



pep
partnership for
economic
policy

Partnership for Economic Policy (PEP): External Review of Capacity Building and Research

Final Report
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Acronyms

AERC	African Economic Research Consortium
APHRC	African Population and Health Research Centre
CARTA	Consortium for Advance Research Training in Africa
CBMS	Community-based monitoring systems
DFID	Department for International Development (UKAid)
DPRU	Development Policy Research Unit, University of Cape Town
ERF	Economic Research Forum
IDRC	International Development Research Centre (Canada)
LACEA	Latin America & Caribbean Economic Association
LFC	Low-income countries, fragile and conflict states
GDN	Global Development Network
MPIA	Modelling and policy impact analysis
PAGE	Policy Analysis on Growth and Employment
PASGR	Partnership for African Social and Governance Research
PEP	Partnership for Economic Policy
PIERI	Policy impact evaluation research initiative
PMMA	Poverty monitoring, measurement and analysis
RCT	Randomised control trial

Partnership for Economic Policy: External Review of Capacity Building and Research

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The overall objective of this review is to provide objective information and commentary on PEP's **capacity building** and **research quality**, and its perceived value-added or "niche" among organizations concerned with engaging policy actors on the basis of rigorous, technically sound research. The review consists of two discrete components, each done by different reviewers. One component is expressly focused on **PEP's capacity building mandate**, and was undertaken by Joseph Hoffman, a Canadian consultant and former Executive Director of the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR) in Nairobi. The other component is expressly focused on the **quality and relevance of PEP-supported research**, and was undertaken by Haroon Borat, Director of the Development Policy Research Unit (DPRU), at the University of Cape Town. Both components have been integrated into this report.

Capacity Building

The review starts by looking at four distinct areas of capacity building (CB) prevalent in the context of development research, which appear regardless of whether the research domain is economics, social or political sciences, or is focussed topically on issues like maternal health, agriculture, science, technology and innovation, etc. These four areas are:

1. Capacity building that occurs as **part of the research process**;
2. Capacity building that occurs through **participation in professional development and training**;
3. Capacity building that occurs **through higher education**; and,
4. Capacity building that focuses on **organisational capacity** rather than solely on individual researchers.

The external review looked at how PEP operates in respect of each area to provide a more comprehensive picture of its capacity building "model". It considers actual experience to-date, as well as possible new approaches for capacity building in the future.

Findings are based on document reviews, interviews with PEP programme coordinators, resource persons, trainers and researchers (in person, Skype, survey), observation of training and research presentations in MPIA, PMMA/PIERI and CBMS prior to and following the Nairobi annual conference. The survey had 80 respondents, 54% of which are involved in Policy Analysis on Growth and Employment research (PAGE), and 62% currently engaged in PEP/PAGE research or as recently as 2014. 23% were involved in more than one PEP project. 43% were female. When the university cohorts are grouped, almost 50% of PEP researchers are university based (teaching staff, doctoral candidates, researchers and a few Masters level students). The survey (Annex 5.1) can be disaggregated in various ways (e.g. by gender, programme, number of projects by researchers, etc.). It illuminated the value in PEP maintaining a more comprehensive database on the profiles of researchers and training participants that includes regular collection of information regarding programme activities, research and professional development.

PEP clearly takes its capacity building role very seriously, and it thoughtfully seeks opportunities to strengthen researchers' capacity in all four areas noted above but less so in the latter two. To date, PEP has used a rather "diffused" leadership model for "capacity building" involving all four

programmes and collaboration across partner institutions. This is a unique approach and has worked well. Although the organisation is evolving associated with its recent legal establishment, engagement of an executive director, and setting up of a Nairobi Secretariat, a new Board vision document should help guide future organisational roles. Table 1 presents the suggestions and recommendations relevant to PEP capacity building activities.

Table 1 – Capacity Building Suggestions and Recommendations

Research Process	Professional Development and Training	Higher Education	Organisational Capacity Building
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek opportunities to reduce uneven distribution of CB opportunities among research team members and place emphasis on higher participation in training, study visits, workshops earlier in project timeframe. Continue with excellent emphasis on providing researchers with clear expectations for and monitoring of policy engagement – but Introduce “how to” guidance on policy engagement and communication through web, training and greater coaching by resource persons Utilise researchers who demonstrate excellence in policy engagement and communication as trainers and resource persons Re-examining the role of the annual conference in context of other ways to bring greater numbers of researchers together once projects have started (e.g. workshops or study visits) Review the post research “incentives” to emphasis policy engagement at the national level Require production of policy briefs, blogs and non-technical media articles <i>by the researchers’ home institution(s)</i> Look at role of the team leader as an instrument for capacity development and provide TLs with training and coaching in this role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Move from 40-50% participation of researchers in PEP training to goal of 100% participation over the life of a research project Make training course evaluations more systematic and uniform placing greater emphasis on assessing participant learning experience. Rethink logframe to go beyond counting participants as CB indicators to more qualitative measures (e.g. assessing researchers growth in fluency in application of methods, use of technology, policy engagement, subject knowledge, etc. Expand modalities for delivery of training (e.g. web-based, open courses, courses focused on how to teach methods) Develop a better branding model i.e. don’t call every form of training a “PEP School, reserve that term for larger courses with multi method or in depth content offering diplomas) Add “policy engagement methods” to the PEP “tool box” and provide training to the same standard as other tools Progressively embed delivery capacity in regional institutions but maintain “brand” and overarching quality assurance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer a version of a PEP School with content and delivery catering explicitly to <i>university teaching staff</i> to help them incorporate teaching the PEP tools in their own courses Work with existing collaborative graduate programmes in regions to enhance current course content or develop new electives in PEP “tools” Develop “model” graduate courses/modules (content, teaching materials, pedagogical training) and provide technical support to developing country universities that wish to introduce PEP tool coverage in existing Masters or Doctoral programmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proceed with MPIA proposal to “institutionalise” use of the CGE model in Southern research centres or institutions. Consider piloting this approach in other programmes Seek potential partnerships with TTI and other regionally specific efforts to enhance think tank or university research units, focus on enhancing capacity to use PEP tools.

Research Quality

Research networks are challenging institutions. The management and co-ordination alone, of multiple individual researchers, research teams and their institutions, ensures that the business of economic policy networks is complicated and prone to often unclear and immeasurable outcomes.

In attempting to measure the quality of the research produced, wherein policy impact is included as well – PEP-PAGE is found to be doing a sterling job. There remain improvements however, in terms of the flow of the process, the structuring of incentives, the specified role of relevant individuals – all of which are easily altered. In terms of the actual content of the research, this too is amenable to change. Perhaps the lowest hanging fruit is that of improving the policy reach of the good work of this network. This review suggests changes of nuance rather than of substance, of tweaking rather than structural changes – and is strongly indicative of a network whose quality of research can be viewed as a positive contribution to economic policy research in the developing world.

In 2012 PEP initiated PAGE, a new, more focused, research intervention designed to draw in low-income country researchers, as well as those from fragile states around a constructive, policy value-added set of research projects. PAGE projects, as stated in the objectives of this initiative, would ensure that, *“rigorous, locally-led analyses (were) generat(ed) (based on) reliable evidence to assist in promoting inclusive growth and female empowerment through improved policies related to labour markets, social protection and entrepreneurship in developing countries.”*

The co-ordinates of the quality of this research are laid down fairly succinctly in this preamble, namely that the research should be both policy-relevant and rigorous in terms of the Economics discipline’s internal standards of quality. It is therefore, within the areas of academic rigour and policy relevance that are the analytical focus of the review, through four broad components:

1. An overview and assessment of the review process, with a focus on whether the process is structured in a manner that ensures that the highest possible quality of output is achieved.
2. An assessment of the quality of the specific working papers produced, based on a number of different criteria.
3. With PEP’s stated intention of research being policy relevant, this outcome is considered for the different country teams.
4. Possible lessons for PEP-PAGE for future rounds of proposal requests.

The review found that PEP has, somewhat uniquely among research initiatives, a strong bias toward LFCs in its selection process. Several concerns arose in respect of the working paper production process: specifically around study visits being possibly too late in the project time frame; payments appearing to lead production of some deliverables; the presence of an apparent ‘incentive cliff’ at the journal production phase; and, the risk of having too few and consequently overworked mentors.

In regard to PEP research products, the review found them to contain very clear and concise research questions. Use of technique is excellent, but perhaps too front-loaded at the expense of analytical questions in many papers. Some papers are poor in their basic descriptive data overview sections. Lastly, the review raises for discussion the merits of funding randomized control trials (RCTs) in LFCs, which may be a luxury in economies with very poor baseline data. Table 2 below presents the respective suggestions and recommendations specific to PEP research.

Table 2 – Research Suggestions and Recommendations

<i>Working Paper Production</i>	<i>Research Products</i>	<i>Policy Relevance and Research Impact</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider bringing Study Visits forward in the research project timeline. • Payment tranches to be more closely aligned to research output thresholds. • Enhance incentives and support available to researchers at mentors at the journal production phase • Actively expand the network of available PEP mentors/resource persons, including people at regional level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain emphasis on very clear and concise research questions, but give greater emphasis to demonstrating how the research questions can inform policy • Maintain attention to excellence in use of research techniques, but strengthen emphasis on analytical questions • Reduce number of papers with poor basic descriptive data overview sections. • Reexamine use of RCTs in LFCs, and place greater emphasis on addressing weak or absent baseline data as a preferred priority in LFCs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve quality of Policy Briefs to ensure they are more than summaries of the working papers. • Give greater emphasis in training and policy brief templates to leading policy briefs with policy questions. • Increase standard of expectations to reduce number of papers and briefs offering simplistic policy solutions. • Maintain emphasis on policy impact and relevance in selection criteria and production process. • Provide a call for proposals with a sub-theme on actual or intended policy interventions of countries. • Increase social media presence of PEP generally and guidance to PEP researchers in terms of their use of social media for research/policy exposure. • Design a cross-country forum of policy-makers as a mechanism to improve the research-policy nexus.