



**Sedi**



**The political economy of evidence  
use in Ghana, Pakistan, and  
Uganda: What SEDI has learned**

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**SEDI Learning Brief 2**



# Introduction

This learning brief summarises insights from the analysis phase of the Strengthening Evidence Use for Development Impact (SEDI) programme (2019–2024), which is funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and is being implemented in Ghana, Pakistan, and Uganda<sup>1</sup>. It identifies similarities in, and differences between, the main findings of the analyses conducted in the three countries. As the analysis was carried out before the advent of COVID-19, it does not cover the impacts of the pandemic on the political economy, policymaking processes, organisational structures, or use of evidence to support governments' responses to it.

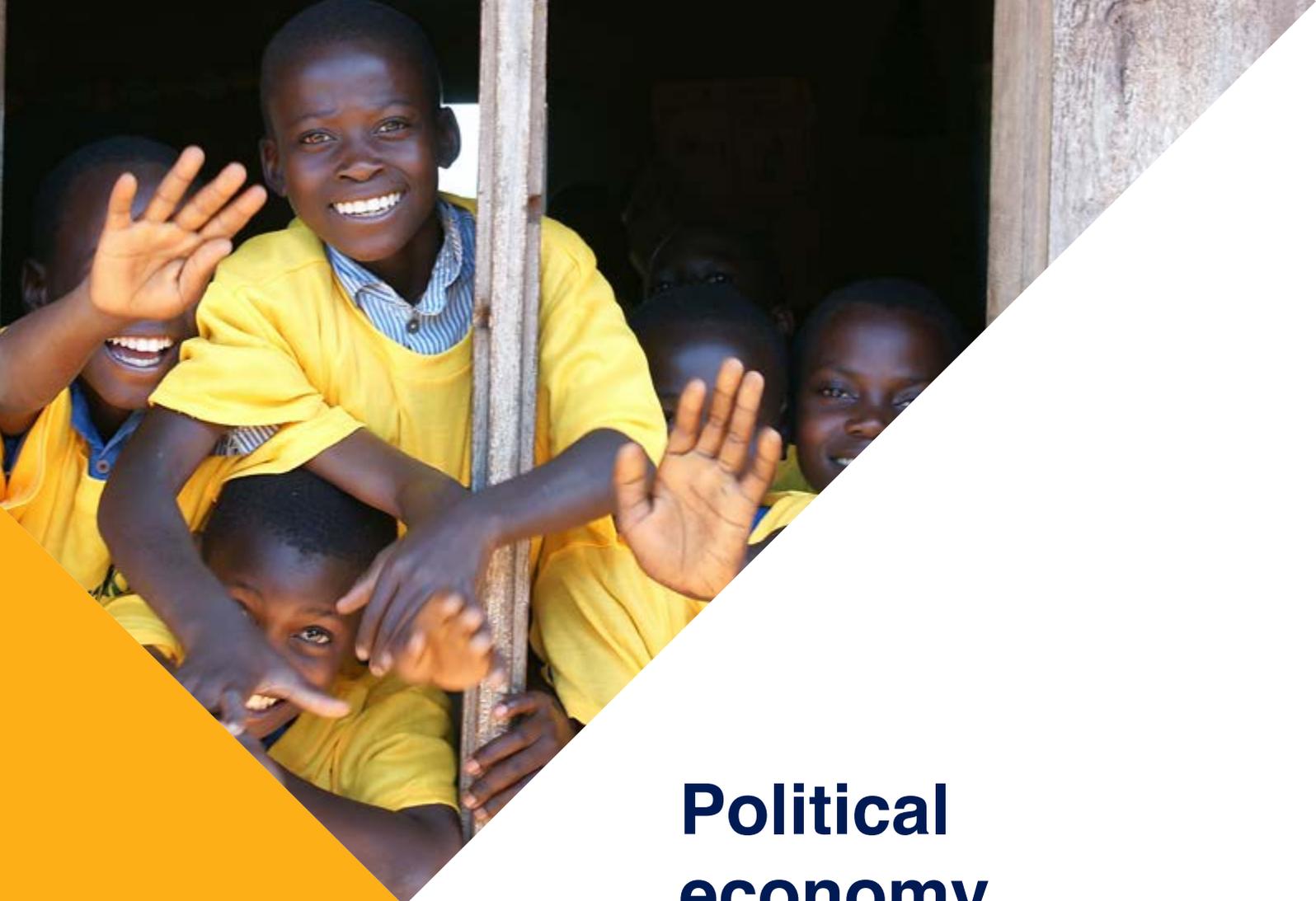
Evidence use in decision-making is influenced by a host of factors, including the political economy, the accessibility of evidence, individual and organisational values, incentives,

norms, and capacity. We sought to understand the political economy of evidence use and identify opportunities for and constraints to this in nine pre-selected sectors. We looked at economic development, public financial management, taxation, and health in Ghana; economic development, education pathways into employment, and child labour in Pakistan;

and humanitarian, family planning, and gender in Uganda.

The findings will inform SEDI's work and enable the design and implementation of a programme that is in line with the principle of thinking and working politically.





# Political economy analysis methodology

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The analysis used an innovative methodological framework, grounded in an overall political economy approach adapted for the three countries, and with three overlapping emphases or ‘lenses’:

- a macro and sectoral lens that draws on classic political economy models (Gaventa, 2009; Batley and McLoughlin, 2015) to explore the national and sectoral contexts for policymaking and to understand how evidence is embedded in policy formulation;

- an evidence system lens to investigate the ecosystem of evidence actors at national and sectoral levels, and to understand the relationships between evidence producers, users, and brokers; and
- an organisational lens to explore the space for change in public agencies based on the authority and ability for, and acceptance of (Andrews et al., 2017), evidence use.

The overall analysis also explicitly incorporated a cross-cutting gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) lens (Shaxson et al., 2020).

While the specific characteristics of evidence are still being examined in SEDI, for the analysis exercise the team adopted the four evidence categories identified in the earlier Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence (BCURE) programme (Wills et al., 2016): government statistical, survey, and administrative data; evidence from research; evidence from citizens, stakeholders, and role players; and monitoring data and evaluation evidence.

The explicit goal of the analysis was to identify the best entry points (sectors, issues, and agencies) to bring about changes in evidence-related processes and working practices within government, and to improve the instrumental and embedded use of evidence.

National partners undertook rapid literature reviews to collect secondary evidence and information, and stakeholder consultations to adapt the analytical tools to each country and sector. They augmented these reviews with key informant interviews.





## **Key findings: power, policymaking, and evidence use**

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## Politics can override evidence, or evidence may be used selectively to suit politics.

The political elite in all three countries influence governance structures and policymaking. The political elite are powerful individuals, organisations, and groups who influence agenda-setting, policy formulation, and implementation, both formally and informally. At a macro level, their interests drive governance and policy decisions. They set the boundaries of what type of evidence is acceptable to them and under what conditions.

In Pakistan, the elite comprises politicians, the military, civil and judicial services, large landowners, and industrialists. They have historically used their influence to support policies that would benefit them, or to stall reforms that would shift power away from them. In this context, evidence can often be contested or subdued to protect powerful political interests. For example, there is a lot of anxiety in Pakistan regarding the use of official statistics on poverty. The relatively low incidence of poverty at the end of Pervez Musharraf's government (2001–2008) made succeeding governments uncertain about what to do with official data—it was politically risky for them to endorse the low incidence officially recorded without being able to bring it down further.

In Uganda, business associations, powerful individual businesspeople, trade unions, and religious and cultural groups wield considerable influence on policy formulation. The parliamentary committees that are meant to scrutinise bills seldom make decisions that are not in the interest of the executive—even in the face of contrary evidence. If evaluation and research evidence is not in keeping with political considerations, it is less likely to be used.

In both Uganda and Ghana, electoral gains influence policy priorities. Senior politicians want to appease, or at least avoid antagonising, 'difficult' interest groups in order to maintain political support that is crucial for electoral success. Populist appeals to voter bases have driven major flagship programmes in both countries, particularly in the education and health sectors.

Policymaking in Ghana is heavily influenced by neo-patrimonial practices and the prevailing clientelist political settlement. Electoral competition is characterised by the distribution of 'rent' to political party financiers and foot soldiers. The party elite is often rewarded with political appointments, including as technical advisers to ministers working on policy formulation. As electoral advantage informs policy in the periods before elections, the policy development process in Ghana is characterised by discontinuity and a high turnover of technical advisers. Evidence is used selectively to develop party manifestos, which are influenced by political expediency. The manifestos then inform the country's short- to medium-term national development policy priorities after a party is returned to power. The executive can assert its dominance over economic development because other institutional mechanisms, such as parliament and the career civil service, remain weak.

## **Patriarchal, socio-economic, cultural, and religious norms of elite groups influence policy and programme investments and also block change.**

Deeply rooted, discriminatory norms and traditional power structures often prevent policies from addressing structural inequality and exclusion. This has meant evidence on issues may not be generated, or existing evidence may be disregarded.

Uganda has a National Priority Gender Equality Indicator framework that is used to track the performance of policies and programmes, as well as progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While evidence may be used to inform priorities, progress has been stalled when cultural and religious groups have stymied legislation, policy, and programming related to gender equality and family planning. As key stakeholders of the Culture and Family Affairs Department in the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development, it is not unusual for cultural and religious groups to veto policies for gender equality fronted by the Gender and Women Affairs Department. These groups are largely opposed to policy or legislation that seeks to redefine women's roles and positions in the household and marriage. For instance, powerful religious groups significantly influenced the development of the Framework for Sexuality Education, and when overruled on key changes they wanted, stalled its implementation. In such instances, we can see that the interests of such groups has a greater influence on decision-making than what the evidence says.

Politicians' public narratives on family planning in Uganda shift depending on the audience. Evidence shows that Uganda's rapidly growing population could pose several challenges to the country's social transformation agenda. At

international forums, the government expresses its commitment to reducing population growth. However, to preserve vote banks and avoid antagonising religious groups, the public narrative for domestic audiences often emphasises the value of a large family. The government's policy commitments to family planning have not yet led to a substantial increase in funding for this issue.

Deeply rooted gender norms in Ghanaian society shape all sectors and all aspects of policymaking. As men control most of the productive resources and political decision-making, the public political and economic space is perceived to be a male domain.

In Pakistan, identity-based inequality and exclusion are normalised and largely invisible to the government. The widespread acceptance of norms regarding child labour among elites—such as industrialists, parliamentarians, and policymakers—has meant that child labour is not a policy priority.



## **International development partners are highly influential in pushing for the generation and use of evidence, but only in their own priority sectors.**

Donors' influence comes from the substantial financial and technical support they provide. However, their support may not be in keeping with local needs and may not always promote the development of sustainable capacity.

In Pakistan, bilateral and multilateral agencies and other donors have been pushing federal and provincial governments to use evidence to demonstrate the results of projects to comply with their funding or cooperation agreements. Their short-term, project-based financing has not, however, helped in institutionalising the culture of evidence use within the government.

Donor influence varies across sectors. The bailout agreed in July 2019 between the Government of Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is pushing the government to use past, emerging, and real-time evidence to correct macroeconomic imbalances and ensure progress on structural indicators. Other development partners, such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and United States Agency for International Development, also have varying degrees of influence over the country's trade policy and practice.

The IMF and the World Bank have been highly influential in facilitating the generation and use of evidence to inform economic development and structural reform in Ghana. Donor influence is focused on selected areas of policy and programming. For instance, the 2016 Public Financial Management (PFM) Act was drafted using the IMF's technical assistance. The Internal Audit Act, Public Procurement Act, and PFM Act were heavily influenced by the World Bank. Donors have played a particularly

important role in pushing for evidence-informed decision-making in Ghana's health sector. They are actively involved in policy dialogue through summits and working groups, and by directly funding programmes. However, critical voices point to their lack of consideration of local contexts while relying on global evidence. There are also challenges related to the sustainability of projects once funding ends and when there is a lack of government ownership and buy-in. However, a shift is expected as donors move from providing programme funding to strategic technical support and advice, as Ghana seeks to move beyond aid.

In Uganda, donors have influenced development in some social sectors, particularly in family planning, gender-based violence, and refugee response. Ministries, departments, and agencies rely on the international data they offer to guide national planning. International actors have also influenced what data government agencies collect and use on gender equality.



## Key findings: government institutionali- sation of evidence generation and use

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## **Government institutional structures have helped promote the generation and use of evidence, but gaps remain. In all three countries, structures have been created to institutionalise the evidence culture.**

In Ghana, every ministry is legally obliged to set up a Research, Statistics, and Information Management Directorate, which is mandated to conduct and commission research, compile and analyse data, and carry out dissemination. The Ministry of Finance (MoF), National Development Planning Commission (NDPC), and the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) are the leading producers and consumers of evidence. Policy Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation directorates are responsible for using evidence in policymaking in their respective ministries. The GSS is responsible for the collection and analysis of statistical data. The non-partisan Inter-Departmental Research and Information Group, and the partisan parliamentary caucuses, provide evidence in the form of briefs and papers to support macro policymaking.

In Uganda, the Office of the Prime Minister (OfPM), National Planning Authority, and Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBoS) have institutional structures and mechanisms for facilitating evidence generation and use. The OfPM is mandated to conduct the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of government programmes, which has helped build evidence in this area. With funding from government and donors, a Government Evaluation Facility was set up in 2013, under the National Policy for Public Sector Monitoring and Evaluation, to boost the capacity of the OfPM to commission and manage evaluations of policies and programmes implemented by ministries, and to promote the uptake of findings and evaluation capacity development. In addition, the government has supported setting up research, planning, or

policy analysis units, as well as M&E units, in various ministries, departments, and agencies. Parliament has tried to institutionalise the use of evidence through its Department of Research Services, Department of M&E, and the Budget Office to provide evidence to legislators.

In Pakistan, most ministries have research and analysis units with mandates to generate and analyse evidence to inform sectoral policy decisions. The Ministry of Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives and the MoF are the most prominent actors in formal policymaking. The recent relocation of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) from the defunct Ministry of Statistics to the Ministry of Planning Development and Special Initiatives has made it easier to integrate data collection and analysis for informing policymaking and planning processes. The two chambers of the national parliament play an important role in keeping the executive in check and in scrutinising public policies, but these are also prone to elite capture.



## **While laws, policies, and constitutional measures have bolstered efforts to improve evidence use, there remain challenges when it comes to implementation**

In Ghana, the constitution provides a check on excesses by mandating the use of evidence through a commission of inquiry. However, contradictions in the legal framework provide opportunities to circumvent the law by means of executive instruments.

All policy proposals submitted to the Ugandan cabinet need to be accompanied by a

regulatory impact assessment report that clearly states the problem, all available options, the winners and the losers should the policy be approved, and the recommended best option. However, policy implementation is not subject to the same evidence requirements and scrutiny as the policy itself.

## **Duplication of structures, fragmentation of power, and lack of coordination have hindered policy formulation, implementation, and evidence use.**

In Ghana, the Ghana Revenue Authority, the MoF, the central bank, the GSS and the NDPC often duplicate the production of evidence on key economic parameters. Conflicting numbers on economic indicators undermine institutional trust or enable decision-makers to 'cherry pick' the most convenient evidence. The NDPC is required to use M&E evidence from ministries, municipalities, districts, and assemblies to improve plans. However, it is common to find duplicate structures under the Office of the President that specifically monitor the ruling regime's flagship projects. There is thus inefficient coordination in the generation of evidence, which has implications for whose evidence the executive uses.

In Uganda, donor-driven M&E is not integrated with the M&E carried out within the ministries' units. In the humanitarian sector, for example, the constant shifts in roles, responsibilities, and authority between government, international

actors, district offices, and other government offices creates confusion and uncertainty for programme implementation, which has implications for the generation and use of evidence.

There is a similar lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities in policy formulation in Pakistan. Evidence produced by government entities may be contested by stakeholders within the government itself.

## **The lack of a regulatory framework in some areas works as a deterrent to effective engagement with evidence producers outside government.**

The lack of a comprehensive framework for promoting effective state–civil society engagement was reported as a challenge in Ghana, both at the national and local levels. Civil society organisations and non-government organisations (NGOs) working with socially excluded populations have some influence at the district level, where they monitor policy implementation.

In Pakistan, there is a need to increase awareness about rules that allow the use of public funding to procure research and analysis from non-government policy research

organisations, private consultancy firms, and universities.

Although Uganda has several institutional platforms for facilitating engagement with other players in the evidence ecosystem, it does not have a clear government research agenda to guide planning, implementation, and policymaking. This has affected the government's ability to use existing research capacity in public, private, and non-governmental institutions. However, the current National Development Plan III aims to develop and popularise a government research agenda.

## **While there is a lack of a regulatory framework, existing institutional platforms have facilitated engagement and promoted collaboration and coordination between evidence producers and users.**

Formal institutional platforms for stakeholder engagement within and outside government are more widespread in Uganda than in the other countries. In Uganda, formal coordination between evidence users and producers has been facilitated through technical and sector working groups, invitations to present to parliamentary committees, memoranda of understanding between government agencies and evidence producers, and associations of users and producers of evidence, such as the Uganda Evaluation Association. Internally, the OfPM has created cross-agency institutional platforms, such as the National M&E Technical Working Group, made up of selected ministries, the National Planning Authority, and other

government units, to discuss M&E reports. The Evaluation Sub-Committee established under this working group includes members from key government institutions, civil society, academia, and donors, and is involved in selecting topics for evaluations and providing feedback on findings.

Although Ghana lacks an institutional framework, the health sector is a notable exception. Through the Common Management Arrangement, modalities have been created for collaboration and coordination among the sector's stakeholders to achieve the Medium-Term Health Development Plan. This arrangement outlines five coordinating mechanisms for inputs into

the policy process: business meetings, sector working groups, the inter-agency leadership committee, decentralised-level dialogue, and

engagement with the private sector and civil society.

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## **There are institutional structures, policies, programmes, and laws for promoting GESI, but they do not address the structural drivers of inequity and exclusion.**

Uganda has established a Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development with the cross-government mandate to promote gender mainstreaming, particularly for gender and equity budgeting. Uganda has over 20 policies, strategies, and laws for promoting gender and equality. Similarly, Ghana has the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection. However, gender-responsive budgeting has not been undertaken owing to financial and implementation challenges facing the Gender Equality Department. In Pakistan, there is the National Commission on the Status of Women within the Ministry of Human Rights.

All three governments translate gender and equity into forms of targeting women and girls in policies and programmes designed primarily to make participation or access to certain resources more equal between men and women, e.g. in the labour force or quotas to ensure political representation. Gender-based violence policies or laws, such as on child and forced marriage, rape, and female genital mutilation, focus on criminality and do not address gendered power relations, norms, beliefs, and practices.

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## **The ‘equity lens’ has often implied that programme targeting is based on very limited population characteristics that do not effectively consider intersectionality. This in turn affects evidence generation.**

Development programmes attempt to target the poorest or most marginalised, based on a population characteristic, such as income, disability, youth, the elderly, women, and girls. Evidence generation has mainly focused on the statistical disaggregation of quantitative indicators. It has also not adequately considered the intersectional dimensions of inequity or the mechanisms that regulate interactions.

All three countries have signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and

there are indications that this is a possible focus area for improving an equity lens.

However, there is no common understanding of what is meant by an ‘equity lens’. Women and girls are seen as a separate group, like youth or people with disabilities, and therefore as competing for scarce funding. Current approaches mainly seek to increase the number of people receiving benefits, rather than considering disparities between groups and the underlying causes of these.

## **Challenges related to technical capacity, staff, funding, and incentives affect the production and use of evidence.**

The problems faced vary across ministries in Pakistan, ranging from insufficient funding to produce research to lack of staff, technical capacity, and coordination between units to produce or analyse evidence.

With a few exceptions, most ministries, policy analysis units, and M&E units within the Ugandan government are understaffed and lack resources. There are also budgetary constraints, and there is a lack of incentives for implementing evaluation recommendations. The reporting systems at national and local government levels are based on self-evaluation by ministries, departments, and agencies, which may not reflect reality.

Lack of staff capacity, coordination between units, funding, and incentives also impede evidence use within the Government of Ghana. Partisan influences have aggravated the challenge. The non-partisan Inter-Departmental Research and Information Group has limited capacity to provide its services. The partisan caucuses, despite having limited institutional resources, are allocated a budget to independently commission research, based on their needs. The high turnover of ministers and other key positions in technical implementing agencies in the health sector in Ghana has provided political parties with a means to circumvent evidence-informed policymaking procedures.

## **At the organisational level, there is considerable variation between public agencies in terms of the authority and ability for, and acceptance of, evidence use (AAA).<sup>2</sup> In most cases, organisations do not possess high levels of authority, acceptance and ability.**

In the economic development sector in Pakistan, most of the organisations examined have high levels of authority for and acceptance of evidence use, but low ability is a recurrent challenge. There are few staff producing, accessing, synthesising, or appraising evidence in a systematic way. Often, this job is carried out by one or two people, who are unable to support a large number of projects. The situation is different in the education and skills sector in Pakistan, where one of the key public organisations has high levels of ability. It is well-staffed and financed through public funding and donors, and has the technical capacity to produce evidence.

In Ghana, the authority for and acceptance of evidence use is high and the ability low – but the low ability in this case is not about few staff or low technical capacities, it relates to limited staff time, as there are multiple projects going on. Another scenario is seen in an example from Uganda, where the authority is potentially present (identified as numerous champions) but acceptance and ability might be limited, owing to the limited resources and donor dependency, which affect the number of staff and the amount of time dedicated to improving evidence use.

## **While efforts are being made to decentralise governance and boost evidence use at the sub-national level, these have met with variable degrees of success across contexts and sectors.**

In all three countries, evidence generation and use has been concentrated at the centre. However, efforts are being made to create capacity and institutional structures at the sub-national level.

The decentralisation of policymaking authority in Pakistan, based on the 18th amendment of the Constitution in 2010, has meant that provincial and local governments are now required to develop systems and processes in social sectors, and to monitor policy implementation, evaluate policy impact, and gather statistical data that can inform policy decisions. However, this devolution is an ongoing process and mandates overlap between national and sub-national governments. The concentration of many research organisations in a few cities has meant that the need for policy research at the provincial level is not often addressed. The impact of decentralisation varies across sectors. Roles and responsibilities between federal and provincial agencies in the skills sector are well defined. However, strategic incoherence and weak enforcement of policies poses challenges. While the responsibility for policymaking and legislation on child labour rests with the

provinces, the incentives and capacity to design, implement, and monitor child labour policy are limited. The federal government remains responsible for responding to and reporting on Pakistan's commitments on child labour to the United Nations.

In the case of Uganda, local governments are responsible for planning, service delivery, and project monitoring. In practice, however, their role is limited. The national government creates policies and overarching budgets, to which district governments are expected to adhere. While a small percentage of the budget is allocated for monitoring government projects, the information gathered is hardly used. This has reduced the monitoring process to an accountability function. Most district local governments rely more on citizen and stakeholder consultations to inform planning. A few departments, including those involved in the humanitarian sector, heavily use the administrative statistics from the District Health Information System. The data collected by local governments are most readily available and used in refugee response planning.





## **Key findings: value, availability, and accessibility of evidence**

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## **Governments mainly focus their evidence-generation efforts on nationally representative quantitative data.**

Evidence is mainly in the form of statistical, survey monitoring, and administrative data. Overall, there is less use of evaluations, qualitative research, and citizen-generated evidence to inform decision-making.

The definition of credible data as nationally representative quantitative data has meant that

problems that are sub-national in scope, or that affect sub-populations, are invisible in the data. Consequently, minorities and marginalised populations are overlooked, and their problems go unaddressed. Qualitative research on their issues is either not prioritised or is ignored.

## **Ministries and departments consider government-generated statistics and international agency-generated evidence as the most credible and impartial sources.**

National statistical agencies—the PBS, the GSS, and UBoS—lead in the production of statistical evidence in all three countries.

In Ghana, the government units trust the evidence provided by the GSS and international agencies. However, evidence produced by the former can be contested by the political class in both the government and parliament when it does not support their preferred position on policy questions.

In Uganda, apart from the administrative data produced by the government, data from UBoS, United Nations agencies, the World Bank, and other donors is seen as credible, impartial, and useful in informing national planning and policies across the sectors. Multilateral agencies contribute to more than 10% of the primary data in Uganda's national statistical system, half of which are produced by United Nations agencies.

In Ghana and Uganda, these agencies contribute to reporting and analysis that uses

gender-responsive and equity-focused analysis. For example, UBoS maintains the National Gender Equality Priority Indicators and the gender-based violence database. However, government demand for it is limited and the focus remains on sex disaggregation, without examining the determinants of inequality.



## **Data may be collected infrequently and the availability and accessibility of data in the correct format is often a challenge.**

In Ghana, for example, key statistics, such as on employment, tend to be produced infrequently. Where data are available, they may be in the wrong format, or not readily accessible. For example, data collected at the district level may be stored only as hard copy files.

Similarly, the generation and use of evidence by the PBS is not always systematic. According to the Constitution of Pakistan, the national population census should take place every 10 years, but the most recent census, conducted in 2017, was carried out almost two decades after the previous one. The unwillingness to share some official data with non-governmental stakeholders has impeded any meaningful

analysis or critique of government policies. There are often delays in the release of numbers on poverty and inequality, which in turn adversely affects the quality of planning at a devolved level.

While UBoS conducts regular surveys that are helpful in showing trends over time, very few ministries, departments, and agencies are able to analyse the large amount of raw data collected by the statistical agency. UBoS contributes 40 per cent of the data to official statistics, while the rest comes from administrative data, which are often considered poor quality.

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## **Government emphasis on national statistical data on GESI has meant that marginalised populations are often invisible and the focus on gender is limited to sex disaggregation of data.**

Evidence about marginalised populations—for example, people with disabilities—is invisible, given the emphasis on having nationally representative statistical and quantitative data. For instance, in Uganda, while national statistics portray the practice of female genital mutilation

as being rare, in some districts it is prominent and widespread, and requires state intervention. In none of the three countries are qualitative studies exploring the dimensions of marginalisation and exclusion carried out frequently.

## **Governments in all three countries face challenges in accessing the most current data, and rely on raw data from government agencies, which are often not disaggregated by sex, or in terms of marginalised sub-populations of interest.**

The lack of access to disaggregated data has hampered programme design, targeting, and implementation. In Pakistan, the lack of sex-disaggregated data on imports and exports of goods and services, trade finance, and exporting enterprises makes it difficult for government agencies to design policy interventions that respond to women's critical needs in trade-related enterprises.

In Uganda, besides the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development's efforts to apply an intersectional analysis of evidence, the government largely focuses on sex disaggregation to support targeting affirmative action policies and programming to women and girls, without looking at the gendered social and structural factors that perpetuate inequity and exclusion.

## **Participation in international policy frameworks, such as the SDGs, has improved monitoring and reporting, and has considerably facilitated evidence generation and uptake in all three countries.**

International donor funding, as well as government participation in international policy frameworks, such as the SDGs, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, have strengthened government monitoring and reporting, particularly on GESI.

In Pakistan, the SDGs have been incorporated in the national development agenda. An SDG Unit has been set up at the Ministry of Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives and SDG taskforces have been established in provincial parliaments. The federal unit has produced a large body of data and analysis to inform policy design and policy review on the SDGs. Progress on implementation of will be monitored and reports on this will be submitted annually to the

National Economic Council.

The commitment to achieving the SDGs in Ghana has also provided an impetus to generating evidence on progress against indicators. It has stimulated data collection, especially on budget allocations. The Ghana Audit Service undertakes SDGs-related assessments and the SDGs Advisory Unit at the Office of the President supports the President to fulfil his mandate as the Co-Chair of the United Nations Secretary General's Eminent Group of Advocates for the SDGs.

Uganda has also established an SDG coordination structure within the government. This includes a policy coordination committee, an implementation steering committee, a national SDG taskforce, and technical working groups.

## **International donors are the main funders of programmes and evidence generation on politically contested issues related to equality and social change; civil society organisations and universities are the main actors driving the change.**

The high degree of influence that donors have has meant that the evidence base focuses on questions or areas that are of interest to them.

Donors have provided the bulk of the funding for gender-related programmes, as well as international data for guiding planning in Uganda. They are also the main drivers of family planning policies and programming, financing civil society groups to influence parliament and the Ministry of Health. However, NGOs focusing on sexual minorities are marginalised in terms of financial support. Research institutions and universities have played a role in producing evidence on family planning. In addition to routine monitoring data, the Ministry of Health mainly uses evidence from external sources,

such as the Makerere University School of Public Health and donor agencies.

While the Pakistan Government is a signatory to several international treaties related to the elimination of child labour, there is a lack of basic statistics on the scale of the problem. Existing evidence on child labour in Pakistan is funded by donor agencies and produced by research and advocacy organisations. As the evidence produced by Pakistani and foreign NGOs is mainly for advocacy or programme implementation, rather than to fill knowledge gaps for research, it does not always present a coherent picture of the nature and extent of the problem.

## **Although there are a few instances of successful partnership, a lack of trust and limited institutional platforms affect government engagement with external agencies producing evidence in the three countries.**

In all three countries, evidence that is critical of government policies is often labelled as biased. The configuration of influential players and the extent of their influence varies, depending on the sector.

Although there are several domestic research producers and think-tanks in Ghana, they are largely perceived as partisan or 'friends of the opposition'. This undermines the use of the

evidence they produce in decision-making. In the area of economic development, few universities or think-tanks have influence on policy, and the uptake of evidence is more likely where there are strong informal personal networks with government officials.

Similarly, in Uganda, those producing evidence that is critical of government policies may be described as 'mouthpieces of the political

opposition'. In the humanitarian sector, while NGOs and think-tanks produce data, research, and evaluations that are relevant to decision-making, these are used by government only if international organisations push for it. There are, however, instances of successful partnership between government and stakeholders in shaping policies. Both NGOs and the private sector have been able to partner with ministries, departments, and agencies in projects involving policy formulation, where they contribute as members of task forces, technical working groups, and expanded boards of major decision-making organs, such as the National Planning Authority.

There are several examples of successful engagement by the umbrella NGO Forum in policymaking.

The shrinking space for civil society to engage in policy dialogue with the government has also been a challenge for evidence use in Pakistan. The government is wary of non-governmental research bodies and has enforced stringent rules and regulations to govern them. Many national organisations are facing financial challenges due to delays in, or denial of, government clearance. They are also under pressure to keep their work focused on areas that are of government interest. Many international organisations have left the country over the last few years in response to changes in rules and regulations that have increased government scrutiny of their work. Organisations that are still in Pakistan are finding it challenging to get their government clearances renewed or are being forced to reduce the scale of their activities.

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**Although the media can be an influential intermediary in sharing evidence with citizens and translating it for them, it may also be owned by, or subject to, the power of political elites, which affects the coverage of issues and the reporting of evidence.**

Both traditional and social media have played an important role in the three countries in bringing citizens' attention to key issues and amplifying their demands to promote discussions with government.

Television talk shows and newspaper editorials in Pakistan often analyse the economic and financial implications of the bailout arrangement between Pakistan and the IMF. Citizens have posted scrutiny of key issues on social media. However, press freedom is curtailed by the ruling elite. Powerful actors, such as the state's security institutions, use the media to advance their policy agendas.

The media in Uganda and Ghana are influential in informing decision-making. In Uganda, they have brought citizens' attention to key policy issues, including the misappropriation of funds. The media in Ghana has promoted discussions between policymakers and experts. However, major media houses seem to lack the capacity to present in-depth political analysis and a sustained focus on issues. Citizens' voices on social media have influenced government decisions, particularly through campaigns on issues that are easier to resolve.

However, inequalities in social media access mean that these platforms are not inclusive and, in some cases, have been detrimental to the

cause of inclusion. There have been instances where posts on social media have denigrated women leaders or issues of importance to

women and girls. They have also not provided sustained coverage of issues relating to marginalised populations.





## Final reflections

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Government institutional structures in the three countries have aided evidence-informed decision-making. However, if the politics and incentives are not aligned, it is challenging to develop the motivation and capacity for evidence use. While there is a need for more formal frameworks for network building between a diverse set of evidence producers and users, the focus needs to be on strengthening trust and building relationships. This is important for building a healthy evidence ecosystem, where the generation of evidence is not about accountability but about learning.

Individual organisations may not follow the patterns highlighted by the PEA at the macro or sector level. If the aim is to improve evidence

use, we need to understand whether there is space for change, and the potential entry points in individual organisations. By building on organisations' existing strengths, there is potential for developing capacity to use evidence in a sustainable and effective way.

The analysis offers insights on why governments use certain types of evidence. There are opportunities to develop capacity in strengthening access to existing evidence and making it more accessible and useful for decision-making. The analysis also points to the need to draw on high-quality evidence from a range of sources to fill knowledge gaps, and for informing policymaking.

Governments need to use evidence that provides insights into the structural drivers of inequality and exclusion. This will help in developing effective, gender-transformative, and inclusive programmes.

To create spaces for change, it is important to constantly update our understanding of the political economy of evidence use. The innovative approach that SEDI used to undertake this analysis—integrating lenses that considered the policy process, evidence ecosystem, and organisational diagnostics into a classical PEA, while paying cross-cutting attention to GESI—was needed to enable the co-design and implementation of an adaptive and responsive programme that can contribute to improving the instrumental and embedded use of evidence. Although SEDI's PEA reports were produced before the COVID-19 pandemic, they demonstrate the value of the approach, and the importance of programmes that are

focused on evidence use thinking and working politically,<sup>3</sup> and rapidly adapting to complex changing contexts.

# About SEDI

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Strengthening Evidence Use for Development Impact (SEDI) is a five-year programme (2019-24) that is working on increasing the use of evidence by policy makers in Uganda, Ghana, and Pakistan. In partnership with country governments, this programme aims to develop capacity and promote innovation in increasing evidence informed decision making. SEDI is funded by UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

The SEDI consortium is led by Oxford Policy Management and comprises national, international, and regional partners. The national lead organisations – the Africa Centre for Economic Transformation in Ghana, the Economic Policy Research Centre in Uganda, and the Sustainable Development Policy Institution in Pakistan provide programme leadership and coordination in each country. These national organisations are authoritative voices in policy processes and will ensure effective engagement and a sustainable legacy for SEDI.

The international partners – International Network for Advancing Science, the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, Overseas Development Institute, Oxford Policy Management – as well as the regional partners – the Africa Centre for Evidence and the African Institute for Development Policy – contribute their knowledge and years of experience in working with governments across the world to promote evidence-informed development. They provide technical thought partnership, facilitate cross country learning, and collaborate on programme delivery.

# Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup>SEDI is being implemented by an international consortium comprising the African Center for Economic Transformation (ACET) in Ghana, the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in Pakistan, and the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) in Uganda. They are supported by the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP) in Kenya and the Africa Centre for Evidence (ACE) in South Africa, as well as by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), INASP, 3ie, and Oxford Policy Management (OPM). The consortium is led by OPM. The team comprises a mix of specialisms, including political economy, evidence systems, organisational change, and sectoral and technical expertise.

<sup>2</sup>We examined organisations, such as line ministries, parliaments, cabinets, planning commissions, statistical services, official civil service training institutions, and councils using the authority–acceptance–ability framework (see Samji et al., 2018).

<sup>3</sup>SEDI plans to regularly update the PEAs carried out during the analysis phase.

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