

*Module 9:
Practical reflections
of embedded co-
production in South
Africa*

Promise Nduku



PACE
Pan-African Collective for Evidence



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Pan-African Collective for Evidence (PACE) NPC / NPO

A non-profit company dedicated to supporting the use of evidence to **reduce poverty and inequality in Africa.**

- Team of **±20** evidence specialists

- PACE provides the secretariat to the **Africa Evidence Network**, a community of **±5,000 decision-makers, researchers, and knowledge brokers** supporting the use of evidence on the continent.



How is PACE



- Our vision is to see a world **free of poverty and inequality**.
- We work to unlock the full potential of **evidence capacities, evidence communities, and evidence synthesis to build institutionalized evidence-to-policy systems** that have a real-world impact on development and transformation.
- PACE works through a **partnership model** and hosts the largest Africa-focused evidence-informed decision-making network, the Africa Evidence Network.



Supporting evidence-based policy-making in South Africa

1. Compiling responsive and policy-aligned evidence-bases

- Human Settlements map
- Developmental State map
- Education evidence map
- National Spatial Development Planning evidence map
- Land reform evidence map
- National Strategic Plan (NSP)-Gender-based violence and femicide evidence map
- Growing Gauteng Together (GGT2030) Policy-relevant matrix

- **2. Providing rapid and responsive evidence synthesis**
- Western Cape Growth for Jobs (G4J) strategy
- COVID rapid responses: Transportation, Small and Medium Enterprises
- **3. Supporting the institutionalisation of evidence-based policy-making (EBPM)**
- Work with the Department of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME)
- **4. Sharing capacities for EBPM**
- Training courses on evidence mapping
- **5. Facilitating communities of practice for EBPM**



Embedded co-production, pioneered and led by the Centre of Government

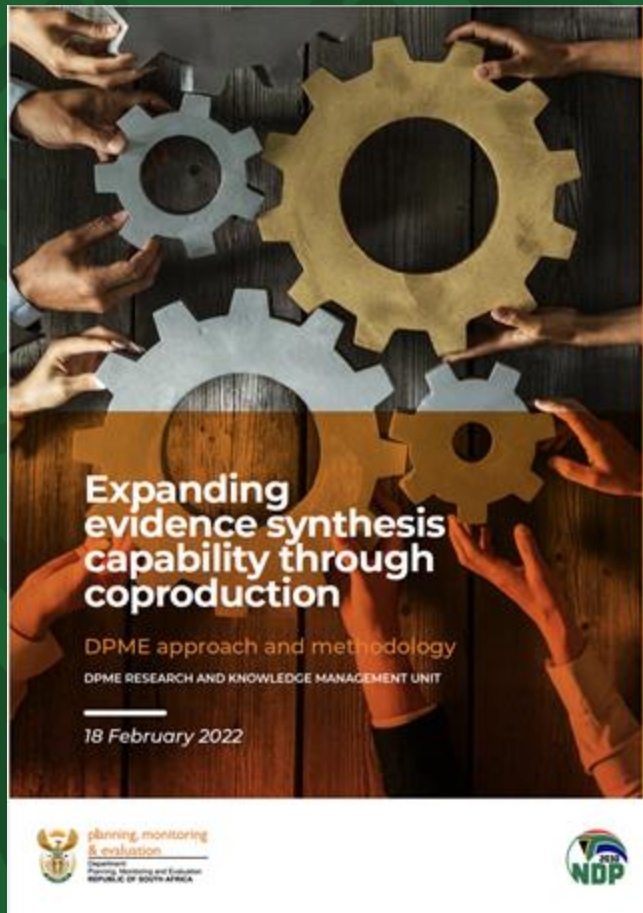


Figure 5: DPME co-production strategies by design

- 1 Match making
- 2 Embedded engagement
- 3 Managing mandates
- 4 Supporting policy champions & building networks
- 5 Good governance
- 6 Commissioning process - effective use of public finance

Collaborating in a policy-led co-production approach: what is different?



- **Co-production model** developed by a government agency with the primary aim of enhancing state capacity and evidence use (ie not to improve research per se).
- Co-production project **commissioned** and **led** by civil servants. Evidence users' needs and contexts shape and drive the project.
- Co-production approach for once-off projects **to fill ad hoc decision-evidence needs** as well as ongoing public sector **knowledge management** needs.

Lesson 1: The deficit of the deficit model



Researchers can be contrarian to civil servants.

- Assuming to speak on behalf of 'the people'
- Assuming that being 'critical' is a default

Researchers assuming technical expertise and custodians of rigour.

- Risk to the policy colleague of her report going to cabinet vs your risk of sending in your paper for peer-review

Consider that policy-makers are equally or more like than you to:

- Have an activist background
- Understand what's possible given the political and economic realities
- Be under pressure to deliver high-quality work in (very) short timeframes with non-flexible deadlines
- Have a public mandate to implement policies and programmes voted for by 'the people'

Lesson 2: Manage interactions and capacities



Co-production does not necessarily come naturally but **can be managed** (even engineered) into existence.

- Provide technical and scientific structure for the messy and non-linear process of co-producing

Co-production is **not a romantic ideal** but a means to an end.

- Manage interactions and mandates carefully
- Manage personalities and skill sets (soft & hard) carefully



Lesson 3: Public sector procurement structures need to be more agile



Co-production challenges a procurement system set up for a **consultancy culture** (and the consultants themselves).

- How do you terminate a contract based on a soft skills misfit/lack of trust?
- How do you build deep and trusted long-term relationships when re-occurring contracts are flagged for corruption?

This is a key risk for the sustainability of embedded and long-term co-production.



Lesson 4: Reframe the incentives in academia



Within a university, market the policy access and policy success as much as the research success (and don't be ashamed to do so).

Attract the brightest or the most policy-sensitive / policy-dedicated?

In the long term: consider the role of academia in society.

As we advance



Difference between using co-production to make research more relevant to policy (**ie research-driven co-production**) and using co-production to enhance a policy decision need with evidence (**ie decision-maker-driven co-production**).

- So as much as the 'co' often infers 'shared' and 'equitable', if we maintain a practice in which most co-production is initiated and conceptualized by academics, we are unlikely to truly put the evidence-user and decision-need first (**prioritise & imagine**).

Plant more researchers in **policy-making organisations** (but not to do research!) and vice-versa (secondments, WW centres, rapid response units).

Professional norms and practices of **policy-makers** to embrace a **rapid learning culture** (and associated skill sets).

Professional norms and practices of **researchers** to make full **policy engagement** a non-negotiable.



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*Thank
you*

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