

RE-ADDRESSING EQUITY THROUGH EVIDENCE-DRIVEN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IN AFRICA.

Second Progress Report.



APRIL 2023.

ABSTRACT.

This is the Third biannual technical report for the ‘Re-addressing equity through evidence driven response to COVID-19 in Africa’ project. The project was initiated with the recognition that COVID-19 pandemic coexisted and interacted with climate change, through overlapping social processes and conditions that underpin vulnerabilities and adaptation. During and post the pandemic, Africa experienced disproportionate vulnerability due to inherent social and economic inequalities that compromise adaptive capacity especially for local communities. The project aims to strengthen opportunities for uptake of research evidence (including IDRC supported research) on COVID-19 by engaging and sensitizing knowledge users (especially policy makers) to the existence of and usefulness of this evidence, while documenting experiences and learnings towards strengthened foundation for knowledge and practice in Africa. It is anchored on a process of co-production with the East African Partner States and other relevant stakeholders to build evidence into the COVID-19 recovery plans, and draw lessons towards establishing an appropriate framework for knowledge uptake for pandemic response in the region.

This project report therefore highlights progress made so far in implementing the respective work packages and next steps. Summarily, through WP1, the team undertook situational analysis and also engaged with the stakeholders from the EAC to identify priority evidence needs with regards to COVID-19 response, equity and climate action. Under WP 2, the team has undertaken a scoping summary and rapid synthesis before developing three priority evidence research papers on:

- i. Evidence on the efficacy of policy, institutional and social strategies in the pandemic response and recovery;
- ii. Evidence on COVID -19 implications on aggravating supervening factors such as social inequalities and climate change;
- iii. Evidence on the degree and mechanisms of research uptake in pandemic response and recovery.

The next steps under Work package 3 will involve a validation workshop on the findings of the three priority evidence papers, with the EAC Policy makers and a co creation of the knowledge translation uptake framework. To enable the pending tasks to be concluded, we have requested for a six-month no-cost extension to enable finalization of products and active dissemination and engagements.

1. Introduction.

The Africa Research & Impact Network (ARIN) in collaboration with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), embarked on a project dubbed 'Re-addressing equity through evidence driven response to COVID-19 in Africa'. The overall purpose of this project is to enhance knowledge translation in the East African context on evidence based COVID 19 recovery. It aims to strengthen opportunities for uptake of research evidence (including IDRC-supported research) on COVID-19 by engaging and sensitizing knowledge users (especially policy makers) to the existence of and usefulness of this evidence while documenting experiences, and learnings towards strengthened foundation for knowledge and practice in East Africa with possible replication in the entire African continent.

To achieve this, ARIN collaborated with the East Africa Community (EAC) to organize an Introductory Policy lab workshop (May 18th - May 19th 2022) which interrogated the state of COVID 19 recovery in the various countries, the knowledge translation project plan, its objectives in detail and engaged stakeholders on how best to intricately assess priority evidence needs in the COVID 19 recovery period. As a result of this policy lab, and the pandemic experience shared for the EAC Countries, priority evidence questions were co-created. These evidence questions formed the premise of the scoping summary and rapid evidence synthesis that was undertaken as part of the project. At first, there were 5 identified evidence priority questions:

- i. Evidence on the efficacy of target policies that were implemented during the Pandemic;
- ii. Evidence on the degree of research uptake during the pandemic within the EAC region;
- iii. Evidence on the efficacy of institutional arrangements for the COVID-19 response in the EAC region;
- iv. Evidence on COVID -19 implications on aggravating supervening factors such as social inequalities and climate change in recognition of the fact that COVID-19 transcended the health sector;
- v. Evidence on the efficacy of social strategies i.e. gender equity to respond to the pandemic;

These were later analyzed and collapsed into three:

- i. Evidence on the efficacy of policy, institutional and social strategies in the pandemic response and recovery;
- ii. Evidence on COVID -19 implications on aggravating supervening factors such as social inequalities and climate change;
- iii. Evidence on the degree and mechanisms of research uptake in pandemic response and recovery.

The above evidence questions were synthesized as part of the Work package 2 project implementation.

2. Research objectives.

In implementing the Knowledge Translation project, the overall objective focuses on strengthening opportunities for uptake of research evidence (including IDRC supported research) on COVID-19, by engaging and sensitizing knowledge users (especially policy

makers) to the existence of and usefulness of this evidence. The specific objectives of the project include:

2.1.Situational analysis to identify the current approaches to equitable COVID-19 management and recovery in the context of climate change within the EAC.

- i. To identify the policy response and how evidence has been used to address the COVID-19, i.e., what kinds of evidence were/are used and how were/are they ushered into the COVID-19 planning process.
- ii. To identify priority evidence needs and potential gaps for African Governments (focusing on the East African region/countries) about impacts and response to COVID-19, and how that intersects equity in climate change and wider social justice principles.
- iii. To synthesise evidence and develop a research agenda on priority evidence needs for African policy makers.

2.2.Policy lessons, recommendations and knowledge uptake framework.

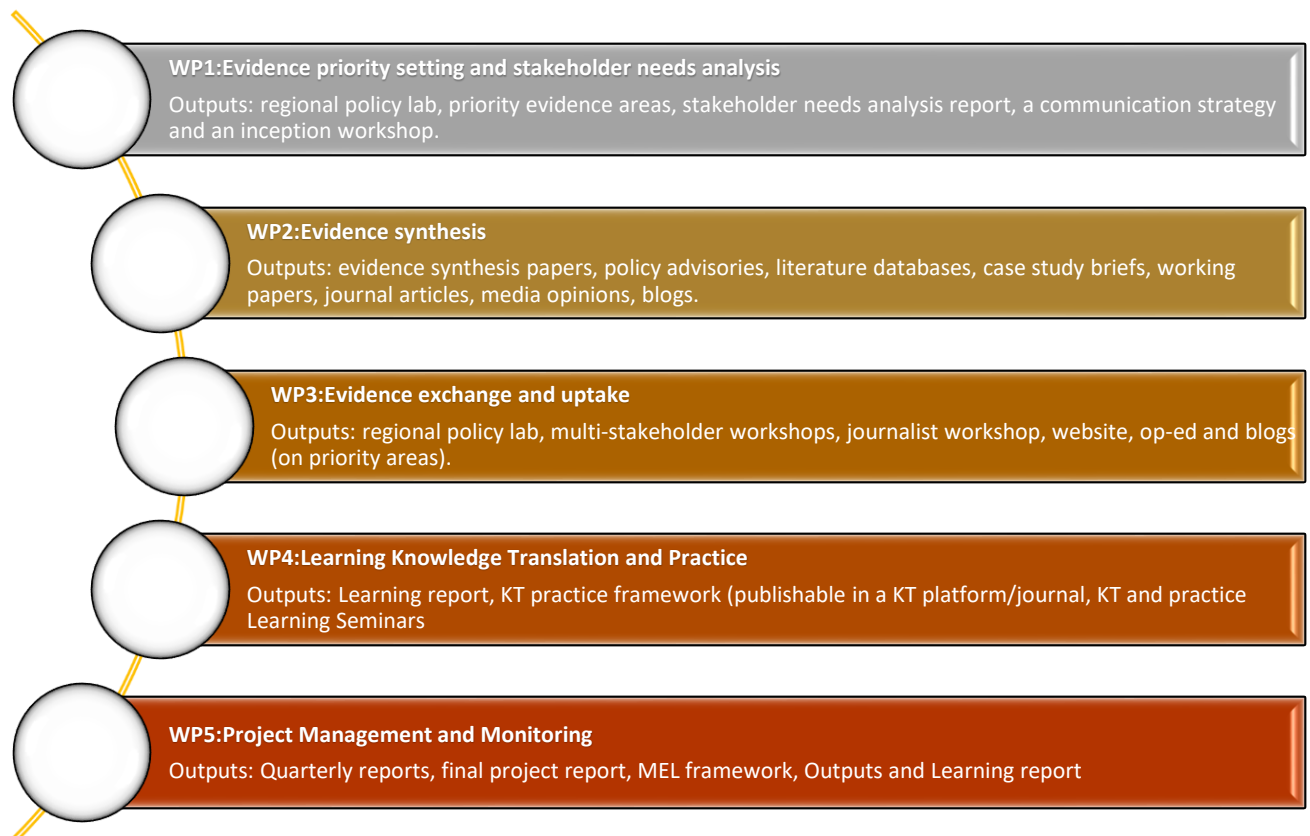
- i. To identify best practices and lessons on equitable COVID-19 management.
- ii. To generate lessons and learning frameworks on best practices for Knowledge Translation and practice through documenting the key challenges, opportunities and processes.
- iii. Characterising knowledge translation and using this to suggest a framework that can be tested and adopted widely both by IDRC and other research for development stakeholders.

3. Methodology.

The methodology employed in the implementation of the project so far is the Cochrane rapid synthesis which promotes specialists' synthesis or summaries of randomized control trials. The Cochrane uses systematic review to support rapid evidence synthesis informative to policy intervention. The framework's focus is to develop tools that will guide the conduct of the systematic scientific review and the development of review methods to synthesize research evidence, primarily from randomized trials, to answer questions about the effects of healthcare interventions. Due to COVID-19 being a global health problem, various government and non-governmental actors have adopted various interventions at multiple levels to manage it. In addition, several academic works and grey literature have been produced since the pandemic hit in November of 2019. Therefore, within this parameter, we seek to synthesize the various works produced and interventions formulated and implemented to examine their effects on health care and the advancement of knowledge and policy on COVID-19.

In preparation of the evidence synthesis under Work Package 2, a scoping summary and a rapid synthesis was conducted which employed qualitative research methodology. This methodology dwells on constructivism and interpretivism which provide an in-depth understanding of research subjects and not predicting their outcomes. Among the four most common types of qualitative research; case study, ethnography, narrative inquiry, and phenomenology, this synthesis focused on case studies, phenomenological and narrative research. In phenomenological approach, it investigated an event or phenomenon by describing and interpreting reported participants' lived experiences to give close to real life feeling of what select countries went through.

4. Activities executed under the various Work packages.



4.1. Work package 1: Priority setting and stakeholder needs analysis.

The following inception activities have already been undertaken as **Work Package 1 implementation**;

- i. Introductory webinar for the project, 5th May 2022; Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, EAC participated;
- ii. Stakeholder engagement with the EAC, Project Advisory Board, Experts across the EAC.
- iii. Establishment of a project advisory team comprising of national, regional and international experts on health, social equity, and climate change;
- iv. A situational analysis on how the EAC Partner States have responded to the pandemic and implications for various social groups in light of existing shocks such as climate change;
- v. A co-design inception workshop with the EAC Partner States/ first policy lab where 3 priority questions were co-created.

4.2. Work package 2: Evidence Synthesis.

Under this work package, the following are the outputs realized so far:

- i. Scoping summary;
- ii. Rapid synthesis document;
- iii. 3 evidence papers currently under internal review

The gist of this work package has been the evidence synthesis work based on the three priority questions co identified with the EAC policy makers. Hinged on the pandemic experience in Africa, the evidence synthesis presented findings highlighted below:

- i. **Evidence on the efficacy of policy, institutional and social strategies in the pandemic response and recovery-** There have been a number of policy, institutional and social strategies used to respond to the pandemic and also to work towards recovery. Various research studies have focused on the impacts of policy informed containment measures set up by various governments. These policy measures included lockdowns on different community groups. These strategies were influenced by policies that became legally binding, and kept being amended later on in response to newer knowledge and challenges. Countries were replicating the same existing institutional systems to respond to COVID 19. This played a role in reinforcing existing vulnerabilities. Unfortunately, there were no clear institutional innovations or shifts to deal with the multifaceted nature of the pandemic.
- ii. **Evidence on COVID -19 implications on aggravating supervening factors such as social inequalities and climate change-** In East Africa, the COVID-19 containment measures were difficult for some social groups to implement more so those in informal settlement areas. There is evidence that the pandemic exacerbated the state of socio economic challenges across the continent especially for the marginalized. Notably, the linkage between COVID 19 and climate change remains unclear. There is lack of clear data to evidence the linkage. Nevertheless, some countries within the EAC i.e. Uganda, have put in place a green recovery plan in view of the fact that the pandemic exacerbated the effects of climate change. Moreover, there are best practices that were adopted in different contexts including outside Africa that can be learnt from.
- iii. **Evidence on the degree and mechanisms of research uptake in pandemic response and recovery-** The role of evidence in supporting COVID-19 response and the preparedness of the EAC Partner States towards future pandemics is critical. Experience shows that COVID-19 coexisted within the social context and other challenges such as climate change thus multidisciplinary evidence was necessary to inform response and recovery. However, from the co design workshop, there was limited insight on what models of research and evidence uptake can work and what lessons can be drawn from COVID-19 experience to build better knowledge update in future pandemics. From the foregoing discussion global narratives were mostly employed as ‘evidence’ to inform policy measures at first. This was later backed by limited yet growing scientific evidence on the spread of the virus. From the outset of the pandemic, epidemiological and social evidence on COVID 19 impacts were dominant. There was no clear, consolidated evidence base to inform response. Governments over relied on epidemiological evidence which were clearer in terms of infection rates. Scientific uncertainty, inadequate research to inform response measures, propagation of inaccurate news, time constraints, and poor linkages among pertinent partners are some of the factors that challenged COVID-19 response. As such, knowledge translation (KT) platforms comprised of ventures, networks, and organizations that encourage policy making informed by evidence can play a significant

role in bridging the gap between science, practice, policy, and politics by providing relevant and prompt evidence that influences pandemic response.

5. Communication, engagement and outreach;

In the course of the Evidence synthesis work,

- i. The Project Advisory board has been convened to discuss the scoping summary and the rapid synthesis work. Based on this, input was received on what the Evidence synthesis based on the 3 priority questions should entail. The advisory board have already been updated on our engagements so far and are at hand to review the evidence synthesis papers prior to validation.
- ii. We have engaged the EAC Principal of Health through WhatsApp calls, follow up emails and a zoom meeting. As at now, we await their feedback on the status of the Cooperation Agreement.
- iii. The EAC Principal of Health invited us to validate our Evidence Synthesis work and present a Knowledge Uptake Framework, work during the intergovernmental meeting for health ministers and NGOs working on COVID 19 related research to be head on April 23rd, 2023. This is being organized by the East Africa Health and Research Commission. We intend to leverage on this engagement to set ground for the adoption of the Knowledge Translation Framework.
- iv. A Validation Concept note has already been shared with the Principal for perusal. The meeting venue was settled for Moshi, Tanzania. The logistical aspects (Hotel, flights, Invites) are to be streamlined in the course of the first week of April.
- v. The main challenge in engaging the EAC Secretariat has been the lengthy bureaucracies which when finally approved will pave way for meaningful uptake of the research outputs and engagement of the policy makers.

Once the three evidence research papers have been finalized, we aim to publish them, develop a blog for the IDRC, IDS and a policy brief from them. This will be shared with the policy makers and published on ARIN website. We are also looking to leverage other opportunities in mainstream media to share the finalized outputs for maximum impact.

6. Next steps.

As the project is already implementing **Work package 3**, the following would be the next feasible steps;

i. Share the evidence papers with IDRC for review and comment.

Once finalized internally, the three evidence papers shall be shared with the IDRC for review and comment.

ii. Convening of the Validation meeting.

The three evidence papers developed by ARIN are the subject of the validation workshop being co organized presently with the EAC. The 2 day workshop also aims at co creating a knowledge update framework for research and evidence still based on the COVID 19 recovery experience.

iii. Sharing findings with the various platforms.

Post validation with the EAC Policy makers we intend to share our key findings from the evidence synthesis work on various platforms including but not limited to; IDRC, ARIN Website, IDS platform, and the Journal of Development in Practice. <https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/cdip20> to publish the expected knowledge translation framework.

7. Updated work plan.


Below is the updated workplan. So far, the team is concluding most of the co-production activities including evidence prioritization and synthesis in consultations with the EAC. The team is also completing work on packaging the products into evidence papers. There has been some delays with the co-creation process due to delayed procedures at the EAC- the project's main impact partner. The next steps involve finalization of knowledge product, engagements with the EAC towards uptake and dissemination and engagement with wider platforms on COVID-19 and climate change issues. To enable this, to take place, we are requesting for a six months no-cost extension to support the process. This is reflected in the updated work plan below:


WORK PACKAGE	Jan 22-May 22	Jun 22	Jul 22	Aug 22	Sep 22	Oct 22	Nov 22	Dec 22	Jan 23	Feb 23	Mar 23	Apr 23	May 23	Jun 23	Jul 23	Aug 23	Sep 23	Oct 23	Nov 23	Dec 23
PHASE ONE.																				
WORK PACKAGE 1: EVIDENCE PRIORITY SETTING AND STAKEHOLDER NEEDS ANALYSIS																				
Organise and convene the project inception workshop																				
Establish and convene first round of regional policy labs																				
Establish project advisory committee																				
Undertake interviews and desk reviews for stakeholder needs assessments																				
Refine project activities and plans in consultations with IDRC																				
Write up report on priority areas and stakeholder evidence needs assessment																				
WORK PACKAGE 2: EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS AND CASE STUDIES																				
Design evidence review protocols and case study guide																				
A state-of-the-art evidence synthesis from existing research including IDRC supported research.																				

Additional key informant interviews to align the evidence Data collection																			
Create and update regional literature database																			
Interviews and analysis for case studies (country or sub-regional) and writing up the findings into working papers																			
Writing up evidence papers and case studies																			
PHASE TWO																			
WORK PACKAGE 3: EVIDENCE EXCHANGE, FEEDBACK AND UPTAKE																			
Convene round two of the policy labs to review evidence papers																			
Revise and align evidence papers based on reviews																			
Prepare policy advisories from the final evidence papers																			
Develop and publish working papers, journal article manuscripts																			
Present highlights of evidence synthesis and policy advisories to existing evidence platform																			

e.g. African Task Force on Coronavirus (AFTCOR)																		
Presentation of journal paper at International Scientific Conference																		
Engage the local and international media with print, audio and video products (including convening of a media roundtable to discuss the synthesis and their reporting).																		
WORK PACKAGE 4: LEARNING KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION AND PRACTICE																		
Undertake learning assessments																		
Undertake regional learning workshops and seminars																		
Develop KT and practice framework																		
Convene learning workshop/policy lab to discuss and validate the KT practice framework.																		
WORK PACKAGE 5: PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING																		

Develop a project monitoring and evaluation framework																				
Assess project implementation and report to IDRC on milestones		Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete

 - Completed

 - Incomplete

