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Government Performance in Service Delivery in Africa

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Abstract

This study analyses government performance in service delivery in Africa and the factors accounting for it. Evidence from Afrobarometer public opinion data covering 35 countries in 2014/15 shows that the government act of providing services in Africa is shallow and varies across countries. Tests of different competing theories prove that the government performance in service delivery is explained mainly by the status of the economy, prevalence of corruption and to some extent by media effectiveness. The study finds, on the one hand, that African governments perform relatively well delivering services when the government performs well or very well in the economy and fighting corruption, the country's economic conditions are better or much better; and media is effective in uncovering mistakes and corruption within the government. On the other hand, governments perform badly or very badly in delivering services when levels of corruption increase and most or all public officials are involved in corruption.

Government Performance in Service Delivery in Africa

Introduction

In the past three decades, most African countries implemented both political and economic reforms toward, respectively, democracy and a free market. Their leaders competed in a multiparty setting to get elected and once in office they tried to perform relatively well in service delivery to reduce poverty that often characterizes the continent. But studies on how (well or bad) African governments perform in service delivery are limited. Most accounts on the subject in Africa come from isolated unsystematic case studies focusing on a single country or even a city, town and or village.

Cross-national investigation tends to be rare. The Afrobarometer¹ is the only effort that has been collecting data on a number of issues, including: government performance in service delivery² in the continent over time. But of its two books (Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi 2005; and Bratton 2013) none have dealt with service delivery and of its 181 Working Papers only six: Blimpo *et al* (2018), Leon, Morello and Ramachandran (2015), Bratton and Sibanyoni (2006), Bratton (2007), Hounsounon (2016) and Bleck and Michelich (2015) discuss service delivery.³

In this study I analyse this neglected area in Africa systematically. My first concern is of a descriptive nature: To what extent do African governments perform (well or badly) their function of delivering public services to their citizens? Do African countries vary in government performance of delivering services? My second concern is to explain the variations that may exist: What factors account for variations of government performance in the delivery of services in Africa?

The first possible factor accounting for variation of government performance in service delivery that I look at is *economic*. I argue that governments perform relatively well in delivering services if the economy also performs well. Investopedia (2013) explains that:

“Economic production and growth, what GDP represents, has a large impact on nearly everyone within [the] economy. When GDP growth is strong, firms hire more workers and can afford to pay higher salaries and wages, which leads to more spending by consumers on goods and services. Firms also have the confidence to invest more when economic growth is strong, and investment lays the foundation for economic growth in the future. When GDP growth is very low or the economy goes into a recession, the opposite applies (workers may be retrenched and/or paid lower wages, and firms are reluctant to invest)” (Investopedia 2013).

¹ www.afrobarometer.org

² Other issues include the quality of democracy and governance, civil society and market.

³ The search was based on key words (namely: service, delivery and provision) in the Afrobarometer publications list.

Similar to the private sector, it can be assumed that the public sector is also strengthened in its ability to provide more and better services as, if well managed, growth will be distributed among the population. Instead of representing economic production and growth with GDP, in this study I specify it by using government performance managing the economy, improving living standards, creating jobs, keeping prices down and narrowing income gaps; and country (past, present and future) economic conditions. I hypothesize that individuals who view, on the one hand, that the government is performing well managing the economy, improving living standards, creating jobs, keeping prices down and narrowing income gaps; and, on the other hand, that their country's economic conditions are better or much better, are likely to form attitudes that lead them to view that the government is performing well in delivering services. This is because, as noted above (Investopedia 2013), that economic improvement has large impacts on almost everyone including delivering services to people.

The second explanation has to do with *the role of news media*. News media shape public opinion (Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi 2005, Gunther, Montero and Puhle 2007) and strengthen the society. Besides being informative, in democracies the media also play a watchdog role of government (Schmitt-Beck and Voltmer 2007). It uncovers mistakes and exposes corruption within the government (Camaj 2012; Starke, Naab and Scherer 2016; Andersen et al. 2011; Brunetti and Weder 2003). People who often access news media and view that news media is effective revealing government mistakes and corruption are expected to evaluate that the government perform negatively in the delivery of services. Media often accentuate the negative and sometimes make the news become worse than it appears to be (Rosenthal 2009).

The third explanation is *corruption*. Corruption undermines service delivery and provision of goods (Kayode, Adagba and Anyio 2013, Pandey 2010). Instead of allocating funds for public goods and services, funds can be applied for private and individual gains. Here I hypothesise that individuals who view that corruption has increased somewhat or a lot and that most or all officials (in the presidency, legislative, executive, judiciary, local government, civil service, private sector and religious leaders) are corrupt are likely to view that the government is performing negatively in delivering services. Yet those who view a positive performance of government fighting corruption are also likely to view a positive government performance in delivering services.

The fourth explanation is *context*. The context where people live matters to shape their views and behaviours (Goodin and Tilly 2006). Here I look at the geopolitical regional context where Africans live – whether West Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo), East Africa (Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda) North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia), Southern Africa (Botswana, eSwatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) or Central Africa (Cameroon, Gabon, and São Tomé e Príncipe).⁴ What

⁴ These countries are those that exist in the dataset used for this study analysis.

regional context affects positively or negatively government performance in delivering services?

Data and Methods

I test and examine the effects of all four explanations individually and against one another on government performance in service delivery using 2014/15 Afrobarometer public opinion surveys conducted in 35 African countries mentioned above. The Afrobarometer surveyed through a face-to-face structured questionnaire a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200-1,400 ordinary citizens in each of the countries. In total 53,935 adult Africans were interviewed. The samples were drawn by taking the smallest geographic units, census Enumeration Areas (EAs) and stratifying all EAs in each country into separate lists according to province⁵ and urban or rural status. 150-300 AEs were then randomly selected from these lists with the probability proportionate to its size in the overall population, ensuring that every eligible adult had an equal and known chance of being selected. Eight households were then randomly selected within each EA, and a respondent 18 years of age or older was randomly selected from each household. A gender quota ensured that every other interview must be with a female.

To analyse the data I use a quantitative method to conduct statistical tests using a series of Ordinary Least Square (OLS) multiple regression tests at individual (i.e. micro) level analysis. In addition, since country variable i.e. country region is included in the analysis, hypotheses are also tested at the country regional (i.e. macro) level. Thus the final test is conducted at a multilevel analysis as it includes simultaneously both the micro and macro variables. Items tapping supposedly the same thing were merged into a single item – that is, a multidimensional concept or index. In order to merge them into an index I used factor and reliability analyses.⁶

Government Performance in Service Delivery

Service delivery is “the act of providing services to customers”⁷ – that is, citizens. Thus government performance in service delivery is the extent to which governments provide services to citizens. In this study I measure the performance of government delivering services by the following Afrobarometer survey question: “How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven’t you heard enough to say: reducing crime; improving basic health services; addressing educational needs; providing water and sanitation services; ensuring enough to eat; maintaining roads and bridges; and providing reliable electric supply?”

Overall, government performance in service delivery is shallow in Africa (Figure 1). With exception to addressing educational needs (53 percent) and improving basic health services (52 percent), the averages of government handling service delivery are below 50 percent. Of these, Africans tend to be more critical of the government’s

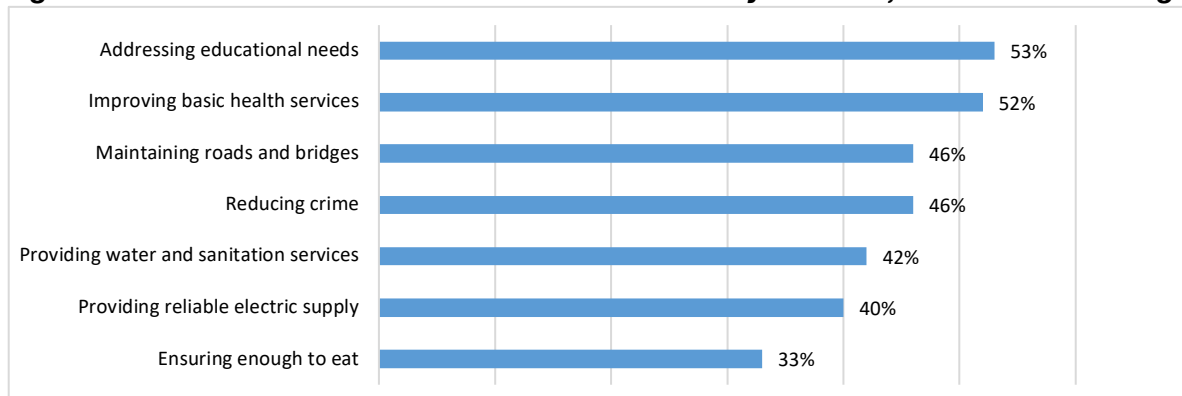
⁵ Or equivalent sub-national area e.g. county, state, region.

⁶ The factor analysis extracted one single factor using the maximum likelihood method and reliability analysis showed internal consistency of the index of at least 60 percent.

⁷ Cambridge English Dictionary.

performance in ensuring enough to eat (33 percent); providing reliable electricity supply (40 percent) providing water and sanitation services (42 percent); maintaining roads and bridges (46 percent) and reducing crime (46 percent). These results suggest that government performance tends to be higher in areas where donors tend to provide support to African and developing countries – that is in social areas: education and health. Exception applies, however, to water and sanitation.

Figure 1: Government Performance in Service Delivery in Africa, Continental Averages



Note: Reported figures refer to ‘well’ and ‘very well’ responses. Details of each service by country are presented in Annex 1.

Instead of analysing government performance in service delivery at the continental level I look at the data at country level to compare countries (Annex 1). Starting with crime, on the one hand, at least two-thirds of Africans from Niger (82 percent), Uganda (73 percent), Botswana (68 percent) and eSwatini (67 percent) are likely to express that their government is performing well or very well in reducing crime; and less than a third of Africans from Gabon (19 percent), South Africa (23 percent), Madagascar and Mauritius (both with 26 percent), Nigeria (29 percent) and Cape Verde (30 percent) are less likely to say so. The rest of the countries are between the one-third and two-thirds thresholds.

Moving to health services, Africans from Mauritius (79 percent), eSwatini (76 percent), Namibia and Botswana (both with 73 percent), São Tomé e Príncipe (69 percent) and Burundi (66 percent) lead in viewing that the government is performing well or very well in improving basic health services while Africans from Madagascar (32 percent), Morocco (32 percent) and Tunisia (33 percent) view that their government lags behind.

With respect to education, Africans from Namibia (81 percent), Mauritius (80 percent), eSwatini (75 percent), São Tomé e Príncipe and Kenya (both with 71 percent), Botswana (70 percent) and Burundi (69 percent) tend to view that their government is performing relatively higher than others in addressing educational needs. At the bottom are Morocco (23 percent), Tunisia (26 percent) and Gabon (32 percent).

On water and sanitation, Mauritians (79 percent) are Africans who lead in observing that the government is performing relatively well in providing water and sanitation services while Africans from Sierra Leone (17 percent), Gabon (23 percent), Madagascar (23 percent), Burkina Faso (24 percent), Guinea (27 percent), Liberia (30

percent), Zimbabwe and Lesotho (both with 31 percent) and Ghana (32 percent) view that their government lags behind.

Ensuring people have enough to eat is the most critical issue among services delivered by African governments. In fact, there is no single country with a percentage above two-thirds expressing that the government performs well or very well ensuring enough to eat. While the highest level comes from Algeria with 58 percent, 16 African countries out of 35 surveyed are below the one-third average of government performance in ensuring enough to eat.

Infrastructures are also a concern for African countries. Countries where citizens view that the government is performing well or very well maintaining roads and bridges above the two-thirds level are only three: Mauritius (79 percent), Cote d'Ivoire (69 percent) and Namibia (68 percent). And those that view the same below one-third are seven: Madagascar (19 percent), Benin (26 percent), Zimbabwe (27 percent), Ghana (29 percent), Tunisia (30 percent), Burkina Faso (30 percent) and Lesotho (32 percent).

On providing reliable electricity supply, only two countries are above the two-thirds level: Mauritius (91 percent) and Sao Tomé e Príncipe (66 percent) but 13 are below the one-third level, namely: Madagascar (8 percent), Burkina Faso (17 percent), Guinea, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe (all with 19 percent), Benin (21 percent), Ghana (24 percent), Burundi and Gabon (both with 27 percent), Mali and Lesotho (both with 28 percent), Senegal (30 percent) and Nigeria (32 percent).

Later on in the regression analysis I use these seven items measuring government performance in service delivery as a single item – that is, the government performance in service delivery index.⁸

Explaining Variations of Government Performance in Service Delivery

In this section I test and analyse the factors accounting for variation of government performance in service delivery. Table 1 presents OLS multivariate regression tests. I first test the effect of each possible explanation individually and then secondly, I test all explanations controlling for one another. I commence with the test of economic explanation. The initial test of the two considerations tapping the economy (Model 1) appear to be positive and significant. Africans who view that the government is performing well or very well managing the economy, improving living standards, creating jobs, keeping prices down and narrowing income gaps; as well as view that past, present and future country economic conditions are better or much better are likely to express that the government is performing well or very in the delivery of services.

Second, I look at the role of the media (Model 2). In general, the media play a role but one new form of news media plays a negative role forming attitudes toward government performance in service delivery. Africans who often obtain news from traditional media sources – that is, radio, television and newspapers are likely to view

⁸ As outlined in the methodology section, composite indices were constructed using factor and reliability analyses.

that the government is performing relatively well in service delivery. Africans who get news from new and modern media specifically the internet are less likely to do so, as the effect of the internet is that they are more likely to view the government performing negatively in service delivery. But social media has a positive sign, suggesting that Africans who obtain news from social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.) are likely to evaluate government performance in service delivery positively. As the role of the media is also indicated by the effectiveness of the media I also analyse its effect. The results of initial tests show that Africans who view that news media is effective in revealing government mistakes and corruption are likely to view that the government is performing well in service delivery.

Third I focus on the effect of corruption (Model 3). The results show that corruption is mainly harmful to service delivery. Of all nine significant effects tapping corruption only three have a positive effect on service delivery. Africans who view high levels of corruption in their countries are less likely to view that the government is performing well or very well in delivering services. Those who view corruption among officials in the presidency, tax officials, judges and magistrates, traditional leaders and business executives are also less likely to evaluate government performance in service delivery positively. Surprisingly Africans who view corruption among government officials and police are likely to view that the government is performing well or very well delivering services. As expected, however, those Africans who view that the government is performing well or very well fighting corruption tend to evaluate positively government performance in delivering services.

After testing hypotheses at the individual level, the next stage is to do so at the contextual level (Model 4). The results reveal that context matters. Africans living in Southern Africa and East Africa and to some extent in Central and North Africa are likely to evaluate government performance in delivering services positively.

Considering all these four explanations simultaneously (Model 5), the results show first that, regardless of changing magnitude, all effects continue to be significant with exception to the level of corruption and Central Africa. Second, the effect of corruption among business executives changed to be positive suggesting that Africans who view corruption among business executives are likely to view that the government is performing relatively well in service delivery but the magnitude of this relationship is almost insignificant (.009). Third, some indicators (e.g. corruption among local councillors and religious leaders) turned to be significant.

Assessing the contribution of each of these explanations individually, the explanatory power of economy (.39) and corruption (.26) considerations appear to be higher than that of media (.02) and context (.02). Overall, the four models contribute with 46 percent explaining government performance in service delivery.

Table 1: Ordinary Least Square Multivariate Regression Model Explaining Government Performance in Service Delivery in Africa

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
ECONOMY					
Government economic performance index	0.587***				0.458***
Economic conditions index	0.105***				0.091***
MEDIA INFLUENCE					
News media index		0.111***			0.083***
Internet news access		-0.02*			-0.022**
Social media news access		0.027**			0.051***
Media effectiveness		0.097***			0.038***
CORRUPTION					
Level of corruption			-0.031***		0.001
Corruption in the presidency			-0.088***		-0.024***
Corruption among members of parliament			-0.003		-0.003
Corruption among government officials			0.024**		0.031***
Corruption among local councilors			-0.007		-0.016**
Corruption in police			0.031***		0.023***
Corruption among tax officials			-0.026***		-0.018***
Corruption among judges and magistrates			-0.04***		-0.021***
Corruption among traditional leaders			-0.011*		-0.011**
Corruption among religious leaders			-0.001		-0.02***
Corruption among business executives			-0.013**		0.009**
Govt. performance fighting corruption			0.46***		0.225***
REGIONAL CONTEXTS					
East Africa				0.113***	0.113***
Southern Africa				0.117***	0.052***
North Africa				0.048***	0.032**
Central Africa				0.047**	-0.002
Adjusted R Square	.39	.02	.26	.02	.46

Notes: The items measuring government performance in service delivery index, government economic performance index and government performance fighting corruption were coded 0=very bad/bad, 1=don't know and 2=well/very well. The items tapping country economic conditions were coded 0=very bad/bad, 1=don't know/same/neither and 2=well/very good. Indicators of news media index and access to news via internet and social media were coded 0=never/don't know, 1=less than once a month, 2=few times a month, 3=few times a week and 4=every day. Media effectiveness was coded 0=not at all/not very effective/don't know, 1=somewhat effective and 2=very effective. Level of corruption was coded 0=decreased somewhat/a lot, 1=same/don't know and 2=increased somewhat/a lot. Corruption among officials' variables were coded 0=none/don't know, 1=some of them, 2=most of them and 3 all of them. The contextual variables are dummies coded 1 to indicate a specific regional category and 0 else. The reference regional category is West Africa.

The indexes were created using factor analysis, which extracted one single unrotated factor using Maximum Likelihood method and reliability analysis, with Cronbach Alpha greater than .60.

Level of significance: ***p=.001, **p=.01, *p=.05. Number of observations (N)=53,935.

Conclusion and Discussion

Evidence coming from Africans themselves reveals that government performance in service delivery in Africa is shallow. Of the seven indicators measuring the act of providing services to citizens, only two – addressing educational needs and improving basic health services - present levels above 50 percent. While the other five indicators are below the 50 percent threshold, the most critically ranked service performed by African governments is ensuring that everyone has enough to eat. Only 33 percent of Africans say that the government is performing well or very well ensuring enough to eat. Although the two well performed services (education and health) correspond to those areas where international donors tend to put more support to African countries, the same does not apply to water and sanitation which also tends to be an area of donor support. This suggests that there may be other factors different than donor support that explain the act of providing services to the people.

By testing four of them simultaneously I conclude that the government act of delivering services is explained mainly by the status of the economy. The evidence shows that when the economy performs well or very well and the country's economic conditions were said to be better or much better individuals also expressed that the government performed well or very well in service delivery. This effect continued to hold even when all other theories were tested against the economic theory.

Following the economy affecting the act of providing service is corruption. When corruption appeared to be increasing and officials were perceived to be involved in corruption, Africans saw that public services were not being provided well by the government. But when Africans viewed that the government was performing relatively well fighting corruption they perceived services were also being provided well.

The third factor is the role of news media. The media influence explaining the government act of delivering services is very shallow but its effectiveness is critical. Those who view that the media is effective in uncovering mistakes and corruption within the government tended to view that the government is handling well or very well providing services. While we expected the rest of news media exposure indicators to have negative effects, as news media tend to enhance the negative (Rosenthal 2009), this study data shows the contrary, with exception to internet news. Africans who often obtain traditional news media (from radio, television and newspaper) and social media tend to view that the government is providing services well or very well to citizens.

A better investigation of this requires one to consider the difference between 'state aligned' and 'private' news media. 'State aligned media' tend to favour the incumbent party and be more informative of government performance while 'private media' tend to be critical of government performance and thus emphasize more the negative.⁹ It

⁹ The CNEP (Comparative National Election Project) is one of the public opinion surveys that specifies news media and allows to make that distinction. Although it did not include media source, Shenga (2007) was able to distinguish between 'state aligned' and 'private' sources of information to analyse its effect on attitudes toward democracy in Mozambique using Afrobarometer survey.

also requires us to consider a country's media plurality. In countries with 'more media plurality' one would expect more critical and negative emphasis on government performance than in those with 'less media plurality'.

The regional African context had little explanation on government handling of services. In order to better investigate the impact of the context, further studies have to consider country contexts by selecting specific countries with particular characteristics.

To finalize, the take outs from this study are that in order for African countries to improve their performance in service delivery their governments have first to improve economic performance and second to tackle corruption. A very good legal framework that can empower anti-corruption units with autonomy and capacity is necessary so that they can detect corruption and take corrupt officials to justice. The same applies to the court system. Yet the public service has to reform adopting New Public Management to be more effective serving the public.¹⁰ African countries have to have governments that can also improve freedom of the press so that the media can be more effective uncovering mistakes and exposing corruption. This suggests the need for more media plurality and less control of the media by state agencies.

¹⁰ New Public Management is an approach to running public service organizations that is used in government and public service institutions and agencies, at both sub-national and national levels. For a quick look: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Public_Management and for further details: Gruening (2001) and Lane (2000). Its basic principles can best be described by seven aspects: management, performance standards, output controls, decentralization, competition, private-sector management, and cost reduction.

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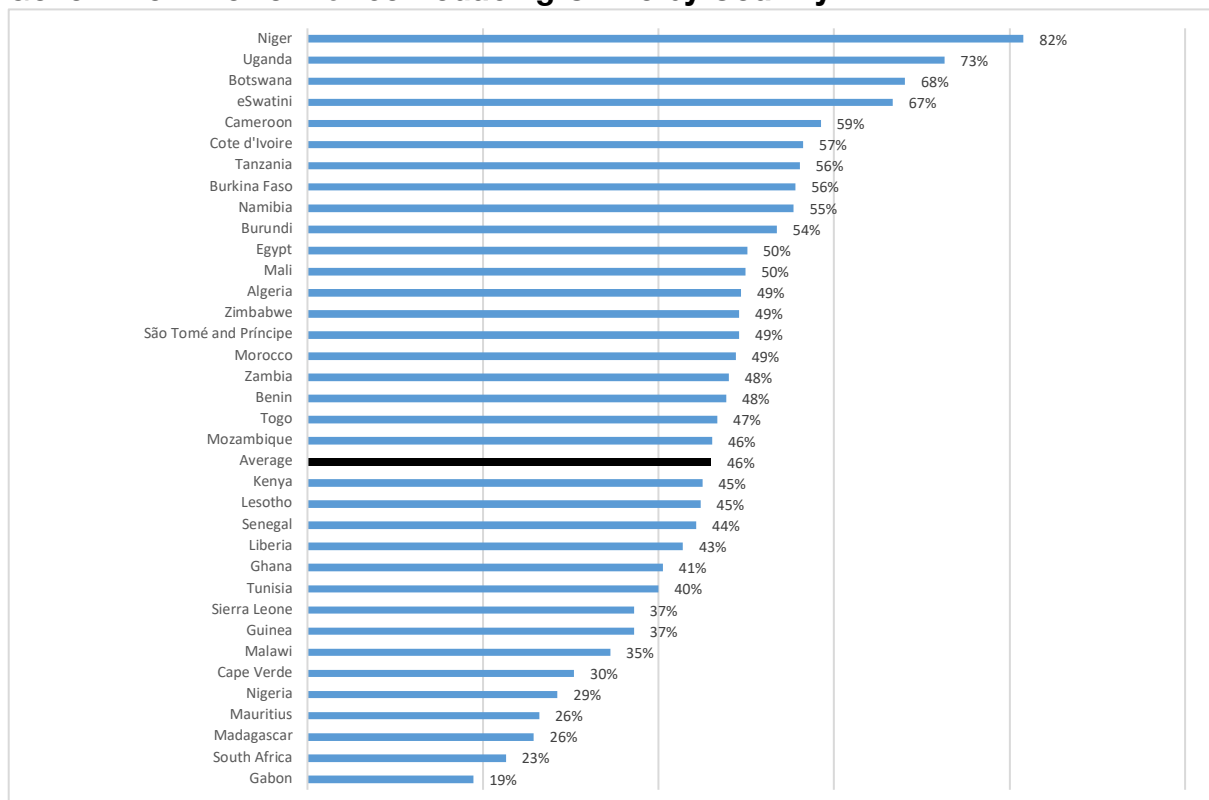
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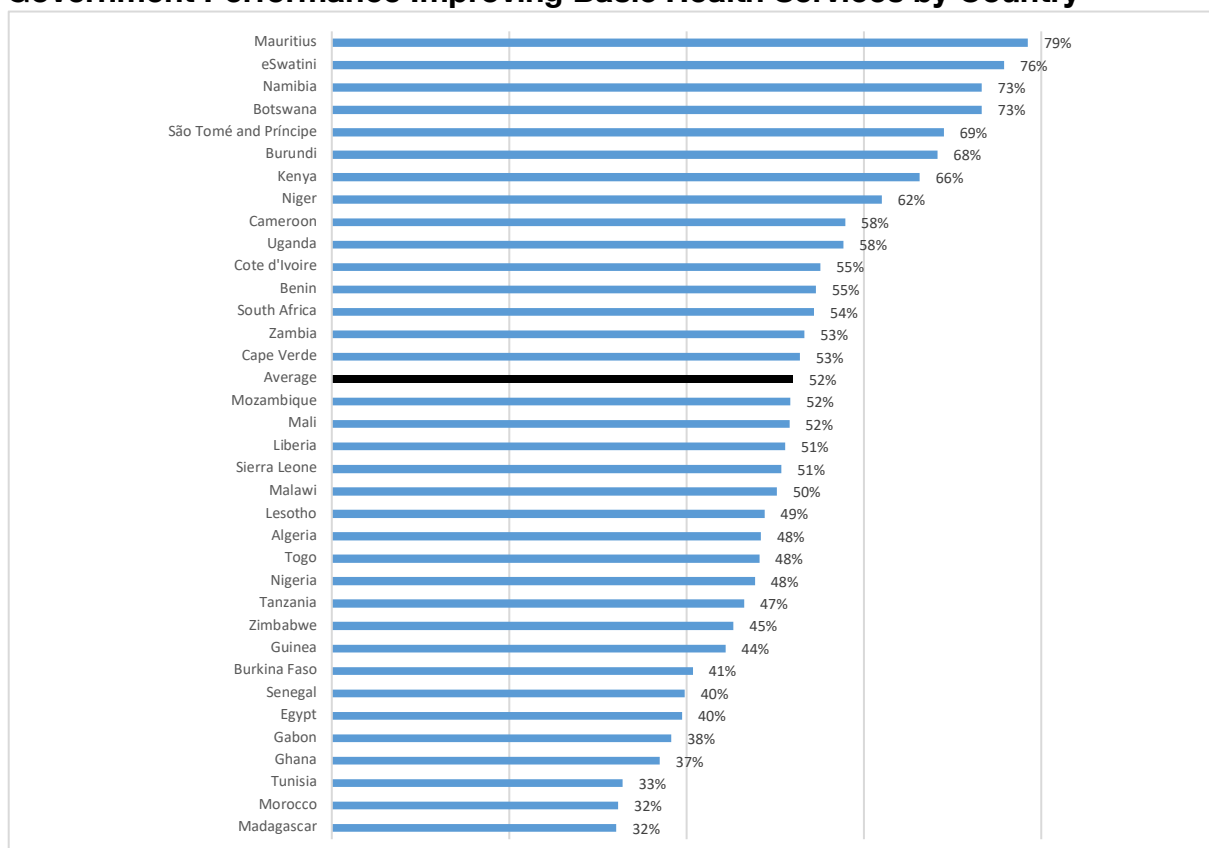
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Annex 1: Government Performance in Service Delivery by Country

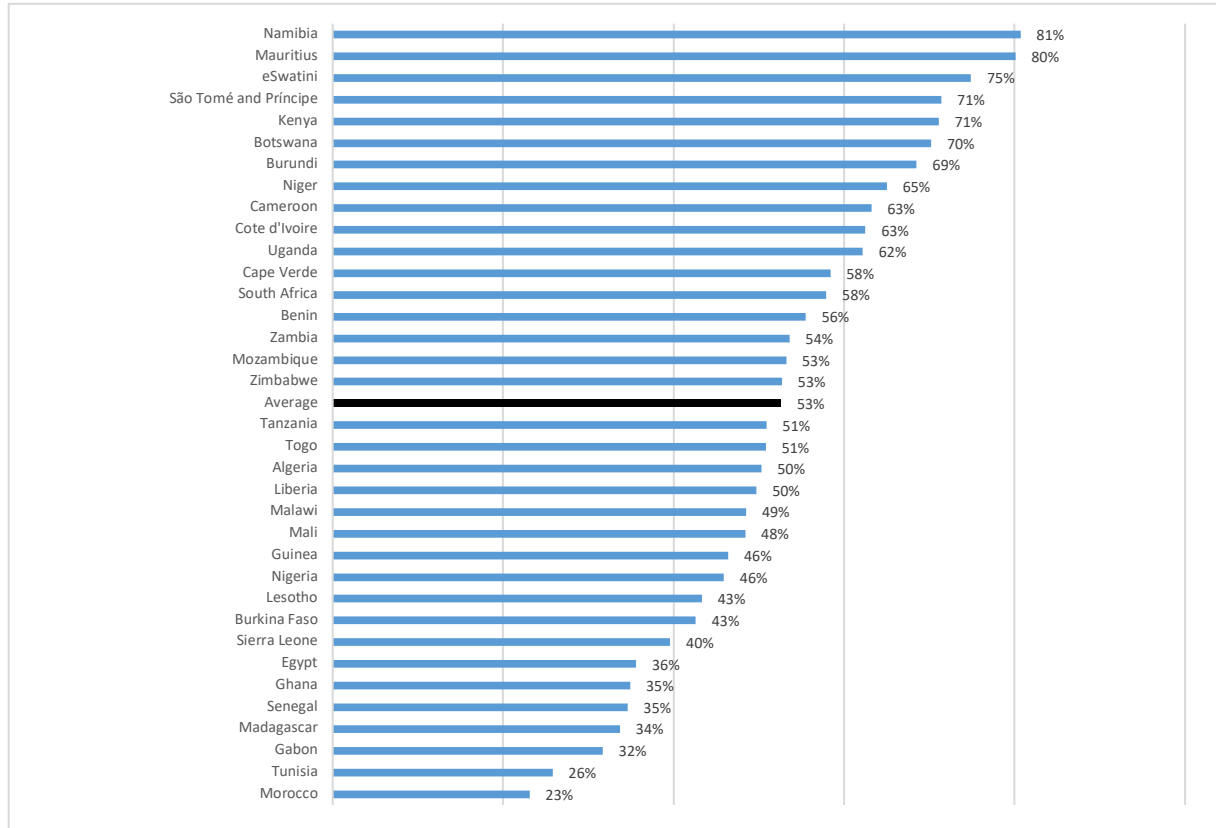
Government Performance Reducing Crime by Country



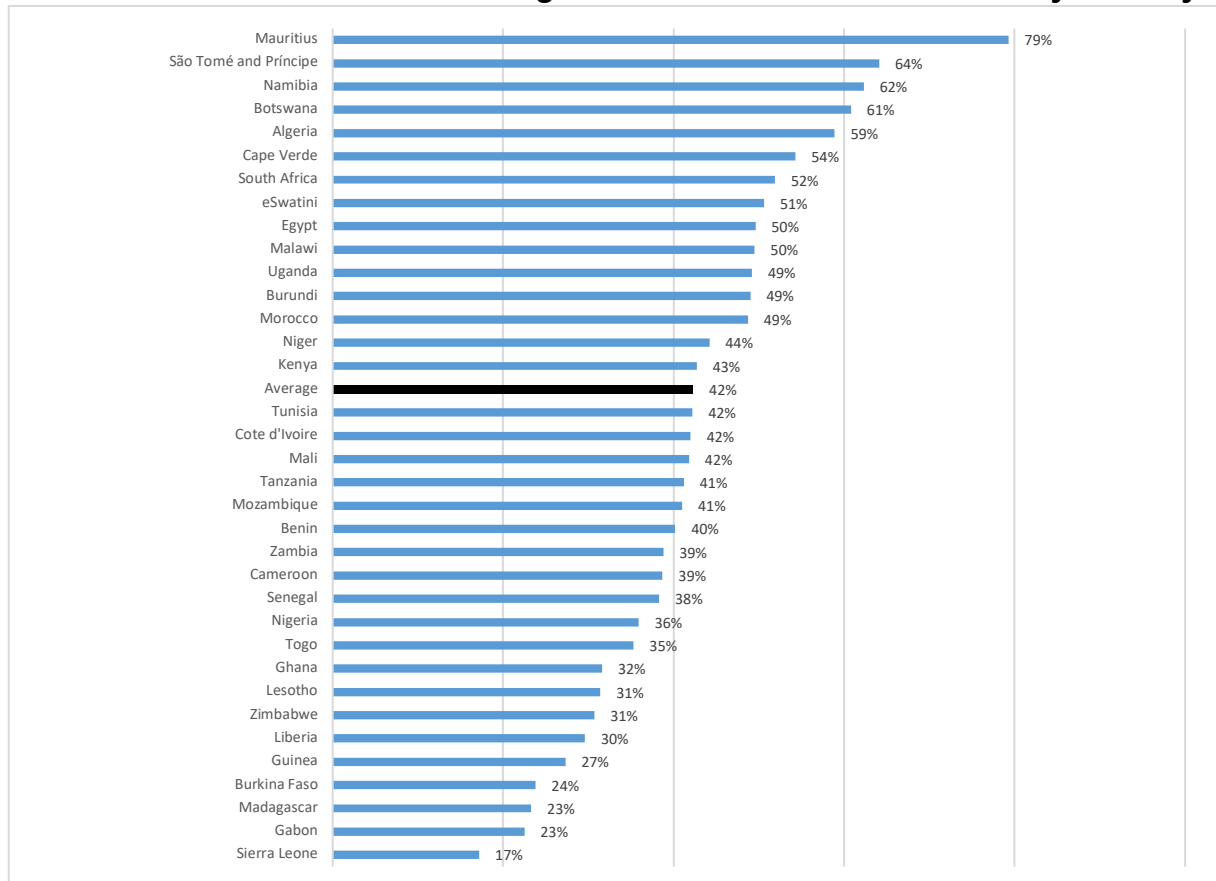
Government Performance Improving Basic Health Services by Country



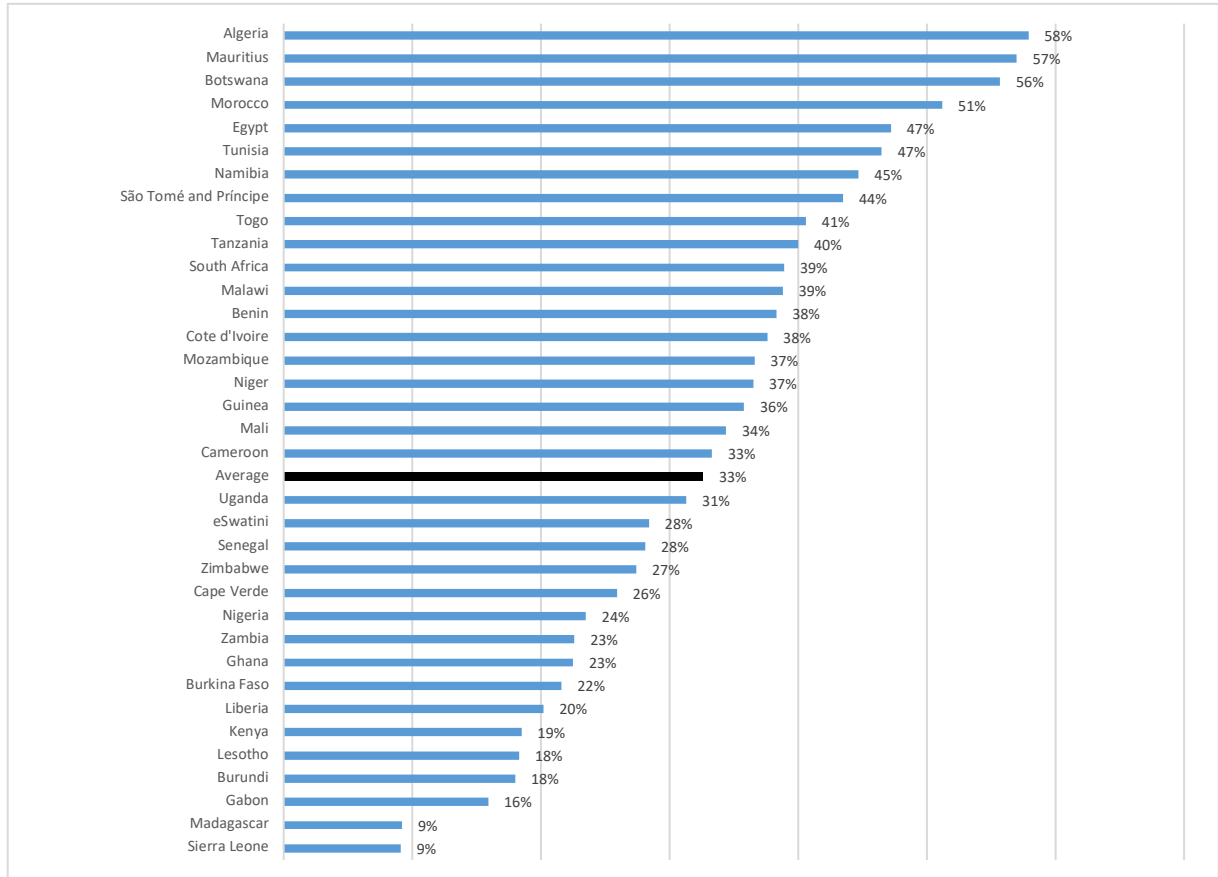
Government Performance Addressing Educational Needs by Country



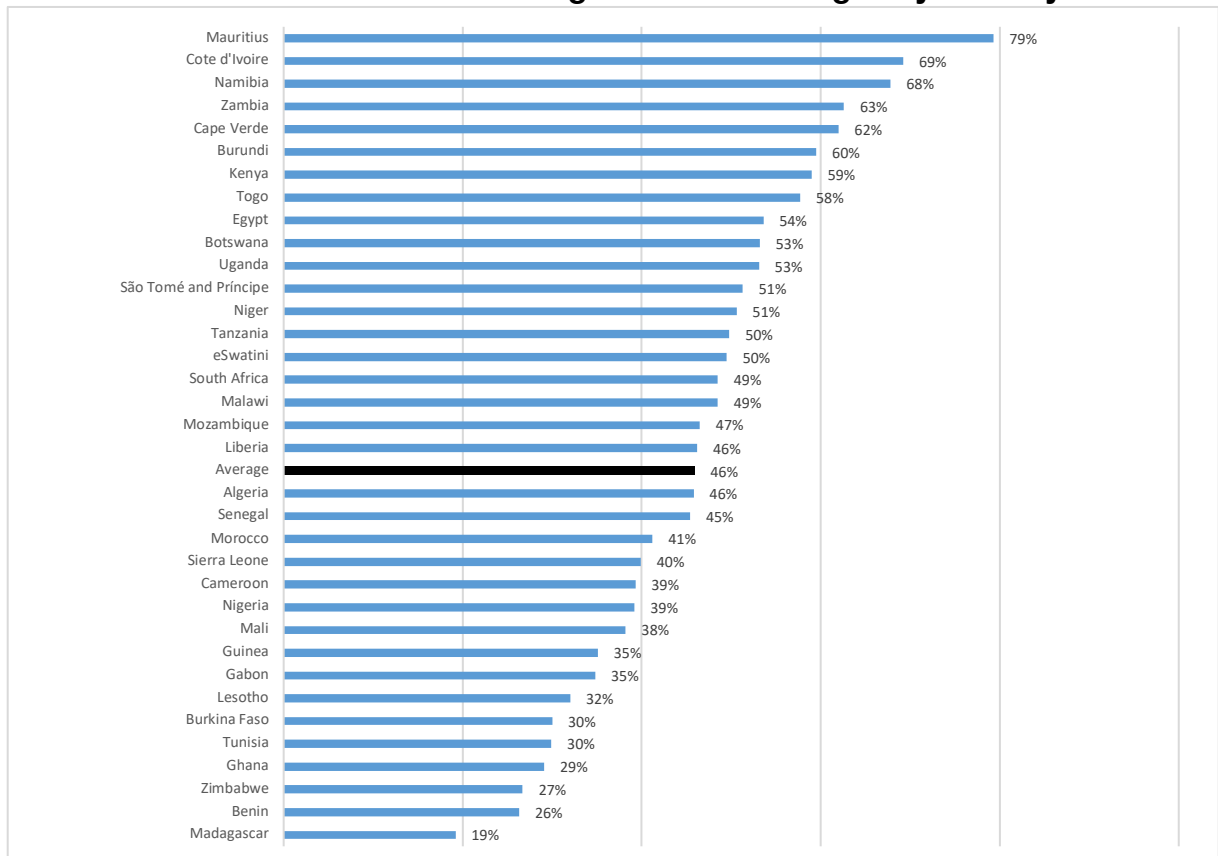
Government Performance Providing Water and Sanitation Services by Country



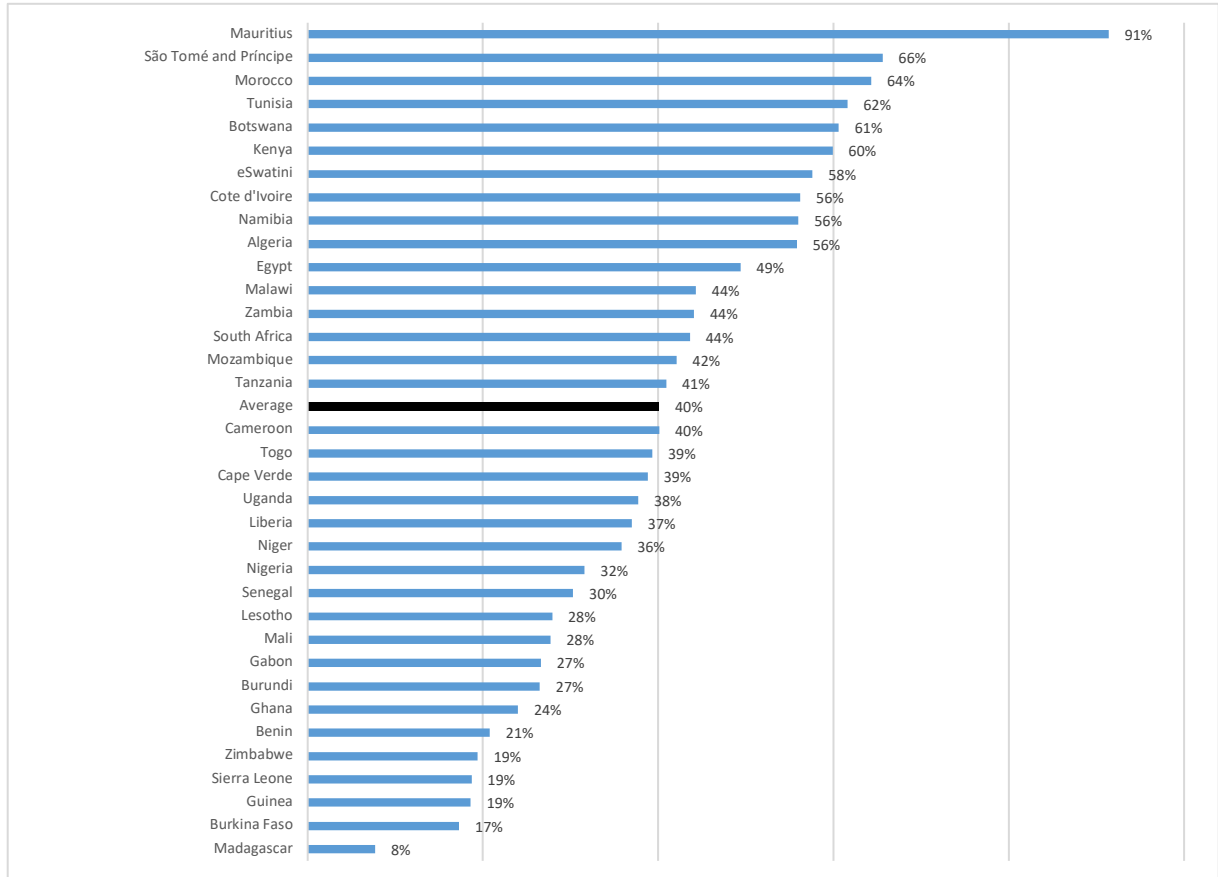
Government Performance Ensuring Enough to Eat by Country



Government Performance Maintaining Roads and Bridges by Country



Government Performance Providing Reliable Electric Supply by Country





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The **Centre for Research on Governance and Development (CPGD)** is an independent and interdisciplinary research institution, established in 2011, dedicated to supporting and conducting relevant, systematic and evidence based research for policy intervention in Mozambique.

CPDG is based in Mozambique, harnessing local expertise, to conduct research in the areas of governance and development, including: democracy, good governance and poverty with the aim of building an effective and capable state that is accountable and transparent, inclusive and responsive.

Our goal is to strengthen empirical social science capacity by supporting and conducting relevant systematic research to inform Mozambican decision-makers for policy intervention and implementation.

Our mission is to produce and promote evidence-based research for effective public policy and decision making in Mozambique.

Our main objectives are:

- To **produce reliable, evidence-based data** on Mozambican citizens and political institutions,
- To **build institutional capacity** to conduct research and utilize research findings in Mozambique, and
- To **disseminate research results** to inform policymaking and implementation.

The values shared by the organization:

- We are an **independent and interdisciplinary** research organization;
- We are **accountable to the public** whose trust we hold;
- We **uphold integrity, neutrality and objectivity** in our work; and
- We are **committed to excellence** in all endeavours.

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*A NOSSA MISSÃO é promover pesquisa e política pública baseadas na evidência empírica
OUR MISSION is to promote evidence-based research and public policy*