“We rededicate ourselves to the enduring Pan African vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena.”

- African Union’s Agenda 2063
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Message from our director

ACE is committed to its mission to reduce poverty and inequality by increasing the use of research evidence.

2019 saw us making valuable contributions through the work of our four portfolios: advancing the art and science of evidence-informed decision-making in Africa, building evidence capacities, supporting evidence communities, and conducting evidence synthesis.

In 2019 we at the Africa Centre for Evidence (ACE) provided responsive evidence services that shaped national and international policy and practice. We moved forward the evidence capacity agenda in Africa and mentored, trained, and supported others in both the generation and use of evidence. We supported the development and strengthening of communities and networks across the African evidence ecosystem. We conducted research and published articles on evidence-informed decision-making for a wide range of audiences and hosted the first-ever virtual Africa Evidence Week.

Perhaps most striking as I look back over ACE’s achievements of 2019 is the potential that we have built, in our work, our partnerships, and our team members: potential to support the response to the COVID-19 pandemic facing the world in 2020 at both local and global levels.

Looking back over ACE’s achievements in 2019 and reflecting on the role that evidence is now playing as the world addresses the COVID-19 pandemic, I am extremely proud.

I am honoured to lead such a talented group of individuals, to receive guidance from such distinguished and experienced advisors, and to work alongside so many partners and colleagues all around the world. To them I extend my thanks and my congratulations on a successful year. We are ACE!

Prof Ruth Stewart
ACE Director
ACE’s values

ACE strives to be a values-centred organisation, encouraging our team to commit to living out, taking on work that espouses, and engaging with partners that do not flout any of the values or motivations below.

We actively work as team members to achieve ACE’s mission of contributing to reducing poverty and inequality by increasing the use of evidence in decision-making, a mission that supports ACE’s vision – to see an end to poverty and inequality in South Africa and across the continent.

THE AFRICA CENTRE FOR EVIDENCE IS:

• Motivated by making a positive, rights-based, and socially-just difference
• Committed to equity and equality
• Focussed on building trust and relationships
• Dedicated to sharing capacity and opportunity
• Respectful of others’ expertise, experiences, and perspectives
• Committed to zero tolerance for any form of discrimination, harassment, or abuse
• Unwavering in delivering high-quality work, on time, and to budget

THE AFRICA CENTRE FOR EVIDENCE IS MOTIVATED BY:

• Methodological rigour
• Innovative thinking
• Reflective practices
• Transparent practices and reporting
ACE’s history, position, and future

Poverty and inequality are complex and profound challenges for South Africa, and for Africa more broadly.

Evidence-informed decision-making has the potential to make a meaningful contribution to the reduction of poverty and inequality in the region. There is therefore a need for African organisations to work to increase the use of evidence for decision-making to address the priorities of the region, and ensure Africa’s participation in the wider global evidence movement.

Over the last 20 years there have been a number of initiatives in South Africa to contribute to reductions in poverty and inequality through an increase in the use of evidence in decision-making. Many of our staff members have contributed to these initiatives, establishing deep relationships across the spectrum of evidence producers and users, building valuable experience and expertise in the evidence ecosystem, and establishing a strong standing amongst the wider evidence community.

The Africa Centre for Evidence (ACE) was established as a research centre within the University of Johannesburg’s Faculty of Humanities in 2017. The establishment of ACE came as a culmination of team members’ involvement in initiatives to support the growing evidence ecosystem in South Africa and Africa. ACE’s birth also reflects a recognition of the critical mass of experience, expertise, and networks that we had established by 2016. Professor Ruth Stewart has been at the helm of ACE since its inception.

ACE’s mission is to reduce poverty and inequality in South Africa and across the region by increasing the use of research evidence. We work towards this mission by aiming to achieve a spectrum of outcomes. These outcomes include raised awareness of evidence-informed decision-making, enhanced capability in using evidence in decision-making, or the actual use of evidence for decisions. We recognise and advocate that progress towards each of these outcomes is incremental, incorporating many small shifts that need to be measured and valued individually; success is not only a new evidence-informed policy.

To these ends, the Africa Centre for Evidence focusses on four strategic goals, aligned to ACE’s four portfolios of work:

1. Better understanding the art and science of evidence-informed decision-making in Africa
2. Building stronger evidence capacities
3. Supporting meaningful evidence communities
4. Producing rigorous and relevant evidence syntheses

This annual report describes ACE’s progress towards each of these goals achieved during 2019.
In 2019 we contributed to the use of evidence to tackle SDGs: 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17
ACE’s top 10 accomplishments in 2019

1. We hosted the first-ever Africa Evidence Week – a virtual engagement event – which received overwhelming attention from our stakeholders on Twitter with over 4,651,218 impressions and 2,493 engagements. We also supported – through the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) – African talent to attend the second international Evidence Synthesis Hackathon, a boundary-breaking 4IR event that brings together synthesis researchers and software development specialists from across the globe.

2. ACE’s teams were successful in 2019 in raising funding to the total value of R20,391,963 (USD1,295,612), which included one R3,5 million project on understanding the art and science of using evidence in low- and middle-income countries, and a R14,2 million project to support the Africa Evidence Network for the next three years.

3. The membership of the Africa Evidence Network (AEN) – one of ACE’s largest projects – reached 3000 members in 2019 with significant pan-African representation; the AEN also hosted the first in-person meeting of its reference group, bringing together over 30 leading evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) professionals from across Africa.

4. To further enhance Africa’s leading position in the EIDM field, we collaborated with major EIDM stakeholders such as the African Institute for Development Policy, the African Evaluation Association and Twende Mbele, and produced the first geo-map of over 150 EIDM institutions in Africa.

5. We produced and launched seven evidence maps in a single calendar year, with some maps being specifically requested by colleagues within South African government departments. We conducted a policy-relevant evidence map and responsive evidence synthesis that informed the South African Presidential Advisory Panel on Land Reform and Agriculture, and we integrated a policy-relevant evidence map within the South African Department of Human Settlement’s Socio-Economic Impact Assessment process.

6. We developed a chapter on implementing evidence-based policy-making in South Africa for the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation which is part of a guidebook for all public servants in South Africa.

7. ACE’s director was invited as a thought leader in EIDM to give a guest lecture by the Centre for Excellence in Development Impact and Learning and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

8. We were invited by Nature’s Palgrave Communications to write a paper on South Africa’s evidence ecosystem with colleagues from South Africa’s Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, which ended up being one of two articles published in Nature by ACE team members in 2019.

9. ACE director Professor Ruth Stewart was awarded a B1 rating from the National Research Foundation of South Africa, and we received support from the Faculty of Humanities Dean at UJ to develop a new postgraduate qualification in EIDM under the facilitation of UJ’s Professional Staff Development Unit.

10. We developed a methodology for evidence maps and rapid evidence responses to be embedded in government departments and hosted a joint learning exchange on this method in collaboration with colleagues from the African Centre for Rapid Evidence Syntheses and the Department for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation.
ACE’s people

We are a multi-disciplinary team and in all our work, we collaborate with other institutions.

This collaboration helps us to continuously learn and improve our work. Our team consists of full-time and part-time staff members. We have an in-house mentorship programme that enables our team to develop their careers further and reach their full potential.

TEAM MEMBERS

Likhwa Ncube
Evidence capacities, Evidence synthesis

Nkululeko Tshabalala
Evidence capacities, Evidence synthesis

Sunet Jordaan
Evidence capacities, ACE operations

Yvonne Erasmus
Evidence capacities, Evidence synthesis

Zafeer Ravat
Evidence capacities, Evidence synthesis

Charity Chisoro
Evidence communities

Linda Etale
Evidence communities

Nasreen Jessani
Evidence communities

Precious Motha
Evidence communities

Siziwe Ngcwabe
Evidence communities

Laurenz Langer
Art and science of using evidence, Evidence capacities, Evidence synthesis

Natalie Tannous
Evidence synthesis, Evidence communities, ACE operations

Promise Nduku
Art and science of using evidence, Evidence capacities, Evidence synthesis

Carina van Rooyen
Evidence communities, Evidence synthesis, Evidence capacities, Art and science of using evidence

Ruth Stewart
ACE operations, Art and science of using evidence, Evidence capacities, Evidence communities, Evidence synthesis

Christa Heyneke
ACE operations

Elton Mpinyuri
ACE operations

Shona Putuka
Evidence synthesis
DISTINGUISHED VISITING PROFESSORS

Professor Sandy Oliver is a distinguished visiting professor at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Johannesburg.

She is Director of the Social Science Research Unit, and Deputy Director of the EPPI-Centre (Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Coordinating Centre), at University College London (UCL) Institute of Education, London.

For thirty years, her interests have focused on the interaction between researchers and people making decisions in their professional and personal lives. With this in mind she has been developing methods to collate knowledge from whole bodies of research – systematic reviews – not just single studies. Most recently this has been in the area of international health systems and development where she has conducted systematic reviews and built up a programme of support for research teams conducting reviews elsewhere. She is a member of the Board of the Campbell Collaboration, a Cochrane editor with their Consumers and Communication Review Group, and a member of the Centre for Excellence in Development Impact and Learning. She has been working with the UK Department for International Development, the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research at the World Health Organisation (WHO), and the Research, Evidence and Development Initiative (READ-It) to strengthen capacity in systematic reviewing in low- and middle-income countries.

Professor John Lavis is a distinguished visiting professor at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Johannesburg.

He holds the Canada Research Chair in Evidence-Informed Health Systems. He is the Director of the McMaster Health Forum | Forum+, Co-Lead of Rapid-Improvement Support and Exchange (RISE), Co-Director of the World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre for Evidence-Informed Policy, and Professor in the Department of Health Evidence and Impact at McMaster University. John supports policy-makers and stakeholders to harness research evidence, citizen values and stakeholder insights to strengthen health and social systems and get the right programs, services and products to the people who need them. He holds an MD from Queen’s University, an MSc from the London School of Economics, and a PhD from Harvard University.

He is committed to helping policy-makers and stakeholders to: 1) learn how to make decisions based on the best available research evidence; 2) find evidence through the McMaster Health Forum’s own products and the best available sources of pre-appraised, synthesised research evidence (including the Forum’s Health Systems Evidence, and Social Systems Evidence, and the Forum-supported and citizen-targeted McMaster Optimal Aging Portal); 3) spark action through stakeholder dialogues, citizen panels and more; 4) embed supports for evidence-informed decision-making, by institutionalising promising and proven approaches; and 5) evaluate innovations in supporting evidence-informed decision-making.
ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The ACE Advisory Committee provides advice and guidance to ACE on its strategic direction, and on the design and implementation of ACE portfolios.

Members of the Advisory Committee act as ambassadors for ACE. The Advisory Committee was deliberately invited to reflect the various stakeholders that ACE engages with; it consists of three members from outside of Africa, three members from within wider Africa, three members from within South Africa, and one University of Johannesburg representative. The members come from various sectors including academia, government, and civil society. As part of ACE’s commitment to collaborating across borders both physical and sectoral, we were excited to host our Advisory Committee members at an in-person meeting during 2019.

HARSHA DAYAL, South African National Department for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, South Africa
SHANIL HARICHARAN, Nelson Mandela School of Public Governancea, South Africa
JOHN LAVIS, McMaster University, Canada
BERYL LEACH, International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, India
RHONA MIJUMBI-DEVE, Makerere University, Uganda
KAMMILA NAIDOO, University of Johannesburg, South Africa
SANDY OLIVER, University College London, United Kingdom
ROSE ORONJE, African Institute for Development Policy, Kenya
JOSEPHINE WATERA, Parliament of Uganda, Uganda
TARYN YOUNG, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

ACE maintained the number of our research associates in 2019, with a few high-level collaborations both within academia and outside of it.

Ekwaro Obuku, Makerere University, Uganda
Desyree Lötter, independent consultant, South Africa
Mapula Tshangela, National Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, South Africa
Neal Haddaway, Stockholm Environment Institute, Sweden
Shanil Haricharan, Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance, South Africa
Harsha Dayal, National Department for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, South Africa
During the year, 10 visitors spent extended time with us at ACE. These visits were central to supporting ACE’s ability to collaborate at an international scale as the Centre works towards its mission of contributing to the reduction of poverty and inequality in the wider-Africa region.

**INTERNATIONAL VISITORS**

**Professor Sandy Oliver**
DVP at UJ, Director of the Social Science Research Unit, University College of London
Purpose: building ACE through one-on-one mentoring sessions with ACE staff

**Professor Nancy Cartwright**
Professor of Philosophy at Durham University, Distinguished Professor at the University of California
Purpose: seminar on the nature of evidence, co-hosted with the UJ African Centre for Epistemology and Philosophy of Science

**Professor Nelson Sewankambo**
Principal of Makerere University College of Health Sciences
Purpose: mentorship on ACE’s proposed new MA

**Dr Majella McCloskey**
Senior manager at the Center for Effective Services, Ireland
Purpose: Winston Churchill fellow seeking to understand the use of evidence in post-conflict environments

**Professor of Practice Beryl Leach**
Outgoing Executive Director of the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation
Purpose: exploration of the possibility of becoming established as a UJ professor of practice

**Dr Marie Gaarder**
Incoming Executive Director of the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)
Purpose: exploration of an organisational partnership between 3ie and ACE

**Dr Lindsay Walker**
PhD candidate at the University of Exeter
Purpose: learning from the work ACE has done with various government departments in South Africa
NATIONAL VISITORS

Mapula Tshangela
National Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries: Director of Climate Change Mitigation Sector Plan Implementation
Purpose: collaboration on producing an environmental evidence map

Dr Kiruben Naicker
National Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries: Director of Science-Policy Interface in the Biodiversity and Conservation Unit
Purpose: collaboration on producing an environmental evidence map

Rina Taviv
Gauteng Department for Agriculture and Rural Development: Deputy Director of Climate Change and Environmental Information Management (GDARD)
Purpose: collaboration between UJ and the GDARD unit

HOSTED INTERNS

Partnering with the McMaster Health Forum, ACE welcomed three interns from McMaster University in Canada on Queen Elizabeth Scholarships. These interns selected ACE as the organisation where they wanted to carry out their internships, before returning to further their studies in Canada. The interns contributed to ACE’s work across different portfolios, and drew on their experiences of doing evidence synthesis at the Health Forum. In 2019, ACE welcomed three interns: Kartik Sharma, Peter Belesiotis, and Natalie Tchakarian.
Our work

ACE’s projects are structured according to four portfolios: advancing the art and science of evidence-informed decision-making, building evidence capacities, supporting evidence communities, and conducting evidence syntheses.

ART AND SCIENCE OF EVIDENCE-INFORMED DECISION-MAKING PORTFOLIO

We aim to advance the art and science of supporting EIDM, with a particular focus on evidence capacities, evidence communities, and evidence synthesis. To these ends we research and review: the practical experiences and tacit knowledge of people across Africa; the evidence about what works for supporting evidence-use, how and why; and the context in which evidence-informed decision-making takes place, including political analysis. We also contribute to the development of theory and methods about evidence-use for decisions. In 2019, we undertook the following work within this portfolio.

Collating the art and science on evidence-informed decision-making in Africa

LED BY: Laurenz Langer  
TEAM: Laurenz Langer, Lihkwa Ncube, Promise Nduku, Ruth Stewart  
DATES: June 2016 – ongoing  
FUNDED BY: Various

ACE has been working to collate knowledge on the art (tacit evidence) and the science (research evidence) on evidence-informed decision-making in Africa. We continue to carve out some pieces of work towards this end. In 2019, this included a detailed EIDM stakeholder engagement exercise conducted by the AEN. This involved over 30 in-depth interviews with African EIDM organisations to elicit their perception of the evidence ecosystem on the continent. We also produced an evidence map on all evidence (research and tacit knowledge) on EIDM interventions in Africa and successfully applied for funding to synthesise this evidence.

Misinformation on the continent: research and country briefs

LED BY: Ruth Stewart  
TEAM: Peter Belesiotis, Natalie Tannous, Natalie Tchakarian  
DATES: July 2019 – October 2019  
FUNDED BY: Africa Check

In 2019 ACE was part of a programme of research in partnership with Africa Check, Full Fact, and Chequeado Series to produce and contribute to research briefings for practitioners that explored the available evidence for fact-checking organisations in different countries. The research briefings included doing country context essays and identifying the research gaps for different topics, such as health and education.

Database of rapid response synthesis services

LED BY: Carina van Rooyen  
TEAM: Steven Chen, Lihkwa Ncube, Natalie Tchakarian (McMaster University QES scholars)  
DATES: 2018 - 2019  
FUNDED BY: University of Johannesburg

The database of rapid response services was developed to support the responsive evidence synthesis service (RESS) project. The overall goal of the RESS project is to strengthen South African environmental policy-makers to self-help and self-serve regarding the use of research evidence in various parts of a policy process. UJ’s University Research Committee is providing financial support for this project.
EVIDENCE CAPACITIES PORTFOLIO

At ACE, the evidence capacities portfolio focusses on strengthening evidence ecosystem(s) through enhancing individual, organisational, and network capacities. We do this through: (1) strengthening and sharing capacities for evidence synthesis, ranging from capacity to conduct full systematic reviews to evidence maps and responsive evidence synthesis services; (2) strengthening and sharing capacities to build and support evidence communities, from communities of practice to broader evidence networks; and (3) strengthening and sharing capacities for evidence-use in decision- and policy-making.

Mid-term review of South Africa’s National Biodiversity Research and Evidence Strategy

**LED BY:** Carina van Rooyen and Laurenz Langer  
**DATES:** October 2019 – March 2020  
**FUNDED BY:** South African Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF)

ACE was contracted by DEFF in 2019 to conduct the mid-term review of the National Biodiversity Research and Evidence Strategy (NBRES), to guide the refinement of the NBRES for its second five-year implementation period.

Chapter on Evidence-Based Policy-Making in South Africa for public servants

**LED BY:** Laurenz Langer  
**TEAM:** Laurenz Langer, Likhwa Ncube, Ruth Stewart  
**DATES:** January – March 2020  
**FUNDED BY:** South African Department for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

We developed a chapter on implementing evidence-based policy-making in South Africa for the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation in South Africa, which is part of a guidebook for all public servants in South Africa.

Supporting African delegates to attend the Evidence Synthesis Hackathon 2019

**LED BY:** Carina van Rooyen  
**TEAM:** Neal Haddaway, Witness Mapanga, Mandlenkosi Ngwenya, Chris Penkin, Ruth Stewart  
**DATES:** March 2019  
**FUNDED BY:** University of Johannesburg, Faculty of Humanities

ACE arranged funding for African participation at the Evidence Synthesis Hackathon 2019 in Canberra, Australia. We also hosted a celebration event for the Hackathon at the University of Johannesburg, where two African participants demonstrated the beta version of two technologies conceptualised and developed as a direct result of their attendance at the event.

External professional capacity sharing

**LED BY:** Carina van Rooyen  
**DATES:** Ongoing  
**FUNDED BY:** Unfunded

Within the Capacities portfolio, ACE provided mentoring support to two teams of Inter-governmental Panel of Climate Change authors undertaking climate change evidence syntheses through our research associate Dr Neal Haddaway. Through its collaboration with McMaster University in Canada, ACE also provided internships for three Queen Elizabeth Scholars who gained working experience by participating in ACE’s various projects. It is also within this portfolio that ACE contributed external examination to six postgraduate courses offered at South African universities, a mixture of courses, and dissertations and theses.
Scholarship on Teaching and Learning (SOTL)

**LED BY:** Carina van Rooyen  
**FUNDED BY:** University of Johannesburg

ACE secured funding from UJ’s Teaching and Innovation Fund for a research project that explores postgraduate student support.

Internal professional development

**LED BY:** Carina van Rooyen  
**TEAM:** Laurenz Langer, Siziwe Ngcwabe, Natalie Tannous, Carina van Rooyen  
**DATES:** Ongoing  
**FUNDED BY:** Unfunded

As part of its ongoing commitment to enhancing its internal staff capacity, ACE continued to run a mentorship programme in 2019 that saw individual team members teamed off with either internal or external mentors to work on development issues. ACE also organised two work retreats that focussed on producing academic papers, deepening the Centre’s strategic direction and team-building.

Supervision of postgraduate students

**Whitney Noble,** supervised by Carina van Rooyen, MA Anthropology, UJ, *The entangled lives of humans and mosquitoes at UJ – An environmental anthropological perspective,* completed.

**Paseka Pharumele,** supervised by Carina van Rooyen, MA Anthropology, UJ, *A kae Meets? A social anthropological study of local knowledges on changing climate and water in Leeuwfontein, Sekhukhune District,* completed.

**Charne Smith,** supervised by Carina van Rooyen, MA Anthropology, UJ, *The gendered experiences of women professional hunters in South Africa,* completed.

**DOCTORAL CANDIDATES**

**Sunet Jordaan,** supervised by Carina van Rooyen and Ruth Stewart, PhD Development Studies, UJ, *How mentorship programmes increase the use of evidence in decisionmaking in South African government,* ongoing.

**Sophia Marks,** supervised by Ruth Stewart, PhD Sociology, Institute of Education, Department for Social Sciences, University College London, *‘A raw experience’ – biographical disruption in a group of women living with HIV/AIDS in Jos, Nigeria: An interpretative phenomenological analysis,* ongoing.

**Suvania Naidoo,** supervised by Carina van Rooyen, PhD Development Studies, UJ, *Social constructions of water quality in the Blesbokspruit in the context of acid mine drainage and its treatment,* ongoing.

**Karen Nortje,** supervised by Carina van Rooyen, PhD Anthropology, UJ, *The social construction of natural resource scarcity – A qualitative study of three case examples from Venda,* completed.

**Sebeka Plaatjiie,** supervised by Carina van Rooyen, PhD Development Studies, UJ, *Contestations about the meaning of local economic development: A case of the Aerotropolis Project in the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality,* revising following examination.

**Takatso Semenya,** supervised by Laurenz Langer, PhD Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University, Knowledge translation in the obesity research sector in South Africa, ongoing.

**Luvuyo Zigana,** supervised by Laurenz Langer and Carina van Rooyen, PhD Development Studies, UJ, *A mixed methods systematic review of successful interventions for integrated water resources management,* ongoing.

**Metoh Azuini,** supervised by Carina van Rooyen and Laurenz Langer, PhD Development Studies, UJ, *Implementation of climate change mitigation projects by local government: Learnings for the City of Johannesburg,* proposal phase.
Providing training and capacity support

Within the evidence capacities portfolio and over the course of 2019, ACE facilitated and supported the following training and capacity support sessions.

**FEBRUARY:** A webinar hosted by the Africa Evidence Network secretariat entitled ‘Capacity sharing for the use of evidence’.

**FEBRUARY:** Facilitated two sessions in UJ’s Academic Preparation Programme on complexity of learning and teaching with technology.

**FEBRUARY:** Facilitated workshop at the South African national Department for Environment, Forestry and Fisheries for around 30 participants on an evidence map of South African environmental evidence.

**FEBRUARY-APRIL:** Evidence mapping training clinics hosted on a weekly basis with the Gauteng Department for Agriculture and Rural Development.

**MARCH:** An introduction to evidence mapping training course delivered for three provincial Departments of Health in collaboration with the South African Evidence Synthesis Centres.

**MARCH:** Evidence mapping training workshop at the Cochrane Africa 2019 Indaba.

**MARCH:** A webinar hosted by the Africa Evidence Network secretariat entitled ‘Enabling engagement and fostering collaboration: Evidence 2020’.

**APRIL:** Weeklong in-depth training course on evidence mapping for 20 participants at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research.

**JUNE:** Week-long in-depth training course on evidence mapping for the Health Systems Trust.

**AUGUST:** Three-day learning exchange on evidence maps and rapid response services between the African Centre for Rapid Evidence Synthesis, Department for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, and ACE.

**SEPTEMBER:** Public seminar on evidence databases, maps and repositories: fit-for-purpose to respond rapidly to policy-makers’ evidence needs?

**SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER:** Three-part webinar series on Introduction and overview of evidence gap maps, rapid response and rapid systematic reviews co-facilitated with the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation.

**OCTOBER:** Day-long workshop at the annual South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association conference on the systematic use of evidence delivered in conjunction with colleagues from the South African Department for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation.

**OCTOBER:** Workshop delivered in conjunction with the research team at the South African National Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation at the What Works Global Summit on evidence mapping and rapid response services.

**OCTOBER:** Practical workshop delivered at the What Works Global Summit on a rapid systematic review on preventing intimate partner violence with colleagues from the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation and the Education Endowment Foundation.

**OCTOBER:** Workshop delivered in partnership with Professor Sandy Oliver at the What Works Global Summit on engaging stakeholders with evidence and uncertainty.

**OCTOBER:** Workshop delivered in conjunction with the research team at the South African National Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation at the Qualitative Evidence Synthesis Symposium on mechanisms for evidence-informed policy-making.

**OCTOBER:** Workshop delivered in conjunction with the Partners for Evidence-driven Rapid Learning in Social Systems (PERLSS) partners at the Qualitative Evidence Synthesis Symposium on mechanisms for evidence-informed policy-making.

**DECEMBER:** Three-day learning exchange on evidence maps and rapid response services between Zeipnet and ACE.

**DECEMBER:** One-day workshop on evidence systems in South Africa for the Ethiopian Public Health Institute.
**EVIDENCE COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO**

We aim to nurture evidence communities, from broad open networks to smaller more focussed communities of practice. To achieve this nurturing, we foster collaboration amongst those engaged in or supporting evidence-informed decision-making. We work to increase knowledge and understanding of evidence-informed decision-making, and we support the broader evidence ecosystem by advocating for using evidence in decisions in Africa. We also advocate for Africa’s full voice and participation in the national, regional, and global movements that aim to increase how evidence is used in decision-making. In 2019, this portfolio included the following communities.

**Africa Evidence Network**

**LED BY:** Siziwe Ngcwabe and Nasreen Jessani

**TEAM:** Charity Chisoro, Linda Etale, Laurenz Langer, Precious Motha, Ruth Stewart, Natalie Tannous, Carina Van Rooyen

**DATES:** December 2012 – ongoing

**FUNDED BY:** The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (with the exception of support from the United Kingdom Department for International Development from 2014 to 2016)

ACE provides the secretariat to the Africa Evidence Network (AEN), a community of over 3000 people with an interest in evidence, its production, and use in decision-making in Africa. Members include researchers, practitioners, and decision-makers from universities, civil society, and government who are based in 42 African countries and 19 countries outside Africa. The AEN is one of the most diverse evidence-for-decisions communities in the world.

Highlights for the AEN in 2019 included the successful hosting of its inaugural virtual Africa Evidence Week, which reached 4,651,218 impressions on Twitter in under seven days. The AEN also collaborated in various conferences and events such as the African Evaluation Association’s 9th international conference and the South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association’s conference. Through our webinar series we facilitated five discussions and debates with our members and the wider evidence community. In 2019 we also strengthened our Advisory and Reference Groups made up of representatives from across the continent, and hosted the first in-person meeting between the member of the Reference Group.

This meeting was a gathering of pan-African decision-makers, researchers, and evidence-informed decision-making advocates from over 11 countries. To recognise the growth of innovation in evidence-informed decision-making in Africa observed throughout the Network, the AEN in 2018 established the first award for evidence-informed decision-making in Africa. The second winner of the Africa Evidence Leadership Award was Ms Mapula Tshangela from the South African Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries who received the award in 2019.

**Collaboration for Environmental Evidence’s Johannesburg Centre (CEE Joburg)**

**LED BY:** Carina van Rooyen and Ruth Stewart

**TEAM:** Likhwa Ncube, Natalie Tannous

**DATES:** April 2012 – ongoing

**FUNDED BY:** Unfunded

ACE hosts the Collaboration for Environmental Evidence’s only centre in Africa, CEE Joburg. The main mandate of CEE Joburg is to support the need for and capacity to do systematic reviews to inform environmental policy and practice in Africa. As a team of experienced reviewers, CEE Joburg works closely with colleagues from other research centres or within different levels of government to offer training and support to undertake or use evidence syntheses in their decision-making. In 2019, CEE Joburg continued with its establishment of a responsive evidence synthesis service for environmental decision-makers in South Africa; read more about this specific project in the evidence synthesis portfolio section of this report.
Participating in the evidence synthesis community in South Africa and further afield

**LED BY:** Laurenz Langer and Ruth Stewart  
**DATES:** June 2017 – ongoing  
**FUNDED BY:** Unfunded

The South African Medical Research Council, the Centre for Evidence-based Health Care at Stellenbosch University, Cochrane South Africa, the Wits Centre for Health Policy, and ACE have started a joint South African Evidence Synthesis Group. This group aims to present a forum for collaboration and discussion on evidence synthesis in South Africa. After meeting together for an inaugural meeting in June 2018, the five centres have since collaborated on two training courses for evidence synthesis and conducted catch-up calls to keep up to date on one another’s activities and offer support when appropriate. In 2019, ACE participated in a joint week long training on evidence-informed decision-making for three South African provincial Departments of Health.

Exploration of institutional capacity, demand, and opportunity for collaboration with the Africa Evidence Network

**LED BY:** Nasreen Jessani  
**TEAM:** Linda Etale  
**DATES:** June 2019 – February 2020  
**FUNDING:** The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

The overall goal of the study is to understand the scope of work on EIDM across 90 identified organisations across all 54 African countries, their reach, their activities, and how scale can be met through engagement with the AEN. This study aims to explore the views, demands, capacities, and potential for collaboration across institutions working in a similar space on the continent.
EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS PORTFOLIO

We undertake and support rigorous and relevant evidence syntheses. To this end, we conduct evidence synthesis that is responsive to the needs and contexts of African decision-makers. We also develop and refine technologies for evidence synthesis production that is suitable to African contexts. Our synthesis team also produces ‘global good’ evidence synthesis that address broader questions of importance to African populations. In 2019, this portfolio included the following projects:

A policy-relevant evidence map on land reform in South Africa

LED BY: Promise Nduku
TEAM: Laurenz Langer, Shona Putuka, Nkululeko Tshabalala
DATES: February - March 2019
FUNDED BY: Conducted under the Partners for Evidence-driven Rapid Learning in Social Systems grant

In collaboration with the South African Department for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, we co-produced a policy-relevant evidence map on land reform in South Africa. This map contained over 300 studies and was used to inform the report of the Presidential Advisory Panel on Land Reform and Agriculture submitted to Cabinet.

A policy-relevant evidence map on science, technology and innovation (STI) in South Africa

LED BY: Promise Nduku
TEAM: Laurenz Langer, Shona Putuka, Zafeer Ravat, Nkululeko Tshabalala
DATES: October 2018 – December 2019
FUNDED BY: South African Research Chair in Industrial Development

In collaboration with the South African Research Chair in Industrial Development, we produced a policy-relevant evidence map on STI in South Africa. The map was launched to an innovation and industrial development audience in December 2019. The map contained over 2,189 studies and was launched to an innovation and industrial development audience in December 2020.

Violence against women and children (VAWC) evidence map

LED BY: Laurenz Langer
TEAM: Shona Putuka, Promise Nduku, Nkululeko Tshabalala
DATES: January 2019 - December 2019
FUNDED BY: Hans Seidel Foundation

For this project, the ACE synthesis team conducted an evidence map of the available research on violence against women and children (VAWC) in South Africa. We mapped over 80 studies and launched the evidence map in collaboration with CLEAR-AA in December 2019.
Integrating evidence maps into the Socio-Economic Impact Assessment System (SEIAS) process in the Human Settlements sector

LED BY: Laurenz Langer
TEAM: Shona Putuka, Promise Nduku, Nkululeko Tshabalala
DATES: June 2019 - ongoing
FUNDED BY: Conducted under the Partners for Evidence-driven Rapid Learning in Social Systems grant

This project explored the feasibility of integrating evidence maps into the SEIAS process in the Human Settlements sector. We updated our 2016 policy-relevant evidence map on Human Settlements in South Africa and explored to what extent it can be used to support the submission of the revised White Paper of the Department to the SEIAS process.

An evidence map of energy sufficiency measures, their savings potential and related costs in mitigation pathways

LED BY: Yamina Shaheb of OpenExp
TEAM: Carina van Rooyen
DATES: May 2019 - April 2020
FUNDED BY: Unfunded

We are producing a systematic map of the energy sufficiency measures, their savings potential and related costs in mitigation pathways aiming at meeting the Paris Climate target.

South African environmental evidence map

LED BY: Carina van Rooyen
TEAM: Peter Belesiotis (McMaster University QE scholar), Charity Chisoro, Lihkwa Ncube, Natalie Tchakarian (McMaster University QE scholar)
DATES: Ongoing
FUNDED BY: UJ’s University Research Committee
PARTNERS: National government Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF), and Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

The mega map on environmental evidence in South Africa is being co-produced with government colleagues. A draft of the map was presented to the national Biodiversity Research and Evidence Indaba, and to the Gauteng Environment Research Symposium.

Global teaching and learning effect size coding

LED BY: Laurenz Langer
TEAM: Promise Nduku, Shona Putuka, Nkululeko Tshabalala
DATES: July 2019 – ongoing
FUNDED BY: Education Endowment Foundation

This project entailed the data extraction for effect size calculation in support of the Education Endowment Foundation’s production of a global teaching and learning toolkit.
Collaborating with Partners for Evidence-driven Rapid Learning in Social Systems (PERLSS)

**LED BY:** Laurenz Langer and Ruth Stewart  
**TEAM:** Promise Nduku, Nkululeko Tshabalala  
**DATES:** November 2018 – October 2021  
**FUNDED BY:** The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the International Development Research Centre

Along with partners from 13 other countries, ACE supported evidence-informed decision-making in the non-health related Sustainable Development Goals. In our respective countries, each partner team in this project was responsible for forming partnerships across the evidence ecosystem and providing responsive evidence services to meet the needs of government colleagues.

Coding support to Global Goods international development reviews

**LED BY:** Promise Nduku and Nkululeko Tshabalala  
**TEAM:** Shona Putuka, Zafeer Ravat  
**DATES:** 2018 – ongoing  
**FUNDED BY:** International Initiative for Impact Evaluation

Starting in 2018 and continuing in 2019, ACE collaborated with 3ie on a range of evidence synthesis projects by conducting joint review steps such as screening, cataloguing of studies, and data extraction.
ACE engages audiences

Our work is useful and applicable to many different contexts.

ACE engages a wide variety of audiences including academic professionals, individuals and teams working within government departments, and practitioners from different backgrounds.

CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

ACE delivered numerous presentations as part of roundtables, panel discussions, and oral presentations at conferences and indabas in 2019, which included:

FEBRUARY: Delivered an online talk as part of the McMaster Top Ten Insights series, online.

FEBRUARY: Presented on the experience of building relationships between different stakeholders at the Twende Mbele stakeholder workshop, Johannesburg, South Africa.

MARCH: Co-chaired the opening panel at the Cochrane Africa Indaba, Cape Town, South Africa.


MARCH: Participated in the 2019 Africa Young Graduates and Scholars Conference, Johannesburg, South Africa.

MARCH: Facilitated a dialogue on skills, relationships, and interactions for EIDM at the 9th AfrEA international conference, Abidjan, Cote d’Ivoire.

APRIL: Gave a high-level presentation on ‘The Science of Using Science’ to the Thabo Mbeki Leadership Institute, Pretoria, South Africa.

APRIL: Chaired a session on the effectiveness of various innovative approaches to evidence-informed decision-making in Africa at an event of the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research.

MAY: Presented on experiences of creating a community of practice in evidence-informed decision-making at the African Institute for Development Policy, online.

JUNE: Presented at the Centre for Social Development in Africa’s Youth Colloquium, Johannesburg, South Africa.

JUNE: Participated in a high-level invitation-only panel discussion at the Partnership for Economic Policy conference, Cape Town, South Africa.

AUGUST: Participated in the Citizen Science Innovation Lab, Pretoria, South Africa.

SEPTEMBER: Hosted a public seminar on evidence maps and rapid response services in Pretoria, South Africa.

OCTOBER: Keynote presentation on embedded co-production between government and academics at the Qualitative Evidence Synthesis Symposium, Brasilia, Brazil.


OCTOBER: Facilitated a panel at the What Works Global Summit on policy-relevant evidence mapping, Mexico City, Mexico.

OCTOBER: Presented on policy-relevant evidence mapping for knowledge synthesis to the Medical Research Council Knowledge Day, Cape Town, South Africa.

OCTOBER: Presented the mega map of South African environmental evidence at the What Works Global Summit, Mexico City, Mexico.

OCTOBER: Presented as a guest speaker in the Centre for Excellence in Development Impact and Learning / London School of Health & Tropical Medicine lecture series, online.

OCTOBER: Presented in the Cochrane Collaboration’s Colloquium, which was redesigned as a virtual event after being cancelled due to civil unrest, Santiago, Chile.


OCTOBER: Acted as members of the board at the Centre for Excellence in Development Impact and Learning board meeting, London, United Kingdom.
OCTOBER: Presented and facilitated at the International Network for Government Science Advisors workshop series designed for policy-makers and scientists living or working in North Eastern Africa to enhance capacities in embedding evidence in policy-making at all levels of government, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

OCTOBER: Participated at the South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association’s conference, Johannesburg, South Africa.

NOVEMBER: Presented on policy-relevant evidence mapping to the South African Evidence-Based Policing Forum.

NOVEMBER: Participated in the Annual Gauteng Climate Change Indaba as a member of the panel on climate change governance, research, awareness and capacity building, Pretoria, South Africa.

NOVEMBER: Launched an evidence map of all Gauteng environmental evidence at the the fourth annual Biodiversity Research and Evidence Indaba, Pretoria, South Africa.

NOVEMBER: Participated in the first Gauteng Environment Research Symposium, Johannesburg, South Africa.

DECEMBER: Launching of a policy-relevant evidence map on Innovation and Inclusive Industrialisation in South Africa in partnership with the UJ SARCHI Industrial Development.

DECEMBER: Launching of an evidence map on violence against women and children in South Africa in partnership with CLEAR-AA.

DECEMBER: Participated in the PERLSS second annual meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
COMMITTEE INVOLVEMENT

ACE is committed to sharing capacity which is why senior team members at ACE continued to act on various boards or scientific advisory committees of numerous academic, professional, and topic bodies in 2019.

- Board member of the South African SDG Hub at the University of Pretoria, South Africa since July 2019
- Scientific Oversight Committee member of the Vaccines for Africa Wellcome Grant initiative at the University of Cape Town, South Africa since November 2019
- Board member of the Africa Check / Full Fact / Chequeado joint research programme to develop the evidence base for tackling misinformation in Africa, Latin America and Europe, global since January 2019
- Editorial Board of the international journal Environmental Evidence
- Reference group member for two Water Research Commission projects
- Panel member of the National Research Foundation’s virtual review of doctoral applications
- Member of the UJ Academy of Distinguished Teachers
- Associate Editor Campbell Collaboration
- Board of Faculty of Humanities at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa
- Editor for the Cochrane Consumers and Communication Review Group since 2006
- Fellow of the UK Higher Education Academy since 2002
- Associate Editor of the Research for All Journal published by University College London since 2016

These roles are in addition to the bodies senior ACE members have participated in since ACE’s inception.

- Board member of Evidence Synthesis International, Norway since November 2018
- Trustee of the Collaboration for Environmental Evidence, global since November 2018
- Board member of the Centre of Excellence for Development Impact and Learning (CEDIL), global since October 2018
- International Trustee of the Zimbabwean Evidence-Informed Policy Network, Zimbabwe since 2017

ACE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

ACE continued to be active on its various social media platforms during 2019, particularly on Twitter using the handles @ACE_UJ, @Africa_Evidence, and @CEEJoburg.

The most dominant highlight from our social media engagement in 2019 were the impressions and engagements generated from the hosting the virtual Africa Evidence Week, which totalled 4,651,218 impressions and 2,493 engagements respectively in fewer than seven days. The cumulative numbers for 2019 from our social media and digital presence are reported below (as of 31 December 2019).

17,999
WEBSITE VIEWS ACROSS
www.africacentreforevidence.org
www.africaevidencenetwork.org*
www.ceejoburg.com

3,954
VISITORS TO
www.africacentreforevidence.org
www.africaevidencenetwork.org*
www.ceejoburg.com

7 278
TWITTER FOLLOWERS ACROSS
@ACE_UJ
@Africa_Evidence
@CEEJoburg

1,140
YOUTUBE VIEWS FOR
Africa Evidence Network

387
LINKEDIN VIEWS FOR
Africa Evidence Network

*Views reported here reflect visitors from September 2019 till December 2019 as analytics tracker changed when this website was relaunched.
ACE’s funding

During 2019, ACE received funding from a total of 11 organisations; below is a list of who we received our funding from and the total values of that funding.

The majority of ACE’s funding remains externally won grants. The reporting of the rand and US dollar values of ACE’s funding were calculated according to the rand-dollar exchange rate at the time of writing; differences between reported and actual amounts are unintentional as we have tried to be as accurate as possible in our reporting.

UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG
The University of Johannesburg provides our office space, as well as other structural support such as access to libraries and an academic community. In 2019 the university – through its University Research Committee – provided financial support to ACE to the value of more than R1,145,000 (USD66,441) during the course of 2019. This funding supported the development of a responsive evidence synthesis service for environmental decision-makers in South Africa, as well as the continued development of the Masters-level postgraduate qualification in evidence-informed decision-making, the continued support of evidence-use among decision-makers in government, the production an evidence map on research that investigates the 4IR in South Africa (the project runs from June 2020 to December 2020), and research into mentorships as an approach to build the capacities of evidence-users. Through the UJ Teaching Innovation Fund, ACE was awarded R47,560 (USD3,029) for research on postgraduate student support.

CENTRE FOR LEARNING, EVALUATION AND RESULTS FOR ANGLOPHONE AFRICA (CLEAR-AA), UNIVERSITY OF THE WITSWATERSRAND
CLEAR-AA and ACE collaborated on an evidence map on Violence Against Women & Children in South Africa funded by the ISS and Hans Seidel Foundation. ACE received a total of R60,000 (USD3,480) from January until December 2019.

INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVE FOR IMPACT EVALUATION
The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation funded ACE for systematic review coding and quality assurance to the value of R700,000 (USD 44,494).

DEPARTMENT FOR PLANNING, MONITORING AND EVALUATION
The Department for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation in South African government funded ACE through an evidence consultancy grant to the total value of R97,950 (USD6,238) to develop a chapter on evidence-based policy-making in South Africa for all public servants.

EDUCATION ENDOWMENT FOUNDATION
ACE received a R101,703 (USD5898) grant from the EEF to support effect size data extraction and calculation for the EFF toolkit from June to December 2019.
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE
ACE received a funding grant to the value of R1,041,453 (USD66,110) (jointly with the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation) to collaborate on the project entitled Partners for Evidence-driven Rapid Learning in Social Systems.

WILLIAM AND FLORA HEWLETT FOUNDATION
ACE received two funding grants from the Hewlett Foundation in 2019 to the total value of R15,070,000 (USD956,715). The first grant was to support the institutional strengthening of ACE as the secretariat to the Africa Evidence Network, and the second grant was directly for some of the activities of the Africa Evidence Network over the next three years from 2020 - 2023. A third grant was received from this organisation as part of the Partners for Evidence-driven Rapid Learning in Social Systems project.

AFRICA CHECK
ACE received R110,000 (USD6,983) from Africa Check to develop a number of background documents, drawing on research, related to misinformation. The funding grant lasted from June 2019 until October 2019.

CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE FOR DEVELOPMENT IMPACT AND LEARNING (CEDIL)
ACE was awarded a grant to the value of R3,496,678 (USD202,975) for a project on the art and science of evidence-use in lower- and middle-income countries. The funding runs from April 2020 to July 2021 and is awarded by DFID and administered by CEDIL.

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF LONDON’S EVIDENCE FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE INFORMATION AND CO-ORDINATING CENTRE (EPPI-CENTRE)
Through a grant to the value of R322,800 (USD18,582) that runs from May 2019 until December 2020 to develop tools for stakeholder engagement in evidence-informed decision-making projects.
ACE outputs for 2019

ACADEMIC PUBLICATIONS


Langer L. 2019. Embedded co-production between government and academic. Keynote address at the Qualitative Evidence Synthesis Symposium on 11 October in Brazil.

Langer L. 2019. Evidence map on violence against women and children in South Africa. Launch in partnership with the Centre for Learning on Evaluation And Results-Anglophone Africa.


Stewart, R. 2019. ‘Turning Evidence for Development on its Head’ Online guest lecture for Centre for Excellence in Development Impact and Learning / London School of Health & Tropical Medicine lecture series, 28 October. Available: https://panopto.lshtm.ac.uk/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=e16bd8ef-117c-4820-8245-aace0095ce76


Van Rooyen C 2019 Enhancing engagement online for #Evidence2020. Presentation for the AEN webinar series on 27 March.

Van Rooyen C 2019 Being a post-graduate student in a complex world. Keynote at the UJ Post-graduate School Annual Conference on 16 October in Johannesburg.

Van Rooyen C & de Wet T 2019 #Feesmustfall and blended learning at the University of Johannesburg. Presentation at the Annual conference of the Society for Applied Anthropology on 21 March in Portland, Oregon (USA).

Van Rooyen C, Marais I & de Wet T 2019 Effectiveness of undergraduate student support interventions: What we learn from a scoping evidence map. Presentation at the 2019 symposium of the Carnegie-funded project on Blended learning and #Feesmustfall on 30 May in Johannesburg.

Van Rooyen C, Marais I & De Wet T 2019 Student support in a blended learning context: What we learn from a systematic scoping review. Presentation at Unisa’s College of Human Sciences’ Research and Innovation Day on 5 March in Pretoria.


**POPULAR WRITING**

