage one or more portfolios drawing on the Delivery Team and being the interface between the Delivery Team and the secretariat.

Leadership

Secretariat

Delivery

Board of Directors

↑

Secretariat

↑

Programmatic Leads

↑

Cross-cutting delivery team
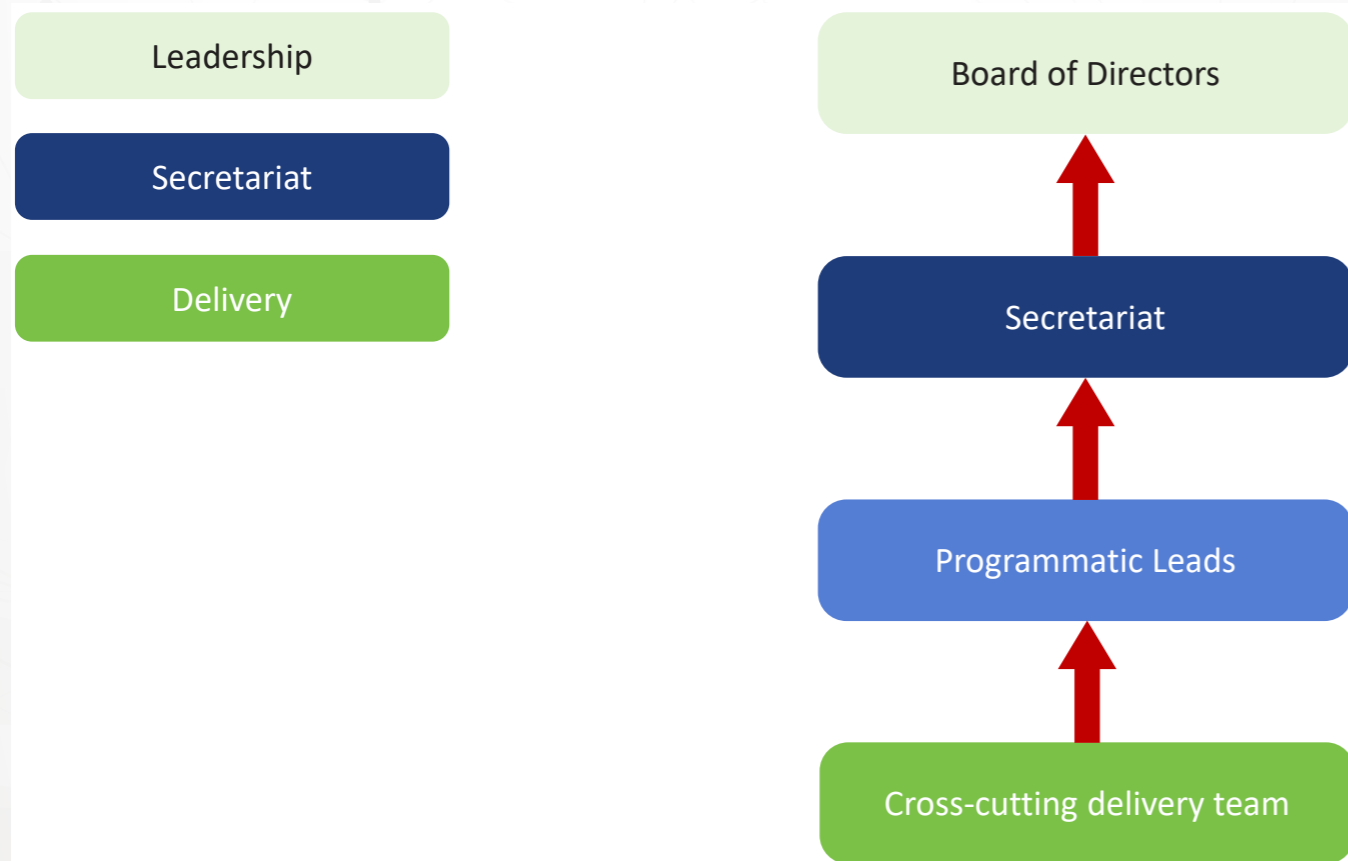
## Option #3 - The integration of programmatic teams

Once the alliance reaches a critical threshold, both in terms of staff and level of effort, dedicated teams to each Programmatic lead might facilitate the quick and quality delivery of the projects. Instead of a Delivery Team, the alliance might choose to organize the delivery 'function' into programmatic teams under the lead of each of the programmatic leads. Members of each team would then be full-time and might be involved in more than one Programmatic team.

Leadership

Secretariat

Delivery

Board of Directors

↑

Secretariat

↑

Programmatic Leads

↑

Programmatic Team #1   Programmatic Team #2   Programmatic Team #3

Option #4 - The integration of a Board of Advisors combined with cross-cutting teams (4.A) or programmatic teams (4.B)

To complement the work of the Board of Directors and the Secretariat and facilitate the engagement with the Africa ETP ecosystem, the alliance can choose to integrate an Advisory board both in the Delivery Team (A) or dedicated Delivery Teams (B) options. This Advisory Board can include users, producers or funders of evidence and support the work of the Board of Directors and Secretariat by providing expertise in specific areas of work of the alliance.

Board of Directors ◄┈┈┈► Board of Advisors

↑

Secretariat

↑

Programmatic Leads

↑

Cross-cutting delivery team

Leadership

Secretariat

Delivery
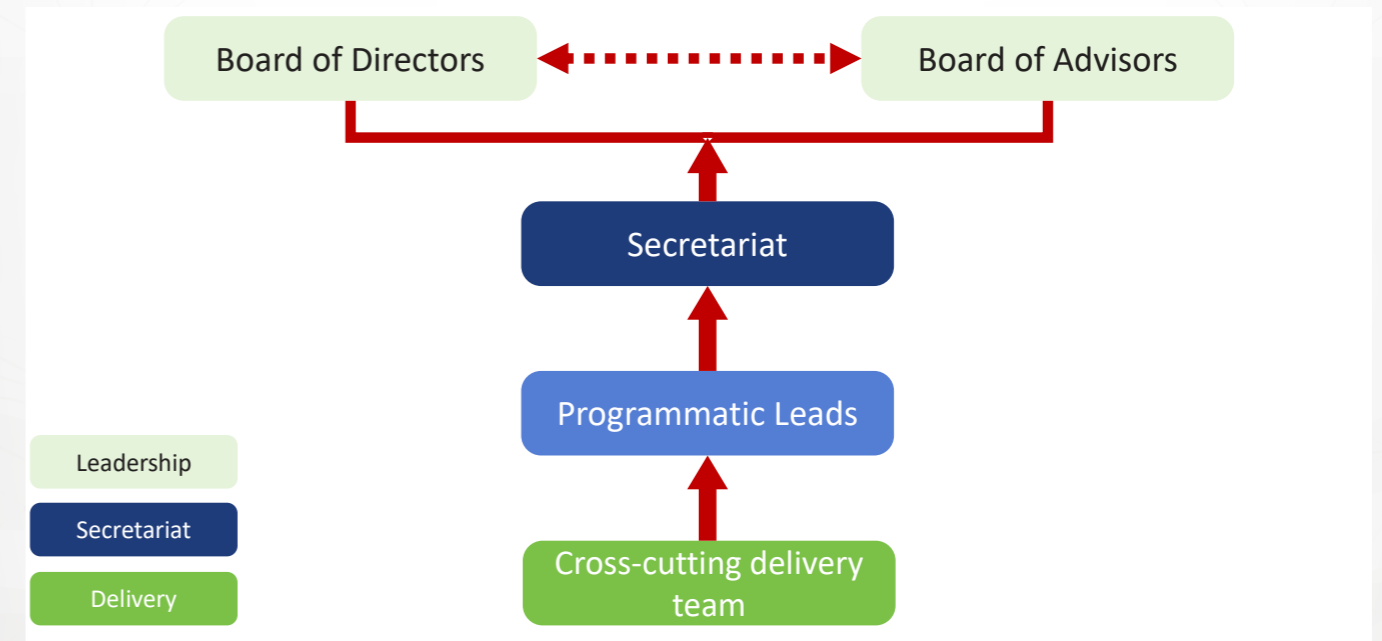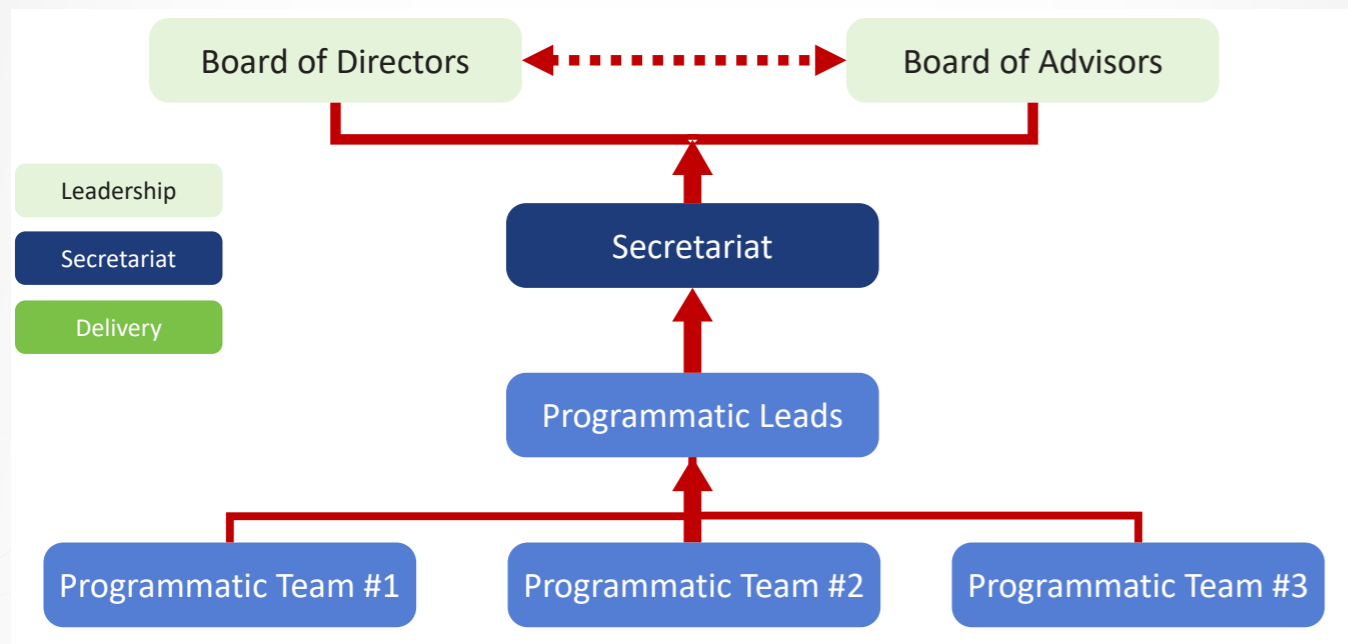
Funding: diversifying the sources of funding to ensure a sustainable model

Lastly, all the aspects of the governance structure depend on the amount of funding received by the alliance. It is therefore important to take different scenarios into account.

Scenario #1 - Absence of funding

The alliance must consider a case scenario where it fails to get funding in the short term. This absence of funding can be caused by the unavailability of funding and/or the lack of interest by funders in the activities of the alliance. In either case, the absence of funding will require the members to make a strategic decision to either drop the project due to lack of initial buy-in, pause it until more funding is available, or fund it internally. In the last scenario, the only viable governance structure would be the lean one.

Scenario #2 - Part funding

A second scenario is the one where the alliance only gets part of the funding needed, for example where the donor agrees to 80% leaving 20% to be funded through internal resources. This can also be due to the total amount of funding from one or multiple funders not being enough to cover the full budget. In either case, attaining partial funding will require the members to make a strategic decision to either fund the gap internally or search for additional sources of external funding. In this scenario, we recommended a lean governance structure that can later be expanded into a fully-fledged or evolving governance structure, including programmatic leads, depending on the amount of funding secured.

Scenario #3 - Full funding

A third, and preferred scenario, is where the alliance gets external funding for the full scope of the network. In this scenario, the focus of the strategic decision-making will be on the source and targeting of funding; the alliance can get all the funding from one or multiple donors for core

support, or the alliance can mix core and project funding to ensure the sustainability of its model.

Cross-cutting scenario - Organizations' commitment

Irrespective of the funding scenario encountered by the alliance, organizations' resource commitment in the standstill period will require a strategic decision. We define the standstill period as the period between the submission of the first proposal to the funder for phase 1 and their response regarding additional funding. In this period, the alliance will not benefit from any external funding and can make the decision to use internal funds and resources to keep the activities running. A series of options are available:

- Pause activities after submission of the proposal to NVF: no activities are to be performed by the team until NVF provides a response on additional funding.

- Pause activities after the development of a shareable concept note to be submitted to other sources of funding: this would represent about 2 days of staff time from each organization over the month of January for additional fundraising activities.

- Pause after completion of the inception stage of phase 2: during this inception stage, additional research, operationalization of the governance structure, and selection of pilot projects will be undertaken. They will require more substantial resources to continue the activities of operationalization of the alliance.