Evidence-informed policy making: a conceptual framework

User guide

This guide is to support users in navigating the conceptual framework developed as part of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Research Commissioning Centre programme of work on evidence use in policymaking. Please refer to the accompanying narrative report for greater detail about the development of the framework and its theoretical basis.

Note: This user guide describes a static version of the conceptual framework. A clickable, interactive web version is currently being developed, which will be accompanied by an updated user guide.

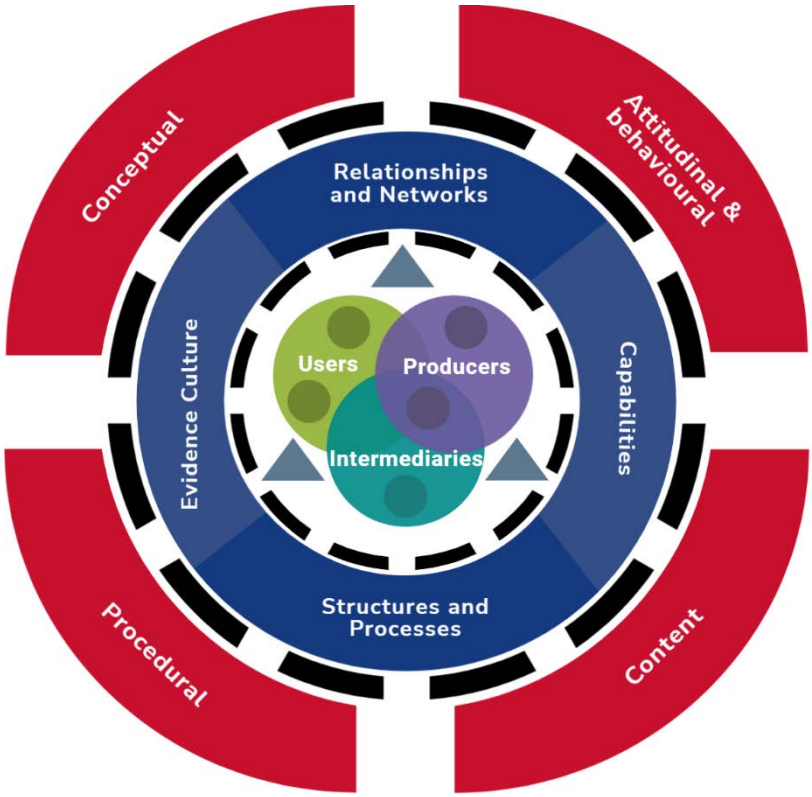

Figure 1: Evidence-informed policymaking conceptual framework

The framework takes a systems approach and is intended to be read from the centre moving outwards. Figure 1 comprises the following elements:

- **Ecosystem of actors** (central overlapping circles): complex interplay of individual actors and institutions that collectively engage in evidence-informed policymaking (EIPM) processes
- **Pathways of change** (middle layer of blue segments): complex journeys of evidence flowing through interconnected actors and levels

- **Moderating/contextual factors** (black dotted bands surrounding the actor ecosystem and pathways of change): conditions that facilitate or impede EIPM
- **EIPM outcomes** (outer layer of red segments): changes resulting from integrating evidence into public policy processes

The evidence-to-policy journey is founded on an interconnected network of actors, including evidence producers, intermediaries and users, operating in an evidence ecosystem. We conceptualise multiple non-linear and dynamic pathways of change that capture the mutually reinforcing routes through which evidence transforms into policy. The evidence ecosystem and pathways of change are in turn influenced by wider contextual factors, which moderate the evidence-to-policy journey. The ultimate outcomes are depicted in the outer ring, which designates the domains in which evidence informs policy.

Actor ecosystem

Figure 2 presents the nested ecosystem model at the centre of our conceptual framework. At its core is a series of overlapping circles representing different actors playing overlapping roles: evidence producers (such as researchers), intermediaries (such as think tanks or embedded policy labs), and users (such as civil servants or elected officials). The larger circles represent the institutional level of the evidence ecosystem in which individuals (small circles) are nested. Institutions are, in turn, nested in a larger system.

External actors (such as research funders or international financial institutions) also influence the evidence ecosystem without directly producing, intermediating, or using research for policy, although there may be some overlap with these functions. External actors are shown as triangles outside the overlapping circles in the centre of the ToC, within the wider actor ecosystem.

Each actor is characterised by particular attributes that shape their perceptions and behaviour—for example, the value they place on research evidence, their technical expertise and professional experience, their ability to communicate research findings effectively, and their relationship-building skills.

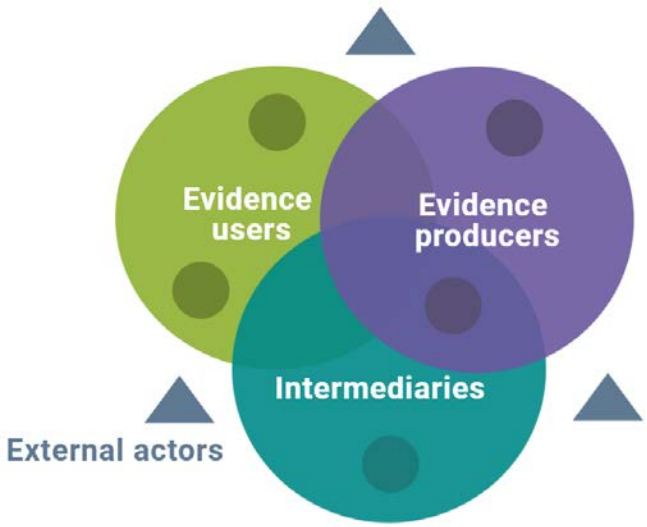

Figure 2: Nested actor ecosystem

Individual actors and institutions are also characterised by the relationships between them. These relationships serve as more than the transfer of information: their effectiveness in facilitating collaboration and dialogue is manifested by built trust, credibility, mutual benefit, and shared understanding and values.

Pathways of change

We conceptualise pathways of change as complex journeys of evidence flowing through interconnected actors and multiple levels (individual, institution and system) (Figure 3). This understanding acknowledges both the transformative processes involved and the contextual factors that shape evidence translation into policy.

Our conceptual framework identifies four main pathways through which evidence influences policy:

- The **capability pathway** operates through multiple mechanisms that enhance individual and institutional abilities to generate, interpret, and apply evidence.
- The **relationships and networks pathway** focuses on creating and strengthening connections between evidence producers, intermediaries, users and other stakeholders.
- The **structures and processes pathway** operates through institutional mechanisms—policies, processes, infrastructures—that drive increased evidence use in policy processes.
- The **evidence culture pathway** addresses the underlying values, beliefs, and norms that shape how evidence is perceived, understood, and used in policy contexts.

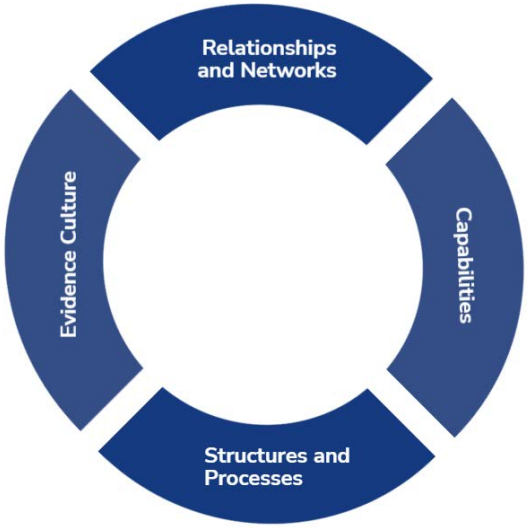

Figure 3: EIPM pathways of change

While this framework identifies four main pathways through which evidence influences policy, we recognise that other pathways likely exist and warrant further investigation. Different contexts, institutional arrangements, and political systems may give rise to other distinct pathways for evidence-to-policy processes.

Moderating barriers-facilitators and contextual influences

Policy decision-making is inextricably linked to the social, political and economic context in which it occurs. We define moderating factors as real-world conditions that affect—whether positively or negatively—how evidence is generated, communicated and used. The dotted bands in Figure 4 show how these factors influence the central evidence ecosystem, including what research is produced, and the transition from evidence to policy through the pathways of change. Examples of such factors include political dynamics, economic constraints, socio-cultural norms and values.

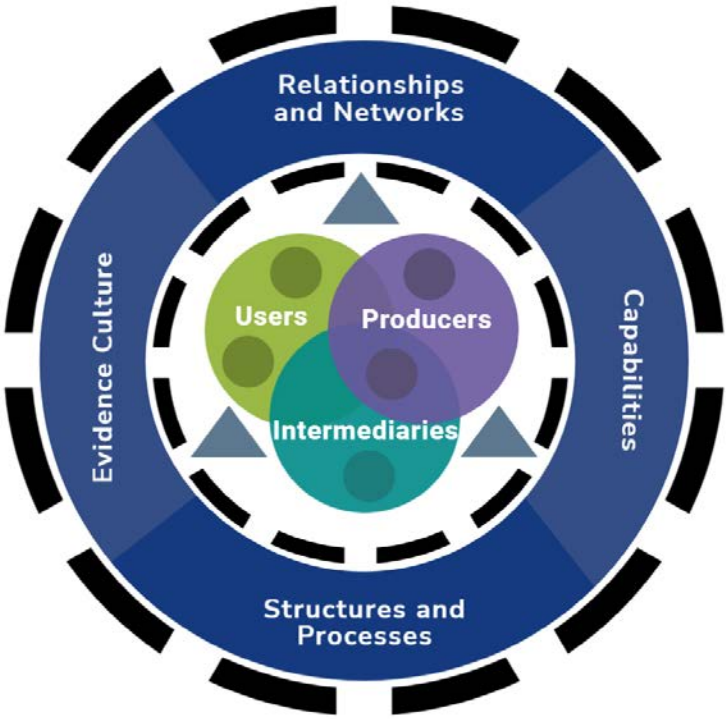

Figure 4: Moderating and contextual influences of EIPM

EIPM outcomes

EIPM outcomes represent the actual changes resulting from integrating evidence into policy processes. We identify four distinct but interrelated domains of EIPM outcomes (Figure 5), reflecting the different ways that evidence can influence policy processes. These comprise:

- **Conceptual outcomes**: when evidence changes in how policymakers conceptualise and understand policy issues and the intellectual frameworks they use
- **Attitudinal and behavioural outcomes**: when evidence drives shifts in attitudes and behaviours among policymakers, including changes in their perceptions of the value of evidence or increased propensity to engage with evidence in policy discussions.
- **Procedural outcomes**: when evidence influences how policies are made, including through enhancing policy development, debate, and implementation processes.
- **Content outcomes**: when evidence directly informs the content of new policies or the revision of existing ones, such as changes in legislation or resource allocation.

These outcomes often occur simultaneously or in different sequences, reinforcing and interacting with each other.

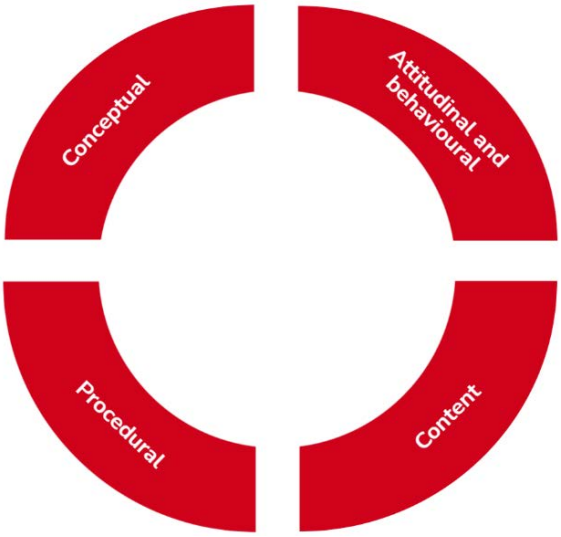

Figure 5 : EIPM outcomes

Measures to monitor evidence use

For each component of the conceptual framework—actor attributes, pathways of change, moderating and contextual factors, and EIPM outcomes—we have identified available measures from academic and grey literature that can be used to monitor them. These range from baseline characteristics of ecosystem actors (e.g., awareness of evidence sources), to intermediate outcomes (e.g., capacity to appraise research evidence) to EIPM outcome measures (e.g., research language in policy documents).

Users are invited to explore the accompanying EIPM Measures Inventory which presents a rich database of measures and related guidance to identify and select tools for assessing the use of evidence in policymaking. The inventory provides detailed information on each measure, including the nature of the measure (e.g., interview, survey instrument); the target population(s), country(ies), and policy sector(s) in which it has been used; the construct(s) it captures; and, for measures targeting unobservable constructs, evidence of validity and reliability. The inventory is filterable by these characteristics to help users quickly identify measures with their desired features. Each measure is also linked to the published paper(s) that use it, which users can consult for more information.

The next iteration of the conceptual framework will interactively link to the measures inventory, allowing users to click on a component or construct in the conceptual framework and be directed to available measures of that domain.