Evidence-informed decision-making landscape map for Parliament of Malawi

Ms. Velia Manyonga

2016

This map is part of a series of maps on the evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) landscapes in different countries in Africa. The series comprises 25 maps and is available from the Africa Evidence Network. This is map 12 in the series. Maps were produced as part of the bursary conditions for attendance at Evidence 2016 (http://evidenceconference.org.za/). Bursaries were provided as part of the UJ-BCURE programme, funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID).

Suggested citation: Manyonga, V. 2016. Evidence-informed decision-making landscape map for Parliament of Malawi. AEN EIDM Landscape Mapping Series No 12. Johannesburg: Africa Evidence Network (AEN) https://www.africaevidencenetwork.org/resources/landscape-maps/

Africa Evidence Network

Strengthening Evidence-Informed Decision-Making in Africa

www.africaevidencenetwork.org

PROPOSED EVIDENCE INFORMED DECISION MAKING LANDSCAPE MAP FOR PARLIAMENT OF MALAWI

SECTION 1: OVERVIEW OF THE MAP

1. **What country / sector / area of work your map relates to.**
The proposed Evidence Informed Decision Making (EIDM) is for Parliament of Malawi. This is a governance sector responsible for carrying out legislative, oversight and representative roles. Parliament of Malawi has 193 Members of Parliament who belong to 21 Parliamentary Committees. These committees analyze policy issues, scrutinize the work and expenditure of the government and examine proposals for primary and secondary legislation.

2. **An overview of who the main role players are in the EIDM landscape (please explain acronyms used in the map in full).**
The main role players in this landscape are the Members of Parliament (MPs). These MPs require evidence when working both in the Parliamentary Committees and the Parliament House debates. The committees perform some tasks which would not be possible to undertake in the large and formal environment of the House Chamber. They require evidence to find out the facts of a case or issue; gather evidence from expert groups or individuals; sift evidence and drawing up conclusions. Each parliamentary committee has its own defined area of operation. This enable it to specialize and build up a body of expertise among its members.

3. **What gaps exist in the EIDM landscape (i.e. what type of organizations/initiatives are currently missing)?**
The MPs come from different academic backgrounds and have busy work schedule. Sometimes, they lack technical skills to access, appraise, synthesize and to apply the evidence for decision making during parliamentary committee and House debate. Despite this, MPs are expected to debate on policy issues or make decision on issues different from their academic background. Lack of these technical skills has resulted in legislations and policies of insufficient quality that fail to address problems or achieve policy objectives.

4. **Are there bottlenecks or organizational silos that impede the flow of evidence through the system?**
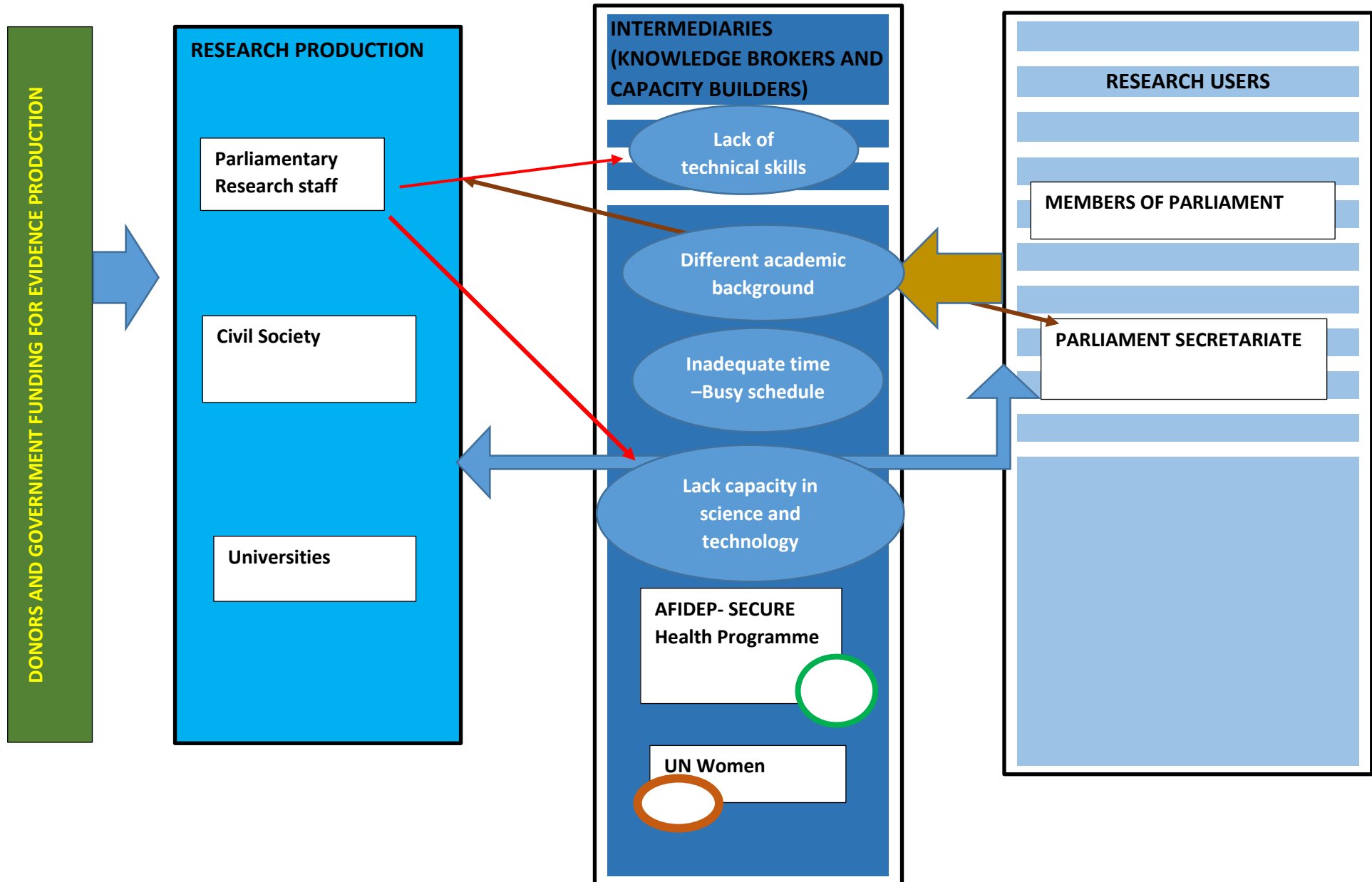Currently, Parliament of Malawi face a number of bottlenecks in the use of EIDM among MPs. The research staff have limited access to information on science and technology and overall parliamentary databases. This makes them face challenges to address a broad range of scientific topics in their work when providing evidence to MPs. This challenge can be addressed by creating a strong linkage between the think tanks (Universities) as sources of scientific evidence to Members of Parliament.

5. **What best characterizes the relationship between research producers and users in your country/the sector you are describing (e.g. distinct groups; co-producers of knowledge; etc.)?**
The producers of research evidence are the parliamentary staff, civil society and university think tanks. They generate evidence to assist inquiries by MPs for legislation and policy making. The users of research are the MPs who need to be well informed and having up to date information to debate the great range of legislations and other policy issues effectively and represent their constituents in Parliament.

The relationship that exist between the research producers and the MPs tend to be stronger and more visible in areas that require quantitative data and analyses such as national budget and its implications on the constituents. For other topics, it is the parliamentary researchers and civil society that engage the MPs. It should be noted that the MPs' personal motivations, such as the desire for political advancement to influence policy for power in a legislative body and for private gain sometimes affect use evidence in the policy process.
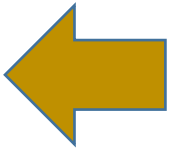
SECTION 2: PROPOSED PARLIAMENT OF MALAWI EVIDENCE-INFORMED DECISION-MAKING LANDSCAPE

DONORS AND GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR EVIDENCE PRODUCTION

RESEARCH PRODUCTION

- Parliamentary Research staff
- Civil Society
- Universities

INTERMEDIARIES (KNOWLEDGE BROKERS AND CAPACITY BUILDERS)

- Lack of technical skills
- Different academic background
- Inadequate time –Busy schedule
- Lack capacity in science and technology
- AFIDEP- SECURE Health Programme
- UN Women

RESEARCH USERS

- MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT
- PARLIAMENT SECRETARIATE

KEY

- MPs demand evidence   and for quantitative analysis.
- The Civil Society engage the MPS

- MPs lack technical skills due to different academic background
- MPs lack capacity in science and technology
- MPs have inadequate time due to busy work schedule

- Parliamentary researchers also support Parliament Secretariat e.g Committee Clerks in the use of evidence

- Parliamentary staff also lack capacity in science and technology

- Role player that engages in EIDM capacity-building

- A community of practice to support EIDM

SECTION 3: CONCLUSION (1 PAGE)

1. **What type of intervention/support would the system most benefit from?**
   The type of support that Parliament of Malawi would benefit is the creation of the strong linkage between parliament and the use of think tanks (universities) as sources of evidence to Members of Parliament. Currently, the university appear before Parliamentary Committees upon being invited by the MPs to give them evidence. The universities do not initiate to give evidence to the MPs. Creation of the network that would encourage the think tanks (universities) to engage parliament whenever new evidence is required.

2. **Comment on how your map relates to the three themes of the Evidence 2016 conference: engage, understand, impact.**
   The proposed Parliament of Malawi evidence informed decisions making landscape is predicated on the assumption that if the research production (civil society, universities and parliamentary staff) are engaging Members of Parliament, MPs would demand and use evidence during any legislation and policy making. This would result in evidence informed legislations and policies.

   Understanding the importance of the use of evidence both between the MPs and the research production players would help the research production players to synthesize the information that would be easily absorbed and used by the MPs. When MPs easily access and synthesize the evidence, they will use it during the house debate and parliamentary Committees.

   Increased engagement between the MPs and the research production players would capacitate the MPs in the use of evidence. This would result in quality evidence based legislations and policies.

3. **Do you think that there are aspects of the engagement described in your map that works well and has potential to be upscaled?**

   Yes. The engagement in terms of capacity building currently provided by the AFIDEP-SECURE Health Programme to both MPs and parliamentary staff if continued presents an opportunity to increase uptake of evidence among MPs. Currently, the AFIDEP-SECURE Health Programme is building capacity of MPs and staff on how they can access, appraise, synthesize and use evidence available when making decisions. This capacity building has been inform of trainings and attachments to other parliaments to learn how other MPs use evidence in parliamentary committees and House debate.

   This capacity building support has the potential of being scaled up if AFIDEP-SECURE Health Programme assist parliament in the creation of a strong network among MPs and think tanks from all reputable universities in Malawi. The Programme should also assist Parliament of Malawi to easily access parliamentary databases.

4. **Is there a creative metaphor to describe the overall EIDM system (e.g. evidence eco-system/jungle; research to policy highway etc.)?**
   Yes
   Parliament Evidence Web