



Ghana: Building Skills and Knowledge in Evidence-Informed Policymaking

Can evidence-informed policymaking (EIP) training help civil servants overcome barriers to using evidence and data in decision making?

KEY POINTS

- Ghana's EIP training program seems to have had a positive residual impact on individual civil service personnel who participated between 2013 and 2016. However, individuals still face institutional barriers to using data and evidence to inform programs and practices.
- There were both direct and indirect impacts from the EIP training that have contributed to knowledge and skill building among colleagues and peers. Mandatory action plans included in the EIP training process required trainees to collaborate with colleagues in their respective ministries, creating an opportunity for them to sensitize their colleagues to the importance of using data and evidence. Trainees also reported that they briefed managers and colleagues about what they learned and drafted formal write-ups on the course.
- The EIP training also fostered the development of informal networks of contacts across national offices involved in evidence production and use. One group of trainees formed a WhatsApp group to keep in touch with one another after the training program ended and reported that they used the group to share information and invite networking and collaboration.

Background

From 2013 to 2016, the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS) and Ghana's national Civil Service Training Center (CSTC) partnered on the piloting and launch of an EIP training program, supported through the VakaYiko Consortium led by the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP), a UK-based NGO.¹

GINKS, the CSTC, and INASP collaboratively developed the training program's curriculum and overall approach, targeted primarily to midlevel civil servants. As different modules of the training program were developed, they were piloted and refined based on feedback from trainers administering the course and trainees enrolled in the program. From the outset the program has had strong commitment and buy-in from the Office of the Head of Civil Service (OHCS), including the highest-level leadership.

The VakaYiko partnership came to an end in October 2016, and the training program is now owned and led by the CSTC. GINKS and the CSTC maintain a strong relationship centered on the EIP training program, although there is no ongoing funding for engagement between them. The most recent EIP training, and the first course conducted after the conclusion of the VakaYiko project, was held in June 2017.

1. The [VakaYiko Consortium](#) was a three-year UKAID-funded project under the B-CURE (Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence) initiative, aimed at strengthening the ability of government actors to utilize evidence and data in their work. Consortium members were GINKS, [Zimbabwe Evidence Informed Policy Making Network \(ZeipNET\)](#), the [Human Sciences Research Council \(HSRC\)](#), the [Overseas Development Institute \(ODI\)](#), the [Parliament of Uganda](#), and [INASP](#). VakaYiko supported the development of the EIP training materials used in Ghana and other countries.

As of the end of 2016, ninety-three civil servants from twenty-seven ministries, departments, and agencies have completed the EIP training program. Trainees interviewed for this case study said that they left with a better understanding of the policymaking process and how evidence can be used to inform policy and programs. They also reported that they acquired specific practical skills, including how to assess the credibility of data, write policy briefs, and use data visualization techniques. In addition to gaining knowledge and skills, they built new networks and relationships with trainees from other ministries.

GHANA'S CIVIL SERVICE TRAINING

Ghana's national civil service, which has approximately 14,000 members, is designed to produce and promote excellent generalists. Most civil servants are recruited and trained centrally through the Office of the Head of the Civil Service. Notably, civil servants can be moved to a new position every four years, either between functional offices and roles within the same ministry, or to new ministries. As a result, an individual with an administrative role one year could be analyzing evidence the next year in a different ministry.

The CSTC provides both mandatory and voluntary training programs for all civil servants. Training is funded through course fees paid by the attending civil servant's home office. However, the challenge of limited funding has made it difficult for most ministries to fully utilize the CSTC opportunities.

EIP Training Program Overview

The EIP training consists of four modules: (1) an introduction to evidence-informed policy, (2) evidence search strategies, (3) how to assess evidence for rigor and reliability, and (4) how to communicate findings. Courses are held at the CSTC offices in Accra and led by trainers who first participated in a training of trainers program designed to give them background on EIP concepts. Typically, the trainers are adjuncts with full-time roles in the civil service, prior teaching experience, and an interest in EIP. There are approximately twenty-five students per class, usually from different ministries. Participants are not given an incentive to participate, outside of the general recognition that comes from completing an optional training program.

All four modules integrate a practical component by requiring participants to integrate what they've learned into an action plan, which they complete at the end of the program. Action plans are then reviewed by the trainers and shared with supervisors and colleagues upon their return to work, checking primarily on the feasibility of implementation. The action plans generated by the participants typically focused on weak data collection and storage systems, technical problems (such as Internet access), and staff capacity issues. Trainees were counseled to try to identify solutions that did not require additional funding to ensure the successful implementation of their plans.

THE EIP TRAINING TOOLKIT

The VakaYiko Evidence-Informed Policy Making Toolkit is a free suite of adaptable resources created to support civil servants and parliamentary staff in using evidence in policymaking in developing countries.

The toolkit is available for download at: <http://www.inasp.info/en/training-resources/courses/229/>

Trainers expressed their belief that it is important to focus on those civil servants who are working in research, monitoring and evaluation, information management, or statistics roles within ministries. But because civil servants are regularly rotated, the Office of the Head of the Civil Service did not necessarily see current placement in one of these offices as a prerequisite to attending the EIP course. This reflects a perception of EIP as a key skill set for all civil servants, not just those in specific roles. Indeed, some attendees with logistics, procurement, or administrative roles participated and reported positively about the benefits of the course, as did their colleagues in direct research or data-related positions.

IMPACT—BUILDING A RESOURCE LIBRARY

A trainee in a line ministry with research, monitoring, and information management responsibilities identified poor access to research as a key constraint for use of evidence among her colleagues. She returned to her office after the EIP training with the goal of establishing a resource library on relevant topics. She created a list of desired materials, including reports, policy briefs, published tables, and journals, as well as potential sources. The civil servant had the active support of her supervisors for these activities; nonetheless, she pointed out that it was her own motivation and desire to create this library that spurred her to action despite challenges.

While the civil servant was able to acquire library space and to source and organize some materials, limited funding made it challenging to obtain as many materials as she had originally envisioned. The trainee has since been promoted to an office in another ministry and is unsure about her project's long-term outlook.

Program Challenges

While EIP training in Ghana offers many advantages to civil servants, it also has several limitations in its current form.

Limitations in skill building. A short-term EIP training program is helpful for introducing key EIP concepts and tools, such as data visualization to civil servants, but it does not meet the need for acquiring broader technical and analytical skills. One course trainer reported that while the skills taught in the course are helpful, the recruitment of skilled staff with critical thinking, decision-making, and analytical skills remains a challenge.

Balancing time spent on course modules. The EIP training must balance the need to cover the full course curriculum within a limited time frame against the cost in time and resources required for attendees to participate. Trainers shared that elements of some course modules, such as developing a policy brief, were particularly challenging and time-consuming for trainees. Even when the policy brief activity was changed from an individual to a group assignment, trainers noted that they were still short on time for the data visualization component of the final module on communicating evidence, which multiple trainees cited as providing a highly valuable skill set for their EIP work.

Institutional Challenges

Trainees also reported challenges related to wider norms and practices around evidence use in their ministries.

Funding and demand. Within the CSTC, established training programs tend to remain part of the registry of available courses. This helps to ensure the continuity of programs. However, as with other voluntary courses, if demand is low, a course may not be held. The actual teaching of a course then depends on both demand from civil servants and available financial resources from sponsoring ministries who can send them. While ministries do have budgeted resources for staff to attend this type of training, they are limited, and it can be a challenge to secure funding for a voluntary training program.

Organizational capacity. Interviews with civil servants, researchers, civil society organization leaders, and policymakers suggest that access to accurate and timely data from civil service actors is an ongoing challenge. Individuals in research or analytic roles report that data requests are best done informally. Specifically, past EIP trainees spoke about challenges such as poor Internet connectivity and a lack of computers and scanners. Academic and government researchers reported they sometimes receive quantitative data in hard copy with preformatted tables. This created a challenge for further analysis and the need, at times, to physically collect data using USBs in order to manipulate the data and share it.

Lack of support from leadership. Interviews with trainees suggested they had mixed levels of support from their ministries for implementing action plans and, more generally, for applying their EIP training in day-to-day activities. The culture of data and evidence use varies from ministry to ministry. Trainees agreed that support from leadership was as important as their own personal motivation to being more data- and evidence-driven. For this reason, the CSTC subsequently looked to target management staff specifically for the EIP training. Trying to balance the need to sensitize managers and the need to train implementing staff will remain a challenge for the program in the future.

IMPACT—REFORMING PROCESSES

One trainee responsible for the creation of an annual report on her ministry's activities across a wide range of functions had previously faced challenges in acquiring information in a timely manner. Compiling the information on deadline required a multitude of different actors complying with information requests.

After completing the EIP course, the trainee redesigned the evidence collection materials and spoke to supervisors about how to improve understanding of her office's needs. With the support of supervisors, she was able to bring different information providers together to discuss common expectations and improve the data collection process for the report.

Reflections and Opportunities

Depending on demand for and the availability of EIP training, the CSTC is evaluating new approaches to creating institutional change and enhancing impact. For trainees to effectively put their EIP knowledge to use, they need a combination of support from senior leadership and basic organizational capacity, such as access to data and Internet connectivity. The free and open availability of the VakaYiko training materials creates opportunity for the adaptation of this program to other contexts and for similar initiatives to learn from the CSTC's experiences. The CSTC could make the following modifications to improve long-term impact and achieve systemic change across government:

- **Targeted selection processes.** The CSTC is now evaluating whether to select participants ministry by ministry, rather than across multiple ministries at once. This could help build a cohort of evidence practitioners in each ministry who can work collaboratively to strengthen organizational and institutional capacity and create systemic change in individual offices more rapidly.
- **Collaboration for broader outreach.** INASP and GINKS partnered with the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA), a leading public policy school and think tank, to pilot a shorter, condensed version of the EIP course from September 2016 to March 2017. The CSTC could explore opportunities for future collaboration with GIMPA, as well as other institutions, to integrate EIP skill sets with traditional academic programs and disseminate practical “how to” concepts to a broader audience of current and future civil servants.
- **Embedding EIP training into the existing scheme of service training programs.**² The CSTC has also begun to absorb EIP content into the mandatory scheme of service training programs. In training in April 2017, three full days (out of ten) were dedicated to EIP content. This was a change from previous sessions in which select modules were incorporated depending on the topic being discussed. As there has been little demand to date for a dedicated EIP course, this could be a sustainable way to offer the course and to build a culture of evidence use in the wider civil service more rapidly. The CSTC has indicated that the next scheme of service training will devote five of the ten course days to EIP training that covers all four modules.

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2. *Scheme* is the term used in Ghana to refer to the different employment levels in the civil service and the different training programs that are available to civil servants depending on where they are in their career path.

For more information, please see <http://results4america.org/our-work/results-for-all/>.

Further Reading

CSTC: <http://cstc.gov.gh/>

VakaYiko Lessons Learned report http://www.inasp.info/uploads/filer_public/63/97/6397dfb9-5003-4fe4-8603-f0ef6f758415/vy_impact_report-digital.pdf (see pp. 22–24)

For VakaYiko independent external evaluation, including reflections on learning around training for evidence use, see reports at <http://www.itad.com/knowledge-and-resources/bcure/>