# What is the empirical evidence linking evidence-generating activities (e.g., an evaluation) to uptake and use to inform specific policy and/or programmatic decisions?

Executive Summary

This literature review synthesizes empirical evidence on how evaluation and evidence-generating activities inform policy and programmatic decisions across multiple global contexts. It examines how evidence is used instrumentally to guide specific decisions, conceptually to shift ideas, and through collaborative processes that encourage stakeholder engagement and institutional learning. The reviewed cases – from countries in Africa, Asia, and parts of Europe – demonstrate that evidence influence does not hinge on a single evaluation but rather on timing, contextual alignment, and strong relationships among decision-makers, researchers, and implementers.

These case studies highlight diverse applications of evidence, such as budgetary reforms, updated procurement regulations, targeted interventions in education, and broader policy adjustments in public health and agricultural development. In each instance, the relevance of findings, timely dissemination, and structured pathways to integrate insights into official deliberations played key roles in shaping outcomes.

Recurrent enablers include effective communication strategies, stakeholder participation, and institutional mandates or frameworks that prompt the regular use of data in decision-making. Where these factors align, evidence can spark meaningful changes and help establish cultures of learning within governance structures.

Overall, this review offers practical guidance for designing and conducting evaluations that resonate with real-world priorities, emphasizing the importance of delivering relevant data at opportune moments and maintaining strong stakeholder relationships. By exploring documented successes, the review underscores the value of evidence-informed approaches for achieving impactful, context-specific policy and programmatic results.

## Introduction

Evidence-generating activities, broadly understood as systematic efforts to collect and analyze information about social and economic interventions, have become integral to decision-making processes in diverse governance contexts (Nelson et al. 2023, p. 11; Fussy 2022, p. 1187). Evaluations, diagnostic reviews, and large-scale monitoring initiatives are commonly commissioned or conducted by government agencies, civil society organizations, and research institutions to provide insights into whether a policy or program is achieving its intended results, what barriers to effectiveness may exist, and how implementation can be improved. While the idea of ‘using’ evidence may sound straightforward, the processes behind it are anything but simple. Uptake depends on alignment with priorities, stakeholder readiness, and institutional norms that govern how new information enters the policy arena (Paine Cronin & Sadan 2015, p. 5).

Among the studies included in this review, many articulate specific pathways by which evidence has shaped decisions about budgeting, regulation, or service delivery (Pophiwa et al. 2020, p. 81; Kawooya et al. 2020, p. 129). Others describe conceptual influences that alter how problems are framed and which solutions are deemed plausible (Amisi et al. 2020, p. 101; Goodnight 2023, p. 639). Still others illustrate how the act of generating evidence – through workshops, collaborative data-gathering, or continuous stakeholder feedback – can build relationships, generate trust, and institutionalize learning that paves the way for more systematic evidence use in the future (Smith et al. 2020, p. 196). By examining this confluence of influences and focusing on documented cases from Africa, Asia, and Europe, we gain insights into the conditions under which evidence sparks meaningful responses.

Nonetheless, limitations in the literature abound. Publication bias remains an inevitable concern, as studies presenting compelling examples of evidence use are more likely to be highlighted, while failures or unremarkable outcomes may go unreported (Paine Cronin & Sadan 2015, p. 8). Some geographic regions and policy sectors are overrepresented compared to others, and it is often unclear precisely which contextual variables – such as political will, bureaucratic capacity, or external donor pressure – are the most critical drivers of evidence uptake (Nelson et al. 2023, p. 15; Fussy 2022, p. 1190). Despite these caveats, each study selected here provides a concrete glimpse of how a documented evaluation or monitoring activity informed real policy or programmatic decisions, thereby illustrating the tangible potential of evidence-based processes.

In the following sections, this review first presents an array of policy and programmatic case studies, offering a closer look at how evidence translates – or fails to translate – into action in particular instances. These case studies are drawn from peer-reviewed articles, published evaluations, and analytical reports that explicitly track the impact of evidence on official decisions and program reforms (Kouakanou et al. 2019, p. 155; Mane et al. 2021, p. 216). Afterward, the discussion moves on to examine the mechanisms of uptake and use, illuminating how instrumental, conceptual, and process-oriented pathways underlie the examples described. Finally, the conclusion synthesizes overarching themes, highlighting how attributes such as stakeholder engagement, timing, contextual relevance, and institutional channels consistently emerge as pivotal enablers of evidence utilization (Stewart 2022, p. 9; Jordaan et al. 2018, p. 461).

## Case Studies of Policy/ Programmatic Impact

A rich body of empirical material demonstrates how evidence, generated in diverse contexts, informs tangible policy and programmatic decisions. Each case underscores how the alignment of stakeholder interests, government structures, and timing can transform new knowledge into reforms or actions. This section draws on studies from South Africa, Uganda, Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, India, and one European Commission initiative, reflecting a cross-regional sampling of how evidence can influence outcomes in distinct policy arenas. Although these examples vary significantly in their sectoral focus – ranging from education to nutrition, procurement, agriculture, health, tax administration, and environmental initiatives – they collectively illuminate recurring conditions that enhance or hinder the uptake of findings.

### South Africa: Funza Lushaka Bursary Programme (FLBP) and National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP).

One exemplary illustration of how an implementation-focused evaluation can drive reform emerges from the Funza Lushaka Bursary Programme, a state-funded initiative aimed at recruiting high-achieving students into teaching (Pophiwa et al. 2020, p. 81). As documented by Pophiwa et al. (2020), the evaluation was commissioned by South Africa’s Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME). It entailed document reviews, semi-structured interviews with select officials, and observational insights from within the department. The evaluation discovered that the bursary was largely effective at bringing skilled individuals into teaching, yet identified inefficiencies in beneficiary placement and gaps in data management. In direct response, the DBE introduced revised selection guidelines targeting geographic and subject-area shortages and upgraded its information management system to track graduate placement more accurately, illustrating a clear instrumental use of evidence. These changes also enhanced the reporting processes, demonstrating that collaborative design and regular feedback loops between the evaluators and policymakers were critical to ensuring the findings were acted upon (Pophiwa et al. 2020, p. 85).

A parallel evaluation focusing on the National School Nutrition Programme, also referenced in Pophiwa et al. (2020), targeted operational efficiency and procurement processes (p. 76). Despite limited data to measure long-term student outcomes, the evaluation highlighted inconsistencies in how provinces acquired foodstuffs and monitored vendor compliance. It prompted immediate updates to procurement guidelines, including a list of compliant suppliers that was shared with provincial education departments (Pophiwa et al. 2020, p. 84). Managers also addressed learner opt-outs through individualized targeting in certain mixed-income schools, thereby adapting the program to local implementation realities. This synergy between evidence and policy changes further underlines the role of stakeholder involvement: workshops, theory of change exercises, and direct engagement with decision-makers instilled ownership over the evaluation recommendations, making them more likely to stick (Pophiwa et al. 2020, p. 82).

### South Africa: Diagnostic Review of Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC).

Between 2014 and 2016, the South African government undertook a diagnostic review of interventions responding to violence against women and children, highlighted by Amisi et al. (2020, p. 98). Employing a realist framework, the review combined semi-structured interviews with document analysis to uncover systemic funding gaps and institutional fragmentation. Once the findings were compiled, the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) and the Department of Social Development (DSD) prepared a concise cabinet memorandum that pinpointed under-resourced sectors needing urgent attention. This short but influential policy document was presented at a time when public awareness of violence against women and children had intensified, and it contributed to an expanded budget allocation in 2018 for relevant social services (Amisi et al. 2020, p. 101). In this sense, the evidence influenced resource prioritization – an important instrumental outcome – but also shaped broader conceptual discussions about the adequacy and coherence of funding models for social welfare. Respondents described how the review encouraged philanthropic and development partners to recalibrate their investment strategies, indicating the conceptual reach of this evaluation beyond government budgets (p. 101).

### Uganda: Public Procurement Evaluation.

In Uganda, a 2012–2013 evaluation of public procurement reforms, discussed by Kawooya et al. (2020, p. 123), illustrates how evidence can directly inform parliamentary guidelines. Through document reviews and interviews with government and donor representatives, evaluators identified inefficiencies in procurement thresholds that led to delays and added costs. The final evaluation report recommended a threshold increase from UGX 50 million to UGX 200 million for standard approvals, alongside greater flexibility for specialized sectors like health and infrastructure. By 2014, these changes were adopted into parliamentary guidelines, marking a clear example of instrumental uptake. Stakeholder engagements played a decisive role: monthly meetings between evaluators and officials allowed the interim findings to be refined, building trust and paving the way for swift endorsement (Kawooya et al. 2020, p. 129). Additionally, the evaluation influenced the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority to prioritize ongoing reviews, showing how a one-time exercise can spark a longer-term shift in institutional culture.

### Benin: Agricultural Sector Evaluation.

Benin’s 2009 agricultural sector evaluation, recorded by Kouakanou et al. (2019, p. 160), demonstrates how participatory approaches can amplify both instrumental and conceptual uses of evidence. Through interviews and workshops involving actors from ministries, producer unions, and donor agencies, the evaluation team compiled data on the sector’s strategic requirements. Crucially, these findings fed into the Plan Stratégique pour la Relance du Secteur Agricole (PSRSA), which redefined agricultural development objectives and paved the way for establishing the Conseil National d’Orientation et de Suivi (CNOS). By involving a broad range of stakeholders early in the evaluation process, the study had significant buy-in, leading to practical measures such as updated legal frameworks and capacity-building programs for agricultural extension services. The evaluation also fostered an ongoing demand for similar evidence in subsequent reforms, illustrating how a well-managed process can seed a culture of continuous learning within a government ministry (p. 155).

### West Africa: Action Research on Tobacco Control.

Regional policy change can also stem from well-coordinated, cross-country efforts. Mane et al. (2021, p. 214) describe an action research initiative conducted between 2011 and 2017, in which 15 country teams across West Africa gathered data on cigarette pricing, taxation policies, and economic simulations of possible tax reforms. Teams typically included at least one academic, a tax administration official, a customs official, and a statistician, ensuring that evidence generation was embedded in a diverse coalition. This approach culminated in a joint position paper presented to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), advocating for higher excise taxes to align with global health best practices. The recommendations were adopted into an ECOWAS directive, with individual countries such as Senegal and Burkina Faso subsequently passing new tobacco tax laws. By centering the collaboration within government and research networks, the initiative overcame industry resistance and delivered data that policymakers found directly applicable to regional treaty obligations (Mane et al. 2021, p. 216).

### India: Annual Status of Education Report (ASER).

Citizen-led monitoring activities can be equally consequential. Goodnight (2023, p. 639) analyzes the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) in India, a large-scale, rapid survey of learning outcomes in rural districts, carried out by thousands of volunteers every few years. By focusing on rudimentary reading and arithmetic skills, ASER gives policymakers and the public clear indicators of children’s proficiency levels that can be easily communicated in mass media. This transparent evidence base, which emerges from a relatively low-cost model, has shaped national discussions on educational quality. Citing ASER in official economic surveys and parliamentary debates has sometimes prompted refinements in budgetary allocations, underscoring how widely accessible data – gathered in an inclusive manner – can alter the direction of educational funding and policy. Although ASER stops short of prescribing solutions, its role in galvanizing stakeholders and elevating learning outcomes as a policy priority is a powerful illustration of conceptual influence transforming into periodic budgetary shifts.

### Ghana: District League Table (DLT) and Holistic Assessment.

In Ghana, two distinct monitoring tools capture how the generation of publicly available data can strengthen accountability and spur service improvements. The District League Table (DLT), studied by Smith et al. (2020, p. 196), ranks districts on indicators ranging from health and education to water and sanitation. Civil society organizations harness these rankings to influence district assemblies and advocate for targeted improvements. Evidence of instrumental use emerged in actions like constructing a toilet and urinal facility in the Garu market, responding to the district’s poor DLT scores. Regular district-level engagements also fostered a process use of evidence, where government officials and community members alike began to see how data could pinpoint service gaps and track incremental progress (p. 197).

Meanwhile, the Holistic Assessment of Ghana’s health sector, detailed by Vecchione and Parkhurst (2015, p. 120), compiles performance data each year and presents it at a National Health Summit, where donors and government officials discuss strategies for improving health outcomes. The final assessment feeds into the Multi-Donor Budget Support Performance Assessment Framework, thereby linking evidence to funding decisions. This interplay illustrates how structured forums at critical decision-making junctures can elevate the significance of evidence, offering a platform for negotiating sector priorities and coordinating donor assistance around transparent indicators (p. 124).

### Nigeria: National Tax Policy Development.

Nigeria’s experience with its National Tax Policy Review Committee, as documented by Sesan and Siyanbola (2021, p. 244), attests to how diverse forms of evidence can be channeled into a coherent policy instrument. Researchers, civil society representatives, and tax administrators pooled multiple data sources – including existing laws, economic surveys, and academic research – to revise the policy framework that guides taxation nationwide. Their final recommendations were incorporated into the 2017 National Tax Policy, illustrating a direct instrumental impact. Yet the process also showcased conceptual shifts, particularly where policymakers acknowledged and integrated stakeholder insights about the implications of tax reform for informal economies. Persistent stakeholder meetings, described as “evidence integration sites,” deepened the conversation around who bears tax burdens and how best to rationalize them (p. 276).

### European Commission: LIFE Programme Evaluations.

Within the European Union context, Højlund (2014, p. 435) examines evaluations of the LIFE programme, an initiative primarily oriented toward environmental conservation and climate action. Spanning several programming cycles from 2003 to 2013, evaluators conducted interviews, reviewed documents, and engaged with project stakeholders to assess the efficacy of funded projects and the overall governance structure. These evaluations had an instrumental effect on refining management practices, such as enhancing monitoring protocols and adjusting funding criteria for future calls for proposals. Over multiple cycles, the findings also prompted the Commission to integrate lessons learned from the LIFE programme into broader environmental policy frameworks, suggesting that while immediate outcomes can manifest in improved program administration, there may also be more gradual, long-term shifts in how institutions incorporate evidence into policy cycles (p. 443).

### South Africa: Socio-Economic Impact Assessment System (SEIAS).

Launched in 2015, SEIAS is a system designed to embed evidence-informed analysis in the formulation of new policies and legislation. Stewart (2022, p. 7) explains that under SEIAS, any proposal heading to Cabinet requires an assessment of its anticipated socio-economic effects, thereby institutionalizing a systematic review of options and potential impacts. This requirement has shaped an increasing number of policy documents in sectors like social grants and public health by mandating that evidence be gathered, synthesized, and explicitly linked to each proposed initiative. While not every assessment leads to major policy reversals, the mechanism itself elevates the place of data within inter-ministerial debates. By formalizing evidence as a prerequisite, SEIAS fosters an environment in which new knowledge is consistently sought out, making it more likely that relevant findings will be considered at the pivotal junctures of policy formulation (p. 9).

### South Africa: UJ-BCURE Mentorship and Capacity-Building.

Capacity-building programs can also catalyze evidence use across various domains. Jordaan et al. (2018, p. 458) describe the University of Johannesburg’s Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence (UJ-BCURE) mentorship program, which linked civil servants in South Africa and Malawi with academic mentors who guided them in accessing and interpreting research findings. One method employed involved systematic evidence maps that consolidated information relevant to topics such as education or healthcare, providing curated resources that mentees could incorporate into their policy briefs. Over time, participants in this program reported heightened awareness of how to locate and apply evidence, leading to what could be described as a conceptual influence: a more robust commitment to supporting evidence-informed policy initiatives. As mentees rose in seniority, they advocated for – and in some instances, established – new procedures for scanning relevant studies before drafting regulations, thus embedding a lasting legacy of the mentorship approach (p. 464).

### South Africa: Landscape Review and Capacity-Building (Stewart et al. 2018).

Stewart et al. (2018, p. 246) document another noteworthy project in South Africa that combined a rapid evidence assessment with a broader capacity-building strategy. The initial evidence assessment mapped the existing landscape of how research was used within government departments, which helped the project team design and deliver targeted training modules for officials. By using preliminary findings as a platform for stakeholder conversations, the initiative ensured that the resulting capacity-building activities directly addressed real institutional gaps. Participants mentioned that they valued the collaborative nature of these workshops, finding them relevant to their daily responsibilities, which in turn encouraged officials to look for ways to incorporate evidence into existing policy processes (p. 249). This case exemplifies how a well-structured review, coupled with tailored capacity-building, can stimulate ongoing demand for credible information.

South Africa: Reflections on Evidence Use by Paine Cronin and Sadan (2015).  
In a broader reflective study, Paine Cronin and Sadan (2015, p. 5) examined how South African officials across multiple departments perceived and integrated research findings into their policy tasks. They found that while some policies benefited from extensive evidence reviews – particularly at their earliest conceptual stages – other initiatives proceeded with negligible use of the available studies. Instances were recounted in which large sums of money were expended on research reports that then sat on the shelf, reinforcing the notion that the mere availability of evidence does not guarantee its adoption. However, when evidence was presented at the right juncture (for example, prior to finalizing a green paper) and connected to pressing agendas (such as reforming local governance structures), it was more likely to be considered. This underscores that timing, combined with institutional mechanisms that incentivize or mandate the use of data, is crucial for bridging the gap between insight and action (p. 8).

### Multi-Country Synthesis by Fussy (2022) and Nelson et al. (2023).

Two broader syntheses shed additional light on how evidence translates into decisions across multiple countries. Fussy (2022, p. 1187) synthesizes experiences from Nigeria, Myanmar, Indonesia, and Bolivia, drawing attention to the role of partnerships, co-authored documentation between policymakers and researchers, and accessible communications materials in catalyzing evidence uptake. In Indonesia, the study found that a high proportion of policymakers contributed to research outputs, creating a sense of ownership that facilitated policy adoption (p. 1188). Across the other contexts, repeated references to open-access data and widely disseminated briefing notes indicate that the more approachable evidence is – both in format and language – the more likely it is to be cited in government plans (p. 1190).

Nelson et al. (2023, p. 11) surveyed evidence uptake from 60 studies of social science research use around the globe, revealing a pattern in which conceptual influence may prevail in higher-income settings, as evidence reframes debates or directs attention to new policy options. In lower-income contexts, the studies found that instrumental use, such as adapting a regulation or altering a budget line, tends to feature prominently whenever credible data can fill gaps in local decision-making (p. 8). However, Nelson et al. also caution that these patterns are not absolute, since the presence or absence of partnerships, strong government ownership, and timely presentation of findings all mediate whether evidence can travel from a research document into an actual policy output (p. 15).

## Mechanisms of Uptake and Use

The case studies outlined above collectively illustrate how evidence can shape policy and programmatic decisions through several overlapping mechanisms, often categorized as instrumental, conceptual, and process use (Vecchione & Parkhurst 2015, p. 120; Kawooya et al. 2020, p. 129). While the original source materials sometimes refer to these concepts in theoretical terms, the salient point is that each mechanism emerges organically from real-world interactions among policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders. By referencing insights directly from the included case studies, we gain a clearer view of how these mechanisms unfold in practice.

Instrumental use is perhaps the most straightforward, involving direct application of evaluation findings or monitoring data to guide concrete decisions. In the Funza Lushaka Bursary Programme evaluation, for example, policymakers in South Africa revised the selection criteria for bursary recipients and enhanced the information management system after specific inefficiencies were identified (Pophiwa et al. 2020, p. 81). This short causal chain – from evidence to action – materialized similarly in Uganda, where the procurement evaluation results led to revised guidelines and thresholds formally adopted by parliament (Kawooya et al. 2020, p. 123). In both instances, the trigger for instrumental use was the presence of actionable recommendations that aligned with immediate organizational needs and could be readily translated into official mandates (p. 129).

Conceptual use operates at a more subtle level, shaping the ways in which policymakers and the broader public perceive issues, define problems, or weigh alternative solutions. The South African diagnostic review on violence against women and children not only triggered additional budget allocations, but also reframed discussions around funding adequacy for social services (Amisi et al. 2020, p. 101), thereby informing how donors and philanthropic groups approached this policy space. In India, the ASER findings recalibrated debates about the quality of primary education by shining a spotlight on learning outcomes rather than just enrollment rates (Goodnight 2023, p. 639). Conceptual shifts often lay the groundwork for future policy modifications, as new understandings permeate discussions and shape broader agendas (p. 639).

Process use emphasizes the role of stakeholder engagement and collaborative research activities themselves. Examples from the Ghanaian District League Table, where district-level workshops and public rankings prompted local officials to discuss and act upon identified deficits, demonstrate how evidence generation becomes a catalyst for collective problem-solving (Smith et al. 2020, p. 196). Similarly, Benin’s agricultural sector evaluation was conducted through participatory workshops that not only elicited policy insights but also forged ongoing relationships among producers, ministry officials, and donors (Kouakanou et al. 2019, p. 160). The iterative feedback loops in Uganda’s procurement evaluation, featuring monthly meetings, represent another manifestation of process use, wherein the evaluation’s progress and preliminary findings were repeatedly shaped by dialogue with government counterparts (Kawooya et al. 2020, p. 129). This ongoing interaction can cultivate an environment of trust, co-learning, and joint ownership that continues to facilitate evidence use long after the initial study concludes.

Across the reviewed cases, certain cross-cutting features reinforce these mechanisms of use. Stakeholder engagement frequently appears as a linchpin, facilitating the co-creation of knowledge and improving the chances of institutional buy-in (Kouakanou et al. 2019, p. 156; Mane et al. 2021, p. 217). Timeliness is similarly pivotal, as evidence that arrives too late in a policy cycle – or too early, when no immediate decisions are on the horizon – may fail to make an impression (Paine Cronin & Sadan 2015, p. 8; Nelson et al. 2023, p. 15). Contextual relevance, including framing issues in locally resonant ways, also enables evidence to be seen as legitimately useful rather than purely academic (Fussy 2022, p. 1189). Finally, institutional pathways, such as the Socio-Economic Impact Assessment System in South Africa (Stewart 2022, p. 7), the National Health Summit in Ghana (Vecchione & Parkhurst 2015, p. 120), or the formation of new policy coordination units (Paine Cronin & Sadan 2015, p. 5), function as conduits that transform evidence from a static report into tangible changes in budgeting, legislation, or program design.

In essence, whether evidence influences decisions depends less on a specific methodological label or typology and more on how it is introduced and integrated into existing structures. The synergy between instrumental, conceptual, and process use underscores that these pathways are interrelated rather than mutually exclusive. A single evaluation can produce immediate regulatory modifications (instrumental), reframe the discourse around a policy issue (conceptual), and build collaborative relationships that endure (process) (Stewart et al. 2018, p. 249). Thus, the experiences summarized here highlight the multifaceted nature of evidence use, grounded in an interplay of stakeholder needs, policy cycles, and institutional norms that encourage or constrain evidence application (Jordaan et al. 2018, p. 461).

## Conclusion

This revised literature review reveals multiple avenues by which evaluation and other evidence-generating activities inform policy and programmatic change, drawing on documented cases that span education, nutrition, procurement, agriculture, health, tax administration, and environmental initiatives (Fussy 2022, p. 1187; Nelson et al. 2023, p. 11). In each instance, the same cross-cutting attributes repeatedly surface as essential drivers of successful uptake: engaged stakeholders (Kouakanou et al. 2019, p. 160), context-sensitive timing, clear alignment with pressing policy needs (Pophiwa et al. 2020, p. 81), and institutional channels that convert new findings into recognized inputs for decision-making (Stewart 2022, p. 9). Whether evidence leads to tangible shifts in procurement regulations, new budgeting priorities, improved program guidelines, or conceptual transformations in how decision-makers perceive particular social challenges depends on whether these facilitating conditions are in place (Amisi et al. 2020, p. 101; Kawooya et al. 2020, p. 123).

One key insight from the cases is that embedding evidence into formal pathways – such as requiring an assessment before policies proceed to Cabinet, or linking annual summits to budget support – can normalize the expectation that decisions must be substantiated by credible information (Vecchione & Parkhurst 2015, p. 120). This helps overcome the sometimes-erratic nature of policy processes, where research may otherwise be sidelined if it does not coincide with immediate political imperatives. Another recurring pattern involves the value of sustained engagement: iterative meetings, workshops, or mentorship programs build trust and awareness, ultimately encouraging officials to seek evidence more proactively (Jordaan et al. 2018, p. 464; Stewart et al. 2018, p. 246).

Yet, significant gaps remain. Studies rarely highlight instances of outright failure or complete neglect of research findings, partly due to publication bias (Paine Cronin & Sadan 2015, p. 8). Regionally, certain contexts – like parts of Latin America – are underrepresented, limiting our ability to generalize beyond the settings profiled here. Moreover, while these documented cases confirm that evidence is used, they do not necessarily measure the long-term effectiveness of decisions made. Sometimes new regulations or budget lines appear on paper but may still face challenges at the implementation stage (Sesan & Siyanbola 2021, p. 276).

Nevertheless, the body of evidence surveyed here underscores that evaluations and related activities can indeed make a difference, particularly when they speak directly to urgent problems, produce recommendations timed to ongoing policy debates, and bring policy stakeholders on board from the outset (Kawooya et al. 2020, p. 129). Conceptual shifts that alter the framing of issues – in education, agriculture, public health, or social welfare – lay the groundwork for subsequent reforms, while process-related benefits, like building institutional trust and capacity for collaborative analysis, can foster a culture where evidence is more routinely sought and applied (Smith et al. 2020, p. 197). For practitioners, the lesson is clear: how evidence is framed, packaged, communicated, and institutionally channeled often matters at least as much as the technical rigor of the research itself. Aligning these aspects effectively can enhance the likelihood that evidence will not only be heard but also meaningfully acted upon.

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