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Theme: *What has Evidence Informed Decision Making (EIDM) to offer African population scientists and the policy makers*

Topic: *Use of Evidence in Planning for the Transformation of the Ugandan Society*

Data and evaluation findings are critical in deciding development priorities, analyzing the magnitude of problems and informing development strategies. The ultimate fruits of development are manifested in the social status of the population such as literacy levels, life expectancy at birth, infant mortality rate, maternal mortality rate, safe water coverage and sanitation levels. Uganda has a fast-growing population which expanded from 9.5 million in 1969 to 24.2 million in 2002 and estimated at 30.7 million in 2009. At 3.2 per cent growth rate per annum (1991-2002), Uganda's population is now about 40 million according to the 2014 Census. The Uganda Vision 2040 envisages transformed Ugandan population from peasant to modern and prosperous by 2040. However, the use of evidence population remains limited. This article reviews the extent to which evidence generated from research and evaluations is used in identifying development priorities being implemented in the National Development Plan (NDP). The focus is on departments responsible for planning and research due to their ability to influence generation and use of evidence.

A review of various sector performance reports, statistical abstracts and audit reports in Uganda indicates that evidence does not often inform decisions due to political and technical challenges including; limited capacity to collect and analyze data, absence of baselines and targets, absence of well-defined leadership for data collection and utilization, inadequate stakeholder engagement and limited budgetary resources. This has led to over reliance on national surveys and censuses by Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) as the main source of reliable data. The reports further show that even where evidence is available, it may not necessarily be used as agencies want to show positive progress to justify the resources allocated to them.

The above challenges notwithstanding, the demand for evidence is on the rise in Uganda as the population is now increasingly becoming aware of their rights. For instance, the Data Technical Working Group comprising membership of UBOS, the Office of the Prime Minister and the National Planning Authority, seeks to improve the lives of Ugandans through better public policies that make use of research, analysis, and evidence. UBOS has invested in the National Statistical Development Plan (NSDP) and the National Statistical Indicator (NSI) framework as an integral part of major investments meant to ensure quality and availability of data and baseline for assessing progress of Uganda's development initiatives.

Recent data from Demographic and Household Surveys indicates that majority Ugandans (68%) live in subsistence, 21.4% are below the poverty line compared to 19.7% in 2017, 23% access electricity, fertility rate of 5.4, and average years of schooling are currently 6.1. It is this data that has been used to inform the choice of strategies pursued in the National Development Plan (NDP). With the 2nd National Development Plan (NDPII 2015/16 - 2019/20) period coming to an end by June 2020, the NDPIII (2020/21 - 2024/25) is being developed and one of the proposed strategies is *“increasing productivity, inclusiveness and wellbeing of the population”*. The decision to pursue this strategy was informed by the recommendations of the Mid-Term Review of NDPII and NDPI Evaluation.

Inspired by the new public management framework that among other things necessitates openness in government, increased accountability and transparency in order to ensure value for money, a wide range of actors has emerged seeking to improve the quality, availability, and use of evidence for development. The recently launch of the data centre by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Uganda is part of these efforts to revolutionize data across spheres of official statistics and administrative data as well as sources like satellite imagery, remote sensors, and financial transaction records.

A key recommendation posted by the article is need to develop and strengthen capacity and visibility of evidence, sustained stakeholder engagement as well financing of processes aimed at generating and utilizing the evidence in making demographic decisions. Political will and ownership are important in effecting data reforms.