



**AFRICA CABINET  
GOVERNMENT  
NETWORK**

## **ROUNDTABLE WORKSHOP FOR AFRICAN CABINET SECRETARIES**

**SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Addis Ababa, 3-7 February 2014**



## Acknowledgements

As stated in the workshop Communiqué, the Africa Cabinet Government Network is most grateful for the support it is receiving from the UK Department for International Development's Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence (BCURE) programme.

We also thank the team from Adam Smith International which organised the workshop so effectively. We specifically acknowledge the work of Ms Julian Walker, who was the rapporteur for the workshop and prepared this report.

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## Executive Summary

This document reports the proceedings of a roundtable workshop for African Cabinet Secretaries held at the Hilton Hotel, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> February 2014.

The workshop was motivated by the principle that “A man who has never travelled thinks his mother is the best cook” – that exchanges of experience can provide valuable lessons. And the experience of delegates was that, notwithstanding differences in systems of government, there was enough commonality of experience to make peer exchange a valuable means of supporting improved Cabinet processes in Africa.

The workshop examined the role of evidence in Cabinet decision-making and ways of facilitating Cabinet decisions to ensure they are informed by evidence. Delegates looked at the roles of Cabinet Secretary and Cabinet secretariat and at how to support good working relationships with Ministers. They examined the role Cabinet Secretariats can play in promoting evidence-informed policy making across government and in building policy-making capacity in line Ministries.

The workshop also included the inaugural annual meeting of the African Cabinet Government Network (ACGN) and established the Council of African Cabinet Secretaries. The ACGN is an organisation to provide formal and informal opportunities for collaboration, mutual support and the sharing of practical experiences across African Cabinet Secretariats.

The presentations and papers submitted to the workshop are published on the ACGN website at [www.CabinetGovernment.net/documents-addis-ababa.php](http://www.CabinetGovernment.net/documents-addis-ababa.php).

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Discussions in Addis Ababa were conducted under the Chatham House rule<sup>1</sup> so none of the speakers is identified in this report by name. However, all those who made presentations have agreed to publication of their presentations, so in some cases this report includes examples or arguments taken from a presentation and makes clear its source. In all other cases quotations are non-attributed.

This report is intended to provide delegates with a record of their discussions and agreements. It is also for individuals who were not present at the meeting – especially African Cabinet Secretaries and secretariats – to share the learning that took place and encourage wide attendance at future meetings.

For more information on the workshop and the ACGN, please go to [www.CabinetGovernment.net](http://www.CabinetGovernment.net).

The workshop was developed and delivered by the ACGN in partnership with Adam Smith International with funding from the UK under the Department for International Development (DFID)'s Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence (BCURE) programme.

In a short welcoming speech from a representative of the government of Ethiopia, delegates were reminded of the positive changes taking place across Africa. From being dubbed the “hopeless continent” in former decades, it was now the “rising continent” – with 6 of the 10 fastest growing economies in the past decade being in Africa<sup>2</sup>. In this context, it was vital that governments were effective in making the right decisions, and following these decisions through to implementation.

This report begins with the Communiqué agreed by the participants, which formalises the ACGN, establishes the Council of African Cabinet Secretaries and affirms their commitment to evidence-informed decision-making. The report then outlines the key points presented, agreed and/or discussed at the workshop.

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<sup>1</sup>The Chatham House Rule: Participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.

<sup>2</sup> Economist, December 2011

## 2. COMMUNIQUÉ

### **Communiqué: Council of African Cabinet Secretaries**

We, the African Cabinet Secretaries and representatives of other African Cabinet Secretaries, having met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 3-7 February 2014, have agreed to establish the Africa Cabinet Government Network as a permanent organisation to provide formal and informal opportunities for collaboration, mutual support and sharing practical experiences.

This decision reflects our shared commitment to evidence-informed Cabinet decision-making by our governments and effective implementation of Cabinet decisions.

The Network also facilitates technical assistance to Cabinet Secretariats and others involved in managing Cabinet processes in Africa.

To achieve this, we have today established the **Council of African Cabinet Secretaries** to lead the Network and bring together those who have the responsibility of supporting and managing the collective Cabinet decision-making in our respective jurisdictions. The Cabinet Secretaries from Ghana, Liberia, Malawi, Rwanda (who was unable to attend the workshop), Sierra Leone, Somalia, Somaliland, South Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zanzibar are foundation members of the Council. Other African Cabinet Secretaries are being invited to join.

At its inaugural meeting today, the Council elected Dr Ernest Surrur, Secretary to the Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service of the Government of Sierra Leone, as President of the Council. Dr Momo Rogers, Director General to the Cabinet, Government of Liberia, Mr Abdon Agaw Jok Nhial, Secretary General of the Government of South Sudan, and Dr Roland Msiska, Secretary to the Cabinet of the Government of the Republic of Zambia, have been elected Vice Presidents for West Africa, East Africa and Southern Africa Regions respectively.

Despite some differences among our systems of government, we share many common objectives and challenges. We are all committed to strengthening the support we provide our Cabinets, especially to ensure that policy proposals are informed by evidence, leading to decisions that can be successfully implemented and monitored.

During the workshop we explored practical ways to improve Cabinet procedures and build capacity within Cabinet Secretariats and line Ministries. We seek to use systematic procedures and processes to produce better outcomes in the national interest. We identified ways of improving the quality of policy proposals coming before Cabinet, recognizing the importance of evidence to inform policy formulation, implementation and the monitoring and evaluation of Cabinet initiatives.

We look forward to future meetings and interactions in a spirit of co-operation and enthusiasm for mutual learning and support across Africa. With an expanded group of Cabinet Secretaries, we will seek to build on this excellent foundation and learn more from one another about practical ways to support our Governments to make and implement policy for the good of our respective citizens.

We appreciate the funding provided by the UK Government for the African Cabinet Government Network and we look forward to building support from additional sources. We also wish to thank the organisers, Adam Smith International, and the presenters at the workshop.

We express our gratitude to the Ghanaian Delegation for accepting our proposal to host the next roundtable workshop.

Finally we give our thanks to the Government and people of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia for hosting us during this period, and to our various governments for allowing us to participate in this initiative.



Dr Ernest Surrur,  
President, Council of African Cabinet Secretaries

7<sup>th</sup> February, 2014

### 3. USE OF EVIDENCE IN CABINET DECISION-MAKING

The workshop began with presentations and discussion of the benefits and the challenges of using evidence to inform Cabinet decisions.

#### 3.1 Benefits of using evidence to inform Cabinet decisions

As agreed in the Communiqué, participants were all committed to strengthening the support they provide their Cabinets, especially to ensure that policy proposals are informed by evidence.

One presenter set out seven reasons why the application of evidence to policy makes both “good policy and good politics”. [Figure 1](#) summarises these seven reasons to use evidence.

Figure 1



The seven reasons for using evidence during the policy making and implementation process are:

- i. to **define a problem**. Often what presents is not the root cause but *symptoms*. Evidence will help to identify the real problem and determine its scale and impact, which is crucial to judging its political significance, urgency and possible long term effects;
- ii. to **choose between different policy solutions** based on an understanding of what might work and what key stakeholders' views are;
- iii. to **promote value for money**: before a policy is adopted, different options' estimated costs and benefits should be analysed. As policy is implemented, evidence of actual costs and results can be used to reallocate funds from less effective to more effective programmes;
- iv. to **help Ministers to win support, and if necessary funding**, for their preferred policy. Political opponents and political allies, the media, the public, civil society and lobby groups, different communities, those individuals who will implement the policy may all to a greater or lesser extent be persuaded by evidence. Evidence used in this way might help to challenge assumptions and prejudices. Evidence is invaluable when arguing the case for more money to be allocated to tackling a problem, enabling it to move up the political agenda. Such arguments might take place around a Cabinet table, in Parliament or to win the support of donors;
- v. to **meet government obligations of democratic accountability**. Parliament, auditors, the courts, the media all have a legitimate role to play in holding the executive to account. Ministers need adequate evidence to justify and explain the policies they are pursuing;
- vi. to **predict and plan for problems**. Risk management is a vital part of policy making involving complex and inherently unpredictable human systems. Because governments cannot be sure

that everything will go right, they must be prepared for what might go wrong. After identifying risks - for example arising from natural disaster, conflict, community opposition, unexpected costs, fraud or technical failure - policy makers can make contingency plans. Plans should include both actions to minimise the *likelihood* or *impact* of these risks occurring and activities to *respond* if the worst happens; and

- vii. to **provide valuable indicators to help adjust and fine-tune policy implementation.**

### 3.2 Definition of terms

#### What counts as “evidence”?

Asking what counts as evidence, one presentation argued the need for a broad working definition, including all the different types of evidence relevant for Cabinet decisions. It was important to recognise that Cabinet decision-making is not taking place in the rarefied environment of a scientific laboratory or a university seminar room. While rigorous, scientific-standard evidence can be invaluable for certain types of decision other, less rigorous, kinds of evidence also have a place.

Delegates examined and discussed the list below, agreeing that it offers a useful working definition:

**Working definition of evidence**, includes:

1. **Scientific/medical** evidence, such as from double blind control studies – most suitable when decisions have a large scientific element relating to medical efficacy, for example looking at use of bed nets against malaria, or anti-retroviral drugs against the development of AIDS.
2. **Large scale quantitative data**, which may make comparisons between countries, for example the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests. Such evidence is often contested, with disputes about whether correlation points to causation – i.e. is it government education policies in the successful countries which cause pupil success, or is pupil success due to other factors that may in turn influence education policies?
3. **Qualitative evaluations** focusing on a smaller numbers of cases in more detail, including data from interviews or questionnaires interrogating individuals about their understanding and motivations. Such evidence tries to uncover not just what happened, but *why* something happened as it did.
4. **Policy or practice evaluations**—these might be systematic reviews of all relevant research in a specific area, giving broad lessons about impact e.g. ‘what works to maximise school enrolment of girl children?’ or more context-specific “action research” evaluation of the results of a pilot study or lessons learned from a donor-funded project. Evaluations showing international or regional good practices and those from other sectors are relevant here.
5. **Census/statistical macro data**—gathered periodically, defining the size and characteristics of a population. Statistical data might gather death rates, birth rates, school enrolment, or economic indicators such as measures of inflation or of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
6. **Opinion research** analysing the views and preferences of whole populations or of different demographic slices, or opinions from focus groups of people involved in specific sectors as users or providers, or from a specific community.
7. **Management information** or **monitoring data** collected in the course of delivering a service e.g. showing staffing levels, administration costs, number of operations performed per year at a certain surgical unit. Or results from implementing a new policy or process.



The value was also recognised of **anecdotal evidence** or **personal testimony** to shape and communicate political decisions. It can be argued that anecdote is the antithesis of evidence, but also that accumulated anecdotes make valuable qualitative or experiential data, especially when coming from sources without a vested interest.

One presenter spoke about the value of the **tacit knowledge** or **practical wisdom** of people inside government, saying “The experience shared by people in government agencies needs to be recognized and valued”. But this was not formally agreed by all delegates to be a type of evidence.

There was disagreement over the proper role in Cabinet policy-making of anecdote. One speaker argued that part of the role of a Cabinet secretariat was to supplant anecdote with facts, speaking of “the importance of evidence over anecdotes”. Another speaker, while acknowledging that anecdote might not count fully as evidence, contended that politicians and all those who operate in a political environment must recognise the power of stories. This type of personal testimony is crucial to the communications task facing governments. A government needs to tell its stories, simply and effectively. It must explain what has been achieved: a before and after story, preferably in pictures. Quoting Chinua Achebe, he argued that “To satisfy the human imagination, we also need stories.”<sup>3</sup>

One delegate offered a useful shorthand categorisation covering many of these types of evidence by saying that policy makers need both:

- Quantitative evidence (from statistics) and
- Qualitative evidence (from stakeholders).

#### *Different Cabinet decisions require different types of evidence*

Decision-making is at the heart of government - decisions about priorities, about allocation of resources, about what policies to adopt to pursue political goals. One speaker posited that good decisions must be well-informed and follow critical discussion.

Different types of evidence will be used to justify different arguments – for example, the Ministry of Finance will focus on efficiency, while spending Ministries may emphasise outcomes like social justice. One of the skills of policy-making is to know what kind of evidence is required in which circumstances. Government - and Cabinet as the pinnacle of collective decision-making – must take decisions after weighing competing arguments and competing (perhaps contrary) pieces of evidence.

#### *“Evidence-based” policy or “evidence-informed” policy?*

Another definitional discussion concerned the term ‘evidence-informed policy’. One presenter made the distinction between “evidence-based” policy – perhaps a more familiar term – and “evidence-informed” policy.

The term “evidence-based”, it was argued, implies that if the right evidence is only presented in the right way, it will *determine* the policy answer. This suggests there is a single ‘right’ policy. But the decisions taken in Cabinet are *political* decisions. Cabinet Ministers are not generally faced with one-dimensional, technocratic problems where examining the evidence will easily determine the best answer. Instead they must balance moral and political values, the interests of different groups and the political acceptability of different options. It was more realistic and more appropriate for Cabinet Secretaries to aim at ensuring

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<sup>3</sup>Chinua Achebe, speaking in 1986 on the occasion of receiving the Nigerian Merit Award: “...I am saying that development or modernisation is not merely, or even primarily, a question of having lots of money to spend or blueprints drawn up by the best experts available; it is in a critical sense a question of the mind and the will. And I am saying that the mind and the will belong first and foremost to the domain of stories.”

Cabinet decisions are *informed* by evidence than attempting to ensure those decisions are *based* on evidence.

### 3.3 Problems with evidence

Quoting the former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, one presenter said that is hard to argue with the sentiment that “*What matters is what works*”. But while ‘what works’ is important, it does not give the full picture. The speaker suggested that scepticism is in order, to ask: How do we *know* that it works? How do we know that a given result was not coincidence? A conscientious policy-maker should also ask *where* it works: In what places and in what circumstances. Much research and policy evaluation emanates from the developed world and results should not be assumed to be easily transplantable into an African context without adaptation.

The point was made that evidence is never final, irrefutable, or self-evident. It is always *probabilistic* and often *context specific*. There is often *disagreement* over what counts as “evidence”. Evidence is (and should be) always *contestable*. Interpreting and critiquing evidence requires a high degree of skill, but is vital if Cabinets are to be supported to take better decisions. As one presenter said “We need to be careful what evidence we rely on, and the degree to which we rely on it”, making the point that “research and statistical evidence is not always 100 per cent accurate in the African context.”

The further point was made that evidence is not value neutral – though facts might be irrefutable, choices must always be made about what facts to select and how to present them. Sometimes different interests and different perspectives will each give only a partial account. A particular Ministry, for example, in presenting a problem to Cabinet may interpret the problem narrowly and present evidence on only one aspect, in order to retain control of the agenda. Thus as one presenter argued, a multi-pronged strategy involving a number of Ministries in co-operation might be a better way to develop a joint proposal for Cabinet, based on joint research and investigation.

### 3.4 Sources of evidence

The need for careful evaluation and filtering of evidence was underlined in a discussion about sources of evidence, since stakeholders usually present evidence in a way that supports their own agenda. Civil society groups are increasingly influencing public affairs and influencing what is viewed as ‘evidence’. Some delegates regretted that good quality research and valuable evidence may be dismissed because of the known political or ideological slant of the think tank or lobby group which produced it.

It was also recognised that NGOs have an agenda, as do donors. It was noted that universities and research institutes play an increasingly important role in modern government. Yet evidence produced by universities or think tanks will also be influenced (intentionally or unintentionally) not least by the policy positions or values of those who commission and fund the research. Research funded by a particular donor agency was unlikely to produce results in opposition to that agency’s interests or opinions (or if it did, may not be published). Delegates also mentioned the role of the media, who will also filter the interpretation of evidence to suit their own purposes. It was argued that it is important to exercise critical thinking when interpreting evidence from any source, asking not just “*what* is the evidence?” but “*whose* evidence is this?”

Some delegates lamented the shortage of home-grown research evidence, saying that local universities failed to meet the research needs of government or even in some cases to show any interest in contributing research to support government policy-making.

Another pointed out that many people – including some Ministers - are biased in favour of international as opposed to home-grown research or statistics. It was a pity that sometimes the mere fact of coming from a foreigner seemed to privilege certain types of information, meaning that policy-making could be too dependent on foreign consultants and policy agendas driven by donor priorities. If foreign experts are used within government, it is crucial to ensure they follow not drive the government agenda, delegates argued.

Consultants should be required to transfer their knowledge, building the local capacity and intellectual capital of government, not just impose their own policy values and views.

The value was emphasised of evidence generated internally by government. This was more useful when shared across organisational boundaries, though Ministries often resist information sharing. In many places the organisational culture holds that since knowledge is power it should be retained tightly, not dispersed. Building on this point, one presenter spoke of the value of pan-African or African Regional data sets and of the African Union's commitment to building a pan African information base.

### 3.5 Role of technical experts

Delegates during group work formulated the following principles on making use of technical experts:

*How best to make use of technical experts in presenting evidence to inform Cabinet decisions...delegate views*

- 1. Who is an expert?...someone with:**
  - hands on experience
  - knowledge
- 2. When to use an expert?...to ensure local understanding of a problem, based upon:**
  - knowing which expert is required
  - having capacity to supervise the expert (e.g. expert NOT writing their own terms of reference)
  - knowing what gaps the expert will fill
  - ensuring value is added; and
  - providing for knowledge transfer to local staff
- 3. Why use an expert?... to provide:**
  - technical advice
  - scientific knowledge
  - impartial, credible and balanced views
  - proven facts and tested methodologies.

### 3.6 Challenges of achieving evidence-informed decisions

Another presenter spoke about the tensions between evidence and the political nature of Cabinet decision-making. Ministers are inevitably concerned with considerations other than evidence - primarily the electoral cycle, which can lead to a short-term perspective. Decisions in Cabinet are shaped in part by considerations such as: the pre-existing policy context; public and stakeholder opinion; media pressure; ideology, values and traditions; pragmatics (e.g. the availability of resources); politics and power.

### 3.7 How does research contribute to policy?

Researchers provide information and suggest different ways to think about a problem. One speaker suggested that research may be less useful when it comes to addressing an issue in terms of the practical policy solutions.

One issue affecting evidence-informed policy is how researchers interact with government. Presenters argued that it is important that there be interaction and mutual learning. While the academic researcher may not fully understand the policy process, or the complexities of government, producing and utilising well-grounded research can contribute to good policy.

### 3.8 The role of Cabinet processes in supporting evidence-informed decisions

It was noted that Cabinet is a political decision-making body, and that Ministers are responsible and accountable for their political decisions. Thus, one speaker argued, Cabinet processes and the Cabinet Secretary should not try to dictate Cabinet decisions. But officials responsible for Cabinet processes can help to ensure there is some order in decision-making. They should support better decision-making by structuring the decision-making process and through sound business management.

Processes can help to test evidence, probe proposals and provide an opportunity for challenge, avoiding any ‘stampeding’ of Cabinet Minister by forcing a decision without proper consideration. Such processes include:

- requirements on format and content of Cabinet memoranda;
- ensuring Ministers and their ministries have sufficient opportunity to consider proposals;
- the use of specialist standing committees, perhaps including pre-consideration by technicians;
- bringing in outside experts to brief Cabinet; and
- using different ways of presenting evidence within Cabinet meetings.

Cabinet procedures and how they can support better decision-making are discussed in more detail in Section 4 below.

Delegates were warned, however, that all rules must allow for exceptions. Good process in Cabinet must include the ability in exceptional cases to bypass that process – for example, an internationally imposed deadline may require an urgent decision to prevent funding being lost. In such cases, exceptions should be allowed and Cabinet should be briefed as soon as possible after the decision has been taken. Delegates also heard examples from different countries (developed as well as developing) where, in spite of due process, bad decisions are taken. Sometimes these must just be rescinded.

### 3.9 What evidence is there that evidence-informed policy works?

One presenter asked whether there is any *guarantee* that Cabinets that conscientiously gather, analyse and use evidence to inform their decisions will never make mistakes, adopt bad policy or waste money. He answered his question in the negative - there are no guarantees. There is no assurance that applying evidence will always lead a Cabinet to the ‘right’ policy answer, he argued, not least because there is no single ‘right’ or perfect policy. Policy is always open for future revision, future adjustment and future improvement.

Another presenter agreed with this conclusion, saying “Government is never finished”. Policy making must be seen as a process not event, with a constant need for attention, adaptation and learning as the political, social and economic environment evolves.

The conclusion was that evidence-informed decision-making will not guarantee desired results. But it is good policy and good politics. Any government – or individual Minister – concerned to leave a positive legacy will do well to inject evidence as a significant part of their decision-making process and adapt their decisions as new evidence becomes available. And as one speaker said, good policy-making is not just concerned with producing the right results but with undertaking the right process.

## 4. REFORMING CABINET PROCEDURES

Delegates heard that one effective way of reforming Cabinet procedures is to pursue linked and mutually reinforcing reforms. Such a reform programme may include an element of trial and error as different designs are tested until the right one is found. Reforms should be tailor-made, not imported wholesale from elsewhere. And the reform process itself should be informed by evidence.

### 4.1 Vision for improving Cabinet procedures

Delegates heard of the vision which will drive reforms to Cabinet procedures in Sierra Leone:

Effective collective decisions under the Constitution that:

- a) are based on **well-prepared Memoranda**, with evidence that proposed interventions will work and assessment of their likely impact, including the impact on other sectors and groups;
- b) use **Ministers' time** effectively, allowing them to review and obtain advice on important proposals, and focusing on strategic issues, especially the President's Agenda for Prosperity; and
- c) are **implemented effectively**, with necessary co-ordination among government organisations and regular implementation reports to Cabinet.

## 4.2 Use of evidence to ground a procedural reform programme

Presentations from Liberia and from Sierra Leone made plain the importance of gathering and using evidence to help shape a programme of reforming Cabinet procedures. For example, research conducted in one government had revealed concerns over: the quality of Cabinet proposals; the length of meetings; the number of ad hoc committees; late circulation of important proposals; poor consultation between Ministries; and poor coordination in implementing decisions.

Building on this point, one speaker outlined the sensitivities of embarking on such a process of reform. Ministers or the Chairperson of Cabinet may resist anything seen to interfere with their political power and influence. They may fear external (especially foreign) meddling in the substance of their decisions. Ministers may also be reluctant to state openly their private views about deficiencies with current Cabinet processes. Such sensitivities must be respected. Ways of addressing such concerns include:

- proceeding step by step, based on evidence, and explaining the reasons for proposed changes;
- proceeding only with explicit approval from the Chairperson of Cabinet;
- emphasising that reforms will address only processes, not the content of policy decisions;
- building and using carefully the personal credibility of the Cabinet Secretary to manage the reform process, ensuring that personal and procedural integrity are maintained;
- trying to deliver what Ministers want; and
- accepting responsibility for any mistakes made, and promptly dealing with them.

## 4.3 Cabinet manual or handbook

There was agreement on the usefulness of a published manual setting out rules and guidance on Cabinet processes. A manual helps to inform both Ministers and Ministries of process requirements, improving compliance. And it ensures that, when Cabinet secretariat staff seek to enforce rules, it will be understood they are "speaking from the book" not making personal objections or being obstructive.

Examples of Cabinet manuals from South Sudan, Uganda and Zambia were shared between delegations. These are available at [www.cabinetgovernment.net](http://www.cabinetgovernment.net).

## 4.4 Agenda setting

Managing the Cabinet agenda is important to ensure that Cabinet spends its time on the right kinds of issues, i.e. ones of strategic importance and which require coordination between Ministries. Long meetings are a common source of complaint from Ministers, so if procedural reform can achieve shorter meetings, a Cabinet Secretary will win political capital and support to pursue further reform.

Ways in which Cabinet Secretaries reported that they help the Chairperson to manage Cabinet's agenda included:

- forward planning of Cabinet agenda and preparation of a work plan;
- requiring that memoranda only be discussed where they have been circulated in advance;
- and/or requiring that memoranda only be discussed where they have been examined in advance by a Cabinet Committee;
- limiting the number of items at any meeting, where necessary deferring items to a later date;

- limiting what may be raised under AOB (e.g. only items for information, not for discussion); and
- providing for the Chairperson’s use a timed agenda, suggesting how long each item should be allocated, with the Chairperson always having discretion to decide to extend discussion beyond the suggested time allocation.<sup>4</sup>

#### 4.5 Cabinet memoranda

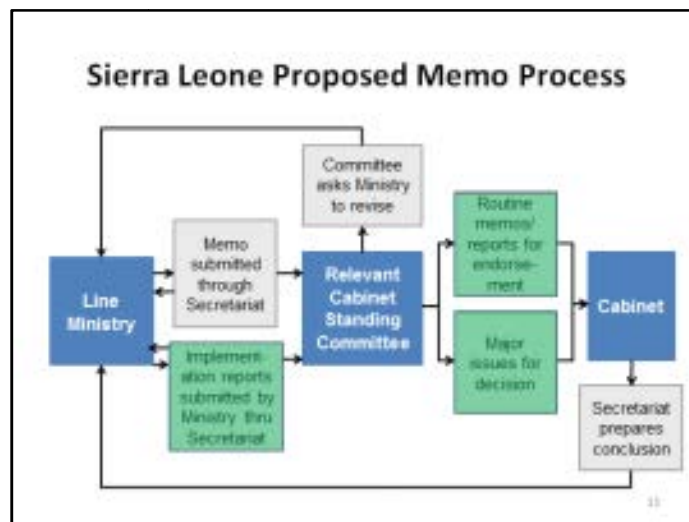
Most delegations reported that there were rules concerning the content and/or format of memoranda for presentation to Cabinet in their jurisdictions, although in some cases these rules were not observed. In one presentation, statistics were shown indicating that in South Sudan the rate of compliance with the standard format for memoranda had increased from 25% to 76% between 2011 and 2013 as a result of tighter enforcement by the secretariat and Minister of Cabinet Affairs, together with other enabling reforms.

The enforcement of rules on the format of memoranda was simple in principle but problematic in practice. Ministers, particularly those with personal influence and/or political power, would sometimes try to circumvent rules and would sometimes get away with it. It was suggested that a Cabinet Secretary needed to be pragmatic and accept occasional exceptions in order to keep resistance manageable.

In ‘vetting’ memoranda, delegates agreed that a proper division of responsibility for policy must be maintained between the Cabinet secretariat and line Ministries. The originating Ministry retains responsibility for policy development and implementation, while the secretariat’s role is to advise and oversee. (See also Section 8 below.)

Process flow diagrams from Sierra Leone and South Sudan were shared with delegates: See Figure 2 below and Figure 3 in Section 4.8.

Figure 2



Delegates heard of problems encountered if a Minister and his or her Permanent Secretary did not agree on the content of a memorandum their Ministry was presenting to Cabinet. For Cabinet processes to work the Minister and Permanent Secretary must agree on the content of a Cabinet proposal and neither should undermine the other by denying responsibility for what it contains.

While recognising that formats should vary between countries, there were many suggestions on what should be included in a standard format for Cabinet memoranda, with one discussion group proposing the following:

<sup>4</sup>Only one Cabinet Secretary mentioned doing this, although there was interest from a number of others.

***'How best to ensure adequate evidence is included in a Cabinet memorandum?'***

A **Cabinet memo standard format** should include the following:

- i. Title
- ii. Evidence of need (completed research, asking people)
- iii. Financial implications (how much? who will fund?)
- iv. Expected impact (in economic, social, environmental terms and on specific groups)
- v. Legal implications (need to change old laws? Require new laws?)
- vi. Impact on other sectors (e.g. other Ministries) - need consultation results in writing
- vii. Consultation with other stakeholders
- viii. Implementation plan
- ix. Monitoring and Evaluation of implementation
- x. Announcement of decision (communications strategy).

#### **4.6 Cabinet focal persons**

Presentations from both Sierra Leone and South Sudan highlighted the role of focal persons to coordinate Cabinet business (called Cabinet Liaison Officers in South Sudan). These are individuals nominated by their respective Ministries to act as a bridge between the Cabinet secretariat and the Ministry. They facilitate the flow of papers to and from Cabinet and help to ensure Ministries understand and are able to comply with procedural requirements, such as the requirements for preparing memoranda. They are not usually policy makers and do not normally write memoranda for their respective Ministries. It was argued that they should be civil servants, under the directive and management of the Permanent Secretary, rather than a personal appointee of the Minister, although it is important that the focal person be trusted by both Minister and Permanent Secretary.

Some delegates felt that the role exercised by a Cabinet focal person could equally well be done by a member of a Ministry's Policy Analysis Unit trained in Cabinet process.

#### **4.7 Cabinet Committees**

Most delegations reported that they have a system of Cabinet standing committees. And by the end of the week two delegations reported a renewed commitment to establish – or revive – standing committees, convinced that the benefits will outweigh the costs. Those delegations whose governments do use Cabinet committees had systems which differed in details – e.g. the number, membership and scope of each committee – but agreed on essential features.

The benefits of having committees examine memoranda before they pass to Cabinet were considered to be that this:

- ensured the right people were in the room together to consider evidence and take decisions;
- reduced the bypassing of procedural rules;
- improved the scrutiny, and thus the final quality, of proposals; and
- reduced the time taken in full Cabinet.

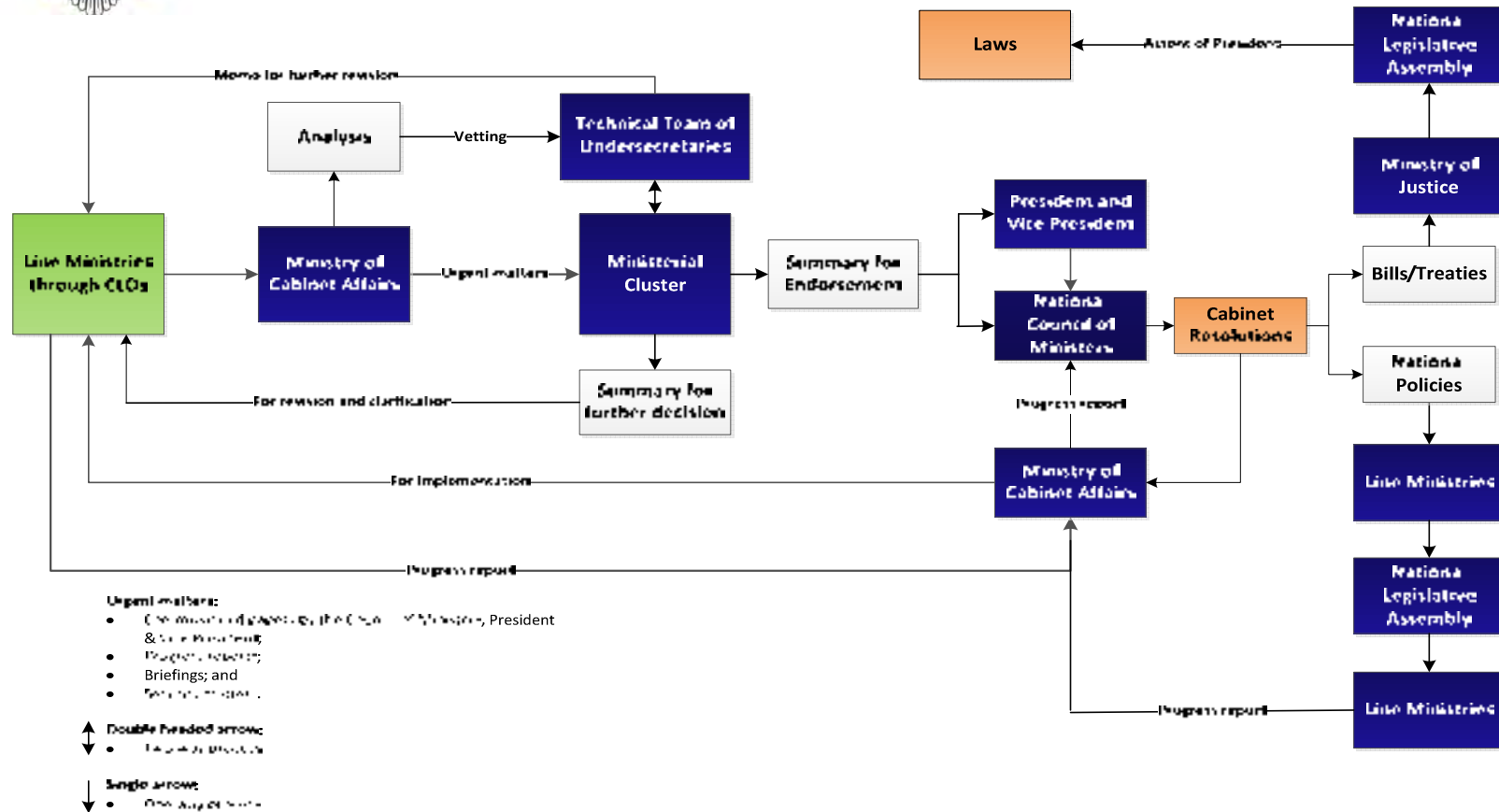
There was a cost, though. In particular, frequent Cabinet committee meetings can increase the burdens on Ministers and even more on their Permanent Secretaries who are responsible for briefing them. Linked to this, some delegations reported difficulty enforcing Ministers' attendance at committees.

Differing practice was reported over who attends Cabinet standing committees. In some cases Deputy Ministers attend, but mostly they do not and it is rare for a jurisdiction to allow a Deputy Minister (Minister of State or sometimes called junior Minister) to present a paper.

Figure 3



# Cabinet Decision-making process





## 4.8 South Sudan Cabinet Cluster system

The Cabinet Cluster committee system in South Sudan was presented in some detail (see [Figure 3 on the previous page](#)). There are three Clusters (covering Governance, Economic, and Services and Capacity Building) and it was felt that fewer committees, each meeting on the same day each week, made diaries more manageable.

Each Cluster meeting is in two parts. In the morning is the **technical Cluster** attended by Undersecretaries (Permanent Secretaries), Directors General and Directors of the relevant Ministries. Their job is to consider the memoranda presented and to study, analyse, amend, make proposals and resolve outstanding issues, especially factual issues.

In the afternoon, the **Ministerial Cluster** meets, supported by the technical team. Ministers generally discuss and make decisions on the basis of a summary of analysis, observations and proposals made by the technical team. At the end of the Ministerial cluster, the technical team and the Cabinet secretariat provide a short analysis and proposals to the Minister of Cabinet Affairs for presentation to the Council of Ministers. The Minister of Cabinet Affairs reviews the Cluster summary for presentation to H.E. the President, prior to the Friday meeting of the full Council of Ministers (Cabinet).

## 5. ROLE OF THE CABINET SECRETARY

The role of Cabinet Secretary (alternatively called Director General of the Cabinet, or Clerk to the Cabinet, or Secretary General to the Government) had many common features and some differences across the different jurisdictions represented. One significant difference is that in many jurisdictions the Cabinet Secretary is also Head of the civil service, in others not. (In Liberia, which has a system closer than many others to that of the United States of America, the Cabinet Secretary is not a civil servant at all but is appointed by the President at the rank of Minister.)

In all jurisdictions present at this workshop, the Cabinet Secretary is head of a Cabinet secretariat, though this might comprise only one or two members of staff in some cases.

The key conclusion from the delegates' discussions and presentations was that the role of Cabinet Secretary had changed, was changing and would continue to change in response to a changing external environment. In the words of one delegate "you cannot step into this role and expect to leave it again unchanged."

Several distinct elements of the role were discussed.

### 5.1 Briefing the Chairperson of Cabinet

Many Cabinet Secretaries spoke of their use of one-page summary notes to brief the President to chair Cabinet meetings. This brief is normally confidential (copied to nobody other than the President) and enabled the Secretary to help in the procedural aspects of chairing the meeting and provide an independent view not allied to any particular Minister or Ministry.

### 5.2 Agenda management

Agenda management is a fundamental role of the Cabinet Secretary and his/her secretariat. At its most basic it involves the bureaucratic task of compiling an agenda and circulating relevant papers; but – done well – it also provides a means of setting priorities and preventing powerful Ministers from "stampeding" their colleagues. Skilled agenda management will remove trivial matters and provide adequate time or consideration of complex matters. One speaker mentioned the opportunity for Cabinet Secretary to arrange a special Cabinet on a single issue, where s/he considers this necessary to afford adequate time for an important issue. Forward planning of Cabinet's agenda will avoid a situation where "everything is an emergency".

Setting and enforcing rules governing how an issue gets to Cabinet can ensure, for example, that a memorandum is considered first by a Cabinet Committee, or that it is circulated far enough in advance that every Minister has time to consider it before the meeting. Some delegates spoke of removing the AOB agenda item to prevent Ministers bringing forward substantive proposals without prior consideration; others said that AOB had been limited in their system to items for information only, not for discussion or decision.

The Cabinet Secretary's role in Cabinet agenda management can be enhanced through discreet use of the Cabinet Secretary's personal credibility and influence with the President and with Ministers.

### **5.3 Informal role of Cabinet Secretary**

The issue of the indirect or informal influence of a good Cabinet Secretary was enlarged upon in discussion and during a panel question and answer session. The Cabinet Secretary may have some control over access to President. If so, this is a valuable resource which should be used sparingly and with discretion. In some cases the Cabinet Secretary is a conduit of Presidential Directives. This gives influence but could be dangerous if any Minister was inclined to 'shoot the messenger'.

One delegate spoke of a "wise counsel" role in which the Cabinet Secretary can help to maintain the integrity of Cabinet and of Cabinet procedures. This role might involve more informal conversations or negotiations to facilitate the business of Cabinet, not simply procedural compliance but ensuring individual Ministers are not left feeling side-lined. Such a role is especially delicate – and necessary – where a coalition government or government of national unity is in office. The presence of Ministers from different political backgrounds and different political parties in the same government made the concept of collective responsibility both more important and harder to maintain.

### **5.4 Performance contracts**

In just one case, the Cabinet Secretary was also the co-ordinator of Ministers' performance contracts with the President, which gave leverage but again had to be used with utmost discretion, care and political neutrality and in the national interest.

### **5.5 What makes a good Cabinet Secretary?**

There was clear agreement on the need for a Cabinet Secretary to have personal integrity. One presenter spoke of the job being about an ability to "lead from below". Three conditions which must pertain for a Cabinet Secretary to fulfil the mandate well are:

- trust between the Cabinet Secretary and the political leaders;
- a competent and capable Cabinet Secretary, able effectively to guide and advise a Cabinet meeting; and
- a demonstrated attitude of service and commitment to the success of the political leadership.

### **5.6 Relationships between Cabinet Secretaries/Permanent Secretaries and Ministers**

It was agreed that the best Cabinet Secretaries develop a symbiotic relationship with Cabinet Ministers. One speaker argued that it is important for a Cabinet Secretary to build trust by ensuring Ministers understand "I don't want your job" but I do want to "help you to help the President".

In a broader discussion of ways to improve working relationships between Ministers and Permanent Secretaries it was suggested that tensions could be reduced by Cabinet Secretary and Permanent Secretaries being careful to:

- avoid surprising their Ministers (including ensuring that the Minister knows how money is being spent in his or her Ministry);
- keeping a record of key conversations or an email log to ensure undertakings are not forgotten;

- respecting the different roles of politician and official, and recognising that both have value;
- being clear about the respective legal and constitutional powers and roles of both Minister and Permanent Secretary, especially where the Permanent Secretary is the accounting officer responsible for ensuring compliance with proper financial procedures and procurement rules;
- recognising the different lifecycles of politician and official, which give rise to different concerns and perspectives. While many Permanent Secretaries can expect to stay in post as long as they do nothing criminal, and may even continue to be paid after their retirement, Ministers are in a more precarious position. A Minister's mind will necessarily be on his or her next election; and
- ensuring a Ministry delivers for the Minister, achieving results in line with his or her political priorities and public pronouncements. Where there is delivery failure, this can lead to suspicion from a Minister that his/her civil servants or officials are political opponents, and seeking to undermine him or her.

In conclusion, the point was made that the Cabinet processes should not be designed for the convenience or benefit of Cabinet Secretaries. Rather it is the role of the Cabinet Secretary to ensure that processes serve to help Ministers, including those who may not be in the most influential Ministries, to get their business done and to develop and implement policy in the national interest.

## 6. ROLE OF CABINET SECRETARIAT

### 6.1 Vision

Delegates were interested to see in a presentation the vision of the Sierra Leone secretariat – see below. At least one other Cabinet Secretary said that he would take this idea home.

The Cabinet Secretariat to be an efficient, effective and **dependable** pillar of support to the Executive by playing a **proactive** role in facilitating **implementable** Cabinet decisions and **helping** other Public Service organizations to do **their** jobs effectively to achieve **timely** implementation of Cabinet's decisions.

This vision, it was reported, is being pursued in a systematic manner. Three key outcomes are being pursued – better proposals; improved coordination; and decisions implemented – via four enabling strategies – a new Cabinet manual; a standing Cabinet Committee system; building policy capacity in Ministries; and strengthening support from the Cabinet Secretariat.

### 6.2 Functions

There was unanimous agreement over the core functions of a Cabinet secretariat – arranging meetings; circulating papers (memoranda) for discussion; taking minutes and producing a formal record of what was agreed; and following up the implementation of Cabinet decisions. However, there were also some notable differences. For example, not every secretariat exercised a policy analysis/review function, and many were not actively engaged in building the policy capacity across Ministries. In only one case was the secretariat also actively supporting substantive policy development.

The basic functions of a Cabinet secretariat were agreed to include the following:

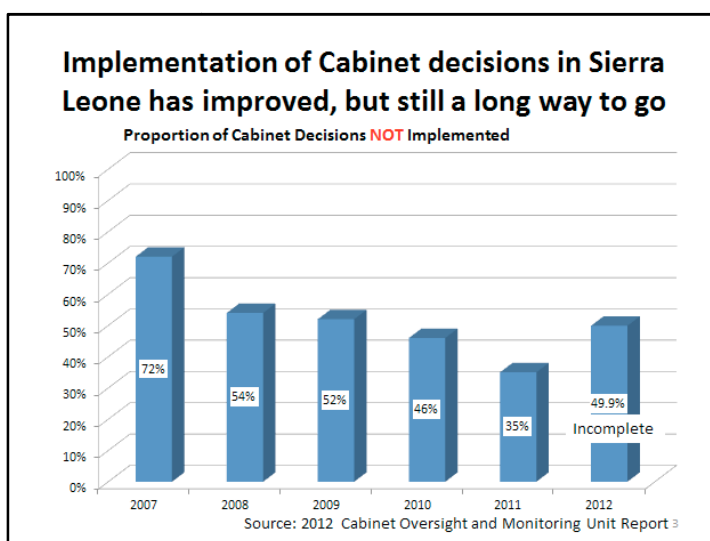
- a) Secretariat: coordinating Cabinet (and committee) business by – setting the agenda (in agreement with Chairperson of Cabinet); distributing papers for discussion; note taking; conveying the decisions of Cabinet; and storing Cabinet documents. In some cases this role encompassed preparing a Cabinet Chairperson's brief bringing out key points for discussion and decision, to assist management of the meeting.

- b) Policy review or critique: exercising quality control over memoranda submitted for Cabinet consideration, to ensure these contain adequate evidence and analysis. This function might also include preparing a brief or summary of memoranda for the Chairperson of the relevant Cabinet Committee or Cabinet itself to help them manage discussion, identifying gaps in evidence or weaknesses in argument that should be probed.

While not every secretariat is currently engaged in this latter policy analysis role, all were agreed on its legitimacy and potential usefulness. Many stated that they are in the process of starting, or building their capacity, to exercise this function.

While every secretariat is engaged in following up implementation of Cabinet decisions, their practice differed. All agreed on the common challenges in getting decisions implemented, with most delegations estimating that only around 50% of Cabinet decisions are successfully implemented in their jurisdiction (although one delegation believed their implementation of policy agreed by Cabinet to be about 60-65% successful). A presentation from Sierra Leone included evidence showing that while implementation had improved it was now back around the 50% mark in the latest year for which record were available (see [Figure 4](#))

**Figure 4**



There was some discussion of the range of reasons for poor implementation. In some cases it was thought to be related to poor initial decisions, based on insufficient evidence and analysis and perhaps taken without reading the supporting documents. Another factor was felt to be the absence, or weakness, of implementation planning in proposals presented to Cabinet. Delegates spoke of policies adopted with little idea of what implementation would cost, or what that implementation would involve.

Even in developed countries, it was heard, “too often the practicalities of implementation can undermine an otherwise valuable policy initiative”. One corrective to this was to have policy implemented in stages, with structured reporting back. Many secretariats spoke of their plans to improve implementation planning in memoranda for Cabinet.

An interesting account was given of the tools used in Liberia to encourage and record implementation of Cabinet decisions. The secretariat has introduced in recent years:

- Cabinet Minutes with Actions Grid (2009);
- Follow-up Matrix of Cabinet decisions per all Ministries, Agencies and Commissions (2010);
- Summaries of Cabinet Minutes (2010);
- Status Reports from Follow-up Matrix for President’s attention (2010); and
- Cabinet Post-mortem (2011).

The role of building policy capacity comprises activities by the secretariat to train and develop officials and Ministers from across government in policy development. Few secretariats, notably Zambia and Uganda, are currently doing this. Others plan to. Section 9: Building Policy Capacity below expands on this, giving examples of how the role is exercised and with what impact.

Supporting substantive policy making was mentioned in some detail by the Uganda Cabinet secretariat; others made passing references, for example, to a secretariat role helping to arrange periodic Cabinet retreats or high level policy summits. In still other cases the policy role of the secretariat is minimal – one Cabinet Secretary spoke of “not much technical input from my office” to the policy making process.

In Uganda the secretariat conducts a range of activities to support substantive policy development:

- Holding strategic policy workshops for Permanent Secretaries by sector, such as education, infrastructure or health, annually outside Kampala to discuss major policy issues;
- Convening policy development workshops for Under Secretaries/commissioners, once or twice a year to discuss major issues;
- Holding an annual Joint Leadership Forum for Ministers and Permanent Secretaries (serving and retired), chaired by the President, looking at areas of strategic need such as government communications; and
- Periodic policy development workshops in Kampala (to which IMF and other donors are invited).

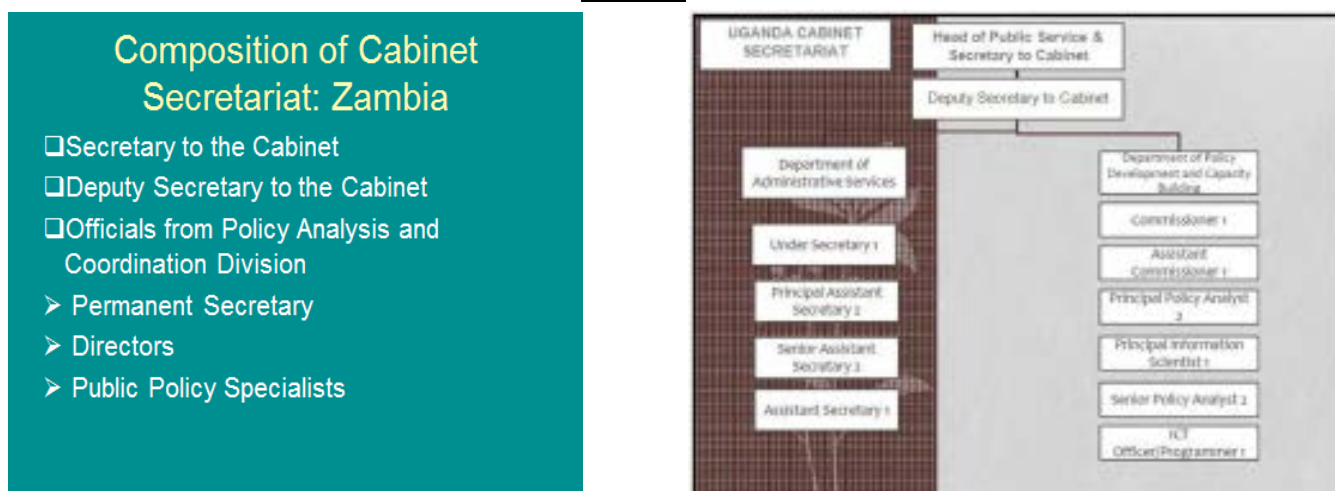
Another possible role for the Cabinet secretariat is supporting the public service to manage transitions as a new administration is formed following an election. This role is particularly important and sensitive where there is a transfer of power from one political party or bloc to another.

Finally, it was mentioned that the Cabinet secretariat has a role in supporting Ministers to translate manifesto commitments into government policy: this is a more complex task where new parties are elected into government, or where a coalition takes charge and several different party manifestoes form the basis of a governing programme.

### 6.3 Structures

The Ugandan and Zambian delegations presented their secretariat structures as shown in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5



## 6.4 Staffing

In one presentation, the point was made that, in Zambia, all staff of the Cabinet secretariat must have a Masters level degree and government experience. Experience is considered vital to the role. Delegates were told that bright ambitious cadres must “grow up first” before being able to work in the secretariat.

## 7. ROLE OF DEPUTY MINISTERS

Delegates’ discussions of Cabinet and Cabinet committees led to an examination of the similarities and differences across jurisdictions in the roles of Deputy Ministers. The terms ‘Minister of State’ or ‘junior Minister’ are also used in some governments.

### 7.1 Common challenges

Delegates recognised common challenges, in that while many of their governments included Deputy Ministers, in most cases these individuals were not given specific roles or terms of reference. In some case generic powers and functions were set out, but in no case was an example given of a Deputy Minister with delegated responsibility from a Minister for a specific policy or service delivery area.

This has led to confusion and frustration as Deputy Ministers often feel they have an office but not a proper job to do. The situation might be harder if several Deputy Ministers are appointed to the same Ministry and are competing for the attention of the Minister and President, and for influence and resources. On one occasion, unhappy junior Ministers had even demanded that they be allowed to convene their own Cabinet meetings. This idea had not met with the President’s approval.

### 7.2 Different solutions

Differences were discussed in the powers that governments gave to Deputy Ministers, although it was unusual for Deputy Ministers regularly to attend Cabinet or to present a memorandum. Where a Minister is unable to attend Cabinet and has a memorandum to present, in most cases this would be presented by another full Minister, acting on the absent Minister’s behalf.

## 8. THE POLICY PROCESS

Throughout the week, a key theme was policy development and implementation – how evidence should be used and how a Cabinet secretariat should manage and support the process. This section brings together those discussions, drawing heavily on presentations made by the Zambian and Ugandan delegations. In both of those countries the policy development process is well advanced and a significant role is played by the Cabinet secretariat.

### 8.1 Policy and legislation

One point of principle on which delegates agreed is that, in terms of Cabinet decision-making, the process of *policy approval* should be separated from the *drafting of legislation*. While the former is a strategic matter of policy in which Cabinet should properly be involved, the latter is a technical process to be undertaken by lawyers (called “Parliamentary Counsel” in some governments).

Delegates felt that a Cabinet should first be invited to agree in principle to a policy. If legislative amendment or new law is needed in order to implement the agreed policy, this should be pursued only after an agreement in principle to the policy.

It was not generally thought necessary or desirable for Cabinet to be invited to consider draft legislation line by line. (The example was given from one jurisdiction where a certificate had to be presented along with a draft Bill giving assurance that its provisions were in line with the policy approval given by Cabinet.)

## 8.2 Policy guidelines

In some governments, guidelines for making policy have been developed and published. It was pointed out that where such guidelines are in force, the role of the secretariat in overseeing policy development is made simpler – it is understood that any criticism by the secretariat of a Ministry’s policy proposal is not a matter of personal opinion or individual animosity but is based on enforcing adherence to the agreed process.

The delegation from Zambia shared their “Guide to preparing national policy”. This is available at [www.cabinetgovernment.net](http://www.cabinetgovernment.net)

## 8.3 Policy development and implementation cycle

The presentation from Zambia showed delegates the role of the Cabinet secretariat at each of 4 stages in the policy development cycle (see [Figure 6](#) and [Table 1](#) below). An alternative 5 stage depiction of the policy development process was offered in a presentation from Uganda ([Figure 7](#)).

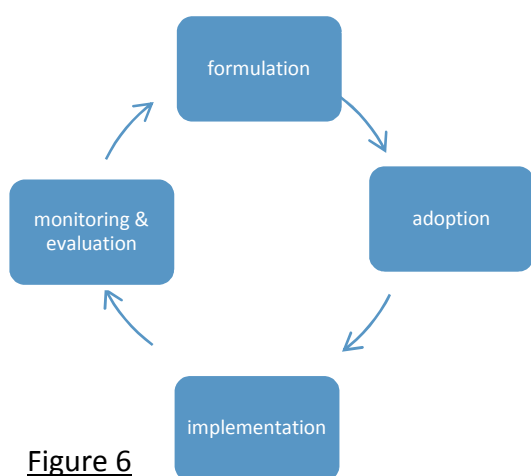


Figure 6

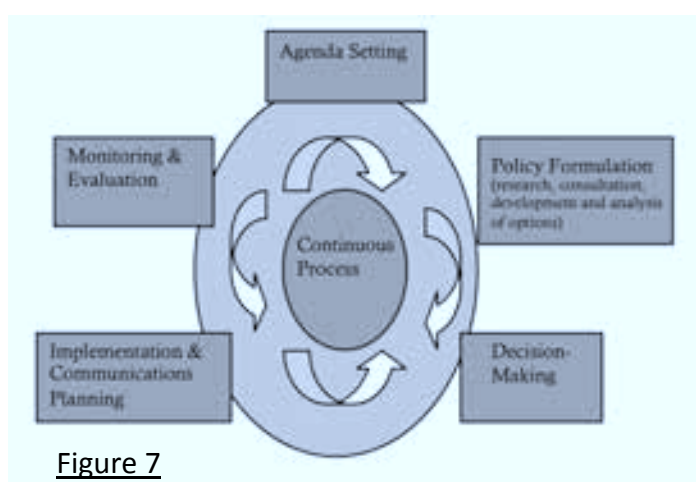


Figure 7

<b>Table 1: Definition of Policy:</b> a statement of goals, objectives and courses of action outlined by the Government to provide guidance for its action	
<p><b>Stage 1: Policy Formulation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secretariat provides guidance on problem identification problem size/impacts; is there a need for a policy?</li> <li>• Situation analysis informed by consultation with stakeholders/ beneficiaries; think tanks, academia</li> <li>• Secretariat provides guidance on drafting based on the approved formats and Procedures: Vision; Rationale/justification; Objectives setting; Measures etc.</li> <li>• Secretariat analyses Draft Policy, ensures it is:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Subject to more stakeholder analysis</li> <li>➢ Circulated to Ministries for comments (14 days) via Memo</li> <li>➢ Finally, submitted to Secretariat by originating Ministry with Cabinet Memo</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Stage 2: Adoption</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prior to placing Item on Cabinet Agenda, Secretariat will further analyse the Draft Policy</li> <li>• Preparation of the Implementation Plan</li> <li>• Subject the Draft Policy to a Committee of Cabinet</li> <li>• Submit to Cabinet for final approval (Secretariat prepares a Brief for Cabinet Chairperson)</li> </ul> <p>If approved, the Secretariat conveys decision of Cabinet</p>
<p><b>Stage 3: Policy Implementation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy/Budget linkage</li> <li>• Secretariat should ensure implementation of the Policy</li> </ul>	<p><b>Stage 4: Monitoring &amp; Evaluation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secretariat requests reports from Ministry</li> <li>• Oversees evaluation to see whether Vision has been attained</li> </ul> <p>Then cycle may begin again, as policy is <b>re-formulated</b> using lessons learned.</p>

Further discussions concerned specific activities and issues at different stages of the policy cycle.

## **Stage 1 - Consultation as part of policy formulation**

### *Within government, between Ministries*

One delegate raised the issue of who has authority to agree or disagree with a Cabinet proposal on behalf of a Ministry. Should a response to consultation always come from the Minister, or was a Permanent Secretary authorised to respond, or even another senior official? It was acknowledged that procedures should aim to ensure that civil servants and Ministers within each Ministry give an agreed response. The risk was mentioned that a consultation response made in good faith by a Ministry official might later be denied by the Minister, which would disrupt Cabinet policy making.

Another delegate spoke of the difficulties of getting Ministries to respond to written requests for comments on draft memoranda. While the originating Ministry should be responsible for seeking comments, it was felt the influence of the Cabinet secretariat should be brought to bear to encourage Ministry responses within the deadline.

Another delegate questioned whether Ministries had anything useful to contribute to policy development outside their technical area of responsibility. It was felt that they did, for example by highlighting any impacts of the policy on their area of responsibility, or through the analysis of skilled economists, sociologists or engineers who were employed across line Ministries in some jurisdictions. In other places, each Ministry has a Policy Analysis Unit which can act as focal point for gathering the Ministry views on others' policies.

### *Consultation external to government*

There was agreement on the value and necessity of consulting external stakeholders and expected beneficiaries as policy was being developed. But concern was raised that this might breach Cabinet confidentiality or that prior consultation might lead to a Cabinet decision being pre-empted or colleagues "stampeded" by building up external support for a specific option. It was felt that confidentiality and the primacy of Cabinet as the decision-making body could be preserved if consultation at the early stages focused on "problem identification/situation analysis" rather than seeking views on any specific proposed solution or options. Cabinet authority could then be sought for external consultation on specific options.

Consultation should take place recurrently to obtain evidence to inform different stages of policy development and implementation. Stakeholder consultation should not be a once-only event.

## **Stage 2 –Adoption: Role of Parliament?**

Delegates asked about the appropriate role of Parliament in the policy cycle. In some jurisdictions, a new policy cannot be considered adopted unless it had been approved by Parliament. In others, the executive has greater flexibility, with no requirement to obtain Parliamentary approval before adopting a national policy that does not involve compulsion or exercise of specific powers of the legislature through enabling legislation or amendments to existing law.

## **Stage 3 – Implementation**

While responsibility for implementing policy lies with the originating Ministry, every secretariat spoke of responsibility for helping to ensure implementation by gathering and reporting back monitoring data to Cabinet.

## **Stage 4 – Monitoring & Evaluation**

One delegate asked about the need for independent verification of monitoring information obtained from Ministries, since Ministries may want to present an overly positive view of their implementation record. This risk was acknowledged, though it was recognised that not all secretariats had the resources to conduct their own assessments on the ground.



Another question concerned the risk of Ministries being subjected to multiple, duplicating monitoring mechanisms– for example from the Cabinet secretariat, the Office of the President (or Prime Ministers) and the Ministry of Finance.

It was explained that in Uganda, Ministries report under their sector to the Office of Prime Minister which coordinates the Government’s Annual Reporting system, covering all government activity. The process of compiling the annual report includes a two day meeting every year which examines each Ministry’s report individually. In contrast, the Cabinet secretariat’s monitoring relates specifically to Cabinet decisions and provides a report to Cabinet every 6 weeks, discussed under Matters Arising.

In Zambia, a meeting is held to discuss the Cabinet secretariat’s consolidated monitoring report before this is submitted to Cabinet, providing an opportunity to ensure that Cabinet secretariat and Ministry of Finance reports are “speaking the same words”.

Early in the week, one presenter argued that policy evaluation is a critical tool and particularly valuable are objective and independent evaluations of government policies, as a test of credibility and to help to sustain support from the Ministry of Finance. The point was made that governments need to agree ahead of time what they will accept as realistically successful outcomes. In this way, monitoring and evaluation form an important element in government transparency, helping to build public support.

#### 8.4 Challenges of policy development

The presentation from Zambia summarised three challenges that could prevent a policy being successful:

- if resources are not adequately linked to policy;
- if donors drive the agenda and there are no adequate plans for when they leave; or
- if policy does not take account of existing law, or necessary amendments to law are forgotten.

#### 8.5 Division of responsibility between Cabinet Secretariat and line Ministries

Delegates discussed where the demarcation lines were drawn between Cabinet secretariat and line Ministry through the stages of policy development and implementation. The Zambian delegation emphasised that the policy role of their secretariat was about “overseeing” and providing “back up support, advice” to “ensure that guidelines and format are followed”.

All agreed on the basic divide – that

- Cabinet secretariat coordinates, oversees and manages the process; while
- Line Ministries initiate, own and implement policy.

But there were differences of emphasis. Some Cabinet secretariats clearly have more resources, more influence and play a larger role in the process.

#### 8.6 Analogies of the policy making process

Another speaker offered different analogies of how evidence feeds into the policy process. The first analogy is drawn from the **oil industry**, seeing research taking place ‘upstream’ and policy development ‘downstream’. Data are extracted and processed by researchers, then passed to policy makers. Researcher and policy maker are: “part of the same industry but ... deal with the product in a different way”<sup>5</sup>. This image was acknowledged to have some force, but suggest the policy process is more linear than it often is.

Another analogy was that of policy making being akin to the workings of an **adversarial legal system**, with prosecution and defence barristers each adducing evidence to support their own case. This analogy illuminated the fact that policy emerges stronger if subjected to critique and challenge. Alternative, competing facts and arguments from Ministries, NGOs or interest groups need to be tested against each

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<sup>5</sup>Quoting UK MP Vince Cable (now Secretary of State for Business and Innovation but at the time an opposition spokesperson) speaking in 2003 at Overseas Development Institute (ODI) <http://www.odi.org.uk/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/events-documents/2609.pdf>

other before a policy is adopted. This analogy highlights the importance of Cabinet and its committees as the forum for this process, with members encouraged to question and challenge the recommendations and evidence put forward in order to make balanced collective decisions.

A different way of looking at the element of conflict would be the traditional **Marxist dialectic** borrowed from Hegel. In this process a thesis is offered against which an antithesis is argued. The dialectical process yields synthesis. Progress is the product of repeated cycles of this back and forth antagonism.

Less theoretically, the image was offered of policy development proceeding by means of **pendulum swings**. A policy theme becomes the vogue – for example, centrally set government delivery targets. This produces benefits but also unintended consequences. In the years that follow, different policies are applied to try to counteract the unintended consequences and the pendulum swings back.

Finally, the speaker offered the analogy of policy making as a **process of trial and error**<sup>6</sup> which echoed one of the presentations which recommended room for some experimentation in reforming Cabinet processes until a system is discovered that fits your needs.

## 9. BUILDING POLICY CAPACITY

At the end of the week the workshop heard a presentation outlining the experience of the Uganda Cabinet secretariat in driving the development of policy skills capacity across government.

### 9.1 Experience of Uganda

It was apparent that, after considerable time and sustained effort, ‘policy development’ was now recognised in Uganda as “a core function of government”. In those jurisdictions in which this was not yet the case, or where there was an absence of policy capacity, instances might be found of Ministers “writing their own” policy. This was not ideal – the proper role of a Minister is setting strategic direction. There should be support from Ministry officials to prepare detailed policy proposals for Ministerial approval.

The Ugandan presentation explained that a programme had been underway for several years under which the Cabinet secretariat supported the development of policy capacity across government. This did not imply that policy responsibility was transferred to the secretariat. Policy was still owned by line Ministries, but the secretariat played a guiding and advisory role.

Three means had been employed to build capacity:

- tools had been developed, in particular policy guidelines and templates for use by policy makers;
- training programmes, including induction for new Ministers; and
- workshops in policy capacity, bringing together Ministers and Permanent Secretaries.

The point was made by one delegate that writing skills were often lacking – especially in governments where English was the official language but not the language in which most civil servants had been educated through secondary and university levels.

Lessons from Uganda’s experience included:

- the need for a long term programme, starting at the top with workshops for Ministers and Permanent Secretaries, then providing targeted training at other levels to meet deficits identified;
- working with international partners – while a long term commitment can bring great benefits, the partnership must be directed by the beneficiary, not driven by donor agendas. Uganda’s ten year partnership with the Ontario Public Service had enabled twinning and placements for Ugandan civil servants and between visits, communication was maximised by using email and teleconferencing to stay in touch. No consultants were employed - activities are designed by and for practitioners;

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<sup>6</sup>Rondinelli, 1993, Development Projects as Policy Experiments: An Adaptive Approach to Development Administration.

- engage local skills and expertise – to help deliver training programmes: in this case through the Uganda Management Institute;
- value links with civil service promotion procedures– policy is now a key component of the written exams which must be taken for promotion in Uganda, so policy training courses are “always over-subscribed”; and
- be opportunistic– the whole policy development programme began when the opportunity for mutual benefit was seized by teaming up with a donor-funded project in the Ministry of Finance which could not engage Ministers but did have on offer policy development expertise.

The long term impact of the development programme has not only been to ensure that the policy function is recognised and legitimised within government. It has also raised the profile and the demonstrated usefulness of the Cabinet secretariat – leading to an increase in its budget.

For the future, a comprehensive policy capacity development programme is planned based on the evidence revealed by a recent “Policy Capacity Assessment of Public Service”.

## 10. AFRICA CABINET GOVERNMENT NETWORK

The Africa Cabinet Government Network met formally over two days, during which it:

- adopted a founding charter;
- elected a Council, President and three Regional Vice Presidents;
- agreed on ongoing work and to meet again, in Accra, Ghana, later in 2014; and
- issued a formal Communiqué.

There was warm agreement on the value of this unique forum for Cabinet Secretaries to meet their peers, share experience and learn from one another. One delegate spoke of the “enthusiasm shown by participants [which] has encouraged me to believe there is a future in this organisation”.

### 10.1 Charter of the Africa Cabinet Government Network

The Charter (see Annex 1) establishes the Network as a permanent organisation to provide formal and informal opportunities for collaboration, mutual support and the sharing of practical experiences across African Cabinet Secretariats. Although not yet established as a registered international NGO, the Charter sets out the objectives and governance of the organisation, including its structure, decision-making procedures, finances and activities. Particular attention was given to the confidentiality of some of the information shared and public statements made on behalf of the Network.

### 10.2 Council of African Cabinet Secretaries

The Council was established during the Workshop to lead the Network and bring together those who have the responsibility of supporting and managing the collective Cabinet decision-making in the members’ respective jurisdictions. The Cabinet Secretaries from **Ghana, Liberia, Malawi, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Somaliland, South Sudan, Uganda, Zambia** and **Zanzibar** are foundation members of the Council.

### 10.3 Elected officers

As announced in the Communiqué, Dr Ernest Surrur, Secretary to the Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service of the Government of Sierra Leone, was elected President of the Council of African Cabinet Secretaries.

Three Regional Vice Presidents were also elected:

- Dr Momo Rogers, Director General to the Cabinet, Government of Liberia, was elected Vice President for West Africa;
- Mr Abdon Agaw Jok Nhial, Secretary General of the Government of South Sudan, was elected Vice President for East Africa; and

- Dr Roland Msiska, Secretary to the Cabinet of the Government of the Republic of Zambia, was elected Vice President for Southern Africa.

#### **10.4 ACGN ongoing and future activities**

Council members and delegates were keen to continue networking via electronic means and to stay in touch between meetings. To facilitate this, contact details were shared.

It was agreed to hold another roundtable in Accra later in 2014. Topics for discussion at that second meeting were debated and delegates identified the following as fruitful areas for discussion:

- sources of evidence (including NGOs and think tanks);
- policy coordination;
- strategic communications;
- managing Government transitions; and
- feeding back the results of activities undertaken following the first workshop in Addis Ababa.

#### **10.5 Applying the lessons from the first workshop**

In a discussion on the final day, delegations were invited to share what they had learned from the week, together with priorities for action in their own Cabinet secretariats identified as a result.

The following priorities for action were listed:

- introducing a standard format for Cabinet memoranda;
- introducing Cabinet standing committees;
- revising the Cabinet manual;
- sharing the results of this workshop with secretariat staff;
- staff capacity building;
- improving institutional evidence gathering (quantitative and qualitative evidence base); and
- producing executive summaries for the Cabinet chair to assist in managing business efficiently.

## Africa Cabinet Government Network

### CHARTER

#### PURPOSE AND STATUS:

1. The Africa Cabinet Government Network (referred to in this Charter as ‘the Network’) is a voluntary organisation established for the benefit of members and, through them, the Cabinet secretariats, governments and peoples they work for.
2. The purpose of the Network is to provide formal and informal opportunities for collaboration, mutual support and sharing practical experience, as well as providing technical assistance to Cabinet Secretaries and others involved in managing Cabinet processes in Africa, in order to facilitate evidence-informed collective decision-making by governments and effective implementation of their decisions.
3. The Network shall provide support and advice on government decision-making **processes**. It shall not provide advice or support on the **content** of government policies or other decisions, unless requested by the government concerned.
4. The Network shall be registered in future in an appropriate jurisdiction to enable it to enter directly into legally binding agreements.

#### DEFINITIONS

5. For the purposes of this Charter, ‘Cabinet’ refers to the supreme collective decision-making body within an executive government, usually comprising Ministers and usually chaired by the Head of Government. It does not include parliamentary bodies which are elected and are directly accountable to electorates.
6. ‘Cabinet Secretaries’ are the principal officials responsible for managing the support for the Cabinet and supervising the secretariat. These are often senior Civil Servants, but may also be Ministers or political appointees. The criterion for membership is based on their function rather than their employment status.

#### STRUCTURE

7. The Network shall be governed by the **Council of African Cabinet Secretaries** (referred to below as ‘the Council’).
8. The Council shall elect a President and regional Vice Presidents, who will retain those positions for a period specified by the Council, but not more than two years. These office holders must be (and remain) members of the Council. There will be a Vice President for each region (East, Southern, West, North and Central Africa) from which there are at least two Cabinet Secretaries on the Council.
9. The Council shall determine the policies of the Network, subject to this Charter, and approve major projects, activities and priorities.
10. The Executive Committee shall comprise the President and Vice Presidents and shall decide matters consistent with this Charter and resolutions of the Council.
11. The Council may also appoint a Technical Committee comprising staff of Cabinet Secretariats, advisers or others to provide technical support if required.

12. The Executive Committee shall appoint an Executive Director who reports to the Executive Committee and is responsible for day-to-day management of the Network and coordination of secretariat support staff provided by Cabinet secretariats. The Executive Director will be the Secretary to the Executive Committee.
13. From time to time the Council may appoint firms or other organisations as agents to assist the Network to manage specific projects or activities, including (but not limited to) contracting with donors, employing staff and managing funds on behalf of the Network. Agreements with agents entered into prior to the establishment of this Charter will continue until completed.

#### **COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP**

14. Membership of the Council shall comprise Cabinet Secretaries or equivalent from African countries.
15. Membership shall be open to all African Cabinet Secretariats who wish to join and agree to comply with this Charter. This includes Cabinet Secretaries in sub-national governments as well as national governments. There is no limit to the number of members.
16. If a member of the Council ceases to hold the office of Cabinet Secretary or equivalent, he or she ceases to be a member of the Council (but may be appointed an Associate Member of the Network in accordance with Article 18).
17. Membership of the Council is limited to the individuals holding the post of Cabinet Secretary, not the governments they work for. The Network shall not impose any criteria regarding the system of government or decisions or actions a government may have taken. The only grounds for refusing or terminating membership are serious criminal conviction or explicit UN sanctions affecting the **individual**.

#### **ASSOCIATE MEMBERS OF THE NETWORK**

18. Other individuals may be appointed as Associate Members, for example former Cabinet Secretaries, individual staff of Cabinet secretariats, advisers who work directly with Cabinet Secretaries, and representatives of organisations or firms who support development of Cabinet processes.
19. Associate Members shall be approved by the Executive Committee subject to any relevant resolutions of the Council regarding criteria.

#### **FINANCES**

20. The sources funding for the Network's activities may include member contributions, donations from governments, and donations or other support from international organisations and other donors.
21. There shall be a compulsory fee for membership of the Council, determined by the Executive Committee and endorsed by the Council. In addition, the Council may request members or their governments to make voluntary contributions to the Network or to specific activities. These contributions may be financial or in other forms (such as allocating office accommodation, equipment or staff members to provide part time support for Network activities, etc).
22. The Council may agree to membership charges for some categories of associate members.

23. The Executive Committee shall seek support from donors for specific projects or for general costs. Any proposed agreement with donors shall be consistent with the purposes of the Network and this Charter and shall be endorsed by the Council.
24. No salaries or fees shall be paid by the Network to Council Members, although they may be reimbursed for expenses incurred on behalf of the Network.

#### **DECISION-MAKING**

25. All decisions of the Council and the Executive Committee shall be made by a simple majority of votes cast, with each Cabinet secretariat having one vote. Where there is more than one member from a secretariat, they shall have only one vote between them. In the event of a tie, the President shall have a casting vote.
26. There shall be provision for decisions to be taken at meetings or by email.
27. A minimum of 14 days notice shall be given for meetings and also 14 days provided to members for votes by email.
28. Emails sent to the last notified email address shall be deemed to have been received. Failure to receive a response to the nominated Network email address will be regarded as refusal to vote or a 'no objection' (depending on the resolution).
29. Members may nominate proxies to vote on their behalf based on procedures agreed by the Executive Committee.
30. Meetings of the Council shall be convened, as required, by the President at least once each year, with necessary decisions between meetings taken by email. Meetings of the Executive Committee shall be convened as required, at least quarterly, where necessary by telephone conference or Skype.
31. The Executive Committee shall have the authority to determine further detailed decision-making rules and regulations consistent with this Charter.

#### **ACTIVITIES**

32. The Network shall engage in activities consistent with this Charter, which may be open to all member secretariats or only some secretariats, depending on the interest and needs of individual secretariats and the availability of funding.
33. Specific activities shall be approved by the Executive Committee, consistent with any work plan, priorities or other resolutions of the Council.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

34. From time-to-time Council Members may share sensitive information or documents with other members or associate members on a confidential basis. It is entirely up to each Cabinet Secretary to decide what information will be shared, consistent with the secrecy provisions of his or her own Cabinet, and shall clearly specify to the Network secretariat the basis on which it is being shared.
35. All members agree to respect the confidentiality of information or documents and not to provide access to others without the expressed permission of the Cabinet Secretary concerned.

**PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND ADVICE**

36. The Network shall not make any public criticism or comment on any decision of a government whose Cabinet Secretary is a member of the Council. No person shall make public criticism or comment on any government in the name of or on behalf of the Network or the Council.
37. All public material will be limited to advice and guidance on Cabinet processes or activities of the Network.
38. Consistent with any policies or criteria decided by the Council and the Executive Committee, information and documents published (eg on the Network website or in newsletters) shall be consistent with the purpose of the Network. Published information or documents shall not purport to represent the views of the Council or its members unless previously agreed by the Council.

**ESTABLISHMENT AND AMENDMENT**

39. This Charter is approved by a meeting of Cabinet Secretaries and their representatives on 7 February 2014.
40. This charter may be amended by a resolution of the Council, provided that prior notification of the specific amendment is circulated with at least 14 days notice.