SUCCESS STORY

Using a Global Living Evidence Map to Inform Research Commissioning

Supporting funding decisions on evidence use in economic policymaking

Overview

The Art and Science of Promoting Evidence-Informed Policymaking: A Global Living Evidence Map provides a structured overview of evidence on how to strengthen the use of evidence in policymaking. This success story draws on the November 2026 update of the map, which includes 1,010 studies. By organising studies across mechanisms, outcomes, sectors and contexts, the evidence map helps users see where evidence exists, where evidence is missing, and how the field is developing over time.

One example of the evidence map's contribution is its use in shaping a programme of research on the use of evidence in economic policymaking, commissioned through the Global Research and Technology Development Research Commissioning Centre (RCC), co-led by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) and the University of Birmingham and funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) as part of its Global Research and Technology Development portfolio. This case illustrates how an evidence map can support research commissioning by helping funders identify existing research, examine evidence gaps and consider where additional research could contribute to the evidence base.

The need

FCDO had identified an interest in understanding the use of evidence in economic policymaking and asked the RCC to scope what a research programme in this area could look like. This was seen as a valuable step because, rather than moving directly to funding new research, the scoping process created space to understand the existing evidence base, identify gaps, and test whether proposed areas of research would be useful to funders, practitioners and policymakers.

This scoping was particularly useful in the evidence-informed policymaking (EIPM) field, where research is extensive but dispersed across different mechanisms, outcomes, sectors and policy contexts. Without a structured overview of the evidence base, it can be difficult to distinguish areas that have received substantial research attention from those where additional research could make a useful contribution.

The contribution of the evidence map

The evidence map provided an important starting point for this scoping work. It directly informed a systematic review undertaken by 3ie and the Pan-African Collective for Evidence (PACE), which built on the map's existing coding and framework. Because studies had already been identified and organised against outcomes and mechanisms, the map provided a useful foundation from which the systematic review could be developed in more depth.

By identifying and classifying a substantial body of research, the map provided a structured starting point for the systematic review. The evidence map had already brought together and structured a large body of relevant studies. This enabled the review team to build on existing evidence-mapping

work and undertake a more detailed assessment and synthesis of relevant studies, including what was known, where uncertainties remained and which questions might warrant further research.

The influence

Several insights from the evidence map and related review played some role in the eventual direction of the funding round. One of the most important was the limited number of impact evaluations of interventions designed to strengthen evidence use. This was seen as a key gap, particularly because many of the impact evaluations identified were concentrated in North American contexts. This helped shape interest in commissioning new research that could test evidence-use interventions in other settings, and to generate learning that could contribute to the wider field.

Another important finding was that much of the research examined intermediate outcomes, such as attitudes, motivation and capability, rather than changes in evidence use within policymaking processes or subsequent policy and development outcomes. These findings provided a rationale for considering research that could examine whether, how and under what conditions EIPM interventions influence policy practice.

In this way, the evidence map helped move the commissioning process from a general interest in EIPM to a more specific set of research gaps and expectations for future studies. It helped inform a research agenda for the funding round that aimed to advance the evidence base, especially in relation to impact evaluation, intervention mechanisms, policymaking contexts and outcome measurement.

The value and lessons

The evidence map provided a structured starting point for research commissioning, helping the RCC identify existing research, examine gaps and avoid duplicating work already undertaken. It helped signal where gaps were most visible and supported a more systematic approach to scoping the funding round. The experience also showed that evidence maps can be useful for research commissioning when they are treated as a foundation for policymaking, rather than as the only input.

In this case, the map and systematic review were complemented by wider stakeholder engagement, including consultations with funders, practitioners and economic policymakers, as well as a broader literature review to support scene-setting beyond the scope of the map. This combination helped sense-check the findings, assess whether proposed research areas resonated with intended users, and strengthen the relevance of the funding round.

Looking ahead

This case demonstrates how an evidence map can move beyond being just a repository of studies to become a practical tool for research commissioning. By making evidence clusters and gaps visible, the map helped inform funding priorities, support more targeted investment, and encourage research that responds to important gaps in the EIPM field. This experience illustrates how evidence maps can support a continuing cycle of research commissioning, evidence generation and synthesis. By connecting existing evidence with new research priorities, the map can help inform future commissioning decisions and reduce unnecessary duplication of research.

About PACE

The Pan-African Collective for Evidence (PACE) is a non-profit organisation that supports evidence-informed policymaking across Africa. Its vision is a world free of poverty. PACE works to unlock the potential of evidence capacities, evidence communities, and evidence synthesis to strengthen institutionalised evidence-to-policy systems and support meaningful development and transformation. For more information: https://pace-evidence.org/art-and-science

About this success story

This success story is part of a series showcasing how policymakers can use the Global Living Evidence Map on Evidence-Informed Policymaking (EIPM).

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