



## APPENDIX 12: CASE STUDY ON THE PROCESS & STRUCTURES MECHANISM

### Title of the case study:

Developing organisational structures and processes for evidence-based policy-making in South Africa's Department of Environmental Affairs

### What mechanism is the case about?

*Mechanism: Influencing decision-making structures and processes.*

This mechanism emphasises the importance of decision-makers' psychological, social, and environmental structures and processes (for example, mental models, professional norms, habits, organisational and institutional rules) in providing means and barriers to action.

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

In recent times, the concept of evidence-based policymaking (EBPM) has been widely recognised as being at the forefront of national growth and development strategies. In a resource-constrained environment, it remains imperative that government departments are cognisant of budgetary limitations and formulate prudent strategic plans to ensure consistent service delivery. In 2008, the Department of Environment (DEA) undertook to improve the uptake of evidence as a means through which its path to policy implementation could be smoothed. In addition to charting an efficient path to influential and realistic policy design, DEA understands that organisational structures and processes play an integral role in the systemic improvement of policy-making. Furthermore, the route to organisational synergy and intimate understanding is largely an iterative process which involves constant reflection and learning from experience.

DEA submits that organisations are inherently distinguishable and that the management thereof is a complex path of managing skills, processes, and people. Therefore, EBPM needs to be integrated within the DNA of the organisation in order to mainstream through Departmental decision-making structures. In this regard, the Department has: (i) developed and implemented five principles on how EBPM can be put into practice, (ii) developed research and evidence structures and strategies that align Departmental evidence needs with policy-making priorities, (iii) committed to hosting an annual Biodiversity Research and Evidence Indaba which looks to strengthen the knowledge, science and policy interface in the environmental sector, (iv) dedicated efforts to build capacity for skills, systems and incentives to use evidence across the environmental sector, and (v) committed to incentivising the use of evidence through annual performance plans which are aligned to its strategic objectives.

First, in its effort to guide policy-makers across the Department on how to integrate evidence, DEA has outlined five principles for EBPM. These principles can be summarised below:

1. The department uses a more **comprehensive definition of what constitutes robust evidence**. This means that there is little prospect of overlooking important data and information which may otherwise fall through the cracks.
2. A collaborative approach to **matching the evidentiary needs of the department and the policy priorities of South Africa** is needed. This would yield a better assessment of policy



- priorities through extensive stakeholder engagement and to ensure that the environmental needs of the country are not foregone in the face of fiscal constraints.
3. The **operational management of the department should be aligned with its evidence needs** insofar as reporting and budgeting for evidence-gleaning procedures are concerned.
  4. DEA considers that **effective policymaking is an inclusive and participatory process with stakeholders**. By design, such an approach yields trust, commitment and respect across the sector and minimises uncertainty.
  5. The **co-production of evidence and policy** is the final principle that DEA has embedded within its activities. This means that policy designs that consider contributions from policymakers, researchers, citizens and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are more results-orientated and relevant.

Second, DEA has developed explicit research and evidence strategies in the environmental sector; this has been an essential part of strengthening EBPM across the Department. To this end, the Environment Sector Research, Development and Evidence (R, D&E) framework was accepted in 2012 and now informs critical decision-making based on key sector priorities. Third, The successful hosting of the annual Biodiversity Research and Evidence Indaba since 2016 is another way in which DEA has resolved to embed EBPM in its processes and structures. The Indaba has enabled DEA to keep a pulse on the top research and evidence priorities in the sector while strengthening its policy, practice and people interface through engagement. Fourth, DEA has looked to build capacity for the collection and use of evidence within its internal structures. Through training and interactive workshops, the DEA staff can better understand the use of evidence in ensuring that policy-making is based on credible data and information. Fifth, analogous to this is the effective use of performance plans to ensure that the uptake of evidence is incentivised within the Department. As an additional layer to ensuring that EBPM is implemented prudently, the performance plans have proven to be successful in yielding better branch and individual performance insofar as evidence use is concerned. With such a comprehensive modification in structures and processes, DEA has been able to conduct its work in a more effective and efficient way.

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

Through the redevelopment of its structures and processes, DEA's strategic outlook continues to thrive and improve the growth and development of the environmental sector in South Africa. As a result, there has been a marked improvement in the use of high-quality evidence as was the case with the White Paper on National Environmental Management of the Ocean or the White Paper on National Climate Change Response. Moreover, the short-term reporting needs of DEA have been improved which has assisted in cultivating long-term strategies. This is an important development due to the social, economic and environmental issues which continue to riddle South Africa. Policy development through more robust structures and processes enables the institutionalisation of evidence use and thus bodes well for the efficacy of EBPM.

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

Through building internal organisational structures and processes for EBPM, DEA has supported the institutionalisation of evidence use as a practice of decision-making in the public sector. Making organisational structures more receptive to evidence use holds the potential to incentivise the routine behaviour of using evidence by policy-makers. To this end, DEA has experimented successfully with



the following process innovation for EBPM: (i) building evidence use as a performance indicator into annual performance assessments, (ii) developing Departmental research & evidence strategies, and (iii) developing departmental principles and guidelines for EBPM. These show that with stable and sustainable structures and processes in place, evidence use—as an organisational imperative—can be embedded within the core fundamentals of public sector organisations and thereby lead to improved economic and social development.

## References

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2. Shaxson, L., Tshangela, M., Bohler-Muller, N., Datta, A., Funke, N., Godfrey, L., Matomneta, B., Pienaar, G., Pophiwa, N. and Strydom, W., 2015. *Five principles and guidelines for an evidence-informed approach to policymaking in government*. DEA: Pretoria, South Africa.
3. Shaxson, L., Tshangela, M., Bohler-Muller, N., Datta, A., Funke, N., Godfrey, L., Matomneta, B., Pienaar, G., Pophiwa, N. and Strydom, W., 2015. *Evidence-informed policymaking in practice: an overview from South Africa's Department of Environmental Affairs*. DEA: Pretoria, South Africa.