

The Art and Science of evidence use in Parliaments: An Insider's story.



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Parliaments are the legislative authority of the state and indispensable institutions of representative democracies mandated to perform three core functions of representation, legislation and oversight.

The ability of Members of Parliament to perform their roles effectively along the policy and legislative cycle is significantly shaped by their access to and use of authoritative and reliable information. Evidence in parliament predominantly serves the purpose of argumentation, legitimisation or rationalization. Although many studies have documented the complexity of evidence use in the other contexts and how to overcome barriers, there is a limited understanding of the evidence ecosystem in parliaments and how this shapes debate and influences policy decisions.

This paper presents an ongoing doctoral discussion, exploring evidence use in parliaments with a focus on drivers (factors that promote use) and constraints (factors that impede use). Using a case study approach of the Uganda and South African parliaments, this paper is oriented on a qualitative approach of discovery and inductive logic. The audience will gain insight from the views and perspectives of interviews, document review and process tracing of three embedded cases. The paper is informed by views from 30 respondents including parliament staff and other key external stakeholders as generators of evidence and legislators as evidence users.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have driven international development towards seeking new and alternative ways to measure and track performance. The new "enabling" SDG 16, which recognizes the importance of strong institutions, including strong parliaments, has created the need for parliaments to evaluate their processes and progress towards particularly targets 16.6 and 16.7.

The paper contributes to legislative studies drawing from an insiders' perspective. This paper is wholly geared towards the evidence user and interventions aimed at improving evidence use in parliaments for an inclusive and sustainable world.