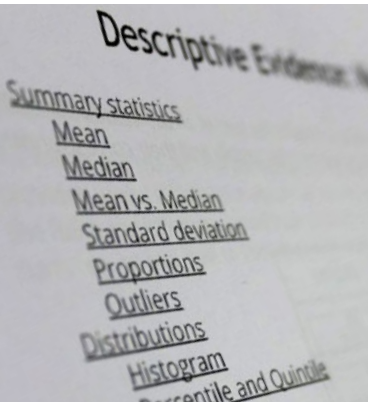


# Training policymakers in the use of data & evidence



**HARVARD Kennedy School**  
*Evidence for Policy Design*

Government will serve citizens better when policymakers believe in evidence and know how to use it.



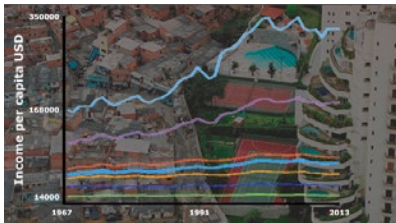
Based on this premise, the team at Evidence for Policy Design (EPoD) has developed a model for instilling an appreciation of evidence and skills for its use among policy decision-makers — capacity-building courses that EPoD can deploy in different countries and contexts, and match to different levels of experience.

- EPoD created six digital learning units that teach analytical frameworks and practical skills to evaluate and use data and research evidence for policy decision-making — topics such as impact evaluation, aggregating evidence, and commissioning evidence.
- Over the course of the four-year Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence (BCURE) program, funded by UK Aid from the UK government, EPoD developed and tailored the content of the units for a target audience of civil servants.
- EPoD deployed these courses across South Asia using a blended learning model that combined online learning through the six digital learning units and in-person instruction that leveraged the fact that participants had engaged with the units beforehand.
- The application of this blended approach involved customizing each iteration to include case study exercises relevant to trainees' contexts, and creating a tailored classroom experience by incorporating data from online units into class sessions to enable teaching based on trainees' demonstrated understanding of concepts.
- EPoD also holds “Ambassadors of Evidence” workshops to enable local instructors to train others in our content. Through these efforts EPoD is creating a corps of instructors who will deliver the BCURE blended modules to leaders and civil servants in their home countries going forward.

# The BCURE Units



**SYSTEMATIC APPROACHES TO POLICY DECISIONS** reviews alternative approaches to systematic decision making, including cost-benefit analysis, decision analysis, and policy analysis matrices. Trainees explore applying these frameworks for more effective policy decisions.



**DESCRIPTIVE EVIDENCE** improves participants' ability to assess evidence which characterizes a policy situation. The unit focuses on the value of descriptive evidence and the role of statistical sampling, with its implications for drawing conclusions.



**IMPACT EVALUATIONS** motivates the use of impact evaluation as a key input to policy decision-making. The unit focuses on five critical questions that individuals should ask when consuming an impact evaluation.



**COST-BENEFIT ANALYSES** introduces cost-benefit analysis as a tool for comparing policy options and introduces fundamental concepts, such as the social discount rate, methodologies used to estimate costs and benefits, and common assumptions.



**AGGREGATING EVIDENCE** provides methods to critically aggregate multiple conflicting sources of evidence related to a policy problem. Trainees learn to consider data quality, external validity, the type of evidence most needed, and the predictions of theory.



**COMMISSIONING EVIDENCE** looks at commissioning new evidence to fill knowledge gaps for policy decisions. Trainees practice determining policy questions that new evidence can speak to, and identifying the best forms of evidence to answer them.

## What is *blended learning*?

EPoD's blended learning approach maximizes returns to learners' time in both the virtual and physical classroom. Participants in BCURE blended-learning trainings complete online BCURE units ahead of in-person class time, allowing learners to work at their own pace and providing instructors with quantitative and qualitative data about their learners. Professor Dan Levy, a pedagogical expert at Harvard Kennedy School who led development of the digital platform, says the blended approach "gives you, as the instructor, a window into students' minds before you even step into the classroom."

**87%** of those enrolled in courses rate the digital units as either effective or very effective

## Data Training in Practice

EPoD has seen its sustainable training model take hold in India and Pakistan. In India, hundreds of civil servants have participated in EPoD's BCURE courses. In addition to delivering specialized versions at governmental ministries, EPoD works with the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), the country's premier civil service academy, to deliver trainings to officers at multiple levels of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS).

In Pakistan, graduates of EPoD's inaugural Ambassadors of Evidence workshop in February of 2016 have gone on to instruct over 1,600 civil servants at the National School of Public Policy. We asked trainees in Pakistan how they put evidence to use in their day-to-day jobs.

- Sultan Muhammad Nawaz Nasir used tax data to analyze low tax filing compliance.
- Zaheer Abbas Malik undertook a study to understand hospital management problems.
- Noman Falah-ud-Din Vardag used data to increase efficiency of postal deliveries.
- Muhammad Naseer analyzed data on previous pay increases to construct a reasonable raise for employees under the Pakistan Ministry of Commerce.
- Mukhtiar Ahmad used survey data to inform an amendment to a Pakistani law about the location of stone-crusher plants.



## EPoD's Training in Action: *a case study*

Policy can often come from the heart rather than the head, especially when focused on topics such as educating children from some of the world's poorest communities. But particularly with such crucial issues, policymakers must base decisions on evidence if they are to ensure that spending directly targets the problem. EPoD training can help them do this.

The Government of Punjab, Pakistan's highest-population province, planned to incentivize workers in brick kilns—a population beset by poverty and instability—to enroll their children in school by providing school uniforms free of charge and giving out cash transfers conditional on school attendance. This is just the type of policy that can get rubber-stamped without analysis because it seems unquestionably beneficial.

Mr. Arqam Tariq, a District Coordinating Officer, was tasked with implementing free school uniforms and conditional cash transfers in the Sheikhpura district of Punjab. Based on his EPoD training, he conducted two activities.

Tariq commissioned a **cost-benefit analysis** that revealed that the costs of the program would be extremely high in his district, in contrast with low expected benefits as the program was currently designed. Tariq knew that to have the intended impact, the plan for rolling out the program would have to be revised.



Tariq then **analyzed administrative data** and saw an anomaly: the total number of brick kiln workers as centrally compiled was constant, but each district showed large fluctuations in the number of workers over time. This suggested that a subset of households migrated regularly to find work—and Tariq reasoned that those households who stayed in one place might serve as appropriate testing ground for the new policy, as there was a clearer pathway to impact when the location (and school uniform) remained constant.

Tariq optimized the target beneficiaries of the program by looking at data from the past three years and identifying 1,100–1,200 children from households that moved less frequently and thus who could benefit most from the program. This new policy is now in its implementation phase—it is being watched closely to see if it is successful in raising enrollment.

## What do BCURE trainees say?

In March 2017, EPoD conducted its second program in Kathmandu, Nepal, with both a policymaker training and an “Ambassadors of Evidence” training-of-trainers for participants from Nepal, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Trainees describe the program:



**AHMED MUNIRUS SALEHEEN**  
Joint Secretary in the  
Bangladesh Ministry of Finance

*“Sometimes you have the opportunity to use evidence, but you don’t have the capacity. But capacity and opportunity should go hand in hand. I think the program that EPoD has conducted here is aimed at building the capacity of a number of targeted people who definitely have the opportunity. So when this opportunity is supplemented by this capacity—that is going to be something really good and will definitely contribute to better decision-making in the arena of public administration in particular.”*



**JYOTI ADHIKARY**  
Assistant Professor at  
Kathmandu University School  
of Management

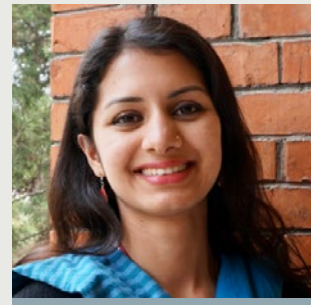
*“These four days of training made me understand what information and data are important for the policymakers as well as what types of research evidence might be relevant for them. I can always use this understanding while I plan some action-oriented research, or design my research question, or decide the type of information I need to collect.”*



**IRFAN QURESHI**  
Assistant Professor of  
Economics, Lahore University  
of Management Sciences

*“As a teacher I take keen interest in pedagogy and exploring new teaching styles. So for me, I think the main take-away was the cutting-edge teaching techniques that are currently being used. The EPoD faculty also elaborated on the use of technology in teaching, how to sharpen delivery and how to engage students that will enable me to be a better teacher and effective communicator.”*

*“My interaction with the EPoD team and policymakers from India also led to cross-country comparisons and what could be done in the field of education. So that was yet another positive spillover that I honestly wasn’t expecting from this program.”*



**ANITA POUDEL**  
Training and Research Officer  
at the Nepal Administrative  
Staff College

*“I think this kind of training should be continued in a larger scale, including the senior level of management and, if possible, the ministers, because they are the ones who play a major role in approving the decisions and policies. We studied many best cases and the successful impacts they created. Those kind of cases and success stories could be compiled, and then used as training materials. After BCURE, I conducted a study to know the existing gap in evidence-based policymaking practice in Nepal based on the concept and focus areas that we learned during the workshop.”*

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# 73.5%

of trainees who responded to a follow-up survey say they use evidence on the job more frequently than before BCURE training

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**NAWIN SONA** heads up procurement for the Department of Agriculture Marketing as Secretary to Government and MD in Maharashtra, India. He has written extensively on the use of data in government, and can describe what a trainee with a good degree of technical knowledge will take from the program:

*“There were some very strong concepts like counterfactuals, and how to look at different alternative scenarios, how to weigh the different options, methods by which to come to a better cost-benefit ratio, and many other techniques. It gave me exposure to the different techniques and how to choose the appropriate one for an optimum solution. That was one of the big takeaways here.*”

*“It is quite pertinent that EPoD developed this training for people who are taking very big decisions financially in government, whose programs have impact that is large and long-lasting. For these people, the right choices should not be based on a hunch. I think that message went over really well. EPoD makes a strong point on how one should not act on a gut feeling that a program would work, but one ought to really look at the hard facts and assess the real impact of the decision by asking for and using data.”*

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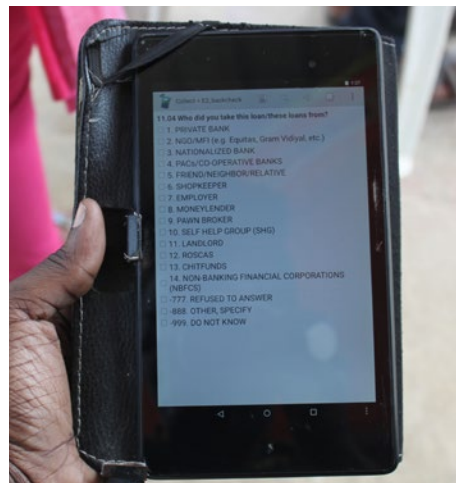
Across the BCURE modules, trainees see increases in technical knowledge. Average learning gains are positive and statistically significant.

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# EPoD is seeking new collaborations to expand this training program to new regions and audiences.

## What does EPoD offer?

- Ambassadors of Evidence training-of-trainers workshops at Harvard Kennedy School to build local capacity to deliver EPoD’s training content and build skills in delivery of the online and classroom model.
- Access to blended-learning resources, including instructor guides, concept review slide templates, and learner data dashboards.
- Enrollment in online units for training participants.
- EPoD guest programs where EPoD faculty deliver customized training and workshops.
- Development of new modules and case studies: EPoD is devoted to building and refining training content in collaboration with policy counterparts.
- Linkages to other training programs that EPoD and its country collaborators offer such as Innovative Leadership in the Age of Data (ILEAD).





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### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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*EPoD developed the BCURE training modules with support from UK Aid from the UK government.*