LEEPS
Learning together to advance Evidence and Equity in Policymaking

Evidence that Works: The Anatomy of a High-Impact Policy Output

Background

Although there has been a proliferation of research on many Sustainable Development Goal-related topics, much of it has not been designed with a policymaker audience in mind. In many cases, evidence outputs are not tailored to meet the needs of decision-makers or aligned with how policy processes function in real-world settings. As a result, many potentially valuable research findings remain underutilized in policy and programming. The Africa LEEPS Partnership is exploring how knowledge brokers can better design and communicate evidence to inform policymaking and program implementation across sectors.

Approach

Using three evidence outputs that have successfully communicated information to policymakers in different contexts and were tailored for policy impact, this brief illustrates what makes an evidence output effective, how it fits into broader decision-making structures, and why it resonates with policymakers in specific contexts.

To complement this, we also include a case study on each of the outputs, which provides an overview of:

- The evidence output and how it originated
- The development and stakeholder engagement process
- How the output was used in policy or programming contexts
- What lessons can be drawn for future design and communication of evidence

About the Africa LEEPS Partnership

Africa LEEPS aims to advance the use of evidence in policymaking to support progress towards the SDGS. The partnership brings together leading evidence organizations from across Africa to learn from each other, exchange knowledge and experiences, and jointly problem solve – to strengthen evidence-informed policymaking and accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

Technical capacity strengthening and policy engagement activities are led by three initiatives: the Centre of Excellence Evidence Policy Action established by the African Center for Equitable Development (ACED), the East African Regional Evidence Synthesis Initiative established by the Centre for Rapid Evidence Synthesis (ACRES) and Alliance for Evidence and Equity in Policy-making in Africa established by the African Institute for Policy Development (AFIDEP).

Results for Development (R4D) serves as the learning and engagement coordinator for LEEPS.

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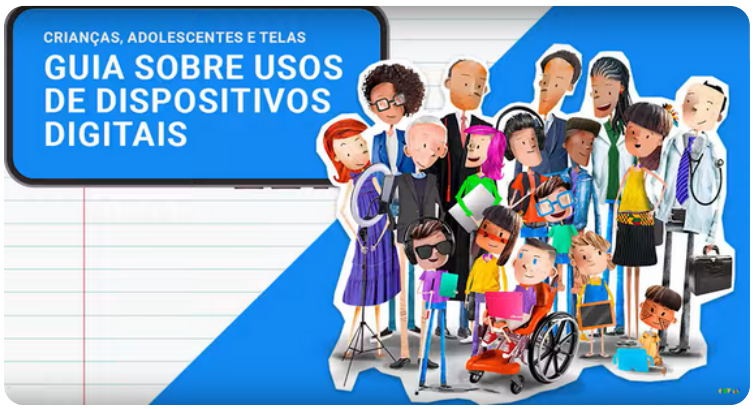
The case studies showcase diverse communication approaches developed across different countries and sectors, demonstrating how evidence can serve as a practical resource and be tailored to meet policymakers' needs. The three outputs chosen were:

- A **nutrition scorecard**[1], developed by the Nigeria Governors' Forum (NGF). The scorecard is a monitoring and accountability tool used to track progress and hold decision makers in Nigeria accountable to key nutrition commitments. It has now been scaled up and expanded into a National Nutrition Scorecard in Nigeria.
- A **rapid response report**[2] **on screen time for children and youth**, developed by the Veredas Institute in Brazil. The Secretariat of Social Communication of the Presidency of Brazil requested that Veredas develop a package of 10 rapid response reports on different priority topics, including this one. The government took this initial report from Veredas and, combined with additional research and evidence, developed an educational video, a webpage, and a guide to further disseminate their findings.



Screenshot from Veredas' educational video on screen time.

- An **information note**[3] **on the "statistical visa"** — a tool that ensures rigorous methodology for data collection, and high-quality, reliable data that can be used for decision making in Togo. This note was developed by the African Center for Equitable Development (ACED), based in Benin, at the request of the National Institute of Statistics and Economic and Demographic Studies (INSEED) in Togo. INSEED took the findings and recommendations from this note to outline their next steps, which included the development of a toolkit on how to design and implement a statistical visa process.

These outputs were selected based on the following criteria:

- The output addresses a specific issue of interest to government policymakers
- The output has demonstrated uptake with government policymakers in the sector

To develop the case studies, the Africa LEEPS team conducted key informant interviews with team members from the NGF (Nigeria), the Veredas Institute (Brazil), and ACED (Benin), who played a leading role in designing and disseminating these outputs. These examples illustrate successful outputs from initiatives within Africa LEEPS (such as ACED) as well as from external organizations (including NGF and Veredas).

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[1] A scorecard is a tool used to measure and track performance or progress against specific goals or criteria, often using indicators or a scoring system to provide a clear, visual summary.
[2] Rapid response reports provide a concise synthesis of the most relevant and high-quality evidence, tailored to the specific context and directly addressing a decision-maker's question.
[3] Information notes are similar to rapid response reports in that they provide a synthesis of high-quality evidence and analysis addressing the decision-maker's question but is developed over a longer period of time with more hands-on engagement from stakeholders.

Key Takeaways

When it comes to getting research and evidence used by policymakers, the path from evidence to action is rarely linear. Despite differences in context, sector, and format, **each case demonstrates practical lessons for knowledge brokers and researchers** seeking to enhance the policy relevance and uptake of their work.

1. Early stakeholder engagement is critical to success

Across all three case studies, engaging stakeholders early, both at individual and institutional levels, was essential for producing outputs that were relevant, trusted, and ultimately used by government policymakers. However, the existence of these relationships alone was not sufficient. Early engagement fostered trust and led to successful collaborations, aligned with policy needs.

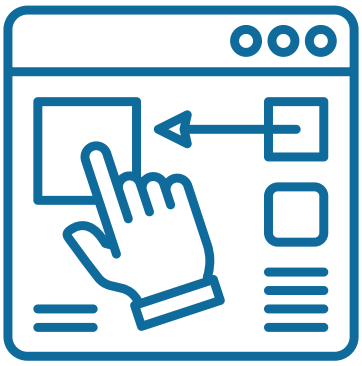
All three organizations used co-creation processes to develop research questions, identify priority areas of focus, and shape the outputs, building trust and alignment with stakeholders while developing each output. This approach laid the foundation for a rich collaboration, ensured buy-in from stakeholders, and streamlined efforts. By jointly shaping the research questions with government actors, these organizations ensured that they were accurately identifying and addressing the key needs of the stakeholders.

Veredas Institute had a well-established track of working with government agencies in Brazil, including the Secretariat of Social Communication of the Presidency of Brazil, who requested this report. Veredas' strong reputation enabled trusted collaboration with the government to shape the research questions and deliver high-quality rapid response outputs to inform their decision-making.

ACED's established relationship with Togo's national statistics agency, INSEED, led to a request for support in improving the quality of national statistics through a statistical visa initiative. ACED facilitated a learning exchange in which stakeholders from Togo traveled to Benin to learn from the implementation experience of the leaders in Benin. This collaboration also helped ACED tailor an experience- and document review-based information note to INSEED's specific priorities and challenges.

When Nigerian government stakeholders identified nutrition as a priority area, the NGF led a multi-stakeholder engagement to co-design a nutrition scorecard with key partners. Building on its prior success with using scorecards in areas like immunization, the NGF had established credibility with governors, who were aware of the tool's effectiveness, resulting in strong acceptance and support.

2. Design and content must be purposeful and user-oriented



Across the three outputs, there was an emphasis that they must be: a) relevant and contextualized, i.e., directly tied to a specific issue or priority identified by stakeholders, and b) simplified and actionable, i.e., presented in a clear, user-friendly format with practical content. These elements not only increase the likelihood of uptake but also help ensure that evidence is timely, useful, and aligned with decision-making needs.

- Nigeria's government officials faced with poor nutrition outcomes and low financing for nutrition, used the nutrition scorecard to monitor progress and increase accountability. The tool includes state-level performance metrics, a red-green color-coded system for easy interpretation, and clear calls to action. This format allows busy decision-makers to quickly grasp key insights without needing to analyze raw data.

- The success of ACED's information note stemmed from its relevance and timing. It was developed at a moment when government stakeholders were prioritizing the improvement of national statistics. The note directly addressed their questions, and ACED's alignment with stakeholder priorities created mutual trust and ensured strong buy-in and engagement.

- Veredas took a similar approach by creating an objective, short, action-oriented output that delivered the content that stakeholders requested, without any extra details or text that they were unlikely to read. Additionally, Veredas selected their output design to be aesthetically cohesive with the topic. In this instance, for an output focusing on screen time for children and youth, they opted for a colorful theme to encourage engagement.

3. Benchmarking motivates stakeholders and enhances accountability

A common element across all three outputs was the use of benchmarking – comparing data or practices across contexts. Benchmarking provides a broader picture of the landscape and allows decision-makers to situate their own challenges within that context, learn from others facing similar issues, and identify clear next steps.

In addition, all three organizations emphasized the value of providing concrete recommendations to stakeholders in their outputs. Although this was not flagged in our interviews with these organizations, knowledge brokers sometimes face a tension between simply presenting evidence objectively and actively shaping findings to guide decisions. The line between informing and advocating can vary depending on the context and the needs of decision-makers.

The NGF nutrition scorecard enables governors from each state to compare metrics in their state against others, encouraging positive peer pressure and healthy competition. The scorecard provides specific calls to action, making it clear what steps governors should take to improve their outcomes.

ACED's information note provided insights on how countries – at different stages of development with their statistical visas – design and implement their processes. This enabled INSEED in Togo to understand how their approach could evolve. The note used benchmarking to showcase relevant models from across the region, grounding recommendations in real-world examples.

Veredas used benchmarking as a trusted strategy to show policymakers how other countries are approaching similar challenges and to learn from what is working elsewhere. They emphasized that well-contextualized lessons from elsewhere can be both persuasive and practical when applied locally. Policymakers reviewing their report in Brazil could quickly see how other governments – Chile, Colombia, the US, Italy, Australia, and others – are setting regulations around screen time in their countries. This comparative view supports faster, more informed decision-making by drawing on global experience.

4. Dissemination strategies must align with audience and context

Each organization tailored their dissemination strategy to fit the type of tool, target audience, and local context, underscoring the importance of flexible, adaptive, context-specific dissemination approaches to effectively reach and influence stakeholders.

The NGF nutrition scorecard is updated on a quarterly basis. The data and recommendations from the previous quarter are presented during their monthly governors' meetings. This regular, structured approach ensures ongoing engagement and accountability among state leaders.

Veredas developed its rapid response report on a very short timeline, as part of a package of 10 total reports on different topics. Veredas shared it with the government immediately upon completion to enable quick review and decision-making by government partners. Veredas also reached out to media outlets to disseminate it to a broader audience, while the government undertook its internal review.

In contrast to Veredas' quick and direct dissemination, ACED found that they needed a much lengthier and participatory dissemination process. After drafting the information note, they held a meeting to present, validate, and disseminate findings. This workshop served as a platform for key leaders and decision makers to discuss next steps, including the development of a toolkit based on the findings.

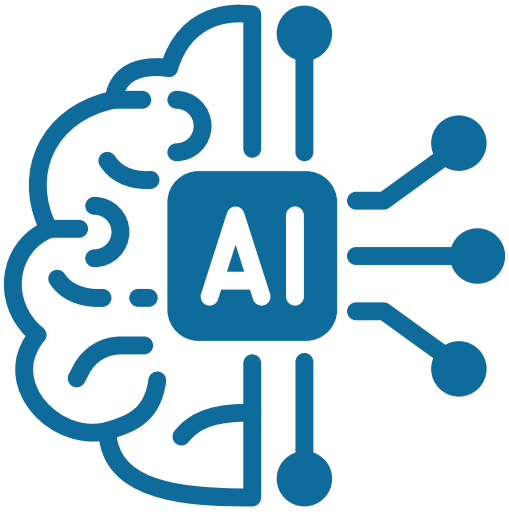
Conclusion

The outputs presented in this brief underscore that **connecting evidence to policy change is complex, rarely straightforward, and hinges on many factors** that go beyond the evidence itself. Impact depends not only on the quality of the research, but also on the process – how it is developed, framed, and shared – with attention to relationships, relevance, and readiness. **Successful communication of evidence requires sustained collaboration with stakeholders, understanding informal dynamics, and navigating complex policy environments**. Across different tools and contexts, what made these outputs impactful was not just their content, but how they were co-developed, framed, and communicated in ways that aligned with the needs and realities of decision-makers.

As we look toward the future, emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), offer new opportunities to strengthen this ecosystem.

AI can:

- Rapidly synthesize and distill evidence across sources
- Enable smarter benchmarking and trend detection
- Support tailored content creation for different policymaking audiences
- Improve the timeliness and accessibility of knowledge outputs



Yet, AI will only be as effective as the ecosystem it serves. To be truly impactful, it must be paired with human relationships, contextual insight, and inclusive design.

As Africa LEEPS continues to learn and adapt, these lessons offer a foundation for designing evidence outputs that are not only technically sound but strategically positioned to make a difference.

Related Resources

This case study is part of a four-part series, developed by Africa LEEPS, exploring effective evidence outputs that have successfully communicated information to policymakers in different contexts and were tailored for policy impact. To view the other case studies in this series, please click on the links below:

1. Evidence that Works: The Anatomy of a High Impact Policy Output
2. Delivering Evidence in 9 Days: How a Rapid Response Brief Shaped the Conversation Around Screen Time in Brazil
3. Red Light, Green Light: How a Scorecard Turned Data into Progress in Nigeria
4. How Peer Exchange and Co-creation Laid the Foundation for National Data Reform in Togo