

AFIDEP

African Institute for Development Policy
Bridging Development Research, Policy & Practice

Strengthening Evidence Use in Parliament: *The Role of MPs*

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Overview

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2. Barriers to increased evidence use in parliament
3. Some ongoing efforts for enabling increased evidence use
4. Specific actions that MPs can undertake to enable increased use of evidence in parliament
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Introduction: What is Evidence?

- Body of facts or information about an issue
- It has to be true or validated or proven
- Excludes false or untrue information, claims



Introduction: The Place of Evidence in Parliament

- Evidence is a crucial ingredient for effective delivery of parliament's core functions:
 - Oversight
 - Budget review, discussion & approval
 - Legislation
 - Representation

**“MPs can not effectively exercise their oversight role without credible evidence”
Malawi Parliament Speaker**



But, evidence isn't always used in parliament debates & decision-making for many reasons...

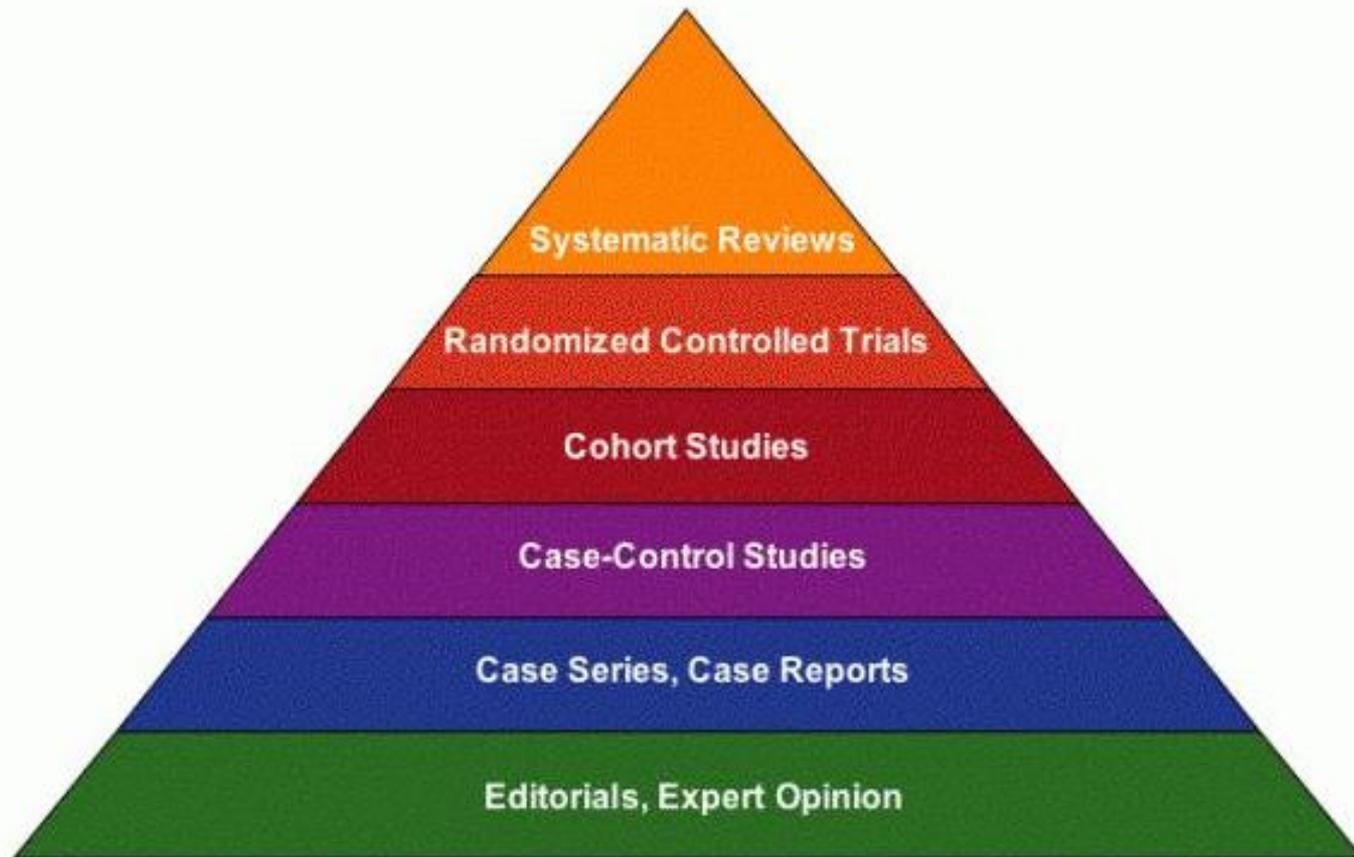
Examples of Crucial Evidence for Delivery of Parliament Functions

- Annual gov't performance/M&E reports
- Budget analyses – critical review of budget estimates vis-à-vis priority dev't issues
- Annual reports of government expenditure
- Regular statistical reports for different sectors
- Regular constituency-level reports on development & other issues
- Research reports on key development issues
 - Also, research on neglected development issues

Levels of Evidence Pyramid

This evidence pyramid provides a concept of higher to lower levels of evidence.

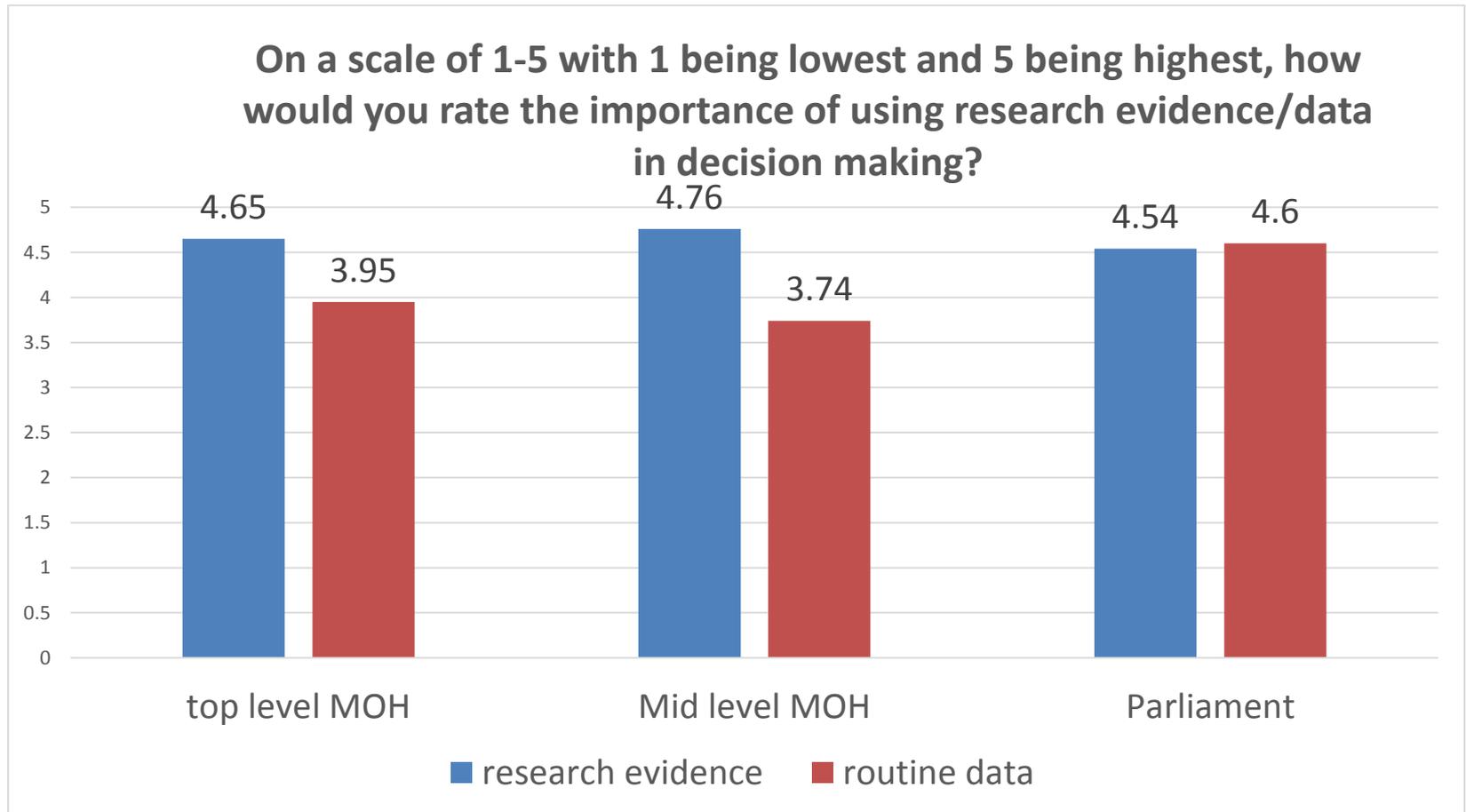
Source: UIC Evidence Based Practice Tutorial, ebp.lib.uic.edu



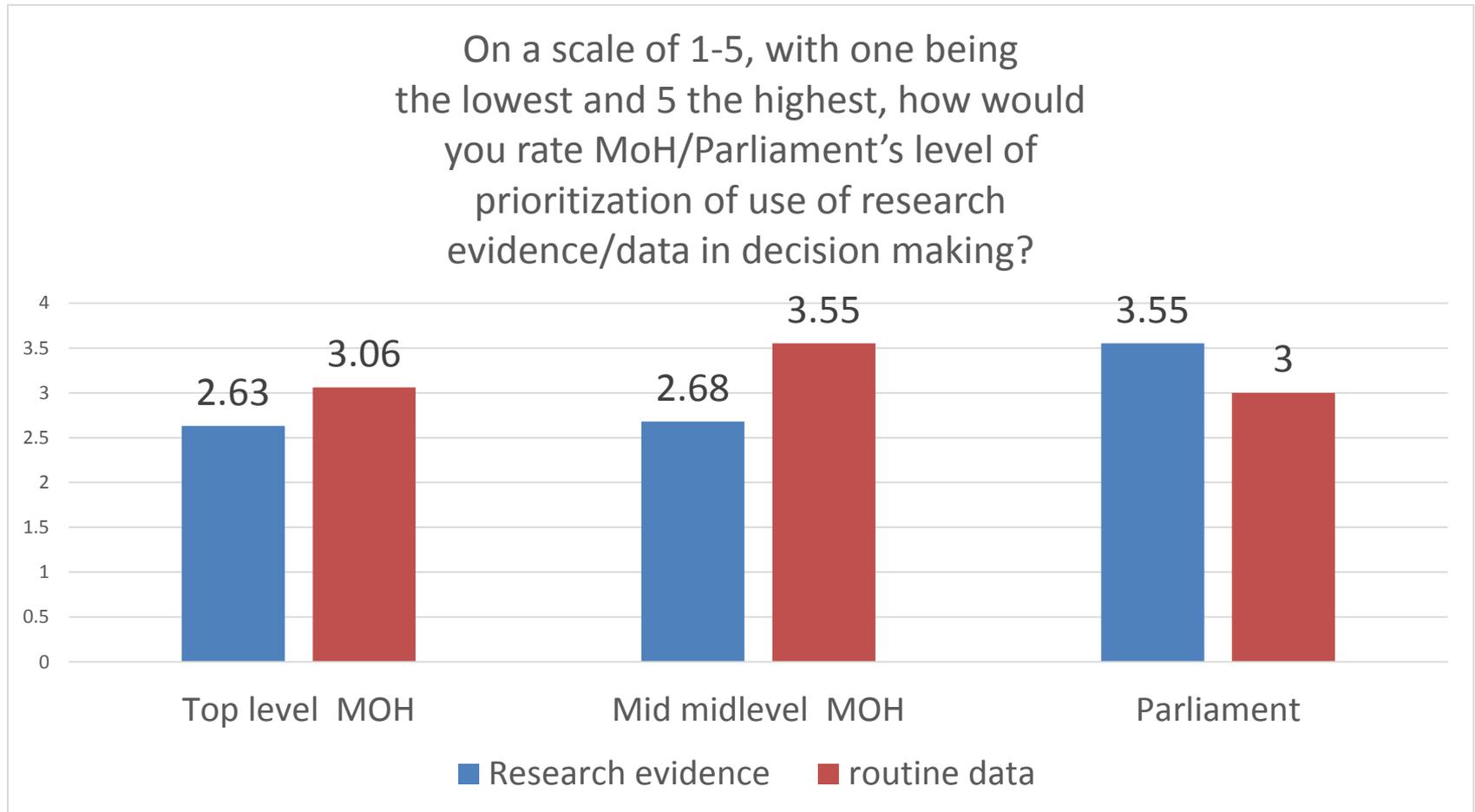
**So why are MPs not using
evidence that much?**

***AFIDEP study in Kenya & Malawi
parliaments in 2014 revealed that...***

Decision-makers rate the importance of research & data use very highly

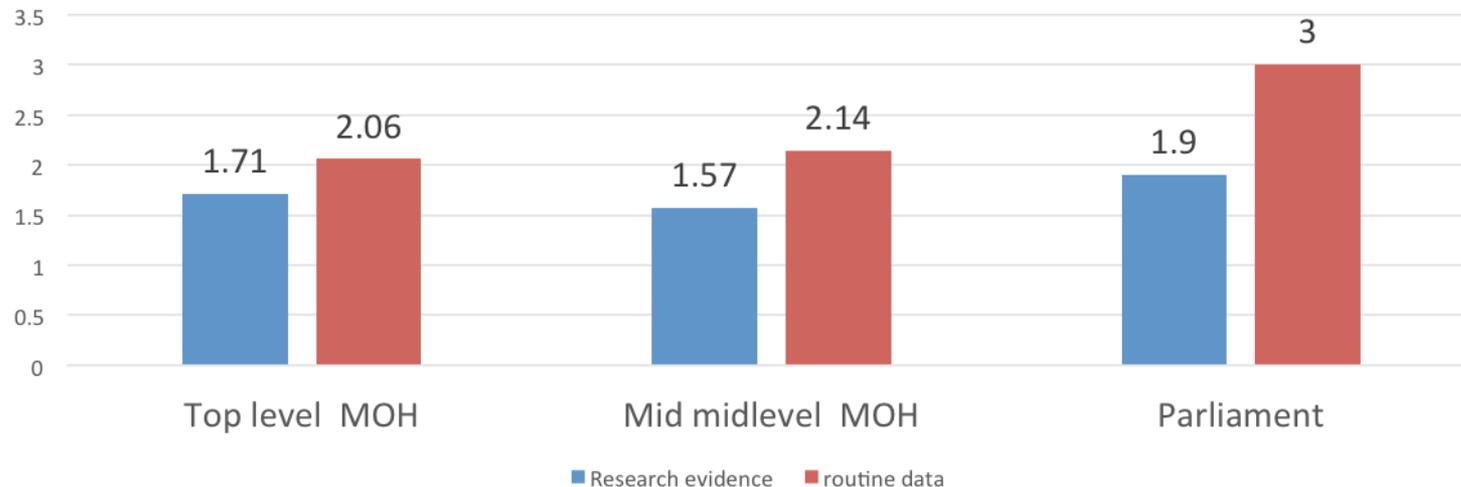


However, most feel that prioritization of research & data use is low at institutional level



Budget allocation to support application of research evidence & data is low

On a scale of 1-5, with one being the lowest and 5 the highest, how would you rate the MoH/Parliament's budget allocation to support application of research evidence/data in making decisions?



Why MPs are not using evidence optimally, cont'd

- Inadequate staffing & skills in research & data use...
 - Few research & other technical staff
 - These staff lack adequate skills to find the relevant information, synthesize & package properly for MPs
- Lack of supportive infrastructure:
 - Poor Internet connectivity
 - No functional library – well-staffed & with relevant information, online databases/journals

Why MPs are not using evidence optimally, cont'd

- Evidence is not readily available to MPs:
 - No online evidence repositories/databases
 - Not well packaged & disseminated
 - Sometimes, not even generated due to lack of funds
- Difficulties with getting data/information from gov't agencies
- Low interest in use of evidence among MPs?
- Politics & interests

There are some ongoing efforts to address these challenges...

Parliaments have put in place...

- Library & information depts/units
 - Research units
 - Adoption of technology
- But often:
 - Libraries aren't functioning effectively to support MPs – poor staffing, no access to online information resources, etc
 - Few researchers
 - Researchers & clerks supporting committees lack requisite skills to effectively find evidence, assess its quality, & packaging it appropriately for MPs

Training program for parliament staff on effective evidence use...

- AFIDEP's program on strengthening capacity for evidence use in Kenya & Malawi
 - Developed & delivered a comprehensive course on evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM)
 - Build capacity of parliament staff in effective evidence searches, assessing, synthesizing & packaging evidence for MPs
- Conducted a workshop on EIDM for 16 parliament staff from 10 countries in last 2 days on:
 - Where & how to find evidence relevant for parliament
 - How to assess its quality
 - How to synthesize & package it appropriately for MPs

International, Regional & National Networks...

- Promoting increased evidence use in parliaments, such as:
 - NEAPACOH
 - Network of African Parliamentarians on Population & Development
 - African Parliamentarians Network on Development Evaluation (APNODE)
 - More recently, the MPs in Kenya have formed the **Parliamentary Caucus on Evidence-Informed Oversight & Decision-making (PC-EIDM)** in 2015

But more needs to be done...

What Specific Actions can MPs Undertake to Enable Increased focus on Evidence in their Parliaments?

- Advocate for increased resource allocation to research generation & use
 - Many gov'ts commit 2% on national budget to research, but this is not allocated
- Champion a focus on evidence:
 - Public debates on development issues in their countries
 - In committee meetings & parliament debates
- Increase allocation of resources to gov't agencies that generate data & information
 - E.g. Bureau of statistics, gov't research agencies
 - Require these agencies to regularly provide required data/information to parliament

What Specific Actions can MPs Undertake to Enable Increased focus on Evidence in their Parliaments?

- Enact laws or seek implementation of laws that require govt to share performance information to enable oversight
- Establish/strengthen links with the M&E Depts:
 - Access to regular performance data to inform oversight
- Form evidence caucuses like the one in Kenya parliament to champion & spearhead evidence use
- Establish formal links with research institutions
 - Introduce regular forums where emerging research on urgent development issues is discussed

What Specific Actions can MPs Undertake to Enable Increased focus on Evidence in their Parliaments?

- Introduce orientation sessions for new MPs on evidence use in parliamentary processes
- Engage parliamentary service commissions on the need for resources to:
 - Revive parliamentary library – qualified, experienced librarians, introduce subscriptions to relevant online resources, etc
 - Reliable Internet connectivity & adoption of online platforms that enable real-time sharing of information between MPs & technical staff
 - Increase numbers of researchers supporting MPs
 - Facilitate regular training for technical staff (committee clerks & researchers) on effective ways of finding evidence, assessing its quality, synthesizing and packaging it appropriately for MPs

Discussion

Country Delegations to Comment on...

Q1. What is the status of evidence use in your parliament?

Q2. What feasible actions could you take as an MP/committee to promote increased focus on evidence use in your parliament?

Our Ask:

- In this year's country commitments, we would like each country to consider making a commitment to at least **1 feasible action** it will undertake in the coming year to enable an increased focus on evidence use in parliament

Thank you!