



Sedi



Using evidence diagnostics to think and work politically: SEDI's experience

SEDI Learning Brief 5

Acronyms

AAA	Authority, acceptance, ability model
BCURE	Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence
DFID	UK Department for International Development (now merged into FCDO)
EIDM	Evidence-informed decision-making
EPRC	Economic Policy Research Centre (Uganda)
FCDO	UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (formerly DFID)
INASP	International Network for Advancing Science and Policy
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MDA	Ministries, departments and agencies
NDP	National Development Plan
NTC	National Tariff Commission (Pakistan)
OPM	Oxford Policy Management
PEA	Political economy analysis
PEA+	Adapted political economy analysis
SDPI	Sustainable Development Policy Institution (Pakistan)
SEDI	Strengthening the Use of Evidence for Development Impact



Key messages

- 'Working politically' requires practitioners to have **trusted working relationships with government** which take time to cultivate and in SEDI's case predated the programme.
- Relationships can be both expressed and enabled by **co-creative approaches, but this way of working can take time to socialise** as it remains outside the norm for some in the development sector.
- **Authority, acceptance and ability (AAA) enabled SEDI to begin to understand the appetite of and space within government agencies** to partner with the programme and further explore their use of evidence through an evidence diagnostic.

- SEDI and its government partners built on the AAA analysis using **the Context Matters Framework to support the move from ‘thinking politically’ in the project’s analysis phase towards ‘working politically’** in implementation.
- **To be agile and adaptive, delivery teams need to make specific methodological choices** about their scope and ways of working. This includes making compromises in order to preserve government ownership of interventions.
- The **COVID-19 pandemic caused a radical and unforeseen shift in ways of working** for all partners involved in the diagnostics; the team was able to adapt the approach and transition to a virtual working environment COVID-19 but there were implications for the participatory nature of the diagnostic.





Introduction

Evidence use in policy is fundamentally intertwined with how government works – its cultures, processes and structures, both formal and informal. Those working to strengthen the use of evidence therefore need to understand how to navigate processes of government reform and the opportunities that this presents. Participatory diagnostic exercises can be used to build this understanding by providing the space and the tools to help government departments and their partners to look at how they already use evidence and what they could be doing differently within the context of their organisational culture and systems. This establishes strong foundations for co-ownership and helps partners to jointly define problems, which in turn underpins the design and delivery of interventions.

This brief shares reflections from two evidence diagnostic exercises (one in Pakistan and the other in Uganda) undertaken as part of the Strengthening Evidence Use for Development Impact (SEDI) programme, funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. For SEDI, evidence diagnostics bridge the gap between political economy analysis and programme implementation, providing one of the first opportunities to put into practice the approach of ‘thinking and working politically’ (TWP) – which emphasises political insight and analysis, responsiveness to context, and flexible and adaptive design and implementation.

Located at the intersection between evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) and broader governance approaches that aim to fortify public institutions and improve public sector performance and accountability, the SEDI experience may offer insights for both those working on organisational reform and institutional change in a public sector context, and those working in knowledge and research systems. For those in the research and knowledge sector, SEDI’s experience shows how methods originating from governance and state capability approaches can build understanding of organisational and institutional reform in government and therefore enhance understanding of how evidence is used. For those operating in the governance sector, SEDI’s experience illustrates that evidence is a key element of strengthening public institutions’ performance and accountability.

In both Pakistan and Uganda, the diagnostic exercises were carried out by joint teams from the SEDI programme and from selected government agencies in each country. Having collaboratively adapted and tailored the chosen diagnostic tool – Context Matters – these joint teams carried out participatory data collection activities to understand the barriers

and opportunities for strengthening evidence within the respective government agencies and identified priority issues for the SEDI programme (and potential solutions it could explore).

The exercises were led by the Sustainable Development Policy Institution (SDPI) in Pakistan, in partnership with the National Tariff Commission, and the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) in Uganda, in partnership with the Office of the Prime Minister. SEDI’s capacity development and brokering workstreams, led by INASP and Oxford Policy Management (OPM) respectively, provided advisory support.

In Uganda, the diagnostic focused on the new National Development Plan (NDP III), which involved several different government agencies; in Pakistan, it was focused at the organisational level of the National Tariff Commission, rather than on a multiagency planning process. Political economy analysis undertaken in the first year of SEDI had identified both agencies as entry points for the programme.



Why carry out an evidence diagnostic?

Building on political economy analysis

In its first year, the SEDI programme embarked on an analysis phase, during which it conducted an adapted political economy analysis (PEA+) in each of its three focus countries: Ghana, Pakistan and Uganda. The aim of this analysis was to ‘set the scene’ and ensure that decisions on entry points for SEDI’s work were informed by an understanding of both the broad political economy context and the likely buy-in and interest among potential partner agencies in the sector.¹

The AAA analysis used as part of the PEA+ aimed to provide a preliminary assessment of government agency 'readiness' to engage with the SEDI programme to avoid common challenges such as isomorphic mimicry and premature load bearing.²

Figure 1: SEDI timeline



SEDI completed the analysis phase and entered its inception phase, just as the COVID-19 pandemic began (Figure 1 [timeline]). In response to the pandemic, SEDI consortium chose to adapt, delaying the diagnostics until the end of the inception phase and prioritising immediate ways to support government agencies to respond to the crisis. (This pivot was, in itself, illustrative of a 'thinking and working politically' approach – see Box 1.) The evidence diagnostics began in the inception phase, aiming to lay the groundwork for the government partnerships that were to be the core pillars of the SEDI programme and inform the design of interventions that it would undertake. In this way the diagnostics supported the transition from 'thinking politically' (the analysis phase) to 'working politically' (the

implementation phase), as illustrated in Figure 2.

The SEDI programme had envisaged that diagnostics would have been conducted in all three countries by the end of the inception phase, providing a set of priority evidence issues for the programme to work on in each agency ('problems') and possible interventions to address these ('solutions'), which would then be piloted (Figure 2). However, the delays in the inception phase due to COVID-19 and the subsequent closure of the SEDI programme just as implementation began meant that (1) only two of the three focus countries undertook evidence diagnostics and (2) the SEDI programme ended immediately after the diagnostic process rather than continuing to support the change plans that had emerged.

Box 1: What does 'thinking and working politically' mean to SEDI?

Limited success – or outright failure – in development programming has been linked to insufficient attention being given to contextual issues, such as political, socioeconomic, and cultural systems and prevailing norms. While there are no set criteria or methods, some core principles have emerged about what it means to think and work in a more contextually aware way ('thinking and working politically' – or TWP). These are that international development approaches need to be:

- problem-driven rather than intervention-driven;
- grounded in contextual realities;
- locally led and owned;
- adaptive, flexible, iterative, and often entrepreneurial;
- more open to risk and failure;
- staffed with skilled and experienced people who are comfortable with the political nature of development and have deeply rooted contextual knowledge and networks they can tap into;
- anchored in international development actors' roles as enablers, brokers, and convenors of locally led reform processes, rather than simply as funders, directors, or implementers; and focused on changing behaviours, not just formal rules.

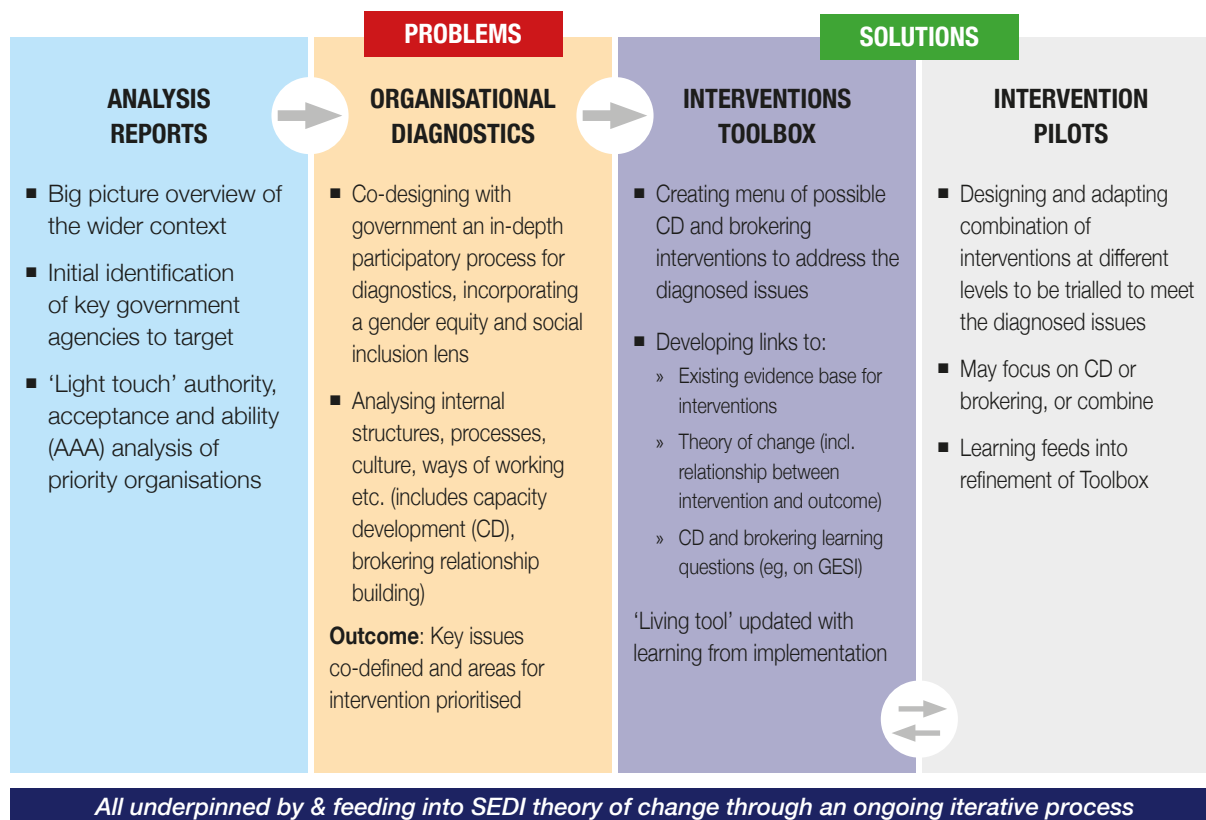
Source: Adapted from Box 1 in Shaxson et al. (2021).

Box 2: Lessons from the Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence (BCURE) programme in thinking and working politically

- Political economy factors are critical elements shaping evidence use in policy.
- BCURE projects were not required to carry out political economy analyses at the inception of the programme, although implementers strengthened their understanding of these dynamics during delivery.
- Projects should have looked beyond ‘face-value’ statements of buy-in and interest from partner government agencies to explore deeper power and political dynamics within government partner organisations.
- Interventions had greater success where they responded to existing entry points or windows of opportunity in a government agencies or sectors.
- Identifying and working with champions was also a key success factor in navigating political dynamics.
- DFID’s contracting model, which was structured around milestones, made it challenging for implementing partners to respond in an agile and flexible way to shifting political dynamics.

Source: Vogel and Punton (2018)..

Figure 2: From analysis to implementation



The SEDI programme's approach to TWP was in many ways a direct response to the evaluation findings from the Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence (BCURE) programme (Box 2), which was funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) from 2013 to 2017. However, SEDI had a much more flexible programme design structure than BCURE, with no fixed activity milestones with government partners set at the outset. To decide which activities to pilot the programme therefore sought to build a deep understanding of organisational dynamics in government agencies. This would ensure intentional, strategic operational choices were informed by an understanding of political and power dynamics, and therefore improve the potential for the interventions' sustainability and effectiveness.

Strong and trusted relationships with government agencies enabled and contributed to this understanding, and would facilitate the close collaboration needed to design and pilot interventions over the course of the programme. The SEDI programme did not see evidence diagnostics as a purely analytical or extractive research process but as a practical, operational way to transition the programme from the analysis phase into implementation. The role of the SEDI team was to facilitate a process through which a public agency could begin to identify and understand the key factors that affect how they are using evidence and priority areas to address. The diagnostics also had particular relevance to ensure a high-quality and evidence-informed approach to SEDI's two technical workstreams: capacity development and evidence brokering (see Box 3).

Box 3: SEDI's technical workstreams

The SEDI programme had two interlinked technical strands of work:

Capacity development in the SEDI programme focused on strengthening capacities at individual level (i.e. among public servants) and organisational level (i.e. within government agencies) to systematically use evidence in policymaking. 'Capacity' is understood to encompass both 'hard/technical aspects', such as skills or organisational processes, and 'soft' aspects such as organisational culture. INASP led the capacity development workstream.

Evidence brokering in the SEDI programme has focused on two aspects: evidence translation and relationship brokering. Evidence translation involves making evidence accessible and useful for decision-making; and relationship brokering focuses on building trust-based relationships between the generators and the users of evidence. OPM led the brokering workstream.

Identifying interventions to pilot under SEDI

Practitioners seeking to strengthen evidence use in policymaking use a wide range of interventions.³ To decide which interventions to pilot in SEDI and how to combine these at multiple levels, the programme needed to build a joint understanding with colleagues in government agencies about where the problems within those agencies lay and which of these might be appropriate to tackle. The programme sought to avoid an approach driven by predefined interventions and rather aimed to ensure that intervention design and selection was rooted in a strong and shared understanding of the cause of the problems identified.

Specifically, the evidence diagnostics aimed to:

- enable co-definition with government partners of the roots of the identified problems in order to build the groundwork for solutions to be fully owned;
 - identify priority areas for action where SEDI is best placed to support;
 - inform the design and timing of interventions using a technical toolbox developed by the SEDI programme to be a 'living tool' or menu of possible interventions that could be adapted and used to increase the instrumental and embedded use of evidence.⁴
- identify appropriate entry points within the agency/ies – for instance, particular units or champions that would be most strategic to engage (understanding that motivation to focus on evidence use, capacity needs, and 'on paper' responsibility to handle evidence may not all exist in the same unit);

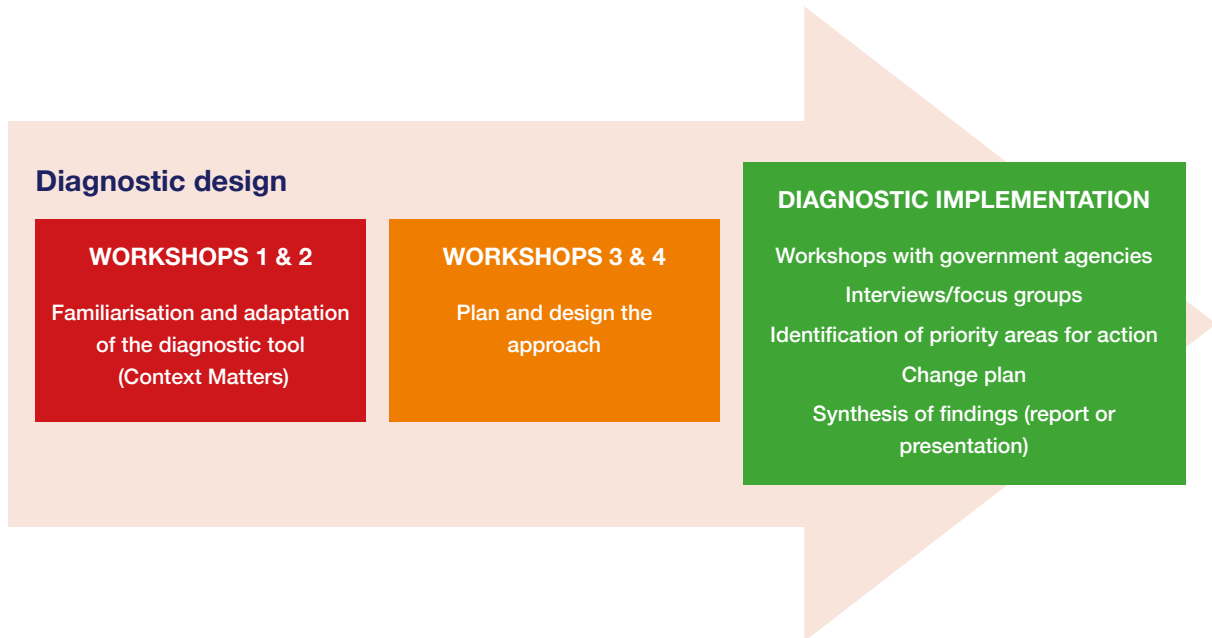


Approach and methodology

The SEDI programme used the Context Matters Framework, a participatory diagnostic tool initially developed by Politics & Ideas⁵ in collaboration with INASP as part of the BCURE VakaYiko project (Weyrauch et al., 2016).⁶ Combining elements of political economy analysis, knowledge systems analysis and organisational assessment, Context Matters identified six dimensions of context affecting evidence use in policy: (1) macro context; (2) intra- and interrelationships; and the agency's (3) culture, (4) capacity, (5) management and processes, and (6) other resources. The aim is to help users identify a feasible, realistic and politically viable change pathway for greater evidence use within a government agency (Box 4; Figure 3). Knowledge about each of these dimensions is collected through document review, a series of workshops, focus

group discussions and interviews, and is used to identify priority areas for action and a change

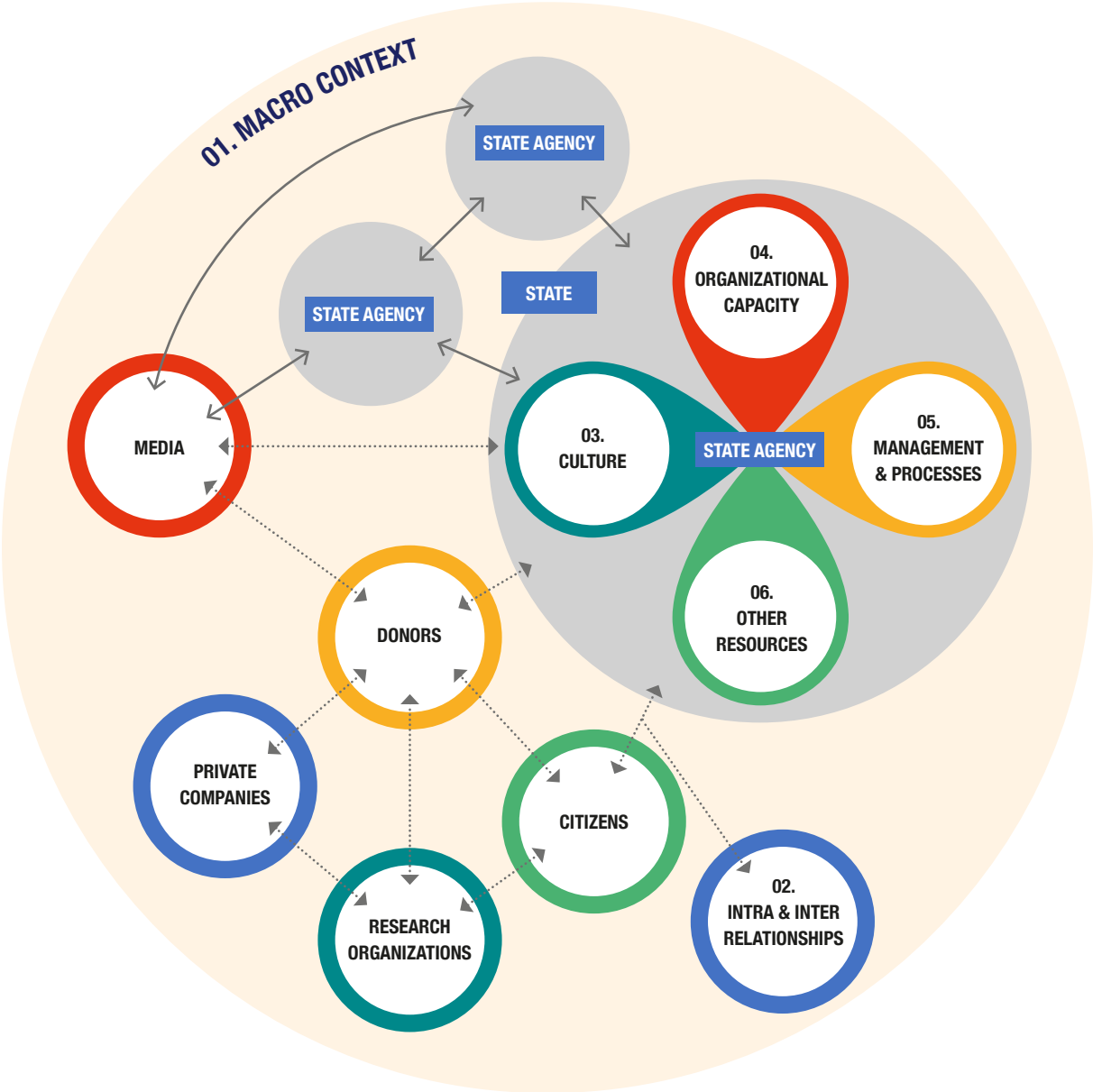
plan or strategy to implement these.



Box 4: Guiding principles for the Context Matters Framework

- It is not primarily designed as a research tool but is a guide for a facilitated reflective exercise, where the participatory process (carried out by a joint team from the project and the partnering government agency) is as or more important than the final product or report.
- It emphasises the value of co-identifying problems and priorities with government partners before identifying solutions.
- It focuses on both the visible factors affecting evidence use (‘hard’ or ‘technical’ aspects such as infrastructure, official plans and structures) and invisible factors (largely related to organisational culture, narratives, beliefs and openness to change).
- It starts from a systemic point of view – seeing problems in context and actively exploring the links and relationships between different components and stakeholders.
- It does not aim to be fully comprehensive and explore all areas in equal depth, but to provide a way to ‘zero in’ on specific priority areas from a broader perspective.

Figure 3: Context Matters Framework⁷



The SEDI programme adapted the Framework to respond to the contextual picture identified by the PEAs, learning from previous evidence diagnostic exercises⁸ and the needs and priorities of the respective government agencies. In using both the 'AAA' framing and then the Context Matters Framework, SEDI chose to work with existing tools, and adapt and tailor these to the programme and country contexts. This was seen as an opportunity capitalise on existing knowledge and expertise that the tools captured and offered all partners the opportunity to

strengthen capacity around these approaches and the knowledge and skills they build. SEDI partners found it important to establish parameters for the key dimensions to be included in the diagnostics, providing guidance on what is meant by 'evidence', 'evidence ecosystem', and '(gender) equality and social inclusion' (GESI)⁹.

Uganda

In Uganda, the evidence diagnostic focused on the Development Plan Implementation Programme ('Programme 18'), one of 18 priority programmes under the country's Third National Development Plan (NDP III), which aims to improve household income and quality of life for Ugandans. The 18 programmes were created to address the persistent challenges resulting from uncoordinated planning, weak harmonisation, limited programme sequencing and poor links between outcomes and

outputs. Each programme has a set of clearly articulated results, objectives and interventions. Programme 18 focuses on increasing efficiency and effectiveness in the NDP III's implementation and is at the heart of delivering the NDP III; one of its key targets is to ensure at least 80% achievement of the NDP III.

EPRC, the diagnostic leads in Uganda, already had an existing relationship with the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) team at Office of the

Box 5: Action-oriented diagnostic for NDP III Programme 18, Uganda (October 2020 – June 2021)

The main partner was the M&E Directorate in the Office of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister, as leader of government business and the overall coordinator, is responsible for leadership of NDP III implementation. The Office of the Prime Minister also houses a secretariat which consolidates NDP III progress reports from Ministries that are leading the implementation of individual programmes. The Directorate's official mandate includes coordinating monitoring and evaluation of government policies and programmes across MDAs and, as part of this, ensuring that evidence is available to inform decision-making. Through the Directorate, SEDI convened four apex agencies responsible for planning, monitoring, evaluating and budgeting: Office of the Prime Minister; Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development; Office of the President; and National Planning Authority. Five other MDAs were also included as they are critical to the functions played by Programme 18:

- Ministry of Local Government, to establish the use of evidence in fostering grassroots development and service delivery, as well as generation of quality of administrative data;
- Ministry of Public Service, to address issues of human resource capacity needs;
- Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, as regulators of research in the country;
- Uganda Bureau of Statistics, as the principal data collecting, processing, analysing and disseminating agency responsible for coordinating and supervising the National Statistical System.
- Ministry of Information Communication Technology and National Guidance, as the body responsible for ICT legal and regulatory environment, secure ICT access and usage for all and increased awareness and citizen participation in government programmes.

Prime Minister, which served as a link and entry point to building relationships with other ministries, departments and agencies within Programme 18.

The first step was to adapt the diagnostic methodology for a cluster of agencies that work together under Programme 18 and involved intensive stakeholder identification, coordination and communication to avoid having single diagnostic pieces that didn't relate to each other. This was followed by an in-depth stakeholder mapping exercise to analyse the landscape and unravel patterns in evidence production and use. Given the multiple players involved in Programme 18, the Context Matters Framework dimension on interrelationships (coordination, evidence flow and channels of interaction) had considerable weight and required special focus.

A design phase to familiarise participants with the diagnostic framework, to agree roles and responsibilities, and to identify other ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) that could take part in the diagnostic process followed. This was longer than originally expected, not only due to the pandemic but also because of the level of adaptation required to carry out a diagnostic of a whole programme (as opposed to a single agency, which would be much simpler). This stage which included workshops with the M&E Directorate in the Office of the Prime Minister was primarily conducted online.

Finally, the implementation phase benefited from a face-to-face approach as COVID-19 restrictions started to ease. EPRC led the workshops and data collection activities, with the close support of SEDI team in frequent online meetings.

Pakistan

In Pakistan, the evidence diagnostic focused on the National Tariff Commission (NTC), the government's autonomous investigation authority on trade and tariff matters. As in Uganda, the Context Matters Framework was adapted to this diagnostic focus, building on extensive work undertaken during the SEDI programme's analysis phase to build a coherent picture of the politics of evidence use in Pakistan's key sectors. SDPI's involvement in the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council as well as other prior collaborations had helped deepen the relationship with key institutions within the trade space, including the National Tariff Commission. The NTC wanted to strengthen its role as a think tank for the government and to improve how it handled and communicated evidence to be more effective in informing policy.

Given this objective, the diagnostic team placed particular emphasis on the intra- and interrelationships dimension of the Context Matters Framework to capture feedback from external stakeholders (other government and non-government actors) on how the NTC operates. The diagnostic's planning and design stage was conducted primarily online with focal points from the NTC while the delivery of workshops was staggered: it was important to keep the face-to-face element, hence full-day workshops were adapted to be done over a number of days, following the COVID-19 guidelines for face-to-face meetings.

Box 6: Action-oriented diagnostic for National Tariff Commission, Pakistan (March – June 2021)

The main partner was the National Tariff Commission, the autonomous investigation authority of Government of Pakistan. SDPI, SEDI's representative in Pakistan engaged with the chairperson of the Commission, who endorsed the exercise and appointed three focal points who would join the design and planning phase and accompany SDPI in the implementation.

NTC has a large leadership team, composed of the chairperson, the members and the directors general. External stakeholders of NTC include some government departments in addition to stakeholders from the private sector whose key input was obtained through interviews (21) and focus groups discussions (2). The rest of the staff, composed of directors, deputy directors, and assistant directors participated in the staggered workshops (5).



Key learning points

Relationships with government partners

Starting with trust

Repeatedly, and in line with the experiences of previous evidence diagnostics shared in the SEDI learning session, the teams found that **trusted, long-term relationships are key to successful work with government agencies.** Such relationships are especially critical for diagnostics like these, where a high degree of trust is required for an agency to open its doors to partners and to look frankly at what is and isn't working. In both Uganda and Pakistan, national partners had strong pre-existing relationships

with the two partner agencies (the M&E Directorate in the Office of the Prime Minister and the NTC, respectively), which ensured sufficient trust to undertake the diagnostics.

Setting expectations

Achieving a balance between SEDI's and government's priorities was an important means of sustaining initial trust and ensuring that SEDI was grounded in engagement with genuine government realities. The SEDI programme's holistic (usually lengthier) approach did not always align easily with the often-short-term interests of government partners. At times, this made it challenging to find the necessary common ground needed to underpin a strong collaboration in which partners could learn from each other. In some cases, government agencies had immediate needs and requests for specific areas of technical input. Meanwhile, SEDI emphasised a whole-picture view of how evidence is being used, identifying barriers and opportunities so as to direct energies to where there was most potential for improvement. This was challenging because while government partners sometimes sought quick technical solution, SEDI was proposing a much deeper, problem-driven analysis first in order to identify sustainable and effective interventions.

In some cases, SEDI was able to respond to immediate government needs. For instance, in Uganda SEDI embedded a technical advisor in the M&E Directorate in the Office of the Prime Minister to support the diagnostic process, provide continuity after SEDI closure and offer much-needed technical advisory support to the Directorate on other aspects directly relevant to SEDI's objectives. While the SEDI team embarked on this process with a systemic approach to evidence, seeking to support governments to address structural challenges to improve evidence use, the team also learned

the importance of investing time in reaching amicable trade-offs between short- and long-term needs to lay foundations for partnership. Emphasising ownership

To maximise the experience of government partners, the SEDI team developed and facilitated activities to elicit both implicit and explicit knowledge. The diagnostics were intended to give government partners a safe space in which to explore their use of evidence, which required them to own and be in control of the process. The process followed the advice of government partners in terms of who to involve and how, when to carry out activities and the appropriateness of tools. To help staff in the Office of the Prime Minister and the NTC to reflect on their own work, the SEDI team emphasised the use of human-centred design thinking, which aimed to tap into the collective intelligence that already exists within teams. While time and practical constraints meant the SEDI team was not able to work in this way all the time, they prioritised this spirit as much as possible throughout the diagnostic process.

This approach was very different to what some government agencies had come to expect from international projects and was enabled in large part due to the existing trust between partners (as already described). In Pakistan, for example, the NTC was more accustomed to working with donors as providers of infrastructure or services (including capacity building); the SEDI programme's approach, however, aimed to co-design and co-implement a plan that made sense for all parties involved. The team invested additional time clarifying roles and responsibilities with government partners. In Uganda, the active involvement of the Office of the Prime Minister M&E Directorate was critical to establishing clear roles and responsibilities for the Directorate itself but also for the SEDI team and how they would complement one

another. This was documented in a terms of reference and a workplan as part of a long and iterative process, which helped to concretise expectations and clarify the time investments required of each team member.

Engendering a sense of ownership among government partners was easier in Pakistan, where the team was dealing with just one institution. In Uganda, where Programme 18 involved more than one agency, this meant building ownership of the diagnostic exercise slowly, beginning with one agency (the M&E Directorate in the Office of the Prime Minister). From this, SEDI was able to progressively grow ownership to the Programme Secretariat under the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development,¹⁰ whose commitment has in turn opened inroads to other agencies within Programme 18.

Working with champions

A key element that underpinned and reinforced ownership was the SEDI programme's active engagement of individual champions within government partner agencies.

While this was a critical theme in both countries, it took different forms for each diagnostic. In Uganda, the M&E Directorate within the Office of the Prime Minister has itself acted as a champion, spearheading the institutionalisation of evidence use within the government over the past several years. The team benefited from strong high-level support from the M&E Directorate's Assistant Commissioner, who has been a champion of EIDM for a number of years, having collaborated with 3ie, Twende Mbele and UNDP among others on several international capacity development initiatives relating to evidence. He was also nominated for an Africa Evidence Network award in 2020.

In Pakistan, the champion was the NTC chairperson, the authority who endorsed the diagnostic exercise and helped to mobilise people within the agency. However, the experience in this case also illustrated the importance of working with a small and committed group of government staff, rather than depending too heavily on the endorsement of a single leader. Staff turnover increased with the COVID-19 crisis and additional pressures on the government. For example, during 2020, the senior leadership at Ministry of Commerce (a key stakeholder for the NTC) changed three times. This required a degree of adaptability as new leadership underwent orientation and to factor in their own vision for the process. **Having buy-in from not only leadership but also a team prevents having to start all over again if the leader who initially started the process, leaves their position.** Overall, the combination of high-level support and mid-level enthusiasm helped the evidence agenda get traction in Pakistan.

Methodological approach

Combining a research and a capacity development approach

Combining a research approach with a capacity development approach and managing the two together – including the tensions between them – necessitated several internal conversations among the SEDI design team and with government agencies to clarify expectations. While a diagnostic exercise has an important research component, in the sense that it is an inquiry process that follows specific parameters, the SEDI diagnostics were also designed to support capacity development. Through a co-creative, participatory and inclusive process, the diagnostic aimed to help all stakeholders (government agencies and national partners) to not only benefit from findings and insights, but to better understand the role evidence plays in their context, to develop their own skills to conduct diagnostics in the future, and to start to advance an evidence agenda in their organisations.

Understanding the space for change: authority, acceptance and ability

The AAA analysis undertaken as part of the SEDI programme's analysis phase provided the diagnostic teams with important indications of where there was space for change or where effort would be needed to build the enabling environment or agency's 'readiness' to improve evidence use. In Pakistan, for example, the *authority* (that is, the high-level agency endorsement) to undertake the diagnostic was clear but *acceptance* among teams that would be affected by resulting the change was less evident and needed further exploration. The SEDI team therefore held pre-diagnostic workshops to introduce the

diagnostic exercise and explain to government partners what it meant and what would be required of the agency's team. In Uganda, the *authority* to undertake the diagnostic was clear among the M&E Directorate but less so within the other core agencies that would be involved in the process. To make sure that this was in place, the M&E Directorate had to intervene and bring other agencies up to speed. *Ability* (that is, the practical aspects of starting a change process) is always challenging, as it demands time and resources, which are usually scarce. In both the Pakistan and Uganda diagnostics, the SEDI team needed to closely support the government partner teams to make sure that participation in the diagnostic wouldn't take up too much of their already limited time.

Going with the grain: linking up with existing processes

Diagnostics in both countries identified existing momentum with the agencies they were working with. In Uganda, the transition from sector to programme had been a window of opportunity to take stock of what had gone well and what hadn't in terms of evidence use. From the government's perspective, the transition was an opportunity to strengthen evidence use as it was already discussing other evidence-related efforts (e.g. a new M&E strategy for the M&E Directorate and research agendas for Programme 18 and others) and making structural changes. By supporting a change process that was already underway, the SEDI programme could contribute an evidence lens to the thinking about how to shape new structures and processes. In Pakistan, the diagnostic helped to generate the commitment necessary to further the NTC's ambition to strengthen its role as a government think tank. In Uganda, the diagnostic has spurred enthusiasm among the

M&E Directorate to develop an evidence-use strategy for the programme area dedicated to development plan implementation.

In practice, linking the diagnostic to existing ongoing processes, especially when these were in the early stages, was challenging to navigate. For instance, conducting the diagnostic during the transition from sector to programme in Uganda revealed that not all the agencies involved were at the same pace of implementation nor had a common understanding of the ongoing reforms and how they were affecting or likely to affect evidence use.

Prioritising focus areas

An important step was for partners to work together to **understand which areas of the Context Matters Framework were most relevant and to devote energy to those, rather than comprehensively investigating the entire tool**. In Pakistan, as mentioned, a key priority for the NTC was to improve its function as a think tank, so external feedback was crucial; this diagnostic therefore focused on the Context Matters dimension of interrelationships within and outside the public sector. In the case of Uganda, the framework dimensions were prioritised by addressing the main functions of Programme 18: parties agreed to focus on planning, monitoring and evaluation, and budgeting.

The emphasis on government partner ownership meant that **the SEDI team had to negotiate priorities and adapt expectations**. For instance, the SEDI team would have liked to have developed a much deeper understanding of gender equity and social inclusion dynamics in the use of evidence in the government partners. However, despite dedicating additional time and resources to ensure these elements were integrated throughout the diagnostic's

planning and implementation (including interviewing additional stakeholders), the SEDI team found it difficult to achieve much depth as it was not always a priority for the exercise in some government agencies. In this context, the team found this an effective compromise between the SEDI project and government partners.

Embracing politics to navigate complex environments

The SEDI learning brief on the programme's analysis phase had noted **the importance of remaining continuously informed about local political economy as a critical element of implementation** (Shaxson et al., 2021: 9). The design of the diagnostic activities – such as the inception meetings in the design stage, the stakeholder mapping in Uganda and the workshops – gave the SEDI team an ongoing and evolving picture of who the key players were and the power dynamics between them. This enabled the SEDI team to adapt as new relevant stakeholders emerged and dynamics shifted. For instance, the Office of the President, who was not initially a key stakeholder in the diagnostic process, was integrated into subsequent stages of the process in Uganda following the release of the Programme Implementation Plan, which made it responsible for tracking NDP III results.

Shifting online: a radical change in ways of working

The shift to an almost entirely virtual way of working necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic constituted a radical and unforeseen change both for SEDI implementation partners, and for government agencies in all the programme's countries of operation. The design and implementation of the diagnostics had been envisaged as largely face-to-face exercises, involving in-person workshops and participatory

methodologies to build trust and relationships. Working virtually presented many challenges: from limited time and attention span to working together in a hands-on way, difficulties in having open and candid discussions, and limited experience in using virtual tools for online collaboration. **The team learned that online ways of working with governments can require much more time to implement and for changes to take effect** than the in-person approaches that both government and practitioners had been accustomed to. However, **virtual working did facilitate the inclusion of some stakeholders that would have otherwise been unable to join** because of their distance from or travel time to the workshops. This was relevant particularly in Uganda where several agencies working under one programme would converge via a hybrid of virtual and physical meetings to deliberate on issues pertaining to diagnostic and how it was going to be delivered. Government partners appreciated some of the new tools – including the use of Ideaflick (an online, collaborative sticky note platform), which they have adopted in their own virtual engagements. The SEDI team had to learn by doing and use online tools creatively to design interactive group exercises as part of virtual meetings.

Adapt framing of ‘evidence’ to the context and partner

The diagnostic processes showed the need to tailor language to the context. The Context Matters Framework follows many in the EIDM sector who have taken a broad view of ‘evidence’ in order to understand how it relates to policy; however, the SEDI team found that **articulating what is meant by evidence in more specific terms, according to the context, helped to focus the diagnostic exercise** (INASP, 2016a; INASP, 2016b Shaxson and Datta, 2016). In Pakistan, for example, the team talked about ‘research’, ‘data’, ‘information’ and ‘statistics’, which made the idea of ‘evidence’ more relatable to government partners because these terms were part of their daily work and tasks. Similarly, in Uganda, ‘evidence’ typically implied monitoring data and statistics. This is a common interpretation. The SEDI team therefore made a conscious effort to encourage participants to be specific when they talked about evidence – e.g. monitoring data, evaluations, citizen feedback – and reflect on the type of evidence they most commonly use, what types of evidence might be missing from this list, and the gender equity and social inclusion implications embedded within different types of evidence.

Management and team dynamics

Accompaniment is needed to support a co-creative process

SEDI encouraged co-creation and adaptation to local context but learned that this requires significant time to do in a meaningful way. For the diagnostics, the Context Matters Framework was a means of operationalising this approach.

The Context Matters tool was new to country leads EPRC and SDPI, and the SEDI team therefore invested significant time in sharing knowledge, experience and methodology, and combining the expertise all partners brought to the table. This process, and arriving at a common understanding, took time – which

was even more drawn out given the pandemic prevented the SEDI consortium from meeting in person in order to co-construct a tailored approach. Sessions to share knowledge, experience and methodologies were carried out online rather than during country visits by international partners as had originally been intended.

These challenges notwithstanding, the team in Uganda was able to introduce and pilot the co-creation approach through a series of virtual workshops to co-design the delivery framework, adapt it to a programme (versus a single organisation) and build the capacity of EPRC and M&E Directorate teams to conduct the diagnostic. This process required a substantial amount of iteration and a committed and focused team that was able to rapidly respond to windows of opportunity, prepare inputs and make decisions about next steps. In Pakistan, the team took a more condensed approach, spending less time on the design of the diagnostic in order to maximise a window of opportunity for delivery of the diagnostic within NTC.

Small and agile teams increase adaptiveness

A clear learning point from SEDI's experience was **the need to keep design teams small and agile**. Hands-on, iterative and adaptive diagnostic exercises such as these require teams to have a common focus and the space to respond quickly to ever-changing political environments. In Uganda, where the SEDI programme first started working, the team initially struggled to get multiple elements of the SEDI programme involved in the design and delivery of the diagnostic (MLA, TWP, Communications, GESI). The team then found that incorporating everyone's point of view was taking too long and risked the programme becoming inefficient and unwieldy and losing

momentum. Over time, SEDI learned to be smarter about when and how to seek inputs. For example, the team identified key moments in the diagnostic process where bringing feedback and perspectives from outside the immediate design team would be valuable (these were at the end of inception phase, for feedback on the delivery framework, and at the reporting phase, for feedback on the first draft). In Pakistan SEDI was able to keep the team small and agile, inviting other SEDI experts for specific input when required. Debrief and reflection meetings after each of the major activities (e.g. workshops) helped both country teams to continually tailor their diagnostic approach.



Conclusion

The SEDI team's experience of conducting evidence diagnostics in Uganda and Pakistan shows how the technical workstreams and the country leads worked together to move from 'thinking politically' in the analysis phase of the programme towards 'working politically' in the implementation phase, using the authority, acceptance and ability (AAA) model and the Context Matters Framework. The reflections shared in this brief emphasise the fundamental importance of trusted relationships with the key government partner agencies, which in SEDI's case pre-dated the programme. While these relationships can be both expressed and enabled by co-creative approaches, the SEDI team found that this way of working was unfamiliar for many involved and it was therefore necessary to invest time in jointly discussing and setting expectations for collaborative working between the project team and its government partners. To facilitate the agility required to work

politically and to inform intentional, strategic and sustainable technical choices, SEDI teams also made specific methodological decisions and compromises.



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Endnotes

¹For a more detailed explanation of the analysis phase methodology see Shaxson et al. (2021)

²The AAA model was developed by the Building State Capability programme team at Harvard University (see Andrews et al., 2017) and adapted for the SEDI programme's PEA ('PEA+'). The AAA model is used for analysing the space for change by looking at degrees of authority, acceptance and ability within government agencies.

³For example, see Langer et al. (2016) and Results for All (2017).

⁴The toolbox was developed by SEDI's technical workstream leads and country leads and was grounded in SEDI's theory of change. While the tool was loosely based on INASP's internal learning and capacity development framework, the levels of change and the interventions identified under each are commonly used in the wider EIDM literature.

⁵Politics & Ideas became Purpose & Ideas in 2021 (www.purposeandideas.org).

⁶The Context Matters Framework can be accessed via this interactive webpage: <https://www.inasp.info/contextmatters>

⁷Reproduced from: Weyrauch, V., Echt, L., and Suliman, S. (2016) 'Knowledge into Policy: Going beyond Context Matters'. Politics and Ideas and INASP, <https://www.inasp.info/contextmatters>

⁸A learning session, which informed the diagnostic design included speakers from government and external partners, sharing experiences from two non-SEDI diagnostic processes: the South Africa Department of Environmental Affairs and Overseas Development Institute evidence strategy process under the BCURE VakaYiko programme from 2013–2017 (Shaxson and Datta, 2016); the INASP/ Politics & Ideas and Ghana Environmental Protection Agency pilot of the Context Matters Framework in 2017–2018 (Hayter and Echt, 2018); as well as emerging insights from SEDI's partnership between EPRC and Uganda Office of the Prime Minister in 2020–2021.

⁹In particular, the team made efforts to integrate gender, equity and social inclusion within the questions being explored by the diagnostics. These questions focused on issues such as the representation of diverse groups in data

collection processes, evidence provision and review and decision-making structures and leadership roles, and asked about what elements of organisational culture promote or hinder a more equitable working environment and policymaking process.

¹⁰For example, the Programme 18 Secretariat is based at the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development, where it doubles as the secretariat the Private Sector Development Programme. As part of the evidence diagnostic process, representatives of the Secretariat attended a diagnostic workshop and presented on their work. They were impressed by the diagnostic on evidence use and the intention of inculcating a culture of evidence use in Programme 18, and subsequently extended an invitation to EPRC to deliver a presentation on use of evidence for planning, budget and M&E during a three-day workshop for planners of ministries, departments and agencies under the Private Sector Development and Development Plan Implementation (Programme 18) programmes. This workshop was attended by 65 participants from over 25 ministries, departments and agencies. The planners are key players in the evidence ecosystem and being able to discuss issues of how to embed evidence use in the two programmes with them was a valuable learning opportunity for SEDI. These planners also indicated that they looked forward to receiving the recommendations from the evidence diagnostic.

About SEDI

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 (FCDO).

The SEDI consortium is led by Oxford Policy Management and comprises national, international, and regional partners. The national lead organisations – the African Center for Economic Transformation in Ghana, the Economic Policy Research Centre in Uganda and the Sustainable Development Policy Institute 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 and Policy, the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, the Overseas Development Institute, and Oxford Policy Management – as well as the regional partners – the African Institute for Development Policy and the Africa Centre for Evidence – 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.

Image Credits

Delegates listen on the first day of a workshop in the Ugandan capital Kampala to draft Somalia's national gender policy. AMISOM

Businessmen holding pens and holding graph paper are meeting to plan sales to meet targets set in next year. Jirapong Manustrong

Increasing Productivity and Unleashing Growth Day 1 May 26th 2012. IFPRI Pakistan Strategy Support Program

Dorothy Okello (Coordinator, Women of Uganda Network) and Imelda Anianbossou (CTA) Photos from CTA's workshop on "Making the next generation ACP agriculture work for women", 2018. CTA (Technical centre for agricultural and rural cooperation

Women in Pakistan wait to vote. FCDO/ Rachel Clayton

Financial businessman analyses the graph of the company's performance to create profits and growth, market research reports and income statistics, financial and accounting concept. Davig Gyung

Man in black and white check shirt using computer: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) activated its Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to assist public health partners in responding to the novel (new) coronavirus outbreak first identified in Wuhan, China. CDC

Woman in white and black striped shirt writing on white paper. Kojo Kwarteng

A discussion. Nadir Badshah, Sustainable Development Policy Institute

First Cohort - YALI Accra Regional Leadership Center. US Embassy Ghana

Panellist discussion. Nadir Badshah, Sustainable Development Policy Institute

The content of this paper is the sole responsibility of the authors and does not represent the opinions of SEDI or the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. Any errors and omissions are also the sole responsibility of the authors. Please direct any comments or queries to sedi@opml.co.uk.

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