

# DRAFT: USAID Evidence Framework

A conceptual framework for using evidence  
for programmatic and strategic decision-making at USAID



# Purpose of the Draft USAID Evidence Framework

USAID's [Program Cycle Policy](#), USAID's policy on [Development Data](#), USAID's [Scientific Research Policy](#) and other guidance define evidence for USAID and clarify standards for research, evaluation, and data management and use. This evidence framework brings information from those sources to articulate USAID's approach to building and using evidence for programmatic and strategic decision-making

This draft is based on a review of common evidence frameworks published by other agencies and it is based on USAID's existing policies and guidance. It is shared with the purpose of engaging internal and external stakeholders in discussion.

Your comments and questions on this draft evidence framework are welcome, and will help USAID to clarify and finalize a final version in the coming months. Please send comments to Elizabeth Roen, Deputy Director of the Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research, at [eroen@usaid.gov](mailto:eroen@usaid.gov).

# What is Evidence for Programmatic and Strategic Decision-making?

Evidence is a body of facts or information that serves as the basis for programmatic and strategic decision-making.

It can be derived from a variety of USAID or external sources, including experiential knowledge, assessments, analyses, program monitoring, evaluations, research, and statistical activities.

Evidence can be quantitative or qualitative.

Evidence has varying degrees of credibility, and the strongest evidence generally comes from a portfolio of high-quality, credible sources rather than a single study.

Source: USAID's [Program Cycle Policy](#) (ADS 201), Definitions



Photo by David Rockkind, USAID

# Using Evidence in Practice

USAID uses the [Program Cycle](#) to ensure programmatic and strategic decisions are informed by evidence. However, in practice, evidence is only one element used to inform decisions. USAID strives for evidence-based practice, which balances several factors when determining the best approach within a given context:

- The best evidence available based on research, evaluation, and other data collections, studies or analysis;
- The individual or combined professional expertise of development practitioners;
- Local and indigenous knowledge, values, priorities, and preferences; and
- Available time, human and financial resources, and political will to implement a certain approach.

# Evidence Standards at USAID

Plan and budget in advance for building and using evidence.

Evaluations must use the highest level of rigor appropriate for the questions and situation, while balancing available resources and time (see figure on next slide)

Research must be of sufficient quality to generate evidence that is credible, reliable and valid.

Use several methods and sources to generate richer information about what happened, why and how.

Consider and value local knowledge and priorities.

Evidence should be relevant and useful for decisions.

No matter the source or method used, share limitations along with the resulting evidence.

Source: USAID's [Program Cycle Policy](#) and USAID's [Scientific Research Policy](#)



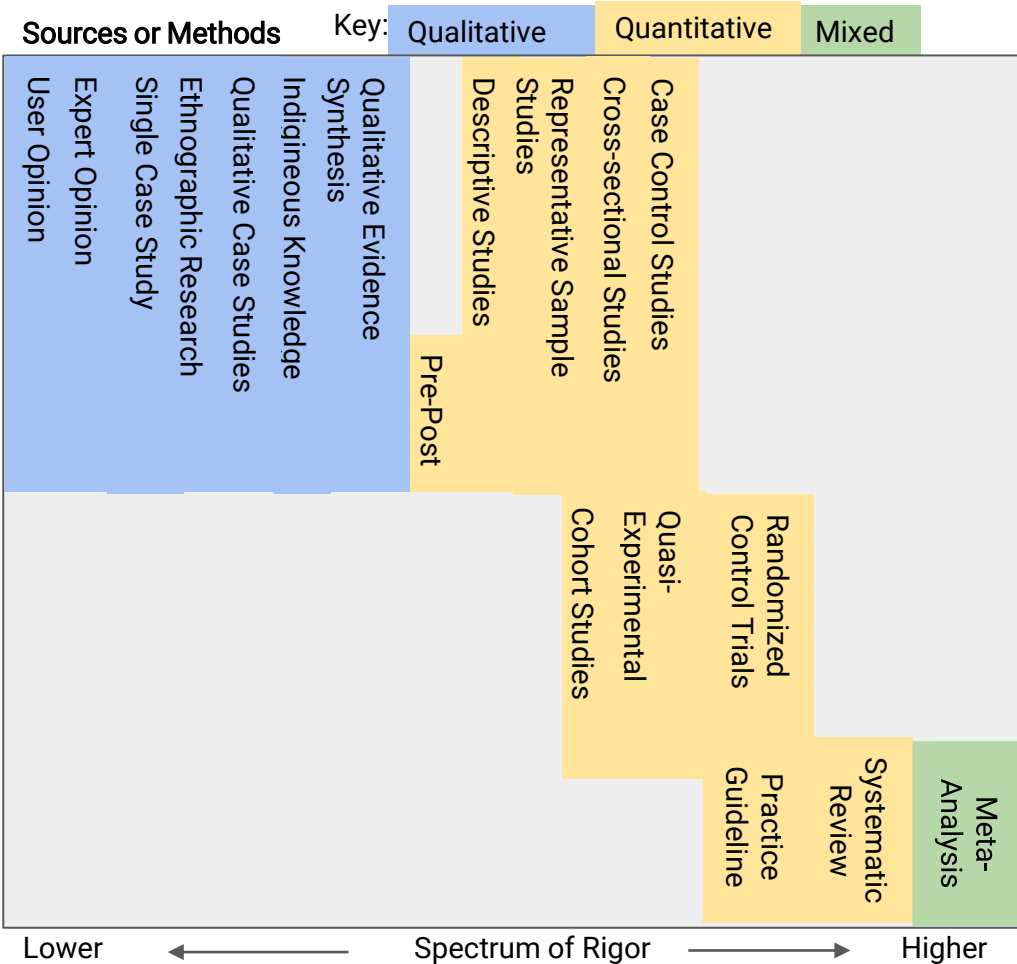
Women from the Ita Guasu indigenous community in Paraguay participate in the development of their community development plan. Photo by Luciano González, Federation of Production Cooperatives (FECOPROD).



# Illustrative Examples of Evidence Sources or Methods Matched with Common Questions

## Questions

- What is the status or context?
  - What should have happened? What did happen?
  - What can be improved?
  - What is the status and what has changed over time?
  - How did USAID contribute to the change?
  - How was program implemented and who did it reach?
  - Did the program consistently meet norms and standards?
  - Who benefited
  - Were there unexpected outcomes?
  - Was there a measurable change in outcome?
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- Did the intervention have a measurable effect on those who participated that was not observed in a statistically matched control group?
  - Does the intervention work better than an alternative approach compared in a specific context?
  - Did the intervention achieve a measurable outcome that can be attributed to it?
  - Is the intervention more cost-effective than other approaches?
  - Does the intervention work in most contexts?
  - Does doing this work better than that?



# Evidence Sources and Clearinghouses

## USAID Development Information and Analysis

[Development Experience Clearinghouse](#): USAID program records and development information, USAID evaluation reports, peer reviewed journal articles, and other analyses

[Development Data Library](#): USAID-funded machine readable data

[USAID Resource Portal](#): portal to a selection of USAID-funded knowledge management platforms and associated research

[Country Roadmaps](#): visualization and trends of 17 third-party indicators curated by USAID to understand country self-reliance

[International Data and Economic Analysis Portal \(IDEA\)](#): Country-level data from multiple third-party sources simultaneously

## Third-party Evidence Clearinghouses

[3ie - International Initiative for Impact Evaluation](#): Evidence Hub with database of individual impact evaluations, systematic reviews, and evidence gap maps

[Cochrane Library](#): reviews of health evidence

[Campbell Collaboration](#): international social science research network that produces evidence syntheses

## Other Federal Agencies' Evidence Clearinghouses

[HHS Administration of Children and Families Research and Evaluation Clearinghouses](#)

[Dept. of Education's What Works Clearinghouse](#)

[Dept. of Labor Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research \(CLEAR\)](#)