



AFRICA LEEPS: PROGRESS AND LESSONS LEARNED IN THE FIRST SIX MONTHS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

PROGRESS REPORT

Introduction

To achieve progress towards the fast-approaching 2030 deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there is heightened urgency for African countries to prioritize development priorities and policies that are guided by principles of equity and supported with a robust evidence base to address specific needs and circumstances. This will require strengthened research, decision-making, and knowledge brokering capabilities and new strategies and structures to incentivize consistent use of evidence in policymaking with attention to equity at all stages of the process. These capacities are critical to ensuring that policymakers have access to timely, high-quality, and relevant evidence to inform decision-making processes.

While many low- and lower-middle-income countries (LMICs) in Africa have made advancements in producing and using evidence to inform decision-making, progress has been uneven, faster in sectors like health while slower and fragmented in others, and not well documented. And while there is growing attention to placing equity at the center of policies, many countries face challenges in integrating gender considerations in the policymaking process – from agenda setting, to policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

There are many challenges that can hinder progress in evidence-informed policymaking (EIP) including: 1) limited knowledge and skill, whether a researcher's ability to produce and communicate relevant and quality evidence for policymaking or a policymaker's understanding of how to make sense of the evidence; 2) a lack of organizational structures and processes to facilitate evidence use, for example, mechanisms to promote knowledge sharing and collaboration between evidence producers and users; 3) a lack of champions and limited support from senior leadership in government; 4) the absence of incentives that reward or encourage evidence use, such as policy frameworks or checklists for documenting evidence; 5) fragmented initiatives that work in isolation and are not well documented, resulting in limited opportunities for learning and scaling; and 6) broader social, economic, and political considerations that make policy engagement difficult.

The consequences of these types of challenges are missed opportunities to inform and influence policies in service of Africa's citizens – to achieve healthier populations, mitigate the impact of climate change on livelihoods, deliver quality education, and accelerate financial empowerment, among other development priorities. Despite these challenges, there is increased interest among policymakers and development practitioners in using evidence to inform programs and policies, reflected in the support for efforts and initiatives that seek to strengthen EIP capacities, institutions, and partnerships, such as the **Africa LEEPS Partnership: Learning together to advance Evidence and Equity in Policymaking for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).**

BOX 1: GENDER EQUITY IN EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICYMAKING: KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

- 01** Evidence-informed policymaking (EIP) is the use of the best available evidence to inform or influence the design, implementation, monitoring, and assessment of policies and programs to advance progress towards the SDGs. Local, timely, and quality evidence provides needed contextual information to ensure that policies are responsive, efficient, and equitable.
- 02** Evidence consists of scientific knowledge, drawn from systematic and replicable research methods (e.g., systematic reviews, scoping reviews, evidence maps) routine data and information, and tacit knowledge, which includes the experiential insights of policymakers, experts, citizens, and other affected stakeholders. Evidence for policymaking can be used to clarify the size and nature of a problem, identify potential actions and the circumstances under which they will work, and monitor progress against intended outcomes.
- 03** Knowledge translation broadly refers to the process of moving (gathering, synthesizing, communicating, and applying) evidence into action (through, for example, policy change, improved practice, program development, behavioral change, etc.) to address Africa's development challenges. In Africa LEEPS, knowledge translation activities aim to enhance the relevance and accessibility of evidence, by facilitating the production of contextualized and appropriately tailored information to address local priorities and by strengthening institutional structures and processes to promote collaboration between researchers and policymakers.
- 04** Gender equity integration in evidence-informed policymaking involves embedding gender considerations in approaches, tools and frameworks, and strategies in EIP to improve gender equitable policy outcomes. This includes increasing the collection and use of gender data as evidence, strengthening gender analysis capacity to inform problem identification and identify potential solutions, using gender indicators to monitor policy implementation and impact, and increasing gender parity among EIP stakeholders (researchers, policymakers and other decision makers alike).

Africa LEEPS is an ambitious initiative aimed at **advancing the use of evidence in policymaking** to support progress towards the SDGs. The partnership brings together leading evidence organizations from across Africa to learn from each other, exchange knowledge and experiences, and jointly problem solve – **to strengthen evidence-informed policymaking and accelerate progress towards the SDGs**. Africa LEEPS is funded by the [International Development Research Centre](#) (IDRC), the [William and Flora Hewlett Foundation](#), and [Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH](#).

This report outlines key components of Africa LEEPS and highlights progress made and lessons learned in the first six months of the partnership.

The Africa LEEPS Partnership is piloting interventions to make local evidence for priority SDGs readily available to policymakers and testing different ways to institutionalize and support consistent use of evidence in policymaking. Partnership initiatives are designed to support knowledge translation efforts across different SDG priorities including health, environment and climate change, human capital development, and governance, documenting how these efforts are influencing policy or program change, and building an evidence base for the most effective approaches.

The Objectives of the Africa LEEPS Partnership

Africa LEEPS aims to enhance the capacity to produce, translate, and use evidence in policymaking within sub-Saharan Africa, with an ecosystem approach that considers and strengthens the interactions between researchers, knowledge translators, and policymakers. Different capacities and organizational supports are needed to ensure evidence use is prioritized in policymaking, including the ability to find, appraise, and synthesize evidence, information systems to improve access to contextualized and locally relevant evidence, expertise to communicate findings in clear and easy to understand formats, and an understanding of how to ensure gender and equity are centered in the design and implementation of policies.



Africa LEEPS partner organizations map out vision for partnership at launch workshop in Kigali, Rwanda.

BOX 2: MISSION AND VISION OF AFRICA LEEPS

The Africa LEEPS partnership aims to build capacities for knowledge translation (KT) – the synthesis, dissemination, and exchange of evidence – and institutionalize evidence-informed policymaking with a commitment to inclusive knowledge building and gender-equitable policies that promote well-being across different sectors in sub-Saharan Africa. The partnership’s vision is a culture of evidence use that advances people-centered policymaking and program implementation in Africa.

Africa LEEPS Partner Organizations

Technical capacity strengthening and policy engagement activities are led by three initiatives: the Centre d’Excellence Evidence Policy Action established by the [African Center for Equitable Development](#) (ACED)¹, the East African Regional Evidence Synthesis Initiative established by the [Centre for Rapid Evidence Synthesis](#) (ACRES)² and Alliance for Evidence and Equity in Policy-making in Africa established by the [African Institute for Policy Development](#) (AFIDEP)³. Each initiative is developing and testing different approaches for promoting equitable use of evidence in policymaking with a focus on strengthening capacity and building vibrant country-level evidence networks. They support knowledge translation efforts across different SDG priorities including health, environment and climate change, human capital development, and governance, documenting how these efforts are influencing policy or program change, and building an evidence base for the most effective approaches. [Results for Development](#) (R4D) serves as the engagement and learning coordinator for Africa LEEPS.

1 Other consortium partner: [Initiative prospective Agricole et rurale \(IPAR\)](#)

2 Other consortium partners: the [Ethiopian Public Health Institute](#), the [Malawi Liverpool Wellcome Programme](#), and the [Center for Reforms, Innovation, Health Policies and Implementation Research](#)

3 Other consortium partners: the [African Institute for Health Systems and Health Policies](#), the [African Research and Impact Network \(ARIN\)](#), and the [School of Gender and Women’s Studies, Makerere University](#)

FIGURE 1: AFRICA LEEPS PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS AND COUNTRIES SUPPORTED

**CENTRE
D'EXCELLENCE
EVIDENCE POLICY
ACTION**

**ESTABLISHED BY THE
AFRICAN CENTER
FOR EQUITABLE
DEVELOPMENT (ACED)**



Consortium partners include:

- Initiative prospective Agricole et rurale (IPAR)

Partner countries include:

- Benin
- Burkina Faso
- Côte d'Ivoire
- Niger
- Senegal
- Togo

**THE EAST AFRICAN
REGIONAL EVIDENCE
SYNTHESIS
INITIATIVE**

**ESTABLISHED BY THE
CENTRE FOR RAPID
EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS
(ACRES)**



Consortium partners include:

- Ethiopian Health Institute
- Malawi Liverpool Wellcome Programme
- Center for Reforms, Innovation, Health Policies and Implementation Research

Partner countries include:

- Ethiopia
- Malawi
- Tanzania
- Uganda

**ALLIANCE FOR
EVIDENCE
AND EQUITY IN
POLICYMAKING IN
AFRICA**

**ESTABLISHED
BY THE AFRICAN
INSTITUTE FOR
POLICY DEVELOPMENT
(AFIDEP)**



Consortium partners include:

- African Institute for Health Systems and Health Policies
- African Research and Impact Network (ARIN)
- School of Gender and Women's Studies, Makerere University

Partner countries include:

- Kenya
- Nigeria
- Through ARIN, Africa LEEPS has access to over 200 researchers and policymakers with national focal points in 36 African countries

First Six Months Progress

In March 2023, R4D was awarded funding to serve as the engagement and learning coordinator for Africa LEEPS, with responsibilities that included facilitating the partnership design and launch. In October 2023, three lead organizations were awarded funding to strengthen knowledge translation and enhance processes and structures for institutionalizing evidence use in policymaking in Africa. This section highlights country-level activities and progress made during the first six months of the partnership.

BOX 3: HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVES OF AFRICA LEEPS INITIATIVES

Centre d'Excellence Evidence Policy Action (led by ACED)

- a. Strengthen the capacity of individuals and institutions in the evidence to policy ecosystem in Africa
- b. Build awareness of and mobilize evidence to inform the development, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and scale-up of policies, programs, and projects in Francophone Africa
- c. Support efforts to institutionalize consistent use of evidence in policies, programs, and projects in Francophone Africa with attention to gender, equity, inclusion, and diversity
- d. Facilitate co-learning and knowledge sharing in knowledge mobilization and evidence-informed policymaking
- e. Strengthen the integration gender, equity, inclusion, and diversity considerations in the design, implementation, monitoring, and scale up of policies, programs, and projects in Francophone Africa

Alliance for Evidence and Equity in Policymaking in Africa (led by AFIDEP)

- a. Strengthen institutional and individual EIP technical capacity at local and national levels to enhance decision-making in policy and programs with initial priority to reproductive health and clean energy
- b. Integrate gender equity in EIP processes at program and institutional levels with initial priority given to reproductive health and clean energy
- c. Nurture EIP networking and learning within countries and across the region
- d. Stimulate improvements in reproductive health and clean energy programmatic interventions in Kenya and Nigeria

East African Regional Evidence Synthesis Initiative (EARESI) (led by ACRES)

- a. Develop an evidence base to support priority SDG and development sector policy questions in reproductive health and clean energy in the region
- b. Cultivate the next generation of EIP leaders in the region
- c. Build new, and strengthen existing, evidence units in delivering responsive and timely evidence for priority development sector policy-making processes in reproductive health and clean energy, through innovative methods, including the rapid response service

Key Partnership Milestones: 2023-2024

- **March 2023:** R4D awarded funding from IDRC to serve as the engagement and learning coordinator for Africa LEEPS
- **August 2023:** Partnership co-design workshop in Kigali where organizations selected in a closed Request for Proposals (RFP) process refined activities and approaches for strengthening knowledge translation and institutionalizing EIP, and co-created 2-, 5- and 10-year visions for Africa LEEPS
- **October 2023:** Three lead organizations awarded funding from IDRC for strengthening knowledge translation and institutionalizing EIP
- **November 2023:** ACED-IPAR launch event for Centre d'Excellence Evidence Policy Action during ACED's annual Evidence-Policy-Action (EPA) Forum – a platform to foster exchange and learning among evidence producers, policymakers, and practitioners in the Francophone Africa region
- **November 2023:** Alliance for Evidence and Equity in Policymaking in Africa (AFIDEP-led initiative) virtual kick-off meeting
- **December 2023:** Shared decision-making and governance framework outlining partner roles and responsibilities launched
- **December 2023:** EARESI (ACRES-led initiative) signed formal MOU with consortium partners
- **February 2024:** Alliance for Evidence and Equity in Policymaking in Africa (AFIDEP-led initiative) in-person annual partners planning meeting and gender equity and inclusion training workshop in Nairobi, Kenya
- **February 2024:** R4D launched cross-cutting working groups on MEL (Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning), Gender, and Communications and Knowledge Management to facilitate learning, exchange, and jointly developed tools and outputs
- **March 2024:** First quarterly partnership meeting to build community and facilitate knowledge exchange and reflection
- **April 2024:** Inception meeting and training of EARESI (ACRES-led initiative)
- **May 2024:** Launch of new Africa LEEPS logo and brand



Partner organizations, ACRES and AFIDEP, visualize challenges and theories of change to achieve Africa LEEPS mission and vision at launch workshop in Kigali, Rwanda.

BOX 4: CO-CREATING THE AFRICA LEEPS PARTNERSHIP

What informed the partnership design?

Africa LEEPS aims to build on progress made in strengthening EIP in the region, including by the PEERSS initiative. It is informed by a rapid scoping and landscape mapping conducted by R4D to understand challenges and opportunities in EIP in sub-Saharan Africa broadly, and in relation to IDRC SDG priority areas of reproductive health and clean energy.

How were partners selected?

IDRC issued a closed RFP to twelve evidence-to-policy organizations working in Africa (six in West Africa and six in East Africa). The RFP invited organizations to share ideas for addressing the gaps and opportunities identified in the rapid scoping phase – fragmented progress in EIP in Africa and a need for enhanced capabilities and processes to promote consistent use of evidence as countries strive to make progress towards the SDGs. Six proposals were received with final awards going to ACED, AFIDEP, and ACRES.

Lessons from this process:

Launching an RFP that invites genuine co-creation in all aspects – from the specifics of country-level activities to partnership structure, roles and responsibilities, and governance can introduce uncertainty and ambiguity in the early stages. For this to be an African-led initiative, partner organizations who are closest to regional and country-level challenges and opportunities and best positioned to do the work had to be centered. Space and flexibility in the design stage were critical to ensuring partner organizations with different voices and perspectives were engaged in setting the direction for Africa LEEPS.

Building a Foundation for Evidence Use: Understanding Priorities and Identifying Windows of Opportunity

In the first six months of the Africa LEEPS Partnerships, the three newly launched initiatives focused on foundation building assessment and engagement activities to identify gaps and opportunities and inform capacity strengthening and other areas of support. Using a variety of approaches and tools, they identified key stakeholders, assessed EIP capacities, and mapped policymaking processes and structures in country-level ecosystems. This section documents and highlights lessons from the foundational activities the initiatives are undertaking to inform the work they do going forward and briefly previews upcoming plans and priorities.

Ecosystem mapping: identifying key actors, frameworks, and processes to advance EIP

The ACED-led Centre d'Excellence Evidence Policy Action conducted an ecosystem mapping in six countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Senegal, Togo) to understand legal, political, and institutional frameworks, evidence use practices, key stakeholders, and their capacity needs. They adapted their previously developed ecosystem mapping tool – holistically examining context, producers, brokers, and users of evidence, incentives, and the sustainability of evidence systems, among other aspects – to facilitate a rapid assessment with a participatory approach that also integrated an analysis of gender in EIP. The adapted tool included a web scraping process to inform an initial mapping of key EIP structures, actors, and practices, priority policy areas, thematic evidence gaps, EIP capacities, and incentives for evidence production. The information gained from web scraping was supplemented with research conducted by national level consultants who also drew on experiential knowledge and stakeholder consultations that brought together key actors from national evidence systems.

The Centre d'Excellence Evidence Policy Action then organized country dialogues in each of the six countries, bringing together evidence generators and users to identify policy processes requiring evidence, exchange EIP experiences and challenges, and improve how key actors in the ecosystem understand the value of using evidence in policy processes. The consultations created a space for ecosystem actors to connect and share with one another and resulted in expressions of interest to engage further on evidence use in policymaking through the Center. The Centre d'Excellence Evidence Policy Action is conducting follow up conversations with decision-makers who attended the stakeholder dialogues to further understand how the initiative can support their decision-making needs.

Organizational capacity assessment: evaluating rapid synthesis capacities of knowledge translation units

The ACRES-led EARESI adapted the World Health Organization's Service Availability and Readiness Assessment tool¹ to evaluate the capacities of the knowledge translation units or functions of the four organizations in the consortium (ACRES, EPHI, CeRIHI, Malawi Liverpool Wellcome Programme) to provide rapid evidence synthesis services. The tool was selected for its focus on capacity constraints, gaps, and opportunities at the organizational level. Findings from the assessment identified capacity gaps and priorities and informed capacity-strengthening plans developed by each consortium partner.

EIP leadership, capacities, and priorities: identifying key policy stakeholders and capacity priorities

The AFIDEP-led Alliance for Evidence and Equity in Policymaking in Africa is currently conducting structured landscape assessments in Nigeria and Kenya to identify windows of opportunity for engaging with key stakeholders, evidence support needs at the individual and organizational levels, as well as capacity needs for integrating gender equity in evidence-informed decision-making. The assessment in Kenya is applying a qualitative study design and political economy analysis framework. Data are being gathered through interviews and reviews of institutional documents and policies of stakeholders in the reproductive health and clean energy EIP ecosystem. The assessment in Nigeria was implemented as two structured workshops with key stakeholders from health,

1 A Service Availability and Readiness Assessment is a systematic survey and tool, originally designed to generate tracer indicators that assess and monitor the service availability and readiness at the health facilities and to generate evidence for planning.

energy, and environment sectors, with the first being held in February 2024, and a second in May.

The Alliance for Evidence and Equity in Policymaking in Africa also conducted stakeholder consultations in Kenya and Nigeria to better understand the EIP capacity needs in those ecosystems. The consultations revealed that a rhetoric of evidence use in decision-making has not yet translated into meaningful investments and action, particularly in the energy sector. Furthermore, through the consultations, AFIDEP identified opportunities to engage decision-makers with evidence, capacity strengthening, and frameworks for equity-based decision-making.

BOX 5: ALLIANCE FOR EVIDENCE AND EQUITY IN POLICYMAKING IN AFRICA IMPLEMENTS 2-WEEK EIP TRAINING

The Alliance for Evidence and Equity in Policymaking in Africa conducted a virtual training session on EIP. The intensive two-week program, entailing three hours per day of interactive sessions, equipped over 52 researchers and policymakers from 16 countries representing eastern, western, central, and southern Africa regions with technical skills to bridge the gap between research and policy decisions. The training tackled key challenges hindering EIP practices in Africa, including researchers' limited understanding about the policymaking process and the role of evidence, the influence of politics and other factors, and inadequate synthesis and knowledge-sharing mechanisms. Participants received tools and strategies for conducting rapid systematic reviews, writing evidence briefs, and preparing and implementing communication strategies. By the end of the training, participants developed draft evidence briefs for review by AFIDEP experts. Certificates of completion for the training will be awarded to groups that finalize their evidence briefs. Participants interested in deepening their learning will also receive mentorship support over six months to continue refining these skills with another rapid systematic review and an evidence brief summarizing the findings.

Using varied landscaping and ecosystem assessment activities, Africa LEEPS partner organizations gained an understanding of EIP needs and priorities in focus sectors and policy domains, identified champions and key stakeholders, and kicked-off engagements to support the evidence needs of decision-makers, including frameworks and tools to promote consistent use of evidence in policymaking.

Forging Relationships and Exploring EIP Strengthening Opportunities: Engagements with Key Ecosystem Stakeholders

Building on early insights from their diagnostic EIP assessment activities, partner organizations in the three Africa LEEPS initiatives engaged with key stakeholders through workshops, consultations, and publications, to better understand evidence needs and priorities and build awareness about the value of using evidence. These engagements helped partner organizations identify windows of opportunities for informing policy and practice and providing capacity support at the individual and organizational levels. A few examples:

- The African Institute for Health Policy and Health Systems (AIHPHS) in the AFIDEP-led Alliance for Evidence and Equity in Policymaking in Africa held a one-day sensitization workshop in Abuja, Nigeria on February 29, 2024, which was attended by 68 key stakeholders drawn from reproductive health, clean energy, and other sectors working at the national level in Nigeria. The workshop presented information on institutionalizing EIP and facilitated a dialogue among stakeholders on EIP, namely identifying barriers and facilitators of EIP, policy processes and tools, training gaps, challenges and opportunities for institutionalizing EIP, including critical actions by key stakeholders for institutionalizing EIP, how to advance intersectoral/inter-ministerial collaboration on EIP and its institutionalization, and policy dialogue, advocacy, support, and legislation on the institutionalization of EIP. The workshop improved participants' understanding of the value of institutionalizing EIP and inter-ministerial linkage and collaboration among various stakeholder groups. The pre-post workshop evaluation showed a 25.8% increase in knowledge and understanding of policy and the policy process, 39.2% increase in understanding of EIP, and 50.9% increase in understanding of what it means to institutionalize EIP. At the end of the workshop, senior policymakers committed to serve as EIP champions and ambassadors in their organizations.
- AFIDEP identified an opportunity to support evidence use in the clean cooking sector through their landscape analysis and attended a working group meeting where they supported the development of key indicators for the clean cooking sub-sector. They proposed the inclusion of an indicator capturing people who want to and can afford to buy and use clean cooking solutions but are hindered by their limited availability. The indicator was adopted in the proposed revision of the clean cooking indicators in the 2024/25 Kenya Integrated Household Budget survey (KIHBS) that has been submitted to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. In addition, they reminded the working group to disaggregate data by gender, vulnerable and marginalized groups, and disabled persons to ensure equity is included.
- The Malawi Liverpool Wellcome Programme in the ACRES-led EARES held consultations with the Head of the Reproductive Health Divisions at the Ministry of Health (Malawi) and stakeholders in the energy and environment/climate change sectors. Through the consultations, the stakeholders generated a list of policy priorities and evidence needs related to the intersection between health, energy, and environment/climate change sectors. As a next step, the team will review the current evidence base to identify evidence gaps in the priority policies and host a second consultative meeting to agree on a final list of the prioritized topics that will also inform the development of an evidence base.
- ACRES held initial consultative meetings with the Earth and Rights Initiative, a civil society organization in Uganda that mobilizes communities to advocate for legal reforms and practices to mitigate the adverse socio-economic and health effects of climate change in the community. The Earth and Rights Initiative works with communities to mobilize legal proceedings that influence the government to protect the environment. The initial discussions have informed a need to map the evidence on the socio-economic, health, and gender effects of deforestation on communities in Uganda. The evidence map will inform specific discussions on the kind of evidence needed to inform community efforts to mitigate climate change effects. Additionally, the discussions with the Earth and Rights Initiative informed the stakeholder mapping for the climate change sector in Uganda.

Through these types of consultations, Africa LEEPS partner organizations furthered their understanding of country-level evidence needs, strengthened relationships with stakeholders, improved understanding of EIP and relevant technical skills, and identified where support is needed. The trust and relationships they are building are crucial to facilitating productive engagement with policy actors and enabling timely, relevant, and appropriately tailored evidence support.

FIGURE 2: LEEPS IN NUMBERS

Approximate number (total across three initiatives)

Researchers engaged	163
Policymakers engaged	159
Civil society organizations and others engaged	164
Publications	3 <i>(AFIDEP newsletter p15-20; ACED-IPAR blog on legitimacy of think tanks in mobilizing evidence and supporting policymakers in West Africa; information note on the Centre d'Excellence Evidence Policy Action, soon to be published on ACED website)</i>
Media coverage	3 <i>(Daily Post, Nigeria; Independent, Nigeria, National Panel, Nigeria)</i>
Conferences	1
Dialogues	7
Webinars	2



Africa LEEPS partners hold a policy dialogue with stakeholders in Nigeria.

Peer Learning and Knowledge Exchange in Africa LEEPS

Africa LEEPS aims to foster a learning partnership in which peers come together to learn, exchange knowledge, and share experiences and lessons to advance their initiatives and accelerate progress in EIP. The partnership creates space for tacit “how to” knowledge exchange and for sharing and jointly adapting, developing, or piloting practical tools for tackling complex challenges in dynamic policy systems. The importance of and value in peer learning is also reflected in the approach the different initiatives are taking to spread evidence use practices, such as convening country-level EIP stakeholders and building regional communities of practice.

Within their respective initiatives, partner organizations are actively engaged in learning from each other – drawing on the gender, sectoral, and policy engagement expertise that each organization brings. As engagement and learning coordinator, the R4D team regularly attends weekly meetings of the ACED, AFIDEP, and ACRES-led initiatives, to surface real-time learning needs or questions and to share timely updates. Africa LEEPS partner organizations also engage in cross-country and cross-regional exchanges to learn from other partner organizations. This section highlights how the initiatives come together for learning and exchange in the partnership.

Technical working groups: R4D facilitates three partnership-wide working groups: Communications and Knowledge Management, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL), and Gender. The working groups bring together partner organizations on an opt in/out basis to engage on cross-cutting topics of interest – sharing practices and approaches, brainstorming strategies to shared challenges, collaborating in developing tools and knowledge products to support their activities, and learning together from external experts. In early working group sessions, participants shared their learning priorities and collectively refined working groups goals and activities.

Quarterly Partnership Meeting: In March 2024, Africa LEEPS held its first virtual quarterly partnership meeting. Quarterly meetings are designed to foster community building and strengthen relationships, provide a forum for sharing activity updates, challenges, and lessons learned, and create space for jointly reflecting on how the partnership can continue to support and serve country-level initiatives. In the first quarterly meeting, partner organizations indicated that partnership engagement activities, including technical working groups and R4D’s regular participation in consortium meetings, were effectively supporting their learning needs.

FIGURE 3: AFRICA LEEPS TECHNICAL WORKING GROUPS



COMMUNICATIONS & KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

The Communications and Knowledge Management working group provides a space for partner organizations to exchange knowledge and experiences on communication and knowledge management in EIP. The group aims to address communication gaps and needs in the evidence to policy space including, but not limited to, lack of accessible, easy to understand evidence products for policymakers, a need to better understand which communication strategies are most effective for different stakeholder groups, and how to develop strategic evidence-informed communications plans that consider available resources, infrastructure, goals, and target audiences.



GENDER

The Gender working group brings together partner organizations to share knowledge and experience on integrating gender equity in EIP. The group aims to strengthen gender equity integration through sharing best practices, exchanging and collaborating on tool and resource development, and learning from peers and external experts.



MEASUREMENT, EVALUATION, & LEARNING

The Measurement, Evaluation, & Learning (MEL) working group creates a platform to promote collaboration and sharing of knowledge, learning, and questions relevant to assessing the effectiveness of EIP interventions. The group aims to co-create partnership-wide MEL frameworks and resources and tools for measuring and evaluating EIP activities more broadly.

Emerging Insights

Understanding decision-maker needs first can help increase buy-in for evidence as a tool to address development priorities. Africa LEEPS partner organizations engaged with key decision-makers through stakeholder dialogues and direct consultations to better understand their needs. By helping them understand the role that evidence can play in addressing development policies and priorities and how collaboration with researchers can facilitate this, partner organizations were able to build early relationships that helped them identify opportunities for supporting decision-makers and for embedding evidence use in decision-making processes.

Legitimacy is a critical issue in evidence-informed policymaking in West Africa. The ACED-led Centre d'Excellence Evidence Policy Action identified the issue of the legitimacy of think tanks in mobilizing and facilitating the use of evidence as a shared and critical challenge in partner countries in West Africa. As a first step to addressing this concern, they are partnering with organizations that already have legitimacy as institutionalized research bodies or evaluation units in their local contexts, implementing activities to strengthen evidence to policy systems, and engaging in regular communication with key stakeholders. The Centre d'Excellence Evidence Policy Action is working with R4D to learn more about how best to reinforce its legitimacy in country evidence to policy ecosystems.

To respond to windows of opportunity, organizations need flexible work plans and budgets. Partner organizations identified opportunities through their diagnostic assessment processes, which were not budgeted for in their original work plans. Having the agency to shift funding as needed to respond to policy opportunities is critical to the work they are doing. Additionally important is the time spent in building relationships to gain access to conversations that can lead to engagement, but this work can be hard to anticipate and often ends up underfunded.

Peer learning that promotes a sharing of expertise and experiences can strengthen activities and initiatives. The ACRES-led EARESI used its assessment process to identify the capacity strengths and weaknesses of EARESI partner organizations that could be enhanced through peer engagement. The AFIDEP-led Alliance for Evidence and Equity in Policymaking in Africa leveraged each organizations' strengths to collaborate on different activities – The School of Gender and Women Studies, Makerere University, supported the integration of gender equity analysis in the AFIDEP landscape protocol, and AFIDEP worked with ARIN to adapt its EIDM training curriculum to train ARIN fellows.

Testing different engagement approaches is important to meeting learning needs in a partnership. R4D explored varied modes of partnership engagement activities to encourage knowledge sharing and learning and found that cross-partnership engagement and learning was richer in small groups on specific topics of interest. The cross-cutting working groups provide space for engaging and productive discussions on specific topics that are of direct interest to Africa LEEPS partner organizations (for example, how to best communicate evidence for uptake and use in decision-making, and how to integrate gender equity in EIP). Conversely, convening the whole partnership for a learning and knowledge exchange activity can be challenging due to the many conflicting commitments of busy partners. The balance the partnership is adopting is to use larger meetings and convenings for building community, sharing updates, and reflecting together, and to host smaller discussion spaces for deep dive learning activities and discussion. This balance will be revisited and refined as learning and collaboration needs and priorities in the partnership evolve.



Partners from IPAR discuss strategies and workplan activities at launch workshop in Kigali, Rwanda.

BOX 6: HOW PARTNERSHIP ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES SUPPORT REGIONAL PARTNERS

Africa LEEPS partner organizations completed a short survey at the end of the quarterly partnership meeting to reflect on how the partnership can continue to support their learning and activities.

- 76.9% of respondents agreed that partnership engagement activities provided them with opportunities to share their knowledge and experience and improve their skills.
- 76.9% of respondents agreed that the goals and objectives of the Africa LEEPS partnership support their own learning.
- 92.3% of respondents agreed that they feel comfortable sharing their perspectives and experiences to inform the partnership.

Moving Forward: What's Next for Africa LEEPS?

Moving forward, the ACED, AFIDEP, and ACRES-led initiatives will finalize and publish the findings from their diagnostic assessment and mapping activities and implement different capacity strategies and policy engagement approaches based on these findings, in alignment with their overall objectives (see above Box 3). Ongoing priorities for the coming months include:

- Raising awareness among policymakers and decision-makers on the importance of using evidence for more effective and equitable policies
- Conducting workshops and mentorship programs to strengthen the capacity of evidence producers, translators, and users
- Providing support to strengthen evidence production and use capacities in targeted government offices and agencies
- Support country-level partners in building an evidence base to address key policy priorities in clean energy, reproductive health, climate, and governance, among other priorities

In the coming months, Africa LEEPS will also continue to prioritize knowledge exchange, peer learning, and documenting of lessons and good practices for sharing widely with evidence communities across Africa and other regions. Key priorities include:

- Adaptively providing virtual spaces for partner organizations to strengthen relationships, share experiences, and learn together
- Finalizing the Africa LEEPS theory of change to understand how the partnership is progressing towards strengthening EIP ecosystems
- Synthesizing and documenting stories of change and emerging good practices to showcase progress and lessons learned
- Disseminating tools, frameworks, and other global public good resources developed through the partnership
- Raising the visibility of Africa LEEPS partner organizations and activities in the global evidence community through the creation of a website and participation in global events