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Global Impact
Evaluation Forum
2024 at the
United Nations

Amplifying impact: Harnessing the power of impact evaluations for evidence synthesis

Panelist

Shannon Shisler, Lead Evaluation Specialist, 3ie

Aprille Knox, Senior Policy Manager, Crime, Violence, and Conflict, JPAL

Pierre Hodel, Policy Manager, J-PAL

Kerry Albright, Deputy Director/Principal Adviser, Evaluation, UNICEF

Agenda



- **Opening remarks**
- **Panelist presentations**
 - **Shannon Shisler**
 - **Aprille Knox**
 - **Pierre Hodel**
 - **Kerry Albright**
- **Panel discussion**
- **Policy discussion**
- **Q&A**



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Examples from 3ie's synthesis portfolio

Panelist

Shannon Shisler, PhD

Lead Evaluation Specialist

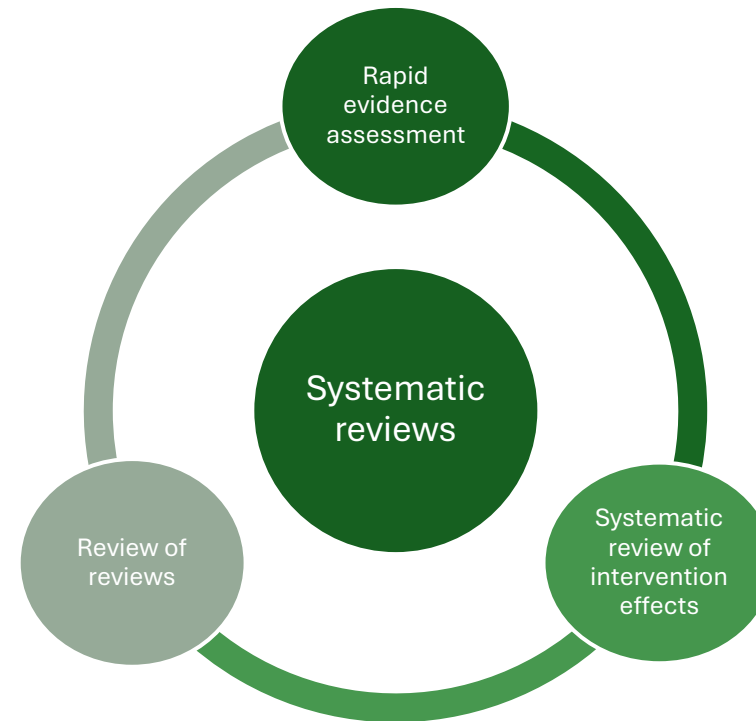
International Initiative for Impact Evaluation

What is Evidence Synthesis



What is evidence synthesis

“...instead of just mooching through the research literature, consciously or unconsciously picking out papers here and there that support [our] pre-existing beliefs, [we] take a scientific, systematic approach to the very process of looking for scientific evidence, ensuring that [our] evidence is as complete and representative as possible of all the research that has ever been done.” (Goldacre, 2012)



Challenges that synthesis can help solve



Poor discoverability

Duplication of work



Fragmented knowledge

Conflicting results



Information overload

Example 1: The Humanitarian Assistance Cycle EGM



Development of the HAEC EGM



It is funded through the **Humanitarian Assistance Evidence Cycle (HAEC) Award**, a USAID BHA award.



An EGM of impact evaluations and systematic reviews of **food security interventions in emergency settings**.



Interventions taking place in any **humanitarian emergency setting**.



First produced in 2022, the EGM was **updated in November 2024**.



To produce a **public good** and to support the HAEC award in **prioritizing IE proposals for funding**.



Key findings

Our EGM includes **186 impact evaluations** and **6 systematic reviews**



Most IEs took place in **Sub-Saharan Africa** (n = 95).



Cash transfers were the most commonly evaluated intervention (n = 56).



Conflict was the most common setting for interventions (n = 41). Drought also appeared in > 30 IEs.

Key findings



11 countries highly vulnerable to an emergency in 2025 have no evidence within our map.

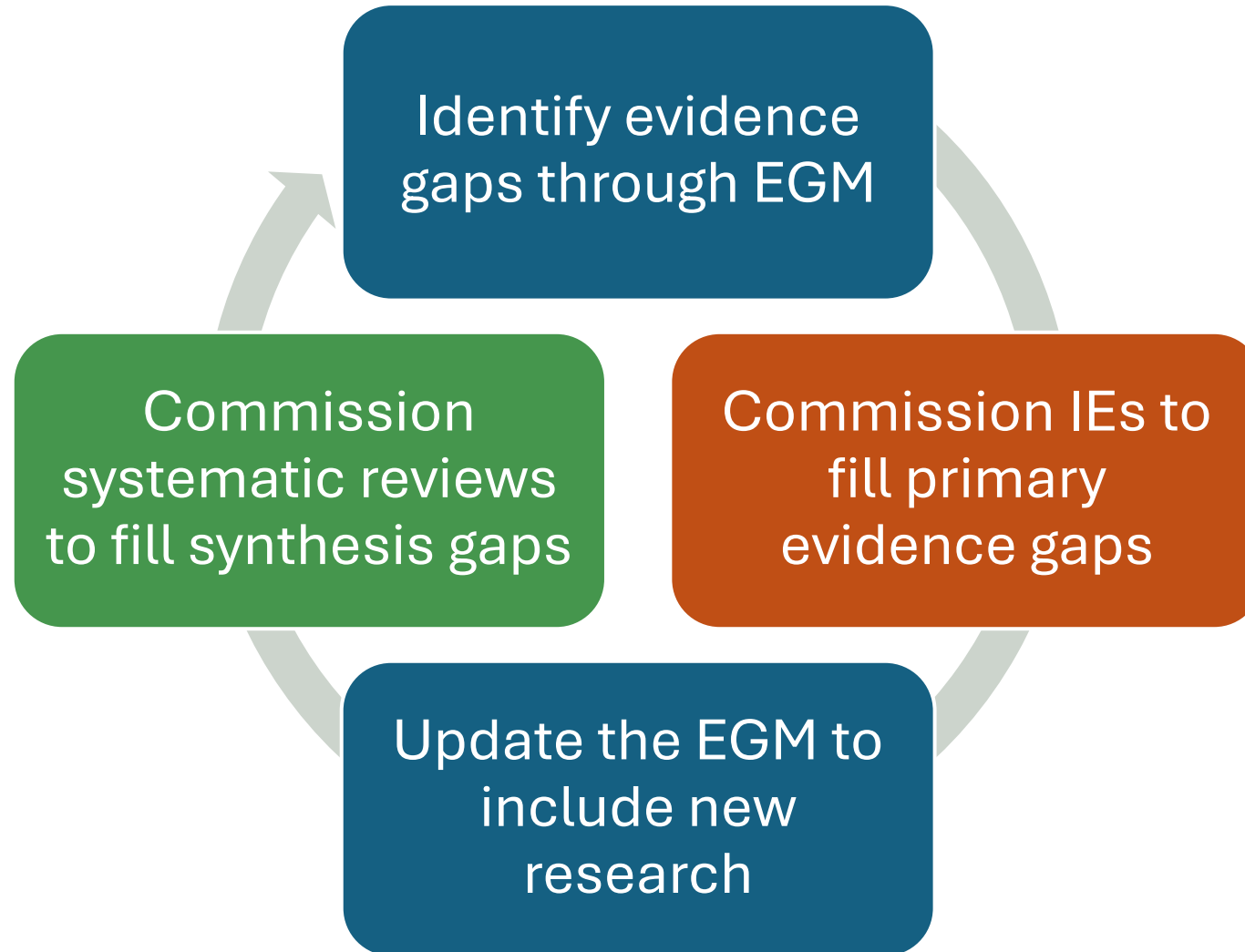


Our EGM highlights many different **innovative IE methods** implemented in difficult situations.



Only **2 SRs** appraised as **high-confidence**, both published pre-2017.

Synthesis as part of the evidence cycle



Example 2: The Women's Empowerment Systematic Review



Development of the Women's Empowerment systematic review



3ie, funded by GIZ



A systematic review on the effects of gender-specific interventions on women's empowerment.



Interventions taking place in fragile and conflict affected settings with high levels of gender inequality.



First published in 2021



To produce a **public good** and to support the German government in prioritizing the most effective interventions to increase women's empowerment in FCAS.



Key findings

We included **136 papers**, corresponding to **104 unique studies** covering **55 different programmes**.



Programs took place across 29 countries, most studies were from **Sub-Saharan Africa** (n = 78).



The studies included data from over **290,000 beneficiaries**



No interventions have a significant negative effect on any outcomes

Key findings

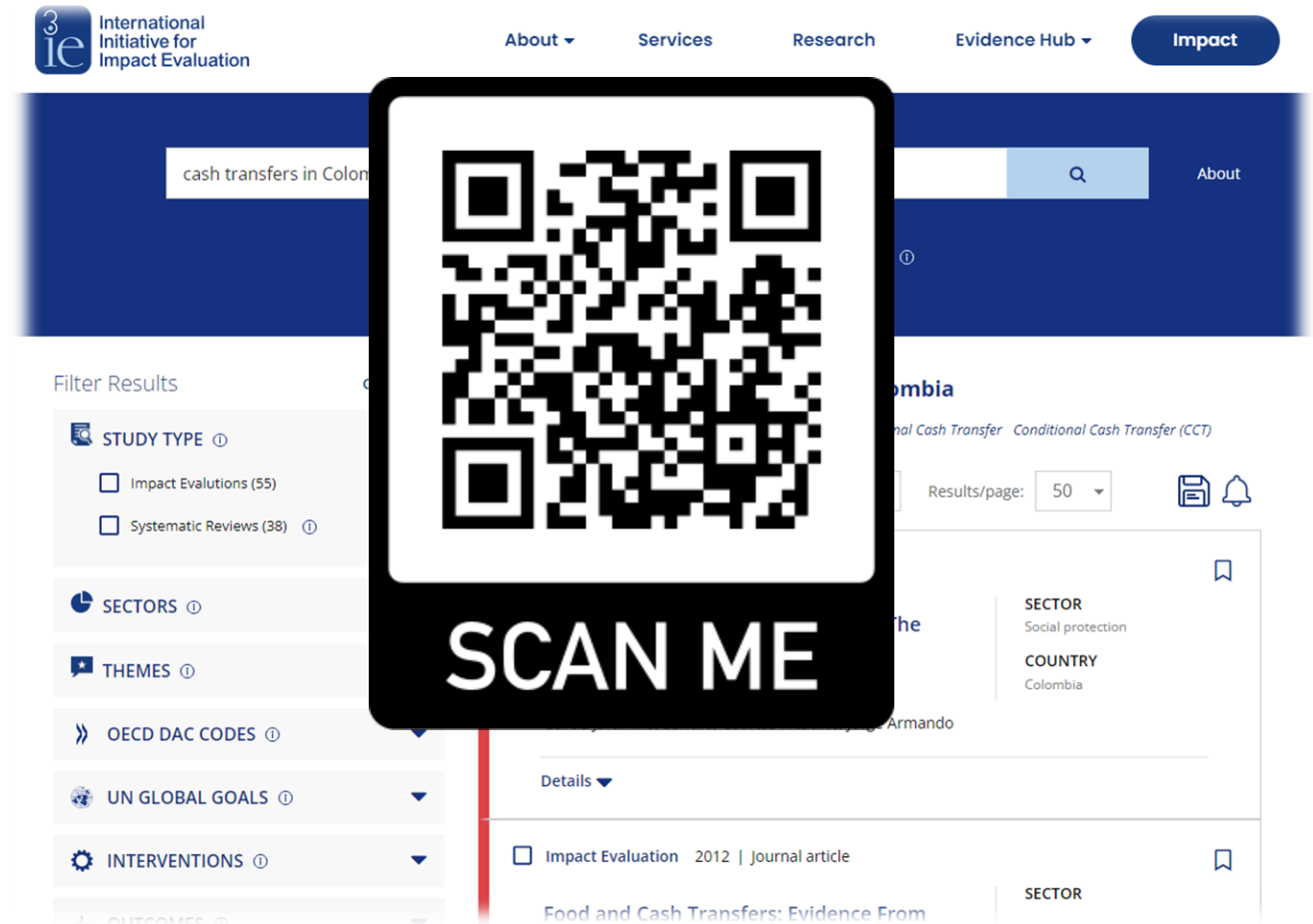


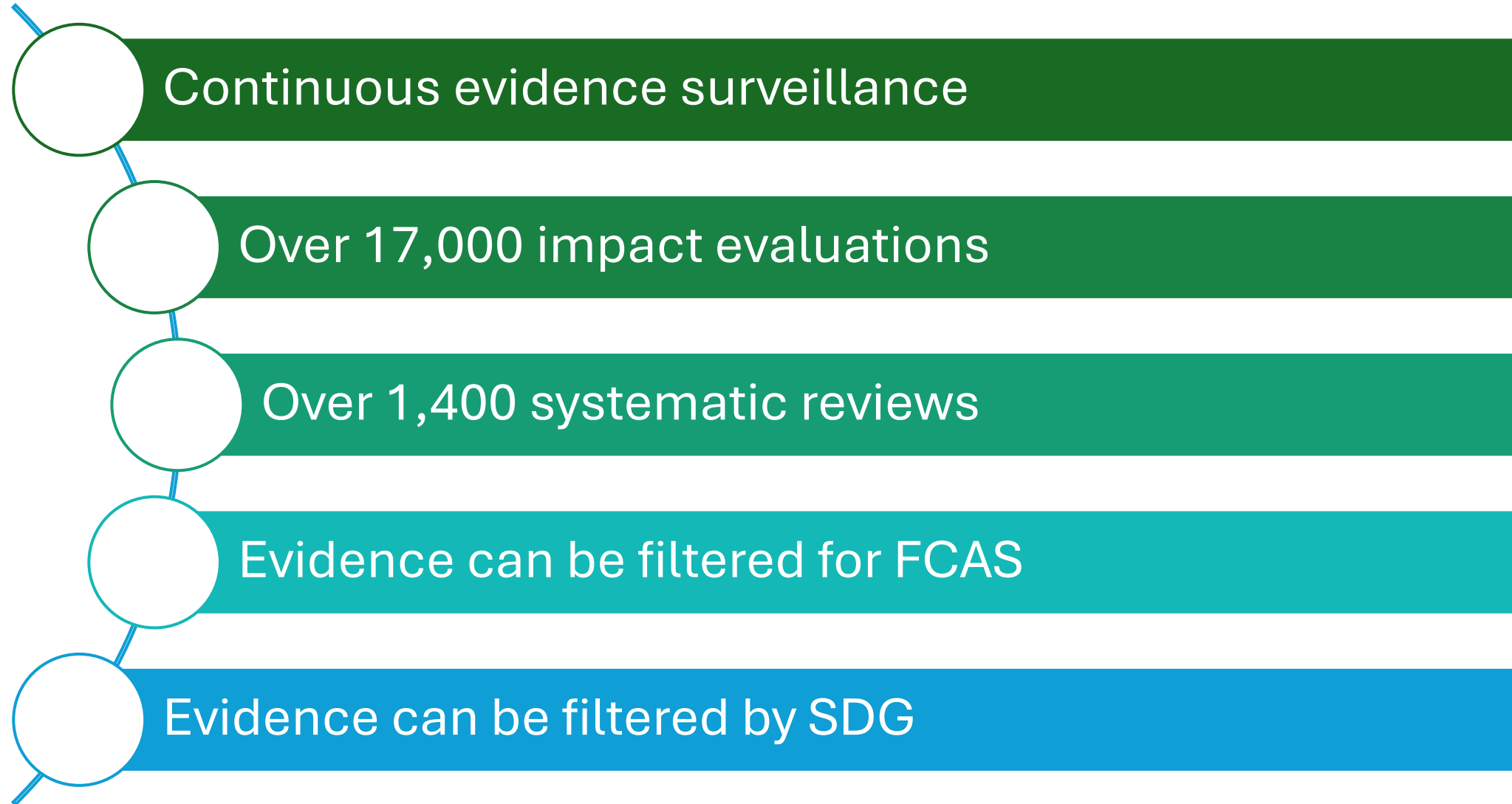
Example 3: The Development Evidence Portal

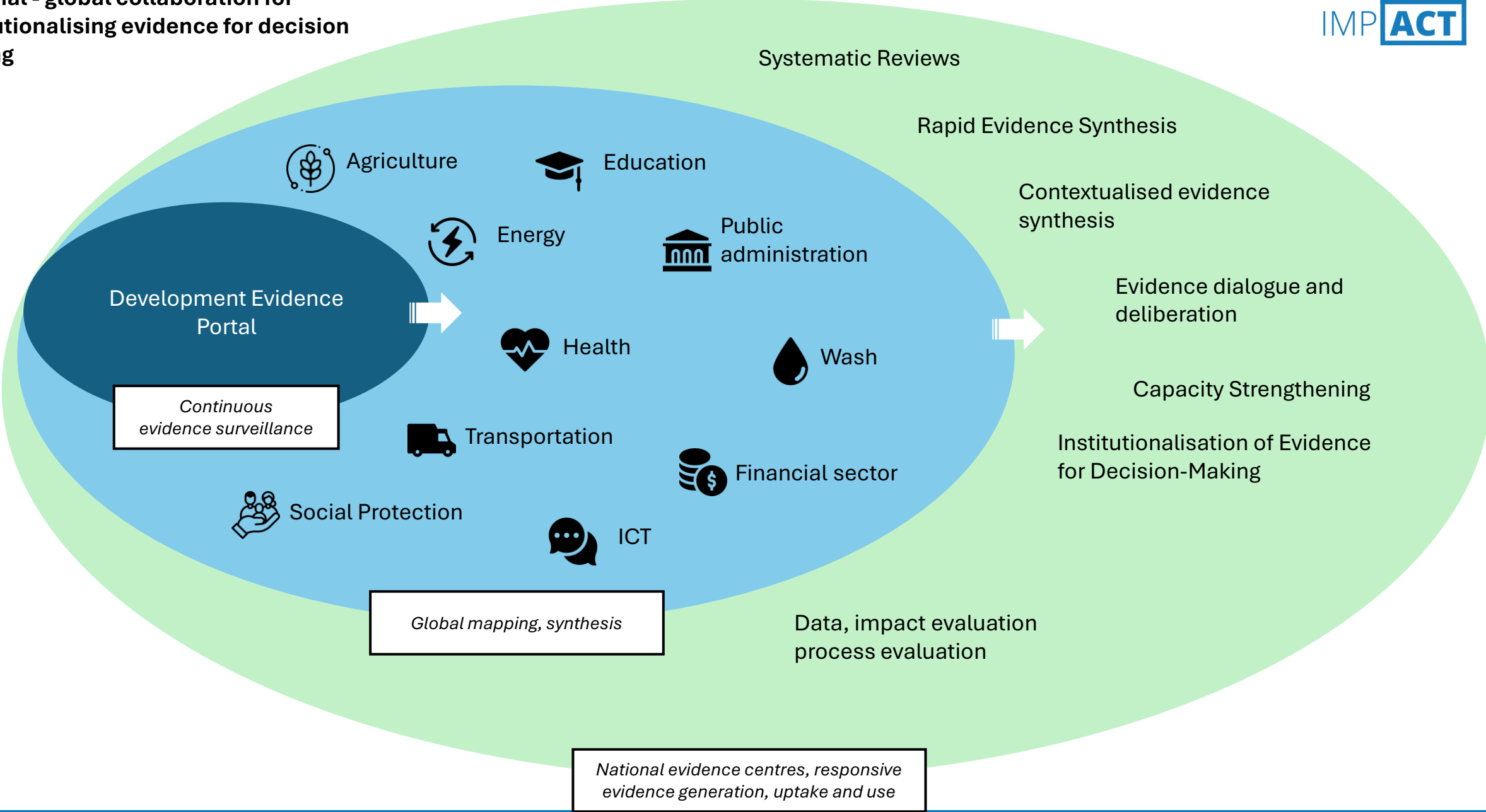


Big picture barriers to evidence use

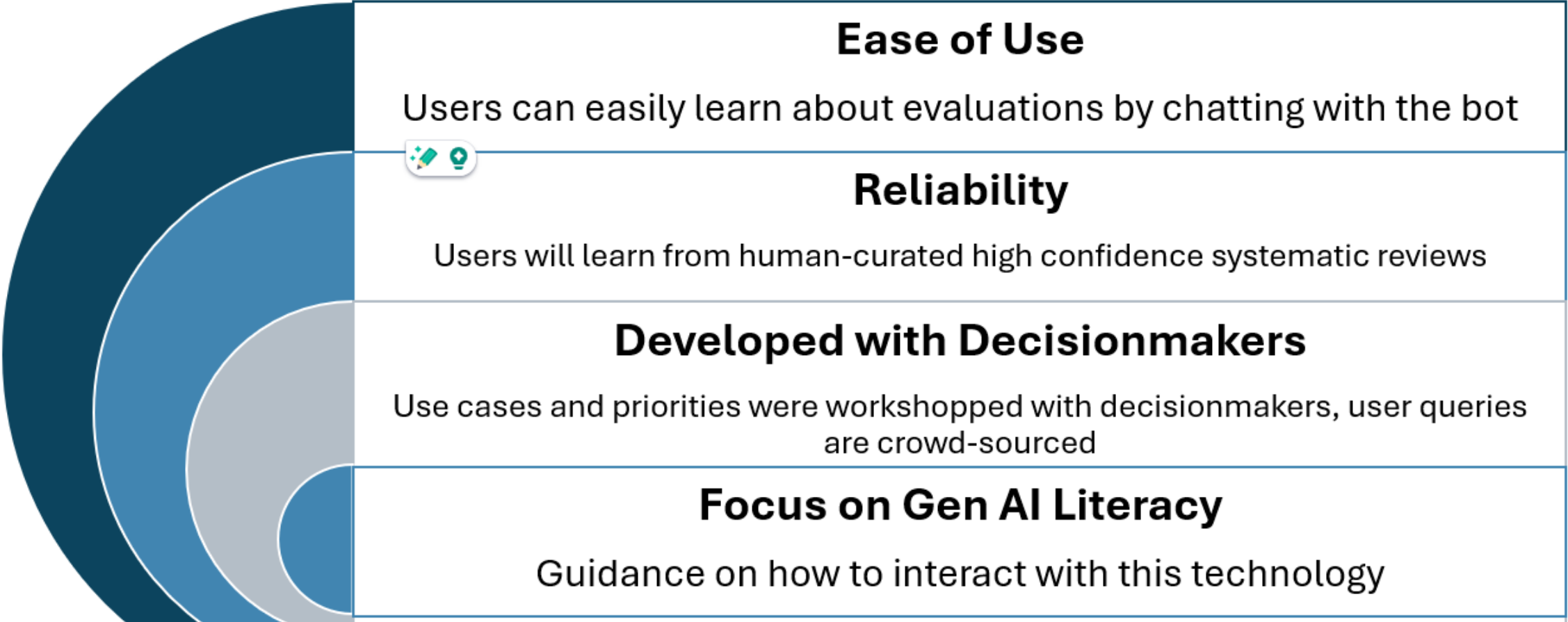
- Limited generation and availability of rigorous evidence
- Evidence concentrated only in certain sectors
- Accessibility to rigorous evidence
 - Few sources of reliable evidence
 - **Complex findings difficult to make sense of**
- **3ie's Development Evidence Portal (DEP)** addresses some of these barriers by curating high-quality impact evaluations, systematic reviews and, evidence & gap maps







THE DEP CHATBOT





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Amplifying impact: Harnessing the power of impact evaluations for evidence synthesis

Panelist

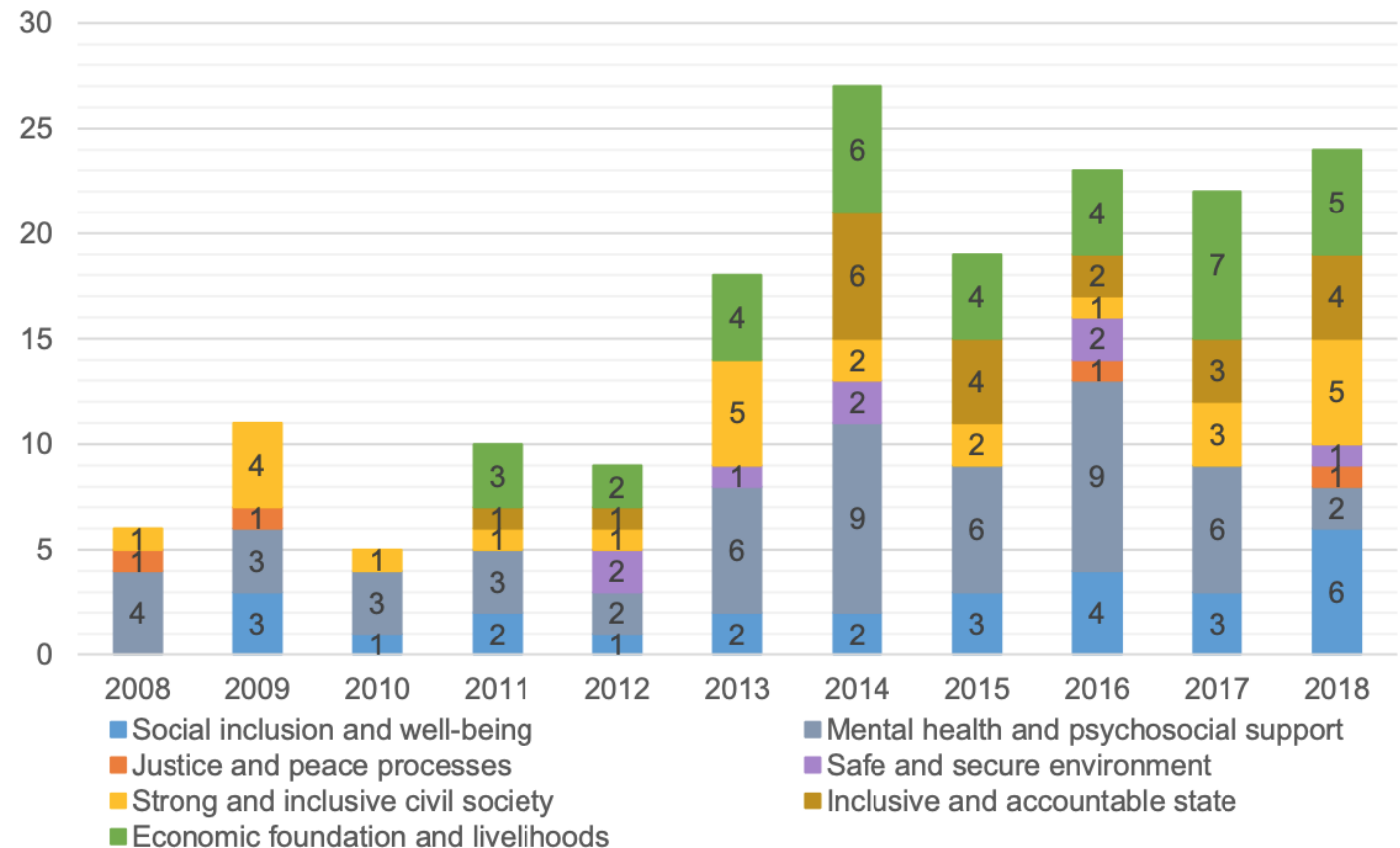
Aprille Knox, Senior Policy Manager (J-PAL)

Pierre Hodel, Policy Manager (J-PAL)

Growth in peacebuilding IEs over time

There has been **dramatic growth** in rigorous impact evaluations of **peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and violence reduction** programming over the past decade

Figure 7: Number of impact evaluations by publication year and intervention group



Sonnenfeld, A, Chirgwin, H, Berretta, M, Longman, K, Krämer, M and Snilstveit, B, 2020. Building peaceful societies: an evidence gap map, 3ie Evidence Gap Map Report 15. New Delhi: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie). Available at: [doi: https://doi.org/10.23846/EGM015](https://doi.org/10.23846/EGM015)

How do we apply what we're learning?

Much of this work evaluates discrete programs and policies to understand their individual effectiveness...

- But also to test broader hypotheses about how these programs might work
- And to generate insights into the human behaviour these programs and policies seek to shape

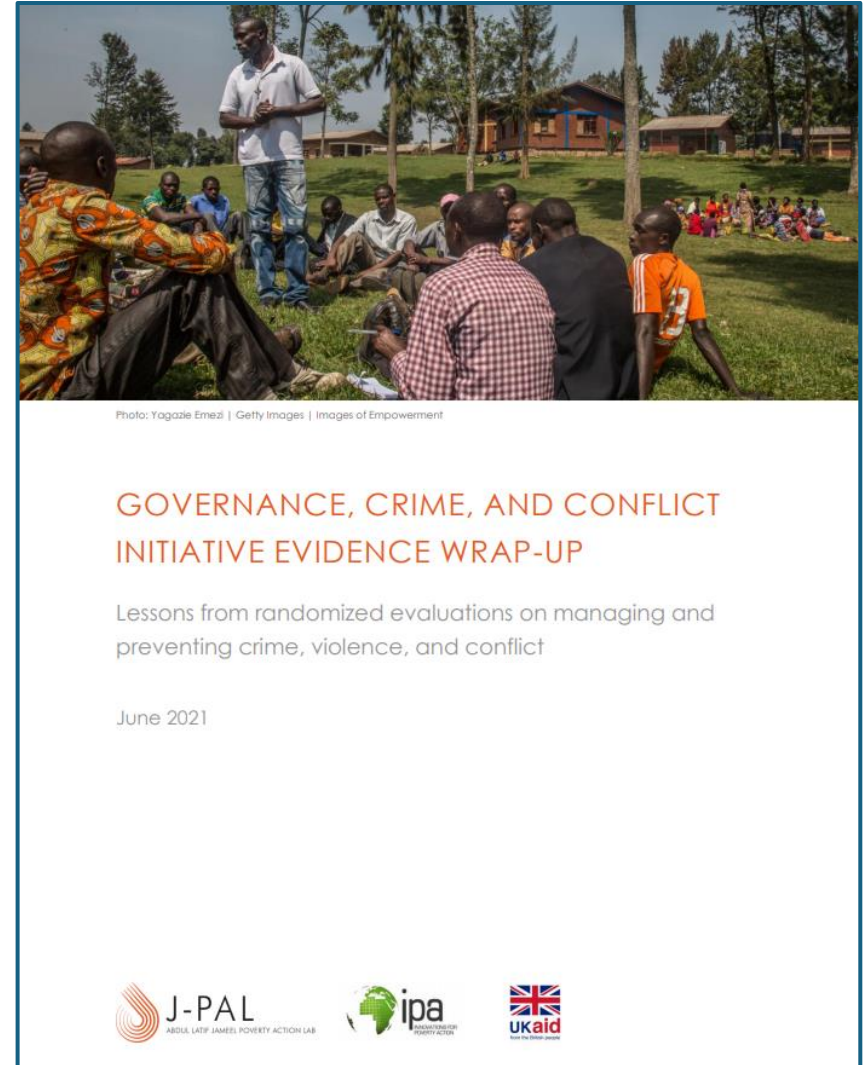
This research is producing a body of evidence that can help civil society organizations, governments, and donors deliver better strategy and programming in fragile settings

GCCI Evidence Wrap-up

Capturing emerging insights from randomized evaluations of interventions focused on conflict and violence reduction, divided into 6 chapters:

1. Policing strategies and building police capacity
2. Justice provision (by state and non-state actors)
3. Reducing violent behavior of individuals
4. Group decisions between violent and non-violent action
5. Peacebuilding, reconciliation, and dispute resolution
6. Preventing violence against women

Update forthcoming in 2025! Access the 2021 version [here](#)



Emerging insights

Peace and reconciliation

- In post-conflict and fragile settings, **relatively inexpensive interventions have the potential to increase trust** and social links between groups
- But it is important to understand and **guard against potential unintended negative impacts**

Individual crime and violence

- **Socio-emotional skills and preferences are malleable in young adults**; investing in them can lead to reductions in criminal and violent activities and behaviors
- Crime and violence prevention programs that draw on **behavior change techniques to foster more deliberative thinking** in high-stakes environments have been effective in reducing criminal, violent, and antisocial behaviors

Strategic decisions behind (non)violent action

- The **type and timing of aid is also important** because rebel groups stand to benefit by capturing aid resources or sabotaging government efforts before they are able to deliver improved services
- Given violent groups have finite resources, they may be more likely to **initiate attacks where the costs and likelihood of retaliation are low**

Applying insights from synthesis



Applying the generalizability framework

- **Step 1:** What needs does the program address and what is the disaggregated theory behind the program?
- **Step 2:** Are the local needs similar, and do the local conditions hold for that theory of change to apply?
- **Step 3:** How strong is the evidence for the required general behavioral change?
- **Step 4:** What is the evidence that the implementation process can be carried out well?

Key features of the framework

Instead of focusing on place and time, focus on **needs** and **behavior**

- What are the **mechanisms** that made the program effective in addressing those needs/shifting behavior

Evidence from any single study is just **one part of the puzzle**

- We weigh the evidence based on quality and adjust priors

Combine **theory, descriptive evidence**, and results of **rigorous impact evaluations** to answer:

- Whether results from one country likely to replicate in another
- When we need more evaluation and when we don't

For more detail, see Mary Ann Bates and Rachel Glennerster, "The Generalizability Puzzle," Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2017.
https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_generalizability_puzzle

Evidence review to inform research strategies – conflict settings

Civilians continue to be the primary victims of conflict and protection risks are increasing in complexity and severity.

Humanitarian actors are implementing a **range of strategies and interventions** to protect civilians from harm.

Limited evidence on:

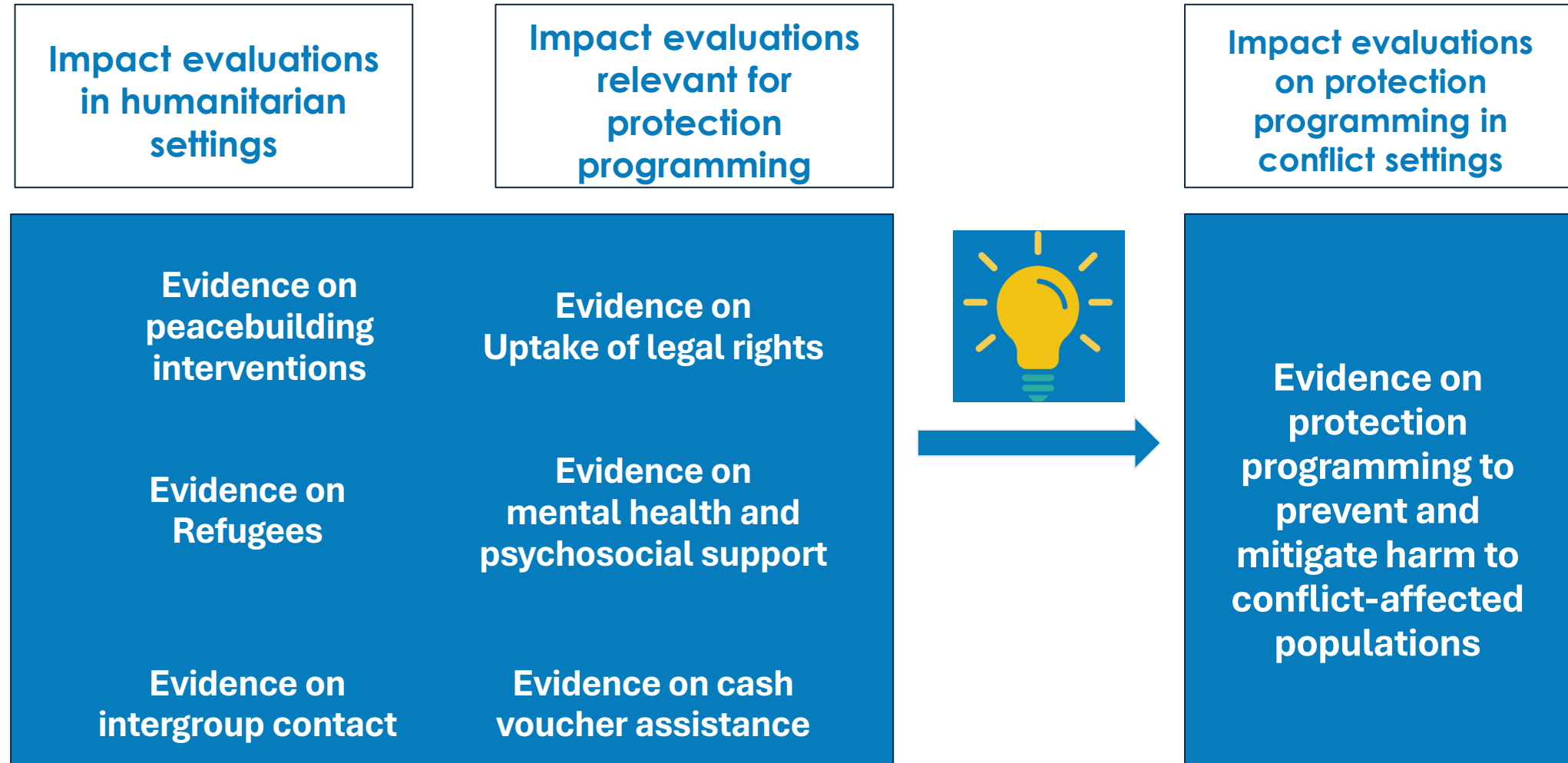
- the **comparative effectiveness** of protection interventions
- the mechanisms **that drive effective protection** programming



RANDOMISED IMPACT EVALUATION IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

A Learning Agenda for the Humanitarian Initiative

Evidence review to inform research strategies – conflict settings





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**The Global
SDG Synthesis
Coalition**



**Parallel Session 4, Theme 2: Amplifying impact: harnessing
the power of impact evaluations for evidence synthesis**

An introduction to the work of the Global SDG Synthesis Coalition

Panelist

Kerry Albright, Principal Adviser/Deputy Director- Evaluation,
UNICEF

Why? Collective failure



The Global
SDG Synthesis
Coalition



The world is far off track...

140 targets with data show only about 12% are on track

Close to half are moderately or severely off track

30% have either seen no movement or regressed below the 2015 baseline.

Based on current trends, the world will not achieve any SDGs even by 2050

2023 HLPF Political Declaration

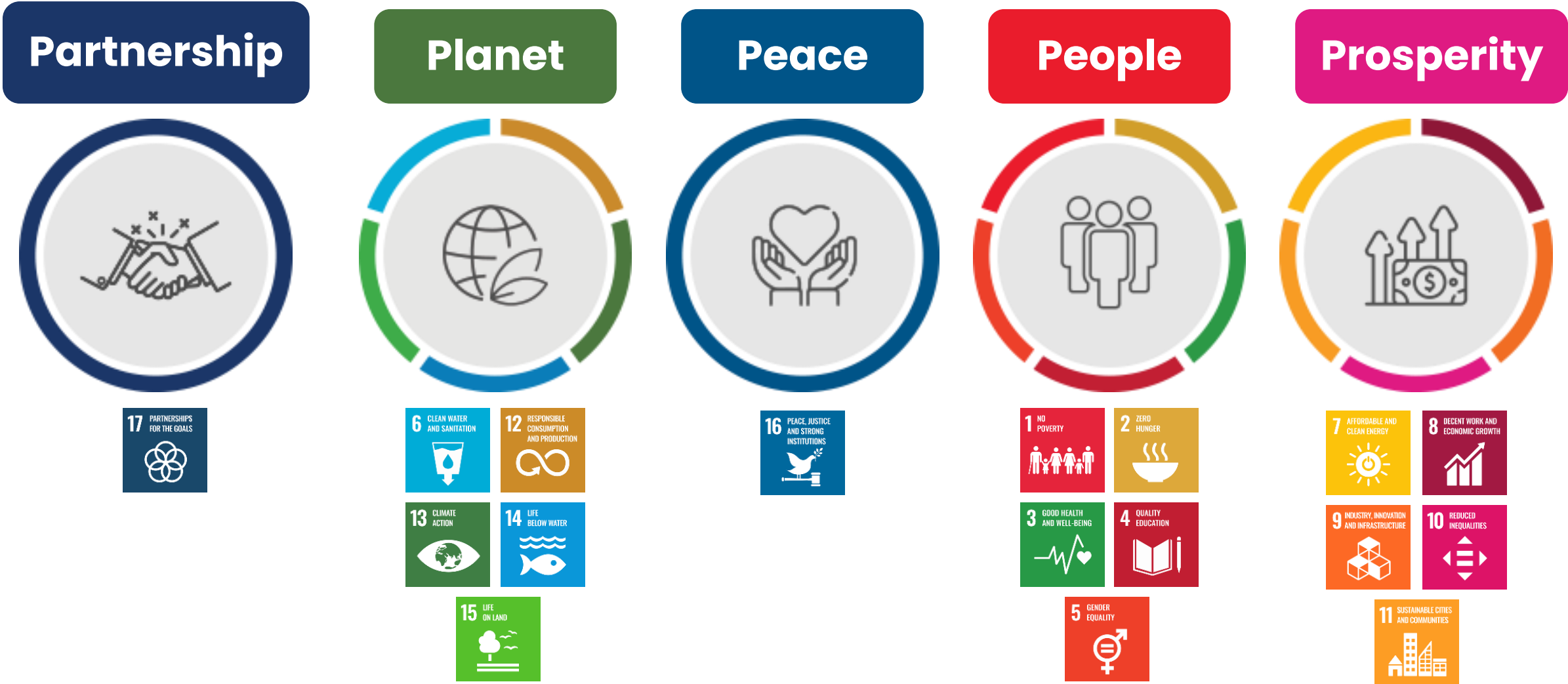
But it is possible to improve future prospects...

Science that is multidisciplinary, equitably and inclusively produced, openly shared, widely trusted and embraced, and socially robust and relevant to society, provides the foundation **Why? Collective failure**

for the transformations the world needs.

Global Sustainable Development Report 2023

How? The Pillar Approach



Who?



The Global
SDG Synthesis
Coalition

IMP **ACT**

46 UN entities
Multiple member states
IFI's
Civil Society institution and networks
Evaluation and synthesis networks



IEO | Independent
Evaluation
Office
United Nations Development Programme

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UN SDG System Wide
Evaluation Office

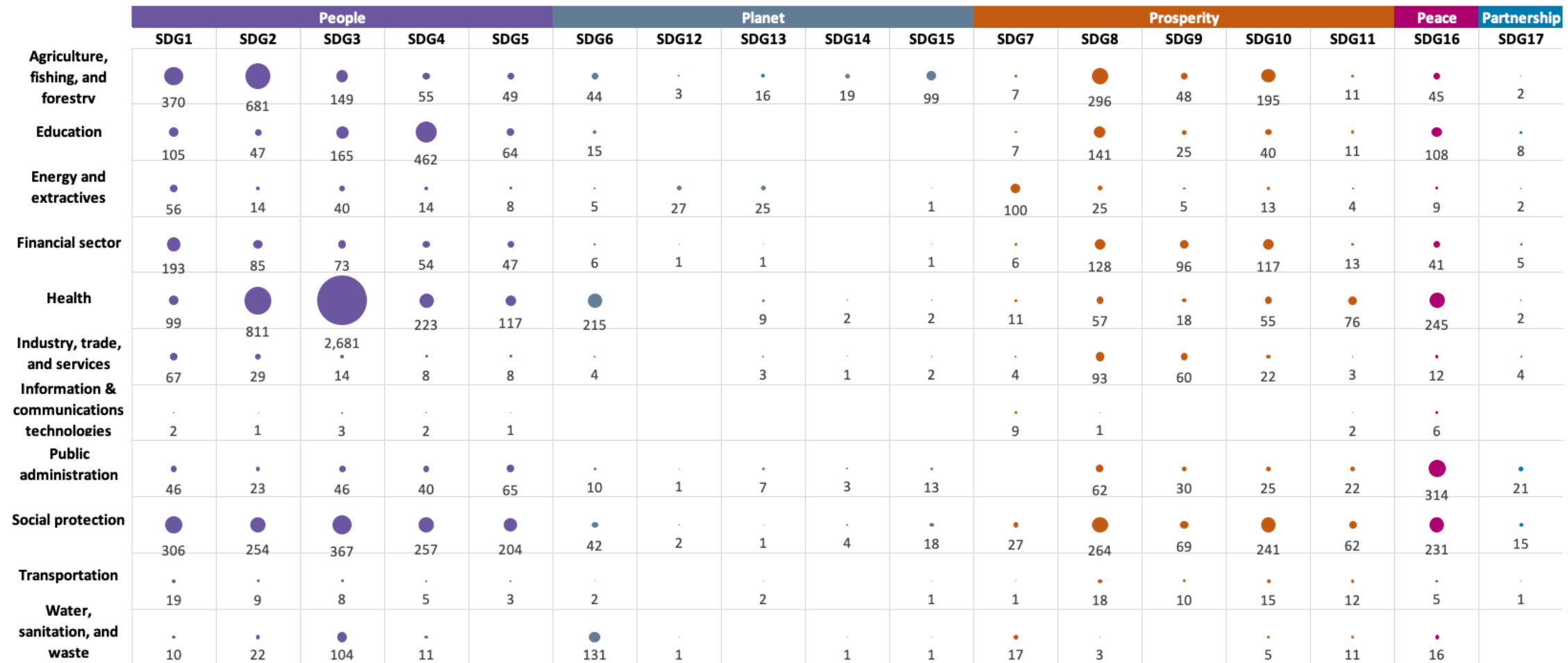


International
Labour
Organization



Impact Evaluation & the SDGs

Appendix 4 Evidence map displaying the distribution of impact evaluation evidence by sector at the SDG level.



Partnership Pillar Synthesis

IMPACT EVALUATIONS/ SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS

Impact and effectiveness of interventions on SDG outcomes

Narrative synthesis
Meta-analysis (where possible)

External academic databases

PERFORMANCE AND PROCESS EVALUATIONS

Why and how interventions are more/less successful

Qualitative synthesis

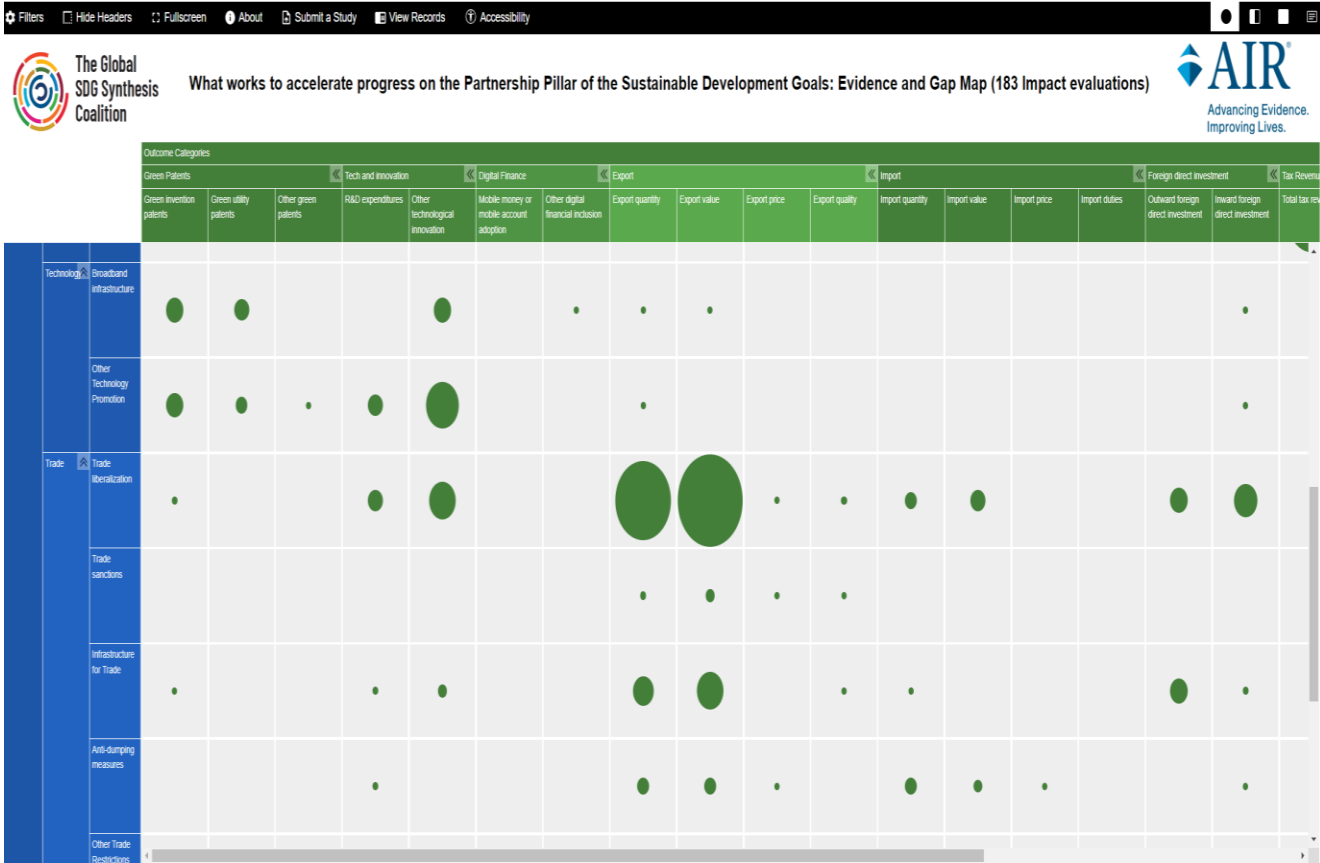
VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS

Themes in VNR data on progress

SDG TRACKER DATA

Statistical analysis to determine outliers

Partnership Pillar Synthesis



Partnership Pillar | THE GLOBAL SDG SYNTHESIS COALITION

Peace Pillar synthesis: scope



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Activity Category	Initiatives
Social inclusion (strengthening social cohesion and conflict resolution as well as inter-group perceptions and relations)	Communications
	Economic inclusion
	Gender/youth inclusion for conflict prevention
	Reintegration of ex-combatants or other ex-offenders
	Social cohesion for conflict prevention
Safe environments (ending violence and building a safe and secure environment)	Border management
	Democracy and peaceful elections
	Early warning systems
	Governance strengthening to prevent conflict, violence, or crime
	Law enforcement capacity
	Youth crime prevention
	Other (e.g., natural resource management, firearms initiatives)
Peace processes and conflict resolution (supporting peace processes, oversight, and post-conflict justice)	Gender for peace
	Governance strengthening to respond to conflict
	Natural resource management
	Peace agreement implementation
	Security and stabilization strengthening
	Social cohesion for conflict resolution
	Transitional justice
	Youth for peace

Peace Pillar synthesis: key takeaways



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IMP **ACT**

Social inclusion: Media and communication initiatives appear effective in promoting positive attitudes towards peace, and in some cases can reduce violence, especially when economic conditions are favorable

Peace Processes: Peace missions are generally effective in reducing conflict-affected deaths during or after conflicts

Safe environments: Access to the police is effective in reducing violence, however the use of military policing may have negative unintended consequences

[Peace Pillar | THE GLOBAL SDG SYNTHESIS COALITION](#)

Peace Pillar synthesis: a fragmented evidence base



- **Impact evaluations could have a more explicit focus on measuring conflict-related deaths**
- **Performance and process evaluations would likely generate more important and credible lessons if they focused on how specific implementation components are linked to violence outcomes**
- **Mixed-methods evidence could provide more in-depth lessons on what works, why, and how in reducing violence.**
- **Impact evaluations could generate more externally valid lessons if donors and researchers coordinate to conduct impact evaluations of promising initiatives in a diverse set of contexts**
- **Evaluations could focus more strongly on initiatives outside sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean**
- **Evaluations could focus more strongly on how environmental factors interact with programs aiming to reduce violence**
- **Impact evaluations could have a stronger focus on gender and youth inclusion, and other vulnerable groups**

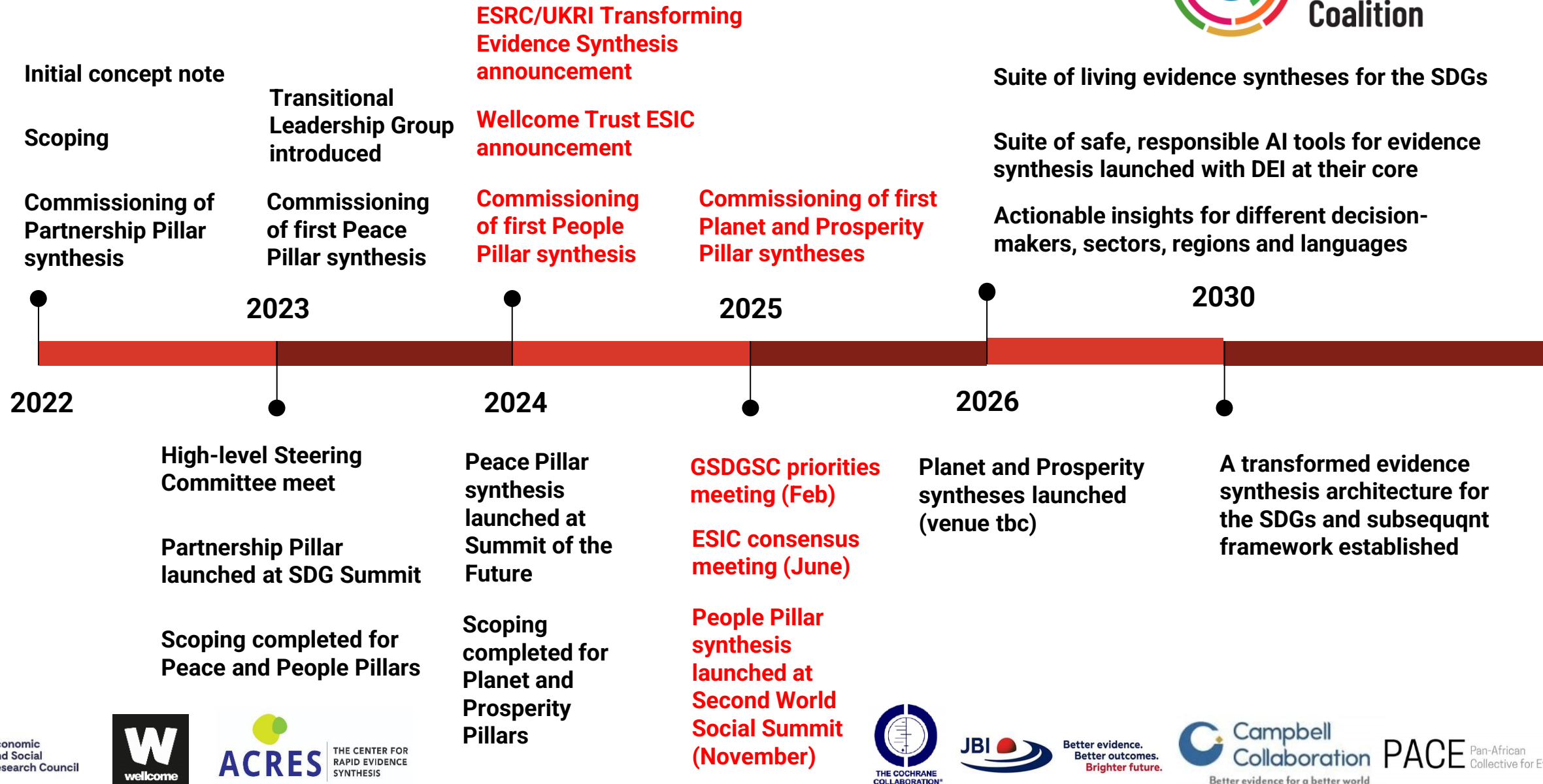
What have we learned so far?

- Need for more **impact evaluation** (what works) , particularly across the UN system and in fragile/conflict affected states, but this also needs to be matched with **process and performance evaluations** (how/why things work) to maximize useful insights for the SDGs. The UN adds real value here.
- **Methodological vs political considerations** of conducting syntheses
- **Evaluation synthesis vs evidence synthesis** (needs new tools and skills-building in both communities)
- **Methods and process innovation**, particularly with 'policy scale' evidence synthesis that is radically more timely, relevant, actionable and affordable and that **foregrounds equity, diversity and inclusion** (EDI) and context considerations
- Potential of **AI-driven living syntheses, with DEI at their core**, to inform real-time decision support systems and an opportunity to **enhance data sharing and re-use**
- Opportunity to think much bigger than original GSDGSC ambition- collaboration with external synthesis and evaluation entities and UN SWEO has the potential to create a **renewed focus on (evaluation) evidence for the SDGs** and **transform the global evidence architecture, including in the global south**
- Need innovative approaches to **stimulate demand-side engagement, communication and use** of evidence syntheses including through identification of (sub) national policy windows of opportunity, making better use of local evidence brokers and better leveraging the UN architecture to stimulate EIDM.

What's Next?



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Thank you!

