



DRIVING THE USE OF EVIDENCE FROM THE TOP: WORKING WITH AFRICAN CABINET SECRETARIES

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last four years the Africa Cabinet Government Network (ACGN) has worked with a group of senior African officials to increase the use of evidence in decision-making by Cabinets or Councils of Ministers. These officials, usually called Cabinet Secretaries, Chief Secretaries or Secretary Generals, are responsible for supporting the key decision-making processes of the Cabinet or Council of Ministers within their Governments. Some of these officials are also Heads of the Civil Service; in other cases they are standalone positions. Usually they are the most senior civil servant, although in some countries the role is performed by a Minister or other political appointee.

This paper:

- highlights why these officials are key actors and how they can play a very positive role in driving evidence informed policy-making (EIPM);
- outlines the institutional capacity building that ACGN has been undertaking over the last four years to harness this potential to make greater use of evidence in Cabinet decision-making in Africa;
- provides some evidence of the success of these institutional capacity building efforts;
- emphasizes what we believe are the critical success factors and major lessons; and
- lists some of the remaining challenges being faced.

THE AFRICA CABINET GOVERNMENT NETWORK

The ACGN is a registered international NGO set up by a group of African Cabinet Secretaries to provide peer advice and technical assistance to improve their support for Cabinet decision-making by African Governments. The organization is committed to supporting inclusive, evidence informed decisions and for the past four years has been working with more than a dozen Cabinet Secretariats from East, West and Southern Africa, with support from DFID's Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence (BCURE) program and Adam Smith International.

So far 14 Cabinet Secretariats have participated in ACGN's international activities, which have included three very successful Roundtable Meetings of Cabinet Secretaries and four international training workshops for

policy analysts from those Secretariats, all of which have focused on the use of evidence in developing policy proposals for consideration by Cabinets. The UK BCURE program also supported in-country technical assistance in three of these Secretariats, in Sierra Leone, Liberia and South Sudan, as well as some assistance to the Council of Ministers in Somaliland. The DFID program has been successfully completed, but ACGN members are keen to continue to work together and to expand their membership to the rest of Africa.

WHY DOES CABINET DECISION-MAKING NEED TO BE INFORMED BY EVIDENCE?

In most African Governments, the Cabinet or Council of Ministers is the key collective decision-making body that approves Government policies and most of the draft laws submitted to Parliament. The Cabinet also allocates financial and human resources to implement those policies and laws once approved. It is the key mechanism where the various Ministries and sectors come together to address the complex challenges facing Governments, challenges that often require 'whole of Government' approaches or at least active collaboration between Ministries and sectors, such as for infrastructure planning, poverty alleviation, economic development and ensuring security, locally and at the national level.

Many donors focus on supporting line Ministries and external bodies, such as think tanks, to improve the quality of policy proposals being submitted for Cabinet consideration, including increasing the use of evidence to inform the policy development process for a specific sector such as health. However, this is not enough.

Policy proposals prepared within Ministries may be informed by evidence, but it is also important for Cabinets themselves to be informed by evidence. There is not much point in having a well-researched and evidence-informed policy proposal come to the Cabinet table if it is then overruled without any consideration of the evidence on which it is based. Even if they do not get into technical policy issues, Cabinets decide priorities and allocate resources, and these decisions also need to be informed by evidence.

This is not to suggest that Cabinets can, or should, be driven only by the evidence, without regard to the many political, strategic and coordination issues they need to consider. But even pure political decisions should be informed by evidence, for example evidence on how a specific proposal might affect the governing party's supporters and key constituencies, evidence on who the winners and losers would be, and evidence on whether this policy can even be implemented at all given capacity constraints and likely political opposition in the Parliament if it requires legislation.

Cabinets also need to take into account the strength and reliability of the evidence for the proposed policy, as well as evidence on how it might affect other sectors and the policies of other Ministries. Too often policy proposals from a specific Ministry are driven by the vested interests of that Ministry, or the sector they represent, or even the international agendas behind the donors and international advisers that support them. In making a national policy decision the Cabinet needs to consider a broader range of issues informed by a broader range of evidence than is likely to be submitted by the proposing Ministry.

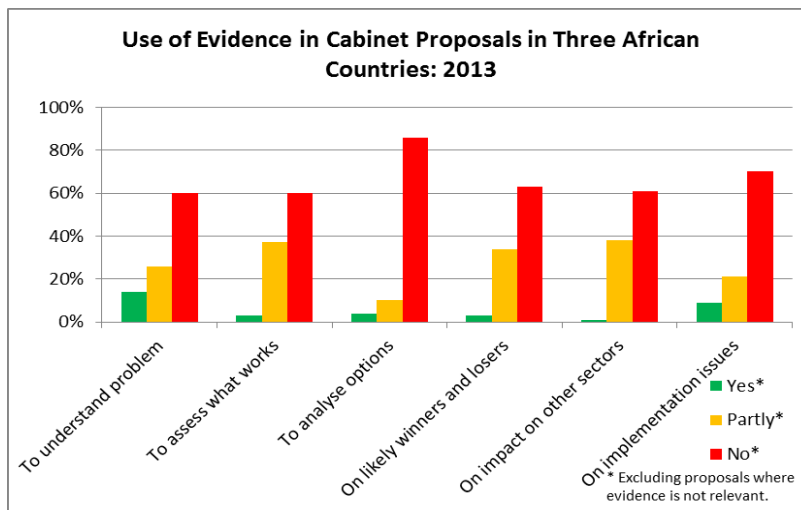
UNIQUE RESEARCH INTO THE USE OF EVIDENCE BY AFRICAN CABINETS

Many, probably most, African Cabinet decisions are not based on evidence.

The ACGN and its governing body, the Council of African Cabinet Secretaries, have been motivated by unique research highlighting that many policy proposals submitted to Cabinets fail to provide Ministers with sufficient evidence on the feasibility and likely impact of proposed policies.

The unique research conducted by ACGN involved privileged access to Cabinet documents in three countries, allowing the research team to assess the extent to which evidence was incorporated into the proposals submitted to their Cabinets over a period of 4-5 months in 2013. This research surveyed all 178 decisions taken by the three African Cabinets over the period of the review. (Participating Cabinet Secretaries were given the option to set aside any specifically sensitive decisions, but in the event none of them did.) All the confidential documents submitted to support these decisions were reviewed based on ACGN’s International Cabinet Process Assessment Tool.¹

As shown in this diagram, the great majority of decisions were taken without relevant evidence, such as evidence to understand the problem, evidence of what works, analysis of options, evidence on likely winners and losers, evidence of the impact on other sectors or evidence on implementation issues.



The review also revealed that, where there was input from international advisers, it often promoted narrow solutions for complex problems, sometimes without regard to the local context, necessary institutional constraints or national priorities.

One example is the input of an international expert on Special Economic Zones, who over-sold the benefits of this mechanism to increase foreign investment. It reminds one of the carpenter who only has a hammer, wandering around looking for nails to hit. In this case the adviser did not provide evidence of where the mechanism had not been implemented successfully and the specific circumstances in which it worked or failed.

The ACGN review also found lengthy papers and reports prepared by international experts that were indigestible for Ministers, exposing the limited capacity in many Ministries to focus policy development on local needs and priorities, and to translate the jargon, for the Cabinet context.

Although these results are from only three countries, other ACGN members have reported a similar story: decisions taken in Cabinet with little or no evidence to support them. They all expressed frustration about the quality of many of the policy proposals being submitted to their Cabinets and expressed a common desire to increase the use of evidence in Cabinet proposals.²

ANOTHER KEY DRIVER: CABINET DECISIONS NOT IMPLEMENTED

ACGN’s work has also been driven by the frustration of many Cabinet Secretaries, and the Presidents they serve, about the low rate of implementation of Cabinet decisions. Partly as a result of the low quality of the

¹ For details of the methodology and the results, see the report in the members’ section of the ACGN website: www.cabinetgovernment.net. Non-members can obtain a copy of the report from the Executive Director: markj@cabinetgovernment.net.

² See the Lilongwe Declaration by the Council of African Cabinet Secretaries in April 2016: <http://www.cabinetgovernment.net/docs/Lilongwe%20Declaration.pdf>

policy proposals submitted to Cabinet, in many African nations only 50% of Government decisions are ever implemented – sometimes even less than 50%. Other decisions are implemented but fail to achieve results.³

Policy decisions that are announced but never implemented not only miss opportunities to achieve national development; they can also undermine the credibility of Governments with voters and international partners. Failed decisions undermine the ability of Governments to make credible promises to potential foreign and local investors, promises that need to be credible if they are to attract longer term investments and economic development. And persistent failure to implement promises to citizens can undermine the credibility of the state, with Governments then seen as a major part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

Often decisions are not implemented because they failed to consider the resources and capacities required to implement them, failed to consider the potential impact on other sectors, were taken without engagement with key stakeholders and/or were taken without analysis of the evidence on what works, and in what circumstances. Africa needs Government decisions that are driven by evidence and analysis of the complex issues, rather than simplistic populism, personal or organizational self-interest, or narrow foreign agendas.

In its discussions with Presidents, Ministers and Cabinet Secretaries, ACGN has found that this common frustration about the low rate of implementation of Cabinet Decisions has motivated steps to improve Cabinet procedures to ensure that proposals are informed by relevant evidence so that impediments to implementation are addressed when the decision is taken, not later when implementation has stalled.

POTENTIAL FOR CABINETS TO DRIVE USE OF EVIDENCE IN PREPARING PROPOSALS

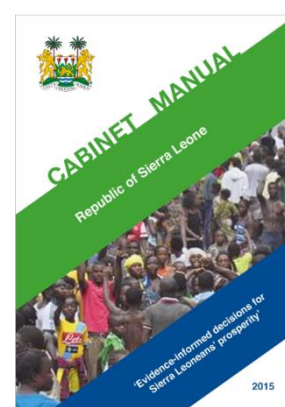
ACGN has therefore worked together over the last four years to enable African Cabinets to make better, more evidence-informed decisions. This support has not recommended specific policies or interventions but has worked to strengthen the processes by which each Cabinet makes its own decisions in the light of local needs and priorities.

ACGN's work has also demonstrated the potential for Cabinets to move beyond consideration of the evidence put before them, to pro-actively drive the use of evidence in the development of policy proposals destined for consideration by Cabinet.

Some of the Cabinet Secretaries with whom ACGN has been working have introduced or strengthened Cabinet procedures that require Ministries to incorporate evidence into their policy proposals to Cabinet. Utilizing the Cabinet Secretary's role as gatekeeper to the Cabinet, this has provided a powerful incentive to the policy staff in Ministries to include evidence in their proposals: if they fail to do so, then their policy proposals will not reach the Cabinet to be considered.

In Sierra Leone for example, this has resulted in a new Cabinet procedures manual that requires all policy proposals to include relevant evidence.⁴ As emphasized by the President of Sierra Leone in introducing the new procedures:

Our decisions must be based on evidence of what works and what is needed to make them work: we must take decisions that can and will be implemented.



³ Based on discussion with ACGN members. In most cases these low implementation rates are not published, for obvious reasons. However, in Sierra Leone a report by the Cabinet Oversight and Monitoring Unit in 2014 showed that only 48.5% of decisions taken over the 6 years 2007-12 had been implemented, with as many as 65% not implemented in one of those years (2011).

⁴ <http://www.cabinetgovernment.net/cab-manuals.php>

A critical step in the new evidence-based procedures is the requirement for all proposals to be submitted using a new standard format focusing Ministries on the key areas where evidence is required.

In Sierra Leone and elsewhere these procedural changes have been reinforced with other steps to build institutional capacity to use evidence, including:

- Restructuring and strengthening the Cabinet Secretariat (eg by establishing a Policy Review Unit) to ensure the Secretariat has the capacity to review draft proposals being prepared by Ministries and to assist them to meet the new procedural requirements for evidence;
- Establishing or strengthening Cabinet Standing Committees, to enable the evidence base of policy proposals to be considered by the relevant Ministers (and sometimes advisers) before the proposal reaches the full Cabinet;
- Setting up networks of Cabinet Liaison Officers or Cabinet Focal Persons in each Ministry to work with the Cabinet Secretariat to ensure that the requirements for evidence are understood in their Ministries and to maximize compliance; and
- Providing training to key Ministry staff on how to prepare evidence-informed policy proposals consistent with the new Cabinet procedures (for example in Sierra Leone more than 150 civil servants have been trained by ACGN, mostly through a 1-month intensive program offered to all Ministries).

WORKING TOGETHER INTERNATIONALLY

ACGN's flagship activities are its regular Roundtable Meetings of Cabinet Secretaries and other senior officials. Three very successful Roundtable Meetings in Addis Ababa (2014), Accra (2015) and Lilongwe (2016) have all focused on evidence informed policy-making.⁵



The Roundtable Meetings bring together Cabinet Secretaries and equivalent senior officials to share their experiences and to discuss issues affecting the critical roles they play within their Governments. The meetings are conducted under '[the Chatham House rule](#)' to allow Secretaries and other senior officials the opportunity to confidentially discuss sensitive issues regarding Cabinet processes, such as their relationships with Presidents and Ministers and strategies to increase implementation of decisions, especially through increased use of evidence to inform policy decisions.⁶ This has enabled constructive, practical and candid discussions on some of the sensitive challenges in driving evidence-informed decision-making in a highly politically charged environment.

⁵ Reports on these previous Roundtables are available on ACGN's website: www.cabinetgovernment.net.

⁶ See <https://www.chathamhouse.org/about/chatham-house-rule>. Articles 56-7 of the ACGN Charter provide for confidential sharing of information between Cabinet Secretaries (<http://www.cabinetgovernment.net/charter.php>).

As a result of these discussions, participants at the Roundtable Meeting in 2016 agreed to the Lilongwe Declaration to work individually and collectively to take practical steps to increase the use of evidence to inform the decision-making of their Cabinets.⁷ These practical steps included new Cabinet procedures requiring policy proposals to include relevant evidence, developing the capacity of Cabinet Secretariats to promote and review the use of evidence, making effective use of Cabinet Committees, building the capacity of line Ministries, ensuring effect liaison between Secretariats and Ministries, and improving coordination between Ministries to devise and deliver cross-government policies and programs.

ACGN's international training programs for Cabinet Secretariat staff, held in Kigali (2014), Accra (2015), Entebbe (2015) and Zanzibar (2016), also specifically focused on increasing the use of evidence in the development and review of policy proposals to Cabinets. ACGN also provides members with peer support, work experience and an on-line cabinet policy development toolkit for member organizations, which also focuses on the use of evidence.

ACGN members report that this international collaboration has played a significant role in their efforts to increase the use of evidence in Cabinet decision-making. As mentioned already, the high-level Roundtable Meetings allow for candid discussion of the practical and political issues that arise in trying to improve Cabinet decision-making, issues that cannot be adequately shared via roving international advisers who have not had the experience of managing an African Cabinet Secretariat.⁸

MEASURING RESULTS

While most ACGN members report increases in the use of evidence in Cabinet proposals, the best documented results come from Sierra Leone, where ACGN worked most intensively under the BCURE program. These results are not necessarily representative; indeed they are probably not shared by other Cabinets given that the rate of change in most other ACGN members over the last four years has undoubtedly been less for a number of reasons, ranging from the civil war in South Sudan, the greater impact of Ebola in Liberia and a higher baseline in some other countries.

However, Sierra Leone's achievements do demonstrate what is possible, in its case achieved despite the ravages of Ebola. (In fact, its Cabinet Secretary has pointed out that "the Ebola crisis also helped to motivate our reforms. We saw first-hand how some of our international partners used evidence extensively in designing their support. We also felt frustration that some other countries did not take more account of research and evidence – in designing their aid or in closing their borders to many West Africans.")⁹

Prior to the reforms in Sierra Leone, its Cabinet Members rarely asked for evidence to support proposals; neither did the Cabinet Secretariat. And there was very limited capacity to review the use of evidence in proposals. Through the new procedures and associated institutional capacity building, there has been what the Cabinet Secretary describes as "*a paradigm shift in how Cabinet makes decisions*". He reports that there is now an '*evidence culture*' in Cabinet, with other Ministers asking their colleagues, for example: "How do you know that will work?" or "What evidence do you have on the likely impact on women?"

⁷ <http://www.cabinetgovernment.net/docs/Lilongwe%20Declaration.pdf>.

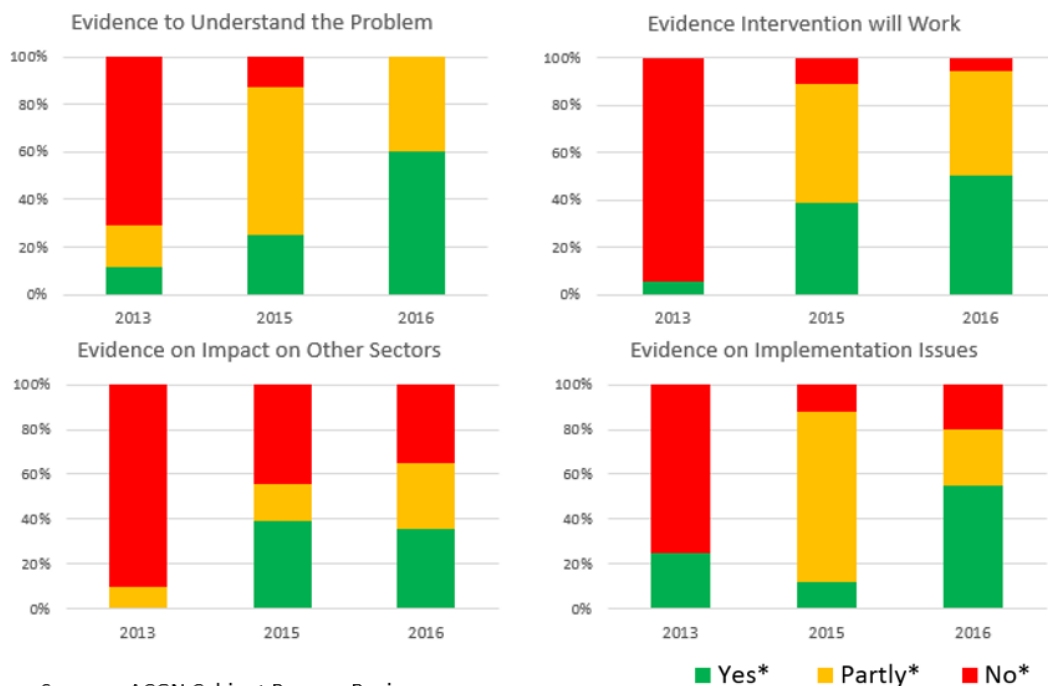
⁸ An internal 2016 survey of 13 ACGN members found that 85% of the responding Cabinet Secretariats had found that Cabinet decision-making processes had become more evidence informed as a result of the support of the BCURE project (the remaining 15% reported that, as relatively new members of ACGN, it was too early to tell).

⁹ This quote and the quotes below are from a recorded address by Dr Ernest Surrur to a DFID meeting in London in September 2016. Please contact the ACGN Executive Director for copies.

The result of the new procedures and this ‘evidence culture’ has been a measurable and statistically significant increase in the use of evidence in major proposals submitted to Cabinet between 2013 and 2016, as shown in the diagram below, which includes four of the key issues on which evidence was measured: evidence to understand the problem; evidence that the proposed intervention will work; evidence on the impact on other sectors; and evidence on implementation issues. Results for other issues were similar.¹⁰

The diagram shows, for each type of evidence, the percentage of written proposals that contained satisfactory evidence (green), partial evidence (yellow) and no evidence (red). In each case a generous, but consistent, interpretation of the required evidence was applied. The survey was initially conducted in 2013 and repeated late in 2015 and late in 2016. The new Cabinet procedures were approved in March 2015, so the 2015 results reflect only partial implementation. In each case, the percentages included only proposals for which that particular type of evidence was relevant.¹¹

Increased use of evidence in strategic Cabinet proposals: Sierra Leone: 2013-2016



Sources: ACGN Cabinet Process Reviews: 2013, 2015, 2016.

■ Yes* ■ Partly* ■ No*

* Excluding proposals where evidence is not relevant.

The use of all four illustrated types of evidence increased over the period 2013 to 2016. The greatest increases were in evidence that the proposed intervention will work and evidence to understand the problem, which were missing from 70%-90% of relevant proposals in 2013. By 2016 all or almost all relevant proposals contained at least partial evidence on these key issues.

¹⁰ See the report mentioned in footnote 1.

¹¹ Sierra Leone was the only country where ACGN has conducted three surveys. Two surveys were conducted in Liberia, in 2013 and 2015, showing a similar rate of increase over that period, but they have not been approved for publication.

A BROAD DEFINITION OF EVIDENCE

Some of the evidence being used in these proposals is from research, for example research commissioned by the World Bank on the success factors in using Special Economic Zones to increase investment. However, in assessing the use of evidence (and in advising Secretariats on new procedures) ACGN has taken a broader definition of 'evidence'. The new procedures in Sierra Leone, for example, require Ministries to provide any evidence on need, on expected benefits, on whether the proposed intervention will have the desired impact, on whether it can be implemented and on what impact it is likely to have on specific groups, such as women or the disabled, and on other sectors, regardless of the source and nature of the evidence. The most important criteria are its relevance and credibility.

The evidence requirement has been deliberately **not** confined to research results. As mentioned already, the baseline review in three countries revealed that a large majority (60-80%) of proposals provided Cabinet with **no evidence at all**. No evidence from research, but also no evidence from proposed implementers or those likely to be affected by the proposal, or from other sources.

Increasing demand for evidence generally was therefore necessary before encouraging the use of more sophisticated evidence.

IMPACT ON CITIZENS

Sierra Leone's new procedures have already had a positive impact for citizens. Some of the benefits have been quantifiable – decisions that have saved millions of dollars by rejecting expensive proposals with little evidence to support them. As the Cabinet Secretary has pointed out, increased use of evidence has helped Cabinet to make decisions that will lead to better outcomes. He gives the examples of decisions on:

- Establishment of post-graduate medical training institutes and a teaching hospital in Sierra Leone, to produce more and better trained doctors;
- A national lands policy, which will facilitate economic development, reduce conflict within communities, and ensure more equitable access to land;
- A national tourism strategy, which will take advantage of Sierra Leone's beautiful beaches and countryside, and wild-life and culture, and help the nation recover economically from Ebola; and
- Restructuring management of Sierra Leone's shipping register, which will enable it to respond to international concerns about Sierra Leone flagged ships being involved in international smuggling of drugs, arms and people.¹²

It is still too early to see the impact of these decisions and, even in eventual evaluations of their impact, it will be hard to quantify the difference made by new procedures or the use of evidence for specific decisions, not least because of the confidentiality of Cabinet documents and discussions. But there is no doubt that the Sierra Leone Cabinet is making greater use of evidence to make better decisions.

¹² From previously mentioned address to September 2016 DFID meeting.

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

There were seven critical factors behind the success of the Sierra Leone reforms and the progress in other ACGN member countries:

1. Focusing on procedures and institutional capacity, rather than just training:

The approach was inherently 'top-down', driven by decisions by the President and the Cabinet and enshrined in written procedures likely to outlast the current actors (see also 7 below). High level approval of the procedures, including the requirements to include evidence in proposals, ensured that Ministries had to comply in order to have their proposals considered by the Cabinet. This top-down approach can be contrasted with many other attempts to increase the use of evidence in policy making that work primarily through training individuals, including line Ministry staff, to persuade them to submit evidence-informed proposals to the Cabinet. Building the motivation and capacity of mid-level officials to use evidence may be wasted or frustrated if high-level decision-making by Governments does not take account of the evidence submitted.

2. Strong commitment and leadership by the President and the Cabinet Secretary:

In 2013 the newly-appointed Cabinet Secretary in Sierra Leone was looking to make his mark with substantial improvements in the support the Secretariat provided to the Cabinet. Importantly, he had the confidence of the President and was also Head of the Civil Service, responsible for assessing the performance of Permanent Secretaries, which facilitated implementation of the reforms in line Ministries. The new procedures were extensively discussed with the President and Cabinet members before the new Cabinet Manual was finally approved by the Government in March 2015. Delays due to Ebola, allowing time for more discussions, actually increased the level of ownership and subsequent compliance.

3. Measuring the evidence content of Cabinet proposals to motivate, focus and track the reforms:

As mentioned already, the Sierra Leone Government already had data quantifying that no more than 50% of its Cabinet decisions were being implemented. To explore the reasons for this, the Secretariat asked the ACGN to conduct a confidential process review of all written proposals considered by Cabinet over a 5-month period in 2013. As discussed above, this review revealed that most proposals lacked evidence on key issues, for example on whether the proposed intervention would work, its costs and feasibility and its likely impact. Limited resources and capacities available to Ministries were significant factors behind low implementation rates, but the review highlighted that most decisions were not informed by available evidence, including evidence on available resources and capacities. Implementation of the new procedures has been reinforced by the subsequent reviews conducted in 2015 and 2016, which have demonstrated very significant increases in the evidence used in proposals, but also the gap that remains.

4. A standard template for Cabinet proposals:

The requirement to use a standard template, which prompts Ministers to provide specific evidence to support their proposals, was the most tangible change, having far more immediate impact than the general principles and rules set out in the Manual. When the Manual was first approved, the President personally insisted that all Cabinet proposals for the next Cabinet meeting be submitted using the new template. Apart from a temporary halt in the flow of proposals, the immediate result was that many Ministers and senior officials approached the Secretariat seeking help to meet the new requirements, providing an opportunity for the newly established Cabinet Policy Review Unit to work cooperatively

with Ministries to build their capacity to use evidence in actual memos they were preparing for Cabinet. The Secretariat did not have to persuade Ministries to use evidence or to attend training; instead Ministries came to the Secretariat seeking help in meeting the specific requirements approved by the President and Cabinet.

5. Steps to improve coordination between Ministries and their capacity to comply:

The new Sierra Leone manual established three Cabinet Standing Committees, to bring Ministers and officials together before Cabinet meetings to discuss proposals and to review the evidence to support them.¹³ The Secretariat also established and trained a network of Cabinet Focal Persons across all Ministries, to assist in complying with the new procedures, especially use of the new template. And with support from the ACGN and local trainers, the Secretariat provided training for 150 civil servants in evidence-informed policy development. Most of the training used practical exercises and included rigorous testing of trainees before and after the training.

6. International support from practitioners and peers:

The international technical advisers engaged by ACGN all had extensive hands-on experience working in Cabinet Secretariats. This helped to build trust and recognised the specialist nature of the policy role of Secretariats, which differs fundamentally from policy development in a line Ministry or a policy think-tank.

Peer advice from other African Cabinet Secretaries also provided vital support for the Sierra Leone initiatives. Cabinet Secretaries are in a unique position within their governments, without the local peer support that, say, Permanent Secretaries can call on. As discussed above, the ACGN held three very successful Roundtable meetings of Cabinet Secretaries to compare notes and privately share practical experiences on the use of evidence and other issues relating to Cabinet processes. Many of these discussions have been very sensitive, which is why it has been important for them to come together face-to-face and to control the agenda, rather than being lectured to by external experts, even when those experts have experience in other similar countries.

7. Mainstreaming to maximize sustainability:

The focus on mainstream institutional processes and working through the civil service has meant that the new procedures in Sierra Leone are expected to be sustained well beyond the DFID support. They are owned and managed by a permanent Cabinet Secretariat staffed by civil servants, not a special unit unlikely to survive a change of President. Despite civil war and abrupt changes in government, the previous Cabinet Manual in Sierra Leone lasted more than 50 years, with procedures based on 1950s UK Cabinet processes. Civil servants in the Secretariat and in Ministries will continue to process evidence-informed memos even if there is 100% turnover of Ministers following the next election. Civil service promotion exams in Sierra Leone now assess candidates' understanding of the evidence requirements of the Cabinet procedures and these competencies are being incorporated into mainstream civil service training.

¹³ This was implemented late in 2016.

CHALLENGES

Significant challenges remain, however:

- a. **Personnel turnover:** Even civil service staff change from time to time, especially in senior positions such as the Secretary to Cabinet. This is why the ACGN program has put so much emphasis on formal, written procedures and institutional capacities, as well as individual training. And at the international level, ACGN has encouraged member organisations to participate in the Roundtable Meetings and training programs with at least two participants, to facilitate continuous engagement when the Cabinet Secretary or other staff are moved to other positions or retire.
- b. **Policy capacity in Ministries takes time to build:** The one-month training program for more than 150 civil servants in Sierra Leone, as well as the international training programs conducted by ACGN, have barely scratched the surface. The low levels of policy development capacity in many African Ministries will take many years to address. Even in Sierra Leone, much remains to be done to close the remaining gaps evident in the results of the 2016 process review and to improve the quality of much of the evidence being provided to Cabinet.
- c. **Line Ministries being assisted by international advisers with little understanding of Cabinet's role or the wider context of policy decisions:** ACGN's reviews of policy proposals being submitted to African Cabinets revealed many examples of proposals supported (or driven) by international advisers apparently with no real understanding of Cabinet processes (even in their own countries). Many of the proposals were driven by narrow donor agendas that were enthusiastically embraced by the relevant Ministry with a strong self-interest in the policy proposal, but failed to consider the wider implications for the nation. And many proposals supported by international advisers were not presented in a format that was appropriate for Cabinet Ministers. This is not necessarily the fault of the donor or the international adviser, but highlights the need for line Ministries, Cabinet Secretariats and Cabinets themselves to critically review proposals in the light of available evidence, especially on local needs, capacities and wider implications. The role of the Cabinet is not just to approve and resource a technical proposal driven by international interests and foreign perceptions of need.
- d. **Difficulty in finding funding for African cooperation on the use of evidence:** With most donors focused on specific countries or regions, and often on specific sectors and policies, ACGN has found it difficult to attract support for Africa-wide collaboration between Cabinet Secretaries on the use of evidence in policy-making. Most donors are more interested in supporting specific evidence-informed policies at the sector level, rather than more systemic and institutional approaches at building the capacity and motivation for evidence-informed decision-making. ACGN was fortunate with the scope and timing of DFID's BCURE program, which was quite unique (in our experience) in casting a wide net and encouraging projects working across national boundaries. While ACGN has decided to fund its core costs through an annual contribution from each of its members, it still relies on funding support for specific activities, both special projects (such as one recently funded by Australian Aid) and for some members to participate in the ACGN (as recently agreed with the World Bank).

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further details on ACGN's work please see its website (www.cabinetgovernment.net) or contact the Executive Director (markj@cabinetgovernment.net).