

# How Global Development Funders

are Prioritizing and  
Investing in  
Evidence-Informed  
Decision Making  
in Government:  
A Rapid Review

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*A Discussion Paper*

Results for All, 2018

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **About Results for All**

[Results for All](#) (R4All) is a global initiative dedicated to helping policymakers use evidence to improve the lives of citizens. We are committed to accelerating the spread of good practices and creating a strong foundation for evidence use in government.

## Rationale for this Study

**To understand how global development funders are prioritizing and investing in the systematic use of evidence to inform government decision making in the countries supported by their grantmaking activities.**

This rapid mapping study summarizes insights gathered from interviews to understand how global development funders prioritize and support evidence-informed decision making<sup>1</sup> in government. It discusses the constraints governments face in promoting the systematic use of evidence, what funders are doing to help address these constraints, and what is needed additionally to build a broad culture of evidence use in governments of the Global South. Its aim is to inform a conversation among development partners that catalyzes collective action to respond to this need.

In a 2017 landscape [review](#), we document over 100 government mechanisms for strengthening institutional, organizational, and individual policymaker capacities to use evidence in policy and practice level decisions (Box 1). The volume of mechanisms identified in the report – largely introduced in the last five to seven years – suggests increasing commitment to evidence-informed decision making in government. Many of the mechanisms, however, appear to have limited reach for reasons that include an absence of broad buy-in, insufficient resources to support practical application of evidence, and weak demand for evidence from policymakers, often because they lack the necessary skills, knowledge, and incentives to find and use evidence in decision making. We posit that a coordinated focus on strengthening these mechanisms – institutional policies and organizational systems and structures – could help governments make more informed and effective policy and practice level decisions that better serve the needs of their citizens.

**The study has three principal objectives:**

1. Understand how funders support the systematic use of evidence in government decision making – what they are currently prioritizing and planned future directions
2. Explore gaps in support for strengthening evidence use in government decision making
3. Gauge funder interest in engaging with other partners to build knowledge and share good practices for promoting evidence use in government

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<sup>1</sup> Defined broadly as the best available information and facts to inform policy, and including research, contextual, and experiential evidence.

## Box 1: 100+ Government Mechanisms to Advance the Use of Evidence and Data in Policymaking: A Global Landscape Review

From January 2016 to March 2017, Results for All conducted [research](#) to document government mechanisms – policies, programs, and practices – for advancing the use of evidence in decision making. The report draws from the literature on evidence-informed decision making<sup>2</sup>, a survey questionnaire, interviews with experts, country visits, and [Evidence Works 2016](#), a global forum that convened senior government officials from forty countries in six continents to share experiences, challenges, and lessons learned in promoting evidence-informed decision making.

The research identifies the main ingredients for evidence-informed decision making as: access to quality data and evidence; policymaker knowledge, skill, and motivation to find and use evidence in decision making; and partnerships that strengthen trust and collaboration between policymakers and key stakeholders in the policy process, including the research community, media, and citizen groups. Government mechanisms described in the report are classified according to these key ingredients, and include examples such as:

- **Improving Access to Quality Evidence:** [MineduLAB](#), a lab for education policy housed within Peru’s Ministry of Education that uses administrative data and experimental methods to test and evaluate the effectiveness of innovations aimed at improving educational outcomes.
- **Building Policymaker Knowledge, Skill, and Motivation:** [Kenya’s Parliamentary Caucus on Evidence-Informed Oversight and Decision Making](#), a voluntary association for members of parliament championing evidence use in oversight and policy decisions. The Caucus’ recognition as a formal body in the Parliamentary Research Services unit helps to ensure continuity in the group’s work even as membership changes following a political transition.
- **Strengthening Partnerships:** The [Maisha Maarifa Research Hub](#), an online platform that gives policymakers and their partners access to research for decision making on topics such as HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health. The Hub was established as a partnership between the National AIDS Control Council, the Ministry of Health Departments of Reproductive Health and TB, and the National AIDS Control and STI Program.

## Study Methodology

The project team began the mapping study with a scan of the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) Registry of datasets for donor funded activities in the Global South with an evidence use-related component. We used this process to identify funders who could serve as an entry-point for an initial conversation and supplemented what we learned from the Registry with an internet search and review of funder websites to learn more about relevant activities and strategies prior to beginning our interviews.

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<sup>2</sup> We define evidence-informed decision making as governments having access to a broad range of quality evidence from different sources (including research, contextual, and experiential evidence) and using it to inform policy.

In total, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 40 individuals from 23 bilateral, multilateral, and philanthropic funding organizations between April 2018 and June 2018 (Table 1 and Appendix A). We identified the informants for our interviews through a combination of the IATI Registry, an internet search, recommendations from the Hewlett Foundation and other partners, and a snowball sampling method where several informants connected us to their colleagues for additional perspectives. In several cases, informants followed-up with additional program documents after participating in the interview.

We used the conversational-style interviews to gather insights on five overarching questions asked over a 30 to 60-minute time frame (Box 2). We then analyzed the interviews to identify commonalities, differences, and key themes.

**Table 1: Interviews with Informants from 23 Funding Organizations**

<b>Multilateral Development Partners</b>	<b>Bilateral Development Partners</b>	<b>Foundations</b>
AfDB (IDEV, Macroeconomics, Policy, Forecasting and Research Department)	DFAT (Australian Embassy Jakarta)	Bernard van Leer Foundation (Knowledge for Policy)
ADB (IED)	DFID (Governance)	Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Measurement, Learning, and Evaluation)
IDB (OVE, Institutions for Development Department)	IDRC (Think Tank Initiative)	Children’s Investment Fund Foundation (Evidence, Measurement, and Evaluation)
UNDP (IEO)	Millennium Challenge Corporation (Sector Operations)	MacArthur Foundation (On Nigeria)
UNICEF (Office of Research – Innocenti)	SIDA (Tanzania Country Office, and Research Cooperation)	Omidyar Network (Learning and Impact)
World Bank (DIME, SIEF, and IEG)	Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division)	Open Society Foundations (Public Health Program)
	USAID Global Development Lab	Rockefeller Foundation
	Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (Department for Africa and the Middle East)	Wellcome Trust (Policy team)
		Westminster Foundation for Democracy

## Box 2: Guiding Questions for Interviews

1. What do you see as the biggest barriers to the systematic use of evidence in government decision making in the countries supported by your grantmaking activities?
2. To what extent are your grantmaking activities helping to address government / country level barriers to using evidence in decision making?
3. Does your grantmaking portfolio support the systematic use of evidence in decision making at the country level? In what ways?
4. What approaches or processes do you use in your grantmaking to assess the impact of activities related to the use of evidence decision making?
5. Within your grantmaking activities, how have investments to advance the use of evidence to inform or influence decision making shifted over time? Where do you see your organization going next and why?
6. Would you be interested in engaging with the Hewlett Foundation and others to build a field in evidence-informed decision making – working collaboratively to support long-term actions for strengthening the use of evidence in government decision making?

## Study Limitations

Our study has several limitations. First, it is not an exhaustive research study on how and what funders are investing in to advance the systematic use of evidence in government decision making. The study was designed and conducted as a rapid review of funder priorities and strategies, with the overarching aim of identifying areas for future collaboration and ways in which governments could be further supported in promoting the routine use of evidence in decision making. Second, our observations and findings are drawn from the perspectives of the individuals we interviewed, mainly experts in economic and social policy research and measurement and evaluation, and may not fully represent an organization's priorities and efforts to support evidence use in government. As our observations are based largely on interviews we also acknowledge the possibility of bias and personal interpretation. Third, given that our outreach to funders was limited to well-known global development funders, it is possible that we have missed new or small funding organizations that are actively engaged in supporting the use of evidence in decision making. Finally, several funders could not be reached for an interview.

## Summary of Main Findings from Funder Interviews

1. Governments face **significant capacity constraints** in promoting the use of evidence in policy and practice and **confront complex political, social, and economic dynamics** in decision making.
2. **Most funders are supporting activities to improve the use of evidence in decision making**, including investments in statistical systems<sup>3</sup> and research and data production, often for a specific sector, product, or policy.
3. Currently institutional strengthening to promote the systematic or routine use of evidence in decisions is **not an explicit objective** of grantmaking for many funding organizations.
4. Many funders are still defining **how best to measure the impact of activities related to evidence use** in decision making.
5. There is a **lack of coordination** in the funding community even in evidence production, where there is a longer history of support.
6. Generally, funders are **open to engaging and collaborating** with others to advance evidence use in policy.

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**Main Finding #1.** Governments face **significant capacity constraints** in promoting the use of evidence in policy and practice and **confront complex political, social, and economic dynamics** in decision making.

Funders consistently identified the following challenges to the systematic use of evidence in government: 1) lack of timely, quality, policy-relevant evidence; 2) limited policymaker skill, knowledge, and motivation to find and use evidence in decision making; 3) an emphasis in government on reporting and compliance over learning; 4) weak organizational capacity to conduct evaluations; 5) unclear rules and procedures guiding and governing the use of evidence; 6) weak partnerships in the policy process – between decision makers, researchers, civil society, the media, and others; and 7) context-specific political and socio-economic factors that negatively influence evidence use. Several informants also mentioned the difficulty many governments face in effectively implementing policies. These challenges are described in additional detail below:

### **Lack of policy-relevant evidence and policymaker capabilities**

- The lack of quality, policy-relevant evidence and knowing where to find it and how to use it to inform decision making is a common challenge at all levels of government and across different contexts.
- Additionally, policymakers often have limited time or technical ability to contextualize global evidence to their specific contexts.

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<sup>3</sup> The [Partner Report on Support to Statistics \(Press 2017\)](#) highlights an increase in investment for data and statistics and an expanding pool of donors and commitments led by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

*“In some cases it’s about a lack of data or not knowing where to get it. Sometimes it’s a lack of relevant local or state-specific data. In one instance, a state wasn’t interested in participating because the data came from a neighboring state, not theirs.”*

*“Research should be relevant and interesting to policymakers.”*

*“Sometimes you have the right evidence but the timing was wrong. A lot of evidence is produced on a research basis, and not timed to the needs of the decision makers.”*

*“Policymakers are busy. They can’t sit down and read many pages. Research briefs still use inaccessible language.”*

### **Compliance-oriented culture**

- Although government offices have become better at collecting monitoring data, typically, this information is not used to inform the design or implementation of policies or programs.
- Governments are wary about embracing and using evaluations for learning purposes as they are often associated with audits. A compliance focus in government overshadows or precludes a learning culture that allows for experimentation and failure.

*“Evaluation in the wrong hands can be considered threatening, and muzzled quickly.”*

*“Government is not a monolith, there are lots of evidence-based agencies, many places where this culture already exists.”*

### **Uneven and weak organizational capacity**

- Funders disproportionately use external consultants to conduct evaluations and are partly to blame for weak evaluation capacity and a lack of evaluations conducted by governments themselves. Although many planning departments have monitoring and evaluation units they often lack capacity – training and tools to use monitoring and evaluation in decision making.
- Evaluation capacity is uneven across offices and where it is strongest it is typically because of external support. In Tanzania the Ministry of Health has a strong monitoring and evaluation unit established with the support of external funders. Evaluation capacity in the Ministry of Education, which has not received the same level of external support, on the other hand, is much weaker.
- In other cases, a scarcity of financial and human resources overburdens existing capacities to use evidence. One informant noted that in Parliaments, many research assistants who are supposed to work on translating evidence and writing policy briefs end up being personal assistants for MPs, because of the limited parliamentary staff.

*“Other donors create parallel data systems that the governments don’t use.”*

### **Unclear process or framework for translating policy to action**

- Few organizations have systems or structures to govern or guide how evidence is used, what criteria it should fulfil, when it should be incorporated into the policy



process, and who is responsible for what roles regarding evidence production, synthesis, dissemination, and use for decision making.

- For complex, multi-sectoral policies in particular, it is hard to identify who should be doing what once a policy is developed. Who implements the policy and how will it be financed, and importantly how can evidence be used to inform these questions?

### **Lack of strong partnerships**

- Limited ongoing collaboration and partnerships between decision makers and research partners can mean that policymakers only engage with evidence producers around a crisis or big decision, rather than building trust gradually and sustaining it over the long term.
- Limited collaboration with civil society hinders the ability of governments to collect data, input, and feedback from citizens to inform and improve policy and practice.
- Government partners often hesitate to engage with media groups, but it is important for them to consider how strategic partnerships could help them use evidence to more effectively communicate the depth and scope of social problems, the rationale for specific interventions, and the results achieved.

### **Challenges specific to political, social, and economic dynamics**

- Resource constraints limit the production of quality evidence. Although a line ministry may want to collect additional data, commission further research, or take a more innovative and results-oriented approach, its ability to engage in these activities depends on support from the Ministry of Finance, which is often conservative in its approach. This could help explain the commonly cited tension between line Ministries and Ministries of Finance or Budget.
- Governments must balance tradeoffs between spending limited resources on new programs and services or on evaluating existing ones; policymakers in settings with especially scarce resources often find it difficult to justify collecting data rather than purchasing school textbooks, for example.
- Government policymakers and their programs are often under-compensated, and as a result, attracted to donor funding even when it does not align with their policy priorities.
- A lack of incentives for using evidence, social controversy or unacceptability of the evidence, entrenched interests, short timeframes to produce results, political transitions, and preconceived biases all make the use of evidence in decision making difficult in many governments and contexts.
- Several informants noted a need to better understand the factors that motivate a policymaker to use evidence, to bring greater value to funders' support and to become smarter about how they work.

*“Governing is daily anxiety, you have problems you have to face every day. Governments are short-lived, they know they have a short period of time to do their job and position themselves for the next election.”*

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**Main Finding #2. Most funders are supporting activities to improve the use of evidence in decision making, including investments in statistical systems<sup>4</sup> and research and data production, often for a specific sector, product, or policy.**

Several informants noted that while their organizations may not have an overarching strategy for promoting the use of evidence in government, or a mechanism for capturing this focus in projects and activities, including allocated funding, the activities they support increasingly have a component focused explicitly on data or research use. Informants described the following ways in which their organizations are supporting evidence use:

- Many funders discussed support for evidence use from the perspective of a researcher rather than a government policymaker. Their grantmaking activities suggest a primary focus on incentivizing the production of policy-relevant research and on packaging, disseminating, and communicating research.
  - For example, through the [USAID-supported Partnerships for Enhanced Engagement \(PEER\)](#), a competitive grants program that invites scientists in low- and middle-income countries to apply for funding in partnership with US Government-supported collaborators, researchers can apply for supplemental Evidence-to-Action funds to engage with policymakers on their research.
  - In Tanzania, SIDA is supporting an innovative cluster approach that engages the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH), local government authorities, and academic and research partners on collaborative research and learning to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Many funders support discrete activities aimed at strengthening capacity to use evidence in a specific sector rather than investing broadly in systems, processes, and policies to advance the use of evidence across government (e.g. knowledge translation and management policies and systems or inter-agency data sharing agreements).
  - The Partner Report on Support to Statistics ([Press 2017](#)) prepared by the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21) notes that while investments in data and statistics have increased,<sup>5</sup> both the quantity and quality of support still falls short of what is needed. Support tends to be narrowly focused on strengthening statistical capacity for specific sectors rather than on addressing broad structural and capacity needs of statistical systems, and development partners are not consistently using partner country data and monitoring systems.
- Several informants described loan or grant structures that promote evidence use in policy.
  - Through a focus on institution strengthening in five-year country agreements (Compacts) that outline shared responsibilities for achieving development objectives, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) invests in data and evidence practices that governments use long after a Compact has ended. For example, MCC is working with the government of Morocco to create an

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<sup>4</sup> The [Partner Report on Support to Statistics \(Press 2017\)](#) highlights an increase in investment for data and statistics and an expanding pool of donors and commitments led by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

<sup>5</sup> Several of the funding organizations included in our study were among the top five providers of development cooperation in statistics in 2015. They include Canada, AfDB, European Commission / Eurostat, UNFPA, and the World Bank. Source: [http://www.paris21.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/PRESS2017\\_web2.pdf](http://www.paris21.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/PRESS2017_web2.pdf)

evaluation unit that will inform the country's approach to Technical and Vocational Education and Training. Additionally, MCC's indicator tracking tables are helping to strengthen government capacity to routinely monitor progress and make adjustments in program activities.

- Other informants described instruments such as Policy-Based Loans (ADB) and Programming for Results (AfDB) as having a focus on institutional strengthening to achieve policy reform and development results.
- Through our interviews, we identified ten specific ways in which funders support evidence use in policy: support to media; advocacy and communications; training programs, workshops, and conferences; partnerships; networks; diagnostic tools; data collection, management, and training; evidence synthesis and guidelines; policy dialogues; and a rare focus on the whole evidence ecosystem.

### **Support to Media**

- Through its On Nigeria program, the MacArthur Foundation is supporting Nigerian-led efforts to strengthen accountability and transparency in government. On Nigeria's grantmaking activities include support to media groups to strengthen data-driven journalism – compelling data stories that are translated into accessible and understandable formats for citizens and policymakers.
- The Bernard Van Leer Foundation builds partnerships with the media to ensure quality coverage of Early Childhood Development-related issues is prominent and accessible to both the public and policymakers.

### **Advocacy and Communications**

- The Bernard Van Leer Foundation engages in advocacy and communications activities to advance evidence-informed early childhood development policies in several of its focus countries, including India and Israel. Advocacy efforts in these countries benefit from the Foundation's established reputation as a known and trusted partner.

### **Training Programs, Workshops, and Conferences**

- Several funders support training initiatives aimed at strengthening government capacity to conduct and use evaluations in decision making. Some direct their support to global training initiatives such as the Center for Learning on Evaluation and Results (CLEAR). CLEAR is supported by the African Development Bank's Independent Development Evaluation Department (AfDB IDEV), while the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) offers limited scholarships for CLEAR workshops to decision makers supported through its grantmaking. CLEAR has recently shifted its approach from training individual policymakers to building partnerships with centers such as the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA), to strategically embed capacity strengthening programs into local institutions and mitigate risks associated with the high turnover of political officials.
- The World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group sponsors the [International Program for Development Evaluation Training \(IPDET\)](#), which over the years has seen increasing participation from evaluators in the Global South. The training program takes place over two weeks and provides a forum for participants to learn from each other and expand their network.

- The World Bank’s [Strategic Impact Evaluation Fund \(SIEF\)](#) hosts quarterly workshops on the basics of impact evaluation with the objective of increasing the use of evaluation in the policymaking, research, and development communities.
- The World Bank’s [Impact Evaluation to Development Impact \(i2i\)](#) workshops are designed to promote the use of evaluation in policy by strengthening technical understanding of impact evaluations; providing a forum for sharing the latest topically relevant evidence; fostering partnerships between researchers and government policymakers; and offering a space for mapping concrete next step actions.
- UNDP’s bi-annual National Evaluation Capacity Conferences provide an opportunity for government officials from national and sub-national institutions to network and share experiences in evaluation. Pre-conference workshops are designed to offer training on specific evaluation approaches and methodologies.

## Partnerships

- UNICEF supports the [Ethiopian Center for Child Research \(ECCR\)](#), established by the Ethiopian Development Research Institute (EDRI), which aims to strengthen partnerships between key stakeholders in child-focused research and evidence, including academia, the central statistics agency, and line ministries, to inform policy and practice. It is designed to holistically build the child-focused evidence ecosystem and improve the use of data in policy and program design by strengthening the capacity of government researchers and improving the accessibility of research.

*“Promoting the uptake of that research is part of our mandate.”*

*“We have to make a bigger effort to support research communication, and not just via conferences, but how researchers can interact with society.”*

## Networks

- AfDB IDEV supports the [African Parliamentarians’ Network on Development Evaluation \(APNODE\)](#), which aims to strengthen Parliament’s capacity to use evidence in oversight roles and responsibilities. Additionally, APNODE offers a space for parliamentarians to network, learn from each other, and share experiences and lessons learned in exercising evidence-informed oversight roles.
- The Children’s Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF) provides funding for an [interactive and virtual network](#) led by PATH and John Snow International (JSI) that is designed to facilitate information exchange and a sharing of challenges, results, and lessons learned in expanding access to injectable contraceptives between Ministries of Health and their partners.

## Diagnostic Tools

- The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP has developed a [self-assessment tool](#) that governments can use to assess and improve evaluation capacities. The tool can be applied by national evaluation units, line ministries, as well as subnational governments. It can also be used to assess evaluation processes for major national programs. The tool is designed to be used by governments with minimal support from evaluation experts.

## Data Collection, Management, and Training

- Through a partnership known as [Data Collaboratives for Local Impact \(DCLI\)](#), MCC and PEPFAR are supporting projects in Tanzania aimed at improving the use of data in policy and practice, by government, civil society organizations, and citizens. In Tanzania, DCLI has established a [data lab \(dLab\)](#) that provides training and data science support services, an [innovation hub](#) that supports entrepreneurs in designing data-based solutions, and a sub-national project that trains local government officials on the benefits of using data through traditional skill-building activities and innovative art programs. Plans are now underway to expand DCLI to Côte d'Ivoire.
- The Knowledge Sector Initiative in Indonesia (KSI) supported the development of a database with an interactive interface designed to make data more accessible to policymakers.

## Evidence Synthesis and Guidelines

- UNICEF's Office of Research – Innocenti recently released a Mega-Map that provides an interactive overview of evidence from existing systematic reviews and gap maps on effective ways to improve child welfare. Additionally, UNICEF supports the [WHO e-Library of Evidence for Nutrition Actions \(eLENA\)](#), an online library of evidence-informed guidelines for nutrition interventions designed to help countries implement and scale up nutrition programs.
- The Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF) also funds systematic reviews and gap maps in areas including agriculture, water, and sanitation.

## Policy Dialogues and Influence

- Several funders, including the AfDB and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, host discussions aimed at bringing evidence into policy discussions. It is unclear, however, from our conversations whether these policy dialogues are used as a single high-level event to discuss a policy brief, or routinely as a practice to support the integration of evidence at all stages of the policy process.
- The Bernard Van Leer Foundation has shaped early childhood development (ECD) policy in more than 25 countries around the world. In Orissa, India, the Foundation is working with policymakers to draft a policy on early childhood care and education (ECCE) that draws on good practices from around the world to address context-specific questions raised by the state, such as the value of exposing children to native dialects at an early age.

## Evidence Ecosystem

- The [Knowledge Sector Initiative in Indonesia \(KSI\)](#) is exemplary in its whole-of-system approach to strengthening evidence use. KSI seeks to strengthen the production and use of evidence in decision making (traditionally the supply and demand sides), build strong partnerships between the research and policy communities, and support reforms to create an enabling environment for evidence use. KSI's design is informed by DFAT's long history of engagement in Indonesia, its strong partnership with government and deep analytical understanding of the Indonesian context. A key lesson from the first phase of KSI is the importance of starting small, working flexibly, and adapting to political realities to influence change and reform. Informants made clear that KSI is not necessarily a model that should be

replicated in other countries, but an approach that depends heavily on power, political incentives, and other enabling conditions for evidence use.

- The [Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence Program \(BCURE\)](#), an initiative funded by DFID from 2013-2017, was designed to pilot or test different approaches for increasing the capacity of policymakers to use research more effectively, by building skills, creating incentives, and strengthening systems required to access, appraise, and apply evidence in decision making. The final program evaluation makes a case for supporting multiple levels of a system – organizational systems and processes, in addition to individual skill-building activities, to shift incentives in government toward routine use of evidence in decision making.

*“Institutional strengthening is hard to sell, but it is an important conversation.”*

*“A strategic mistake we’ve made is bringing our own rulebooks and banging on the table, thinking that what works in the UN or USAID should be working elsewhere – we need to move away from those assumptions to build evaluation capacity at the national level, and we need to understand the reality of the underlying decision making process, with warts and all.”*

Table 2 identifies six broad approaches that emerged from our interviews, for cataloguing different ways funding organizations support evidence-use related activities. Several activities can be classified under more than one approach and defining focus, and are listed only as illustrative examples.

**Table 2: Examples of funder approaches and activities to support evidence use in policy**

Approach	Defining Focus: Evidence production, use, or combination	Example of Funder Activities
<b>Strengthening capacity for policy research</b>	Evidence production	<p><b>IDRC Think Tank Initiative:</b> Core funding and capacity development for think tanks focused on research methods and skills, policy engagement and communications, and organizational effectiveness</p> <p><b>SIDA:</b> <a href="#">Capacity development activities</a> at universities and research organizations for research, research management, and dissemination of research results</p>
<b>Product-focused</b>	Combination, but dominant focus on evidence production	<p><b>World Bank / DIME:</b> Impact evaluations in 8 thematic areas: energy and environment; agriculture; governance; gender; transport; fragility, conflict, and violence; trade and competitiveness; and entertainment education</p> <p><b>World Bank / SIEF:</b> Impact evaluations in the social sectors: early childhood development and nutrition; basic education; health systems;</p>



		and water and sanitation
<b>Broad institutional strengthening / capacity strengthening</b>	Evidence use	<b><u>DFID Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence:</u></b> Capacity strengthening focused on policymaker skills, incentives, and evidence use practices
	Combination	<b><u>DFAT Indonesia Knowledge Sector Initiative:</u></b> A holistic strategy to strengthen knowledge institutions, policymaker skills, and the link between knowledge production and knowledge use
<b>Issue-focused</b>	Evidence production	<b>Wellcome Trust:</b> evidence to inform health policy  <b>Children’s Investment Fund Foundation:</b> evidence to improve children’s lives
<b>Legislature-focused</b>	Evidence use	<b>Westminster Foundation for Democracy:</b> improving evidence use in Parliaments
<b>Accountability-focused</b>	Evidence production	<b>Omidyar Network:</b> support for data and tools to help citizens hold government accountable

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**Main Finding #3.** Currently institutional strengthening to promote systematic or routine use of evidence in decisions is **not an explicit objective** of grantmaking for many funding organizations.

In our conversations with funders we aimed to distinguish between small, tangential project components that encourage evidence uptake on the other side of research production, and activities or efforts that give central focus to strengthening awareness about the value of using evidence, building policymaker capability to find and use evidence in decision making, or creating organizational systems and practices to facilitate the integration of evidence in the policy process. We hoped also to get a sense of the main stakeholders funders engage with in the policy process.

We found a tendency for informants to describe evidence-informed decision making as a by-product of activities rather than an end-product, goal, or field in and of itself. Several informants noted that their organizations did not have a coherent or overarching strategy for promoting evidence use in government decision making for the following types of reasons:

- Strengthening broad policy engagement capacity outside of the development or humanitarian initiatives they support is simply not in their mandate.
- Many of their projects focus on the production of data and research and end with dissemination. There is limited scope or opportunity to take a next step to measure the use of evidence.
- The highly decentralized nature of large multilateral partners as well as many bilateral agencies significantly limits their ability to enforce and monitor practices related to

evidence use in regional or country offices. Many informants shared the view that this posed a major challenge to instituting organization-wide evidence use practices.

- Government policymakers are not the primary target for their organizations.
- One informant noted explicitly that they are only partly and indirectly engaged in research uptake.

*“We are probably not thinking about evidence use as much as we should be.”*

*“We are definitely still thinking about research evidence for national policy, but we don’t have a foundation-wide commitment, instead, we have an interest in funding platforms that generate data and make it accessible.”*

*“My organization is not an evidence-based policy organization alone, it is a political institution as well.”*

*“Evaluation and monitoring activities are generating costs that are not for the immediate benefit of the people. This is a little bit difficult sometimes to justify even though everyone knows we have to do it, we need it.”*

- We observed that funders who are mainly supporting research initiatives tended to articulate challenges from a researcher’s perspective and used the term evidence-based rather than evidence-informed.
- Informants generally agreed that to date, there has been disproportionate emphasis on research and data collection and quality improvement, with insufficient attention paid to the use of that evidence.
- Only six of the informants we consulted discussed evidence use in the context of a broader ecosystem. These informants recognized the need for a **shift from ad hoc promotion of evidence use to systems-level interventions that institutionalize evidence use, engage with different actors, and promote a broad body of evidence.**

While few informants spoke of an explicit organizational focus on building demand for evidence use in partner governments – strengthening systems and structures and shifting incentives – several described recent efforts to **build internal evidence use practices and learning agendas** in order to better achieve development objectives. The practices are designed to address challenges that limit the effective use of evidence in programs, including a lack of technical skills to synthesize data quickly and use it in decisions; an overall organizational culture that does not place high value on evidence; and an ad hoc or piecemeal approach to using evidence. Some informants view the emphasis on building an internal culture of evidence use as a promising and necessary precursor to structured engagement on evidence use in policy by governments at the country level. Internal-facing evidence initiatives described by informants include:

- The Rockefeller Foundation’s modernizing reforms which aim to openly share data generated through grantmaking activities with partners and grantees.
- UNICEF’s annual DREAM meeting of Data, Research, Evaluation, and Monitoring staff that has become increasingly focused on the use of evidence in policy.
- An upcoming organization-wide survey that will assess UNICEF staff skills and attitudes toward using evidence and how they rate their organization’s performance in evidence-informed decision making.
- A stipulation in the 2016 UNDP evaluation policy that 1% of program funds should be dedicated to evaluations, with funds allocated between the Independent Evaluation Office and country offices.



- The collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) practices USAID and its partners are implementing to improve outcomes and promote a culture of learning.
- Several informants described internal policy teams that had been established within the last two years to encourage and improve the use of evidence across different teams and better influence change.
- At least two informants cited a strong commitment from leadership to advancing evidence use in their organizations.

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**Main Finding #4. Many funders are still defining how best to measure the impact of activities related to evidence use in decision making.**

Informants agreed that measuring the impact of evidence use in decision making is a challenge that deserves more attention. Many openly indicated that they didn't have an answer for how best to do this given the only recent focus on evidence use in their organizations, and shared the following types of perspectives:

- It is challenging to isolate and measure the extent to which evidence informs policymaking given the many other factors that influence the policy process.
- Historically, many funders have not tracked research or evidence uptake.
- Several informants shared indicators that were output but not outcome oriented – measuring the reach of data products (e.g. number of views and downloads) or the number of products developed (e.g. trainings and policy briefs).
- One informant mentioned a need to better understand how to measure the impact of activities on public discourse and dialogue.
- Some informants felt that log frames and results frameworks used to track overall performance of activities also indirectly measure evidence use.

While not a direct measure of impact, we note the many different lenses that funders use to broadly assess enabling conditions for evidence use vary substantially: some informants cited the number of evaluations as an indicator of a government's openness to using evidence, others referred to individual and organizational capabilities, and others mentioned openness to using evidence in Parliament.

*“If we want these investments to endure, we have to invest in data and evidence. Frankly the development community could do a better job of telling that story, but instead they're focused on telling what their dollars bought immediately.”*

*“In my view, we don't have a strong enough theory on what it takes to improve demand and enhance capacity to use data and evidence among other factors to make decisions. Even making this process more explicit could be important, but we haven't unpacked it or stated our theory of change for how we're promoting better informed decision making.”*

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**Main Finding #5. There is a lack of coordination in the funding community even in evidence production, where there is a longer history of support.**

There was consensus among informants that stronger collaboration and partnerships are needed to avoid duplication and missed opportunities and to improve the value addition of their contributions to evidence-informed decision making. One informant noted that there are

several successful examples of coordination at the country level. Others shared the following observations:

- There is an absence of transparency in how funders share information about evidence use-related activities. Funders frequently discover that other partners are undertaking a similar study well after their own study is underway, or they hear from government partners that other funders are initiating similar discussions with them on the same topic. Another described a “power game” where donors who operate in the same country attempt to influence the government using their own evidence and recommendations.
- Funders should capitalize on their specific comparative advantages when considering increased coordination with others. Informants shared, for example, that AfDB has convening power and the ability to get governments to listen; UNICEF through its work in 190 countries has broad reach and influence; UNDP also has broad reach and a reputation for being responsive to country partners.
- Funders do not have a common understanding of the benefits of evaluations and, similar to the perception in government, evaluations are still considered by many to principally fulfill an audit function, thus inspiring fear of scrutiny, reluctance to engage, and even hostility. When funders do commission or conduct evaluations, they are too often evaluating their own work and priorities rather than government projects; the lack of collaboration means the government is rarely involved or learning.
- Funders have different mandates which can challenge efforts to coordinate support for regional and local initiatives such as African Evaluation Society (AfrEA). AfrEA is well positioned to take on a coordinating role in the evidence-informed decision making community but faces significant resource and capacity constraints.
- One informant questioned the usefulness of global organizations that collect data from countries but take a long time to produce reports. The dated information quickly becomes less relevant to government decision making. The informant felt that funder resources would be better spent on strengthening peer review and research capacity at the regional level.

Despite these types of coordination challenges, informants acknowledged the importance of not steering away from giving increased support and attention to the use of evidence in decision making, particularly in the current climate of ‘post-truth’ and populist movements. A few informants described future activities they hope to support, such as a policy network for governments, researchers, and other partners; in-depth knowledge sector support in one country, like DFAT’s Knowledge Sector Initiative in Indonesia; and benchmarking tools to help governments assess evidence practices.

*“We are at the point where evidence use is much higher on the agenda already.”*

*“I do think we’re being a little more aware of the entire system that needs to be in place around data than we were in the past.”*

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**Main Finding #6.** Generally, funders are **open to engaging and collaborating with others to advance evidence use in policy.**

Informants were open and receptive to engaging in a conversation about how to strengthen evidence use in policy and practice decisions with other funders. One informant shared that

while promoting evidence use is not a current priority for her organization, we had a champion in her. Others stated their interest in engaging, with the following caveats:

- They are not doing much yet in supporting systematic evidence-informed decision in government.
- They are not sure if they could contribute financially.
- They are not likely to expand the scope of their current activities.

Some offered specific suggestions for improving coordination in advancing the evidence agenda, namely:

- A global action plan to help raise funds for data collection, statistics, independent research and evaluation, and evidence use.
- A platform for sharing evidence and research methodologies to minimize duplication and facilitate learning and exchange.

*“Donor collaboration to support transdisciplinary research and put policymakers at the center could be helpful.”*

*“It would be great to have a platform for International Financial Institutions to share evidence to 1) avoid duplication and 2) have studies inform each other.”*

## Final Reflections and Potential Next Steps

Based on the interviews we conducted with 40 informants in 23 key global development funding organizations, we offer the following final reflections:

- The importance of strengthening government capacity to use evidence in decision making is not a new concept or a conversation that we can take credit for exposing. What we hope this study will do is call attention to what funders are already doing to promote the use of evidence in government and spur a conversation about what could be done to accelerate these efforts.
- Funders should be applauded for their work to promote the use of evidence in policy and practice level decisions. Although these efforts may not be anchored in an explicit focus or overarching evidence strategy, they represent a promising start that we hope can lead to concerted, intentional, and focused efforts on building evidence systems in government. As a next step, funders could explore ways to improve how they capture and report on current investments to promote evidence use in decision making – with the objective of singling out evidence achievements that are often buried in larger stories. This could be a way to build buy-in for various evidence initiatives. It is also an opportunity to stimulate broad debate and discussion about the challenges, lessons, and successes of different approaches for strengthening evidence use in government.
- We hope that the progression in the funding community from a dominant focus on evidence production to a general consensus that evidence use deserves greater attention, will move next to identifying and supporting mechanisms to help decision makers systematically use evidence to inform the many routine decisions that impact the lives of their citizens. The informants we spoke with widely agreed that more needs to be done to advance evidence use in government. The openness and appetite in the global development funding community for engaging further on this topic give reason for optimism.
- Finally, despite the agreement that more needs to be done to advance evidence use in decision making, very few informants spoke of evidence-informed decision making as a separate field. We suspect this is because evidence conversations to date have

been framed around policy or sectoral priorities and not as an organized ecosystem. We acknowledge that there are many outstanding questions about what it means to institutionalize evidence use in decision making, including which approaches or mechanisms are most effective, that deserve greater clarity in future conversations.

### **How can the funding community come together to advance evidence use in**

**government?** Based on our interviews, we offer the following considerations for next steps:

- An immediate next step could be to engage in follow-up consultations and interviews with funders that expressed an interest in engaging further to:
  - Build common definitions and understanding of evidence-informed decision making, specifically what is meant by systematic or institutional use of evidence, and the policies, practices, systems, and structures that would be most effective at helping governments to achieve this.
  - Explore ways to communicate and share information about efforts to advance evidence use, and create opportunities for funders to share experiences with each other.
- We hypothesize that there could be value for the funding community in collectively investing in core evidence infrastructure – such as dedicated evidence or policy units; skill building activities for decision makers; or structured partnerships between government, research, and academic communities – to accelerate advances in policy and practice goals across different disciplines. As an essential first step, scholarship is needed to understand which institutional arrangements are most effective, in which contexts, and why. The increasingly complex social challenges governments are facing today demand improved coordination and collaboration across a multitude of institutions, policies, and sectors.
- Given the challenges associated with institutional capacity strengthening, and in particular its image as a less attractive and impactful option than investing in a specific approach, product, or commodity, there is a critical need to tell more stories not only about how evidence is used to inform policy, but also to articulate the direct link between institutional capacity – data systems, knowledge management structures, and legislative requirements – and lives saved.
- Finally, an analysis of the value added that each funder could provide to strengthen the use of evidence in government decision making is needed to align partnership opportunities with specific funder experiences and strengths, and avoid duplication.

*“If we want these investments to endure, we have to invest in data and evidence. Frankly the development community could do a better job of telling that story, but instead they’re focused on telling what their dollars bought immediately.”*

*“The cost of making decisions without evidence is extremely high.”*

## Appendix A: List of Interviewees

Name	Organization	Type	Geographic Focus
Karen Rot-Munstermann	African Development Bank (AfDB), Independent Development Evaluation Department (IDEV)	Multilateral	Africa
Thouraya Triki	African Development Bank (AfDB), Macroeconomics, Policy, Forecasting and Research Department	Multilateral	Africa
Marvin Dormand-Taylor and Joey Tan	Asian Development Bank (ADB), Independent Evaluation Department (IED)	Multilateral	Asia
Rachel Machefsky	Bernard Van Leer Foundation, Knowledge for Policy	Philanthropy	Brazil, Côte d'Ivoire, India, Israel, Netherlands, Peru, Turkey
Nushina Mir, Negar Akhavi, and Erik Hedblom	Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Measurement, Learning, and Evaluation	Philanthropy	Global
Suneeta Krishnan	Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Measurement, Learning, and Evaluation, India Country Office	Philanthropy	Global
Erin McCarthy	Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), Evidence, Measurement, and Evaluation	Philanthropy	Global
Ria Arief and Kirsten Bishop	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Australian Embassy Jakarta	Bilateral	Global
Monika Huppi	Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Office of Evaluation and Oversight (OVE)	Multilateral	Latin America
Jorge Kauffman and Jose Antonio Mejia-Guerra	Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Institutions for Development Department	Multilateral	Latin America
Peter Taylor	International Development Research Cooperation (IDRC), Think Tank Initiative	Bilateral	Global

Erin Sines	MacArthur Foundation, On Nigeria	Philanthropy	Nigeria
Lona Stoll, Katherine Dunning	Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), Sector Operations	Bilateral	Global
Jussi Karakoski	Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Department for Africa and the Middle East	Bilateral	Global
Jessica Kiessel	Omidyar Network	Philanthropy	Global
Heather Benjamin	Open Society Foundations, Public Health Program	Philanthropy	Global
Kevin O' Neil	Rockefeller Foundation	Philanthropy	Global
Inger Lundgren	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Tanzania	Bilateral	Global
Anna Maria Oltorp	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Unit for Research Cooperation	Bilateral	Global
Peter Bieler	Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC), Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division	Bilateral	Global
Melissa Lawson	UK Department for International Development (DFID), Governance	Bilateral	Global
Alan Fox, Arild Hauge	UNDP, Independent Evaluation Office (IEO)	Multilateral	Global
Kerry Albright	UNICEF, Office of Research – Innocenti	Multilateral	Global
Sasha Gallant	USAID, Development Innovation Ventures (DIV)	Bilateral	Global
Jessica Lucas and Shannon Griswold	USAID, Global Development Lab	Bilateral	Global
Brian Bingham	USAID, Global Development Lab	Bilateral	Global

Anna Ruddock	Wellcome Trust, Policy team	Philanthropy	Global
Majda El-Bied	Westminster Foundation for Democracy	Philanthropy	Global
Arianna Legovini	The World Bank, Development Impact Evaluation (DIME)	Multilateral	Global
Sophie Sirtaine	The World Bank, Independent Evaluation Group (IEG)	Multilateral	Global
Alaka Holla and Aliza Marcus	The World Bank, Strategic Impact Evaluation Fund (SIEF)	Multilateral	Global