



APPENDIX 11: CASE STUDY ON THE SKILLS MECHANISM

Title of the case study:

Working for solutions: UJ-BCURE's problem-based and relationship-centred approach to building capacity to use research evidence in Africa

What mechanism is the case about?

Mechanism: Supporting policy-makers to develop skills in accessing and making sense of evidence. This mechanism emphasises the importance of policy-makers having the necessary skills to locate, appraise, synthesise evidence, and integrate it with other information and political needs etc.

What happened (description of the background to the case and its key features)?

The University of Johannesburg-led programme to Build Capacity to Use Research Evidence (UJ-BCURE) was a £1,2 million initiative funded by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development. The programme operated for three years from January 2014 to December 2016. UJ-BCURE focussed on increasing evidence-based policy-making among civil servants in South Africa and Malawi through the application of EBPM training workshops and mentorships and supporting the growth of the Africa Evidence Network. The programme subscribed to a needs-led and relationship-centred capacity-building approach, responsive to the needs of policy-makers and embedded within the existing evidence ecosystems.

UJ-BCURE developed a unique approach to EBPM capacity-building combining a range of training workshops with different types of mentoring opportunities. Across these two main instruments, the programme centred on (i) building strong relationships between policy-makers and researchers as a key vehicle for change; (ii) embedding the capacity-building activities in policy-makers' real-world decision-making needs and existing structures and systems, and (iii) fostering the use of bodies of evidence rather than single studies, and the relevant EBPM capacities associated with this. As a consequence, UJ-BCURE worked closely in its design and implementation with policy-makers gradually moving towards co-production approaches towards the end of the 3-year programme.

The programme offered a range of entry-level EBPM capacity-building workshops to civil servants in Malawi and South Africa. These workshops focused on generic EBPM skills such as searching for evidence, appraisal of evidence, and integration of evidence into policy processes. From these workshops, demand was assessed for more in-depth capacity needs linked to more detailed policy decision-making priorities. At this stage more specialised and tailored training opportunities were designed according to the specific needs of the policy-makers.

Having identified an acute evidence and policy decision need and supported the building of baseline EBPM capacity, the programme then went into the mentoring stage to provide personalised and tailored in-depth support for policy-makers along their evidence journey. The exact type of such mentoring differed according to policy needs and ranged from individual one-on-one mentoring, to team mentoring, as well as unit-wide mentoring. The topics of the mentoring were close linked to



the policy development process at hand and therefore could be very specific (e.g. finding a particular type of evidence, designing a specified appraisal tool). The mentorships were mediated by mentorship guidelines and a signed mentorship agreement.

This combined model for EBPM capacity-building was then lastly embedded in a wider systemic attempt to build national and regional evidence networks between policy-makers and researchers. To this end, the programme hosted a range of networking events such as the Evidence 2014 and Evidence 2016 conferences. This was based on the premise that only through long-lasting and trusted relationships can EBPM become a reality.

What impact did the case have? / What is the importance of the case to EBPM?

In total, UB-BCURE offered 614 EBPM workshop places and providing over 126 mentorship opportunities for EBPM. The programme was externally evaluated and documented over 100 instances in which policy-makers changed their practice as a result of the programme activities, increasing their understanding and use of evidence. In South Africa, the programme worked with nine government departments and increasingly focussed on in-depth mentoring for applied cases of evidence use during policy development.

These mentorships commonly took the form of either individual or team mentorships, with optional workplace visits to enhance learning. In total, UJ-BCURE delivered 52 individual mentorships and six team mentorships for three policy teams, with 40 workplace visits facilitated.

Some of the more prominent products from this arm of the programme include a co-produced evidence map, the co-development of a guidance note for policy-makers on producing and using evidence maps during policy design, and input into a draft national water stewardship policy. In terms of sustainability, the recognition from policy-makers of the usefulness of evidence synthesis methods for EPBM is an important element of UJ-BCURE's work.

What is the relevance of the case for South Africa?

UJ-BCURE was implemented in South Africa and thus naturally supported the local evidence ecosystem. The programme left a legacy of a more well-connected evidence ecosystem and a strong mentoring model for EBPM capacity-support. Having worked with 9 government departments, the programme brought EBPM stakeholders in South Africa together. It also facilitated a high-level cross-government group on EBPM to nurture thought leadership and discussions on the use of evidence in the country.

Conclusion: why does this case illustrate the power of the mechanism in supporting the use of evidence?

UJ-BCURE is a powerful case to explore the potential of EBPM capacity-building as a tool to support the use of evidence. The programme developed a model of EBPM capacity-building that went beyond mere technical skills and embedded relationships and evidence networks as a central capacity component. This was achieved through the combination of workshops and mentoring opportunities and an increased focus on co-production for EBPM. The programme successfully implemented this model in two different countries hinting at its potential wider applicability.



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