1. Introduction

Evidence-based policy and research are critical in making informed decisions especially for socio-economic development. Research is important in identifying challenges and problem issues to be addressed, providing alternative options, and offering feasible and acceptable approaches to address priority problems. The policy research process also involves assessing potential outcomes and the possible impacts of the preferred decision(s) proposed, and evaluating achievement of intended objectives. In this brief, we place research at the core of policymaking by focusing on the need for evidence-based policy. The brief proposes areas that should be addressed, and changes that can be made, to ensure the country’s development agenda is guided by rigorous research and that policy decisions are informed by the recommendations of such research. It calls for a framework of policy development, policy dialogue, and assessment of policy impact as a way of establishing whether policy decision(s) meet the intended objectives.

2. Background

Research is one of the core processes of well-informed decision-making in any country or organization. Research, in particular policy analysis, plays a role in the policy process (Newman et al., 2015) as it involves the process of discovery of new knowledge or validating existing knowledge and allows for scrutiny of the process and findings (Mwabu, 2004). Research in policy, in its broad sense, involves identifying, investigating and analysing political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental issues with a view to coming up with informed options of addressing specific challenges or problems. Research needs involvement of key stakeholders in problem-framing and identification, information and data gathering, evaluation and broader consultation on policy issues, and should be directed at a specific purpose and solving a specific problem, with the findings being acceptable to concerned stakeholders (Mwabu, 2004). The 2010 Constitution of Kenya (Government of Kenya, 2010) provides for citizen participation in the management of public affairs of the country such as legislative activities at the parliament (Section 118 (1) (b)) and at the county assembly (Section 196 (1) (b)), in public finance matters (Section 201 (a)), and in specific areas such as management of the environment (Section 69(1) (d)), the Bill of Rights (Chapter 4) and devolution (174 (c)). This is meant to ensure that citizens...
are involved in policy decisions that are of national and/or county interest.

3. Need for Evidence-Informed Policy

A policy that will make a major impact is likely to be based on available information or evidence. Evidence-based policy involves use of reliable and timely knowledge, premised on rigorous research, and promoting its utilization in public policy formulation, hence helps to improve the reliability and credibility of policy advice (Head, 2010). This calls for a readily accessible pool of information/data sources from which such evidence can be derived. Due to the large number of policy-related issues to be addressed, such information/data may not be readily available at a central reference point or centre.

The Government is the main entity charged with collection and storage of social, environmental and economic data, although such data/information may not be comprehensive enough to support all policy decisions due to institutional constraints. The National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) keeps a database of research that has been conducted; the database may not be comprehensive enough, however, especially since it is limited to the work of researchers licensed for fieldwork. The Kenya Open Data Portal provides online access to government data, the challenge being the extent of availability and frequency of updating this information. Policymakers also face technical capacity constraints depending on the policy issue to be addressed (Newman et al., 2017). This calls for close collaboration amongst academics, researchers, civil society and government agencies to enable for ease of identification of relevant information/data, complement policymakers in providing up-to-date research output and in providing feedback to what the policymakers are doing. Factors which are necessary for constructing an evidence-informed system of decision-making include (Head, 2010):

- Putting in place high-quality information bases that can be used as a source of information for problem framing and evidence building;
- Having a pool of professionals with skills in data analysis and evaluation;
- Ensuring a system of incentives, both political and organizational, for utilizing evidence-based analysis and advice; and
- Promoting mutual understanding between the roles of policy professionals, researchers and decision-makers.

The main concern in evidence-based policy is how the evidence is used to influence policy in a timely and effective manner (Newman, 2017). Evidence can be used to address a social problem, to generate ideas that affect policy, or in a political strategy (Newman, 2017). This points to the importance of understanding the need for the evidence before that evidence is put together and the use of reliable information to build the evidence that can be used in decision-making. It is also important to understand the main stakeholders, opinion shapers and potential champions for the cause (influencers) in a given policy formulation process and be able to address their perspectives and coherent opinions (Simmons, 2015).

Evidence should be organised to address such positions to ensure that stakeholders’ needs are taken into consideration, and that the policy chosen is all inclusive and able to address the issue at hand (Simmons, 2015). Stakeholders’ interests and expectations should be analysed with sufficient caution to minimize stakeholder bias (‘selection bias’).

Use of evidence in policy is not limited to policy formulation but also to establishing the potential or actualized effects, outcomes and impacts of policy decisions. Since each policy has an intended impact, monitoring the progress of implementation and eventual impact of a policy is necessary. To a large extent, this involves research and presentation of credible or almost irrefutable evidence. Evaluation helps, first, to inform a review of policy to ensure that it is in line with the objective set, thus providing room for any adjustments where necessary, and secondly, offering a basis to inform future policy decisions to demonstrate value for invested resources (finances, personnel, equipment and space). It is also a learning point to the extent that any unintended outcomes are established and documented.

4. Policy Landscape

There are many actors in the policy landscape, each advancing specific interests, all aimed at a specific goal in the policy process. The actors include ministers, parliament, civil servants, the private sector, civil society, labour organizations, the media, international organizations, and international research institutions. They include national research institutes, academic and learning institutions, private sector organizations/lobby groups, and non-governmental and multilateral organizations and institutions among others. All the actors seek to engage in the process directly and try to influence each other. To add to these is a huge range of advisors and personal assistants assigned to senior government functionaries. International organizations (e.g., United Nations agencies – WHO, FAO, WTO, UNCTAD, UNFPA, etc.) shape the global, regional and national policy processes – for example, the setting of the global development agenda where Kenya is a signatory (e.g., SDGs, Agenda 2063, etc.).

With all these actors, the policy-making process is complicated (see figure below). While most policy processes involve sequential stages from agenda-setting
5. Key Challenges

Other than the competition in research and policymaking, some key challenges stand out:

- **Capacity** – capacity challenges are faced both at the national and county governments. The capacity issue includes inadequate skills to carry out feasibility studies on projects, and monitoring and evaluation and project audits (which has been mainly limited to financial audits done by the auditor general), and financing constraints which limit the activities that can be implemented at any point in time. This means that most projects do not achieve value for money and the eventual impact is not established in most cases. The county governments are the most affected as they have planning units without capacity, often affected by turnover of staff especially with new governors coming into office.

- **Public participation** – although enshrined in the Constitution, the process of public participation has not always been inclusive. This has led to implementation of projects most of which are not people-needs driven, hence having little or no impact on the standards of living. Public participation ensures that development is in line with promises made to the electorate, hence putting the government in check in implementation of projects.

- **Implementation** – in situations where projects are well-planned on paper, implementation becomes a challenge. This can range from project scheduling and financing to actual technical requirements among others. Most projects take longer than planned and have cost over-runs. A number of projects are also affected by corruption where either finances are not used as planned or kick-backs lead to low quality of works. This situation is characterized by variations in cost. Delays in implementation at times also arise due to delayed disbursement of project funds.

- **Commitment to the country’s development plan** – there are challenges occasioned by commitment to Vision 2030 and the Big Four Agenda, especially at the county level. Realization of the country’s development plan is only possible if both the national government and the devolved units share the same vision on development. In situations where some county governments are not committed to the national development agenda, realization of the development plan may not be possible.


The Big Four Agenda covers four main areas: food and nutrition security, universal health coverage, affordable housing, and manufacturing. In each of the four areas, the targets for 2022 has been set on specific areas, the achievement of which involves identified initiatives and enablers. Legislative changes that are necessary to achieve food security and nutrition and affordable housing have also been identified. Despite these, there is still a gap on how various aspects of the agenda will be implemented, what conditions are necessary for their implementation,
prioritization and scheduling of the projects, and the necessary resource requirements.

Three key areas are important for research in the realization of the Big Four Agenda. These are policy, legislative, and investment priorities. Identifying gaps in current policies and coming up with policies that can support the development agenda can be established through policy-oriented research. Development of such policies will provide a basis for developing relevant legislation or review of existing legislation that will provide the legal basis for ensuring achievement of the initiatives or for supporting the enablers. At the same time, the actual investments necessary for each of the areas, their prioritization, resource needs and the framework for such investments are also important. This should be accompanied by a clear approach to be used in raising financing, how to meet any capacity constraints, identification of partners and the role they will play, and the implementation plan. At the same time, development targets should be linked to their economic and welfare impacts on the country.

Taking each of the four areas of the Big Four Agenda, and considering the three key areas of research, some of the issues of interest include:

- **Food Security**: Agricultural productivity and its improvement, farming technology, availability of agricultural land, cost of farm inputs, development of high-quality seeds, crops to focus on, financing of agriculture, availability and access to food, nutritional quality of food, availability and cost of food imports, price stability, extent of employment generation, availability of storage and preservation facilities, etc.

- **Health**: Models of health care financing and health care coverage, affordability of health care services (including medicines), quality of provision of health care (including medicines), technical capacity in provision of health care, availability and access to health care facilities, health care technology and equipment, etc.

- **Housing**: Affordability, financing (both for investment and purchase), slum upgrading, availability and cost of building materials, building technology, access to and prices of urban land, legal/regulatory issues covering building standards, land and land use, etc.

- **Manufacturing**: Cost of inputs especially energy, availability and capacity of supportive infrastructure (transport network, broadband, warehousing, etc.), technical capacity, standards, legal issues, technology, financing sources, etc.

**7. Way Forward**

Even as the Government is implementing the Big Four agenda, it is necessary for there to be a solid framework for evidence-based decisions to be made in the implementation of the Agenda for a variety of reasons. We identify four stages that are necessary for achievement of the nation’s development agenda:

First, develop a consultative framework supported by inputs from various stakeholders and based on research to reach a policy-informed decision. This can be achieved by having in place a coordinating committee that is charged with organizing policy discussion forums and collating the views and suggestions into an implementable framework.

Second, put together a project management team that is charged with prioritization and implementation of the core projects and other complementary projects that would support and ensure the realization of the Big Four Agenda in the next few years. The projects will need substantial resources, and thus it is important to come up with a mechanism for prioritizing the projects, a transparent and accountable implementation process, and identification and planning for other complementary activities and projects that would lead to satisfactory achievement of desired priority objectives. Efforts have been made towards this by the formation of the President’s Delivery Unit (PDU); it also needs inputs, however, from other stakeholders.

Third, develop a national framework for monitoring and evaluation of policy decisions and government projects. The framework will set standards to be followed in conceptualization and implementation of government projects, identifying the respective activities, outputs, outcomes and expected impact of the projects. This is important as it will guide project implementation, provide for periodic technical and financial audits, ensure a project provides value for money, and capture the impact of a project.

Fourth, enhance capacity for research and policy analysis both at the national and county government levels. Capacity should include technical aspects of project planning, monitoring and implementation, donor requirements, and social and technical audits. Due to the tight schedule for proposing and agreeing policies, carrying out adequate research becomes a challenge. This can be addressed through collaboration between government institutions and professional bodies, academics, the private sector, investors (especially for large-scale public-private partnerships) and non-governmental organizations. Such collaboration will provide readily available information and data relevant for drafting policies. Collaboration also entrenches public participation, an aspect which is key in the policymaking process under a devolved system of government.
References


