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Using administrative data to inform policy – JPAL Africa and City of Cape Town collaborate

A collaboration between the City of Cape Town (CoCT) and academic researchers, including researchers from the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab Africa (J-PAL Africa) based at the University of Cape Town (UCT) has supported systematised data access and strengthened data systems with the objective to better use the data collected by CoCT for decision-making on key policy priorities.

The CoCT is developing strategies, capabilities and systems to enable the large amount of data generated in the day-to-day administration of policies and programs, to be used more broadly for research and policy making. These data resources have the potential to help the CoCT tackle multiple and interrelated municipal policy challenges, thus ensuring service provision to communities in a sustainable manner and promoting social and economic development amongst others.

In the recently published Handbook on Using Administrative Data for Research and Evidence-based Policy, Associate Professor Brendan Maughan-Brown and chapter co-authors Hugh Cole (CoCT), Kelsey Jack (University of California, Santa Barbara), and Derek Strong (University of Southern California), discuss the use of administrative data by CoCT and external researchers as well as the development of stronger systems for accessing and analysing administrative data.

They illustrate the potential for administrative data by describing research on pre-paid electricity meters conducted by Jack and Grant Smith (UCT), which found that pre-paid electricity meters led to a reduction in electricity consumption. They also describe how the partnership has advanced CoCT's vision for streamlined data sharing, and how bringing researchers into the planning and implementation process helped to ensure that data sharing solutions work for both policy and research. The end goal is a single, cloud-based, data sharing platform for both public-use and restricted-use data sets, documented in a browsable catalogue with standardised metadata.

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