



STORIES OF CHANGE: SPOTLIGHT ON ROSE OLAYO

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN RESEARCH AND POLICY THROUGH PROMOTING EVIDENCE USE, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

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Dr. Rose Olayo, a public health researcher and senior lecturer at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST), has long been committed to generating new knowledge through her research and guiding postgraduate students in their studies. However, despite her dedication, she faced significant challenges in getting her research considered and used to inform policies that could benefit communities. Inadequate engagement between researchers and policymakers, insufficient resources, and an underdeveloped capacity for packaging research for decision-making posed barriers to her work. In response to these challenges, Dr. Rose participated in the Evidence-informed and Equity in Policymaking Training offered in April 2024 by the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP) through the Alliance for Evidence and Equity in Policymaking in Africa (AEEPA). The training provided her with critical skills and tools that transformed her work and widened the scope of her contributions to public health.

Before the training, Dr. Rose recognized the gaps that hindered her ability to contribute to policymaking. Despite the wealth of research being conducted at her institution, much of it never reached policymakers. ***“Most of the work done by our postgraduate students ends up on the shelf, never making its way to the decision-making table,”*** she reflected. A lack of structured engagement between researchers and policymakers meant that critical evidence often went unnoticed in policy formulation. Moreover, Dr. Rose identified insufficient capacity among researchers to synthesize evidence in a way that was useful for policymakers. While academic institutions generated new knowledge, the tools and resources needed to organize and present this knowledge systematically were lacking. Furthermore, infrastructural gaps such as insufficient access to digital tools and Wifi hindered the collection and organization of evidence.

The Alliance for Evidence and Equity in Policy-making in Africa (AEEPA) was established by the African Institute for Policy Development (AFIDEP).

AEEPA is one of three Africa LEEPS initiatives who lead technical capacity strengthening and policy engagement activities.

The Alliance aims to accomplish the following objectives:

- 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
- Integrate gender equity in EIP processes at program and institutional levels with initial priority given to reproductive health and clean energy
- Nurture EIP networking and learning within countries and across the region
- Stimulate improvements in reproductive health and clean energy programmatic interventions in Kenya and Nigeria

The evidence-informed decision-making training became a turning point for Dr. Rose through which she gained valuable skills in systematically gathering, organizing, and synthesizing evidence. She learned to use specific tools, such as search strategy frameworks and databases like PubMed, MEDLINE, Scopus, and Web of Science to maximize finding the most relevant and valid evidence utilized in her work. These tools helped her and her students focus on rigorous evidence synthesis, leading to higher-quality research proposals and outputs. One of the immediate changes Dr. Rose noticed was in her supervision of postgraduate students. She became more intentional about training them to organize and synthesize evidence systematically, improving the quality of their proposals and research. *“Before, I wasn’t thinking through the evidence-collection process systematically. Now, I use tools to guide the process and ensure that we end up with the most relevant evidence,”* she said.

The knowledge and skills Dr. Rose acquired from the training empowered her to apply for and win a mini-grant from the African Research and Impact Network (ARIN) to assess her institution’s capacity for championing and supporting evidence-informed policymaking. This opportunity allowed her to address one of the most significant gaps she had observed—her institution’s limited engagement with policymakers. The mini-grant project focused on identifying and addressing the gaps that prevented research from being translated into policy. *“At our institution, we generate a lot of research, but it’s not feeding into policy decisions,”* Dr. Rose noted. Through the mini-grant, she aimed to establish structures within her university that could bridge this gap. By improving engagement between researchers and policymakers, she hoped to create a system that ensured research findings were used to inform health policies and practices, benefiting not only the institution but also the broader community. Dr. Rose also joined AEEPA’s six-month mentorship programme, which further deepened her knowledge in evidence synthesis and translation. As part of this programme, she developed a systematic review protocol on health information strategies to improve adolescent service uptake. This work allows her to apply the skills she had learned in the training directly to her area of interest, develop a systematic review manuscript for dissemination to a peer-reviewed journal, and translate the scientific products to policy briefs targeted at policymakers.



Another critical component of the training was its focus on gender equity and inclusion in research and policymaking. Though Dr. Rose has not yet applied this aspect extensively, she sees it as a crucial part of her long-term research goals. She expressed a desire to assess how gender equity and inclusion considerations were integrated into her institution’s policies. Her interest also extends to her research on sexual and reproductive health among adolescents, where she plans to explore how gender equity and inclusion issues affect the uptake of health services in sub-Saharan Africa.

Looking ahead, Dr. Rose envisions her work’s lasting impact on her institution and the broader public health landscape. She aims to use the mini-grant project as a foundation to strengthen the capacity of her institution, ensuring that research is systematically translated into policy. By establishing stronger links between researchers and policymakers, she hopes to improve the uptake of evidence in decision-making processes, ultimately leading to better public health outcomes. In the long term, Dr. Rose plans to integrate gender equity and inclusion considerations into her work on adolescent health, ensuring that health policies are inclusive and equitable, particularly for vulnerable populations. The training has transformed Dr. Rose’s approach to research and the translation of research into policy and practice. What began as a recognition of gaps and challenges has evolved into a clear vision for change, driven by newfound skills and a commitment to evidence-informed policy and practice and equity and inclusion. She hopes to create a more collaborative and evidence-driven public health environment within her institution and beyond through her efforts.