Putting Money Where the Evidence Is

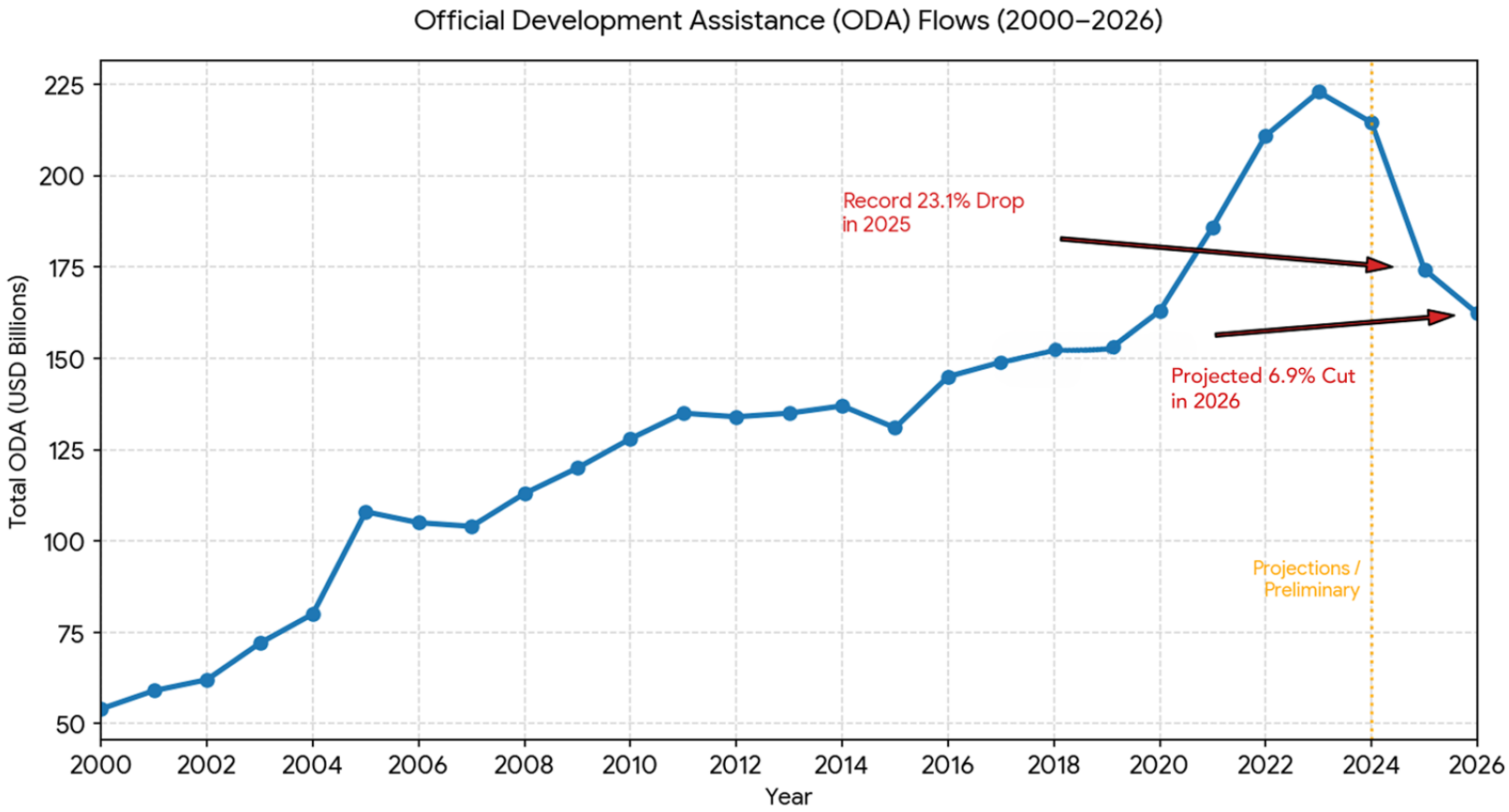
Perspectives from international development

September 2026

Emmanuel Jimenez
Independent Evaluation Department
Asian Development Bank

Independent Evaluation ADB

More constrained resources: Official development assistance trends



Source: https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/official-development-assistance-oda.html

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ADB is an MDB

- A multilateral development bank (MDB) is an international financial institution chartered by countries to provide financial and technical support for **sustainable economic development and poverty reduction** in lower and middle-income countries.
- ADB 2025: Almost $30 bn approved for 160 new projects.



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Multilateral development banks (MDBs) mobilize most of the funds needed to lend to their developing member countries from:

1. Individual depositors
2. Grants from official development assistance of richer member countries
3. Grants from UN agencies
4. Bonds sold in the commercial market



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Foundations of evaluation in MDBs

Accountability

Is ADB doing the right things?

Is ADB doing things right?

Are resources properly allocated and used, and intended outcomes realized?

- **Independent**
- **Objective-based**

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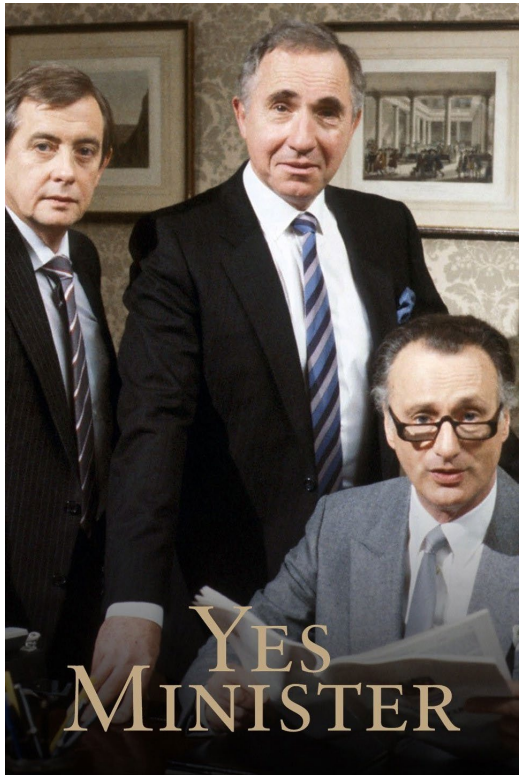
Learning: shortcut to impact?

Board of Directors



Evaluators

Operational management and staff



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Foundation: ADB evaluation policy stresses accountability and learning to assess impact of projects, programs and corporate activities

Accountability

Is ADB doing the right things?

Is ADB doing things right?

Are resources properly allocated and used, and intended outcomes realized?

Learning

What lessons are critical for improving development impact of future policies, strategies, programs and projects?

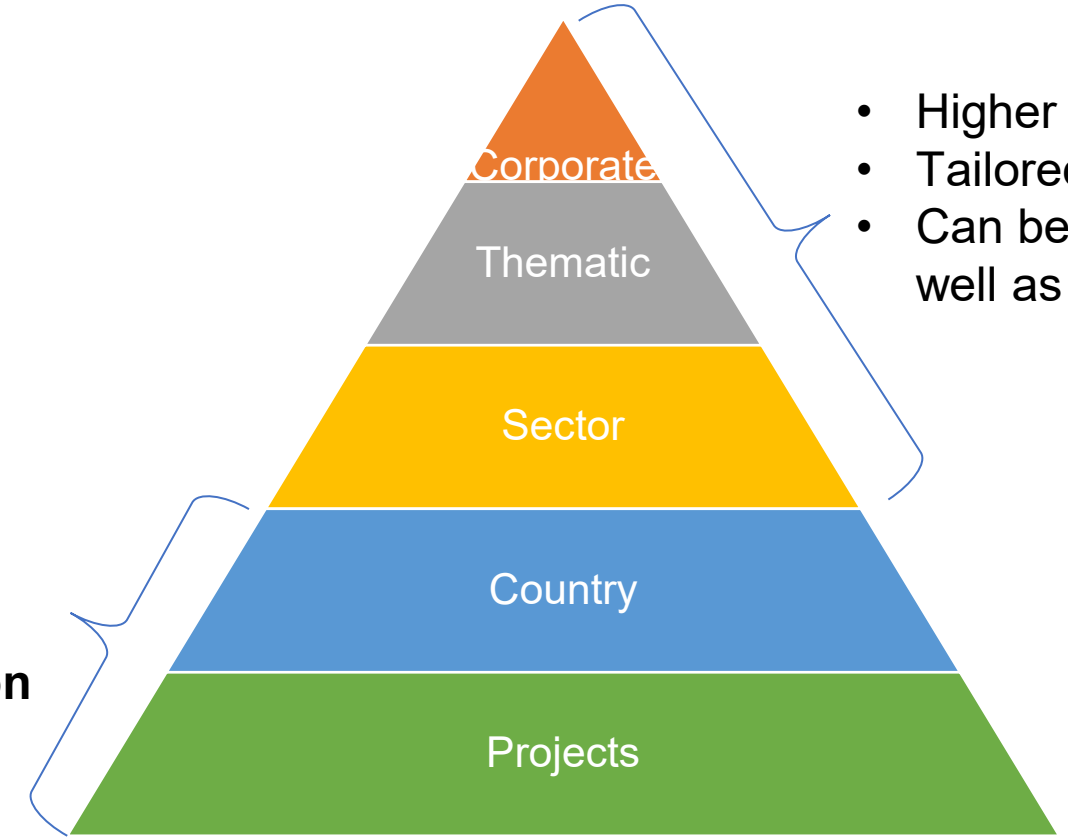
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What is evaluated and on what criteria?

OECD DAC Criteria Used to assess Project Success ("Impact"?)

- Relevance
- Coherence
- Effectiveness
- Efficiency
- Sustainability
- Development Impact

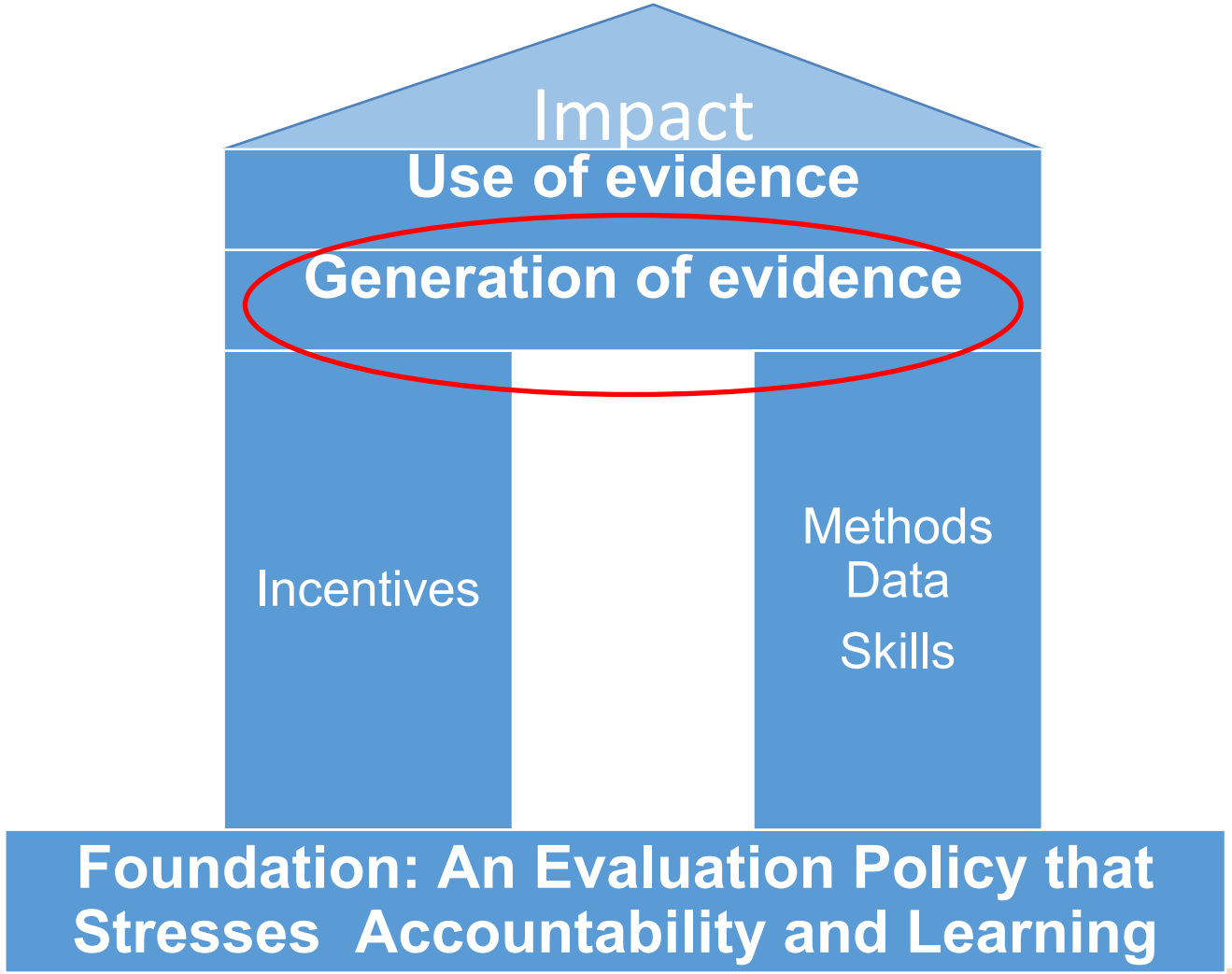
Validation (all projects) and Evaluation (some projects)



- Higher plane
- Tailored approaches
- Can be formative as well as summative

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Building a culture of evidence at MDBs



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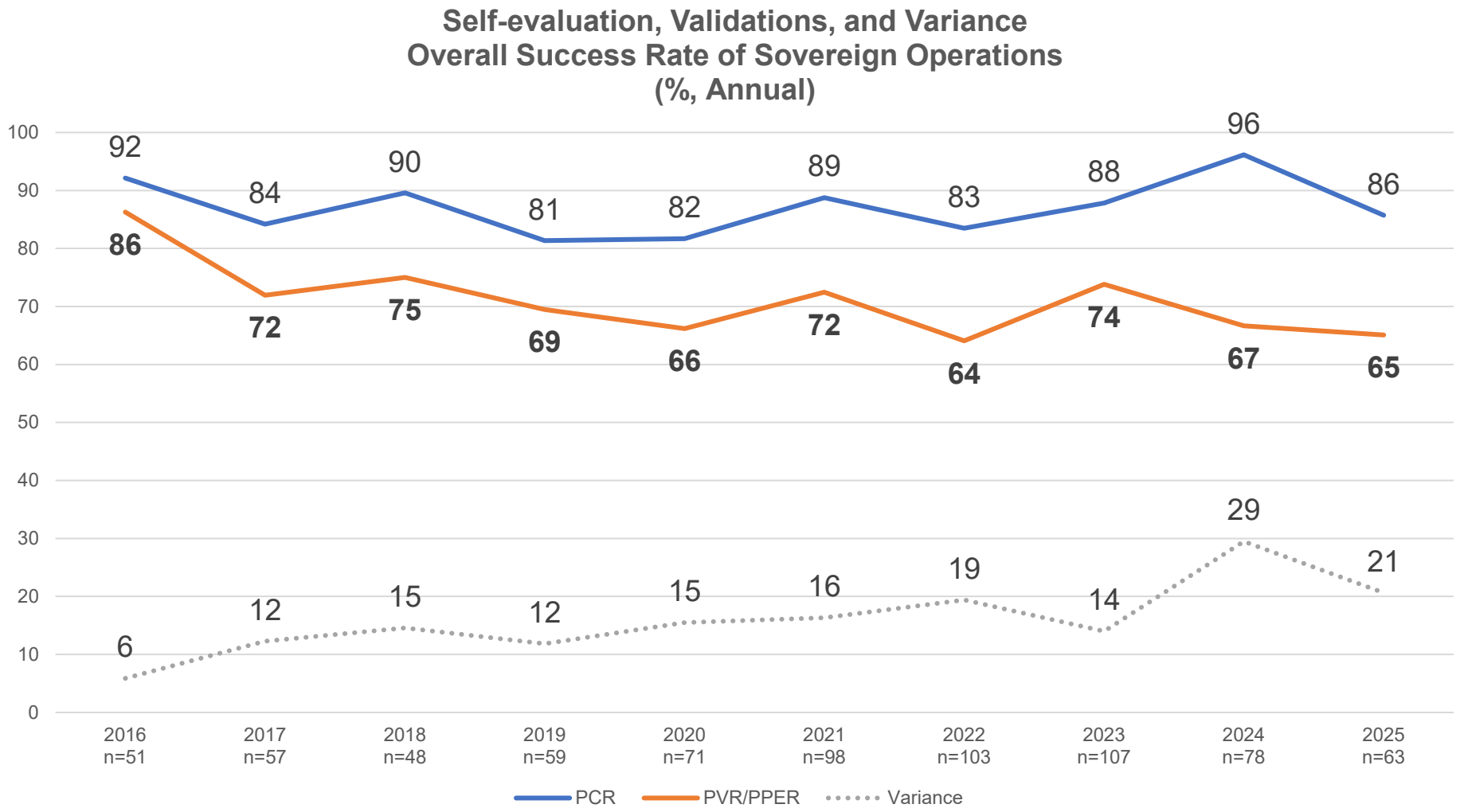
The proportion of projects that are rated by ADB as successful or highly successful is:

1. 100%
2. 75-99%
3. 50-74%
4. 25-49%
5. 0-24%



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1. Be realistic in self assessments



Greater realism can

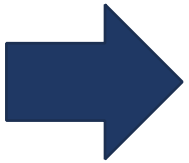
- Save resources
- Lead to better learning

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Incentivizing realistic self-assessments

Causes of unrealistic assessments:

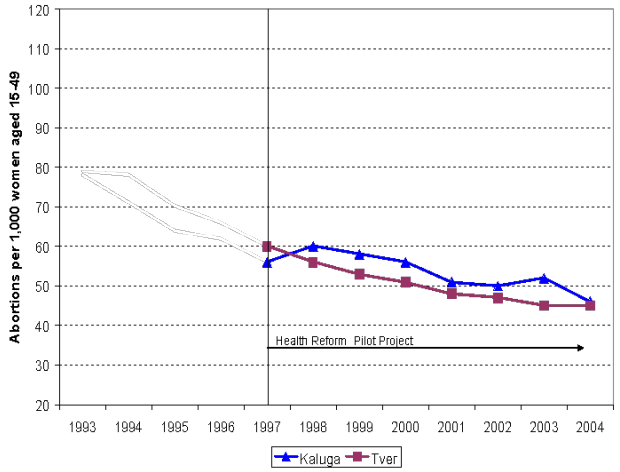
- Overoptimism
- Approval culture: partly driven by drive for volume in business model
- Gains from honest self-assessments unclear
- Possible gaming

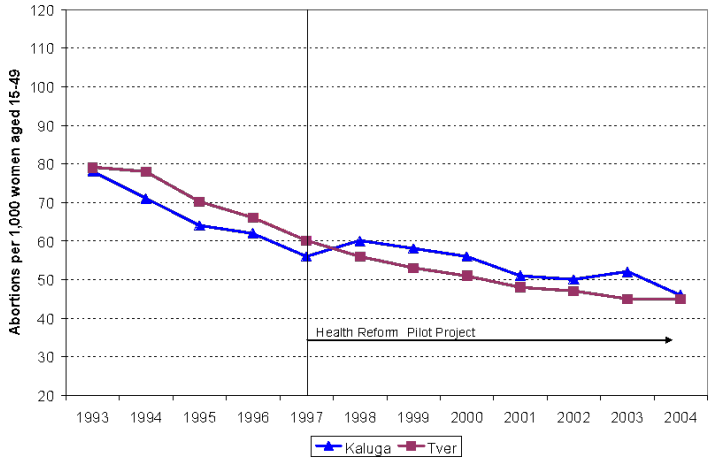


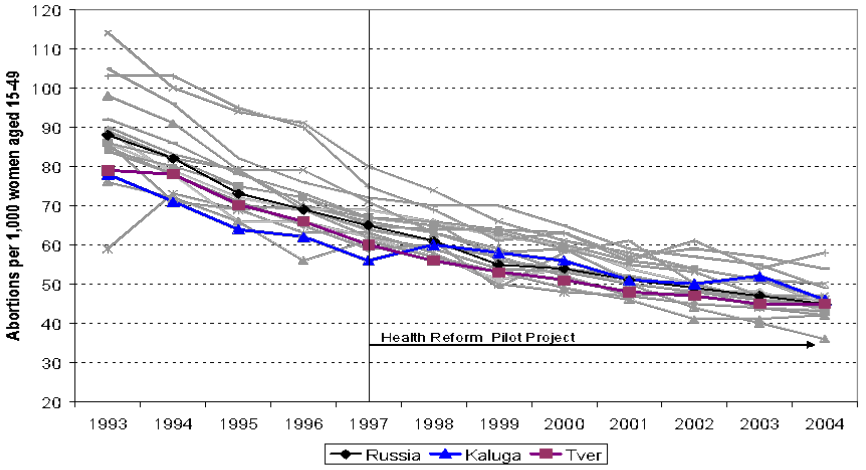
Track realism or quality of self-assessment.

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Methods and data: addressing attribution



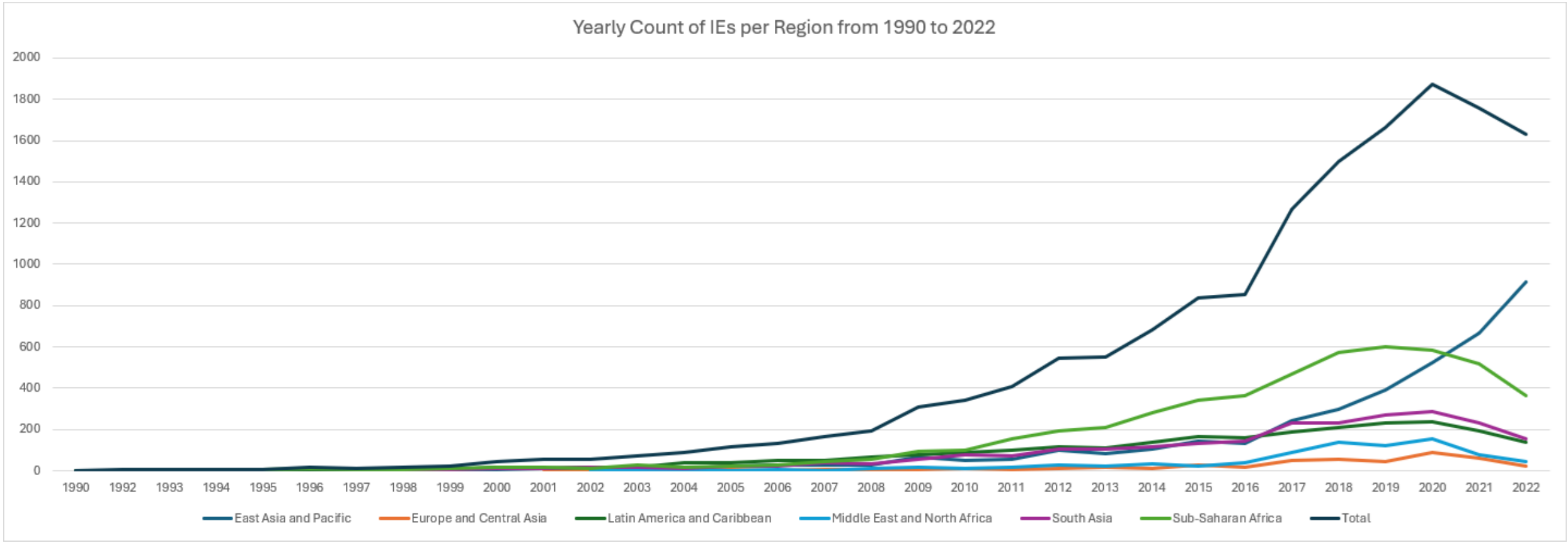




Main issues: Establish “counterfactual”
-- External factors
-- Self selection by program or by beneficiaries
Rigorous Impact Evaluations: experimental and quasi-experimental

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Number of published IE studies per year



Source: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), Development evidence portal
https://developmentevidence.3ieimpact.org/

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Impact evaluation results are generally not used in independent evaluations

- Only a small proportion of projects in the World Bank and ADB have been subjected to rigorous quantitative IEs.
  - Difficulty in identifying controls
  - Time and cost
  - Methodological issues: generalizability and context, scalability, evaluability bias among others
- Independent program evaluations have relied mostly on case studies, administrative data, document reviews, structured interviews of key informants, focus group discussions and staff surveys



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2. Use a plurality of methods, rigorously

- Triangulation
- Theory to develop a narrative of causality
  - Developing a theory of change
  - Contribution analysis and process tracing
- Strategic selection of cases
- Care in interpreting perception data
- Documenting processes for replication



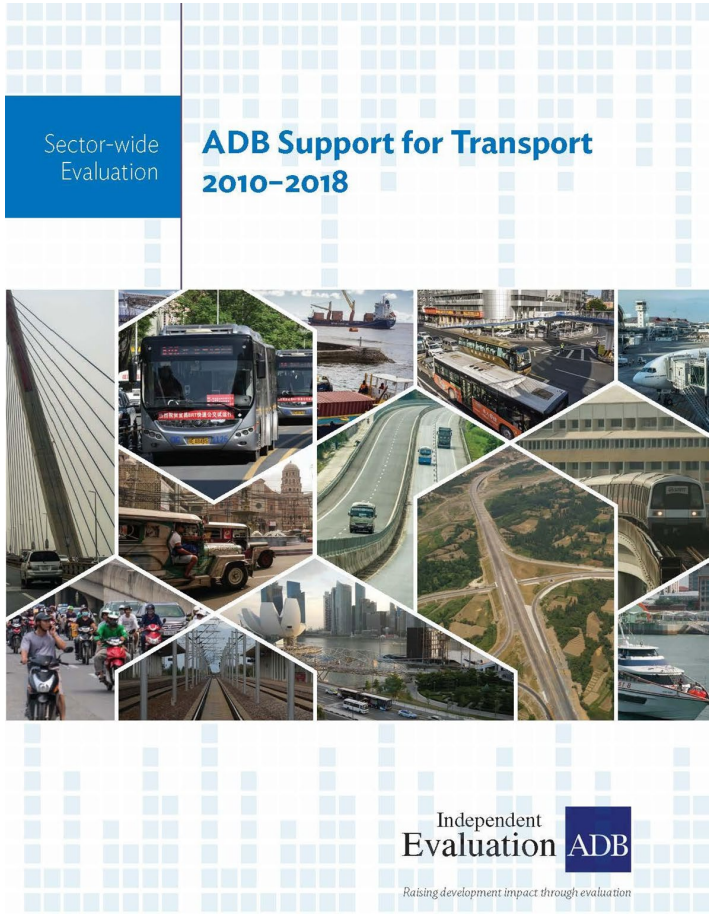
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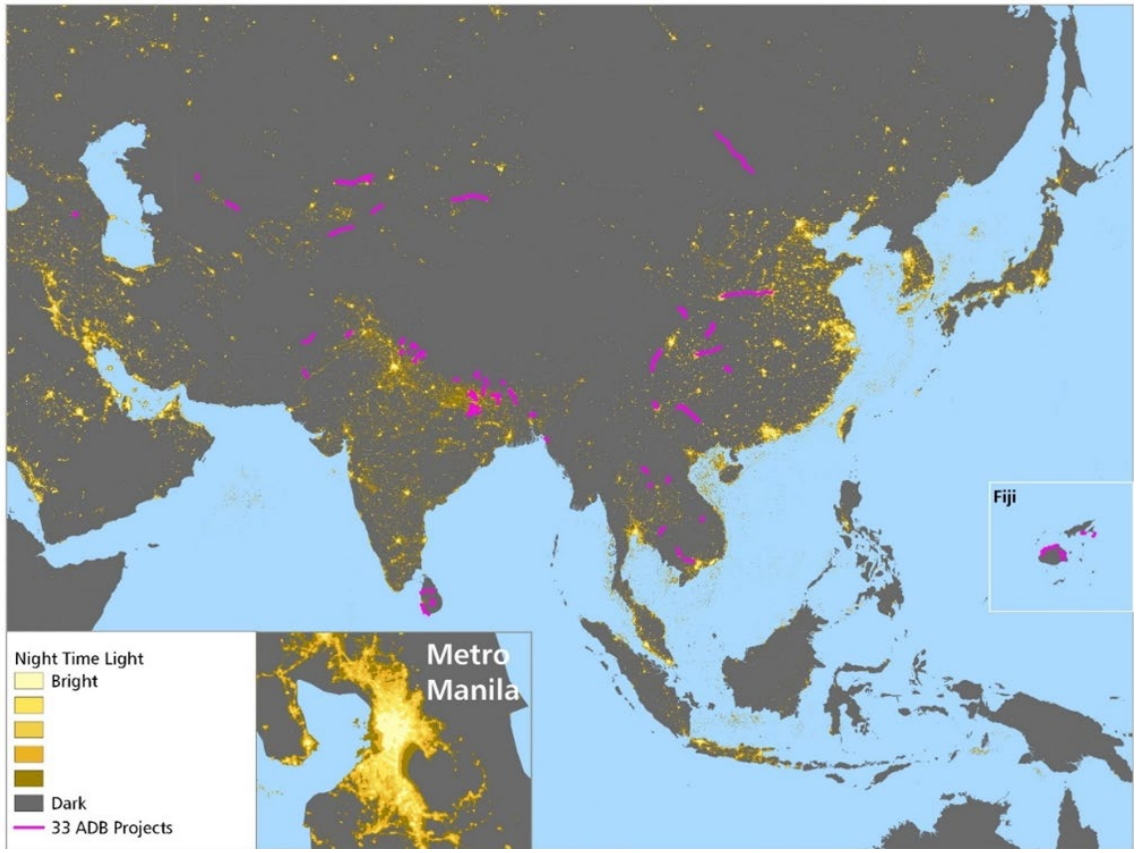
3. Use technology when appropriate



- Most project designs include M&E including baseline and endline measures (controls more contentious)
- Implementation is not well done
  - Not a priority given other more immediate concerns
  - Lack of capacity
- Technology can help

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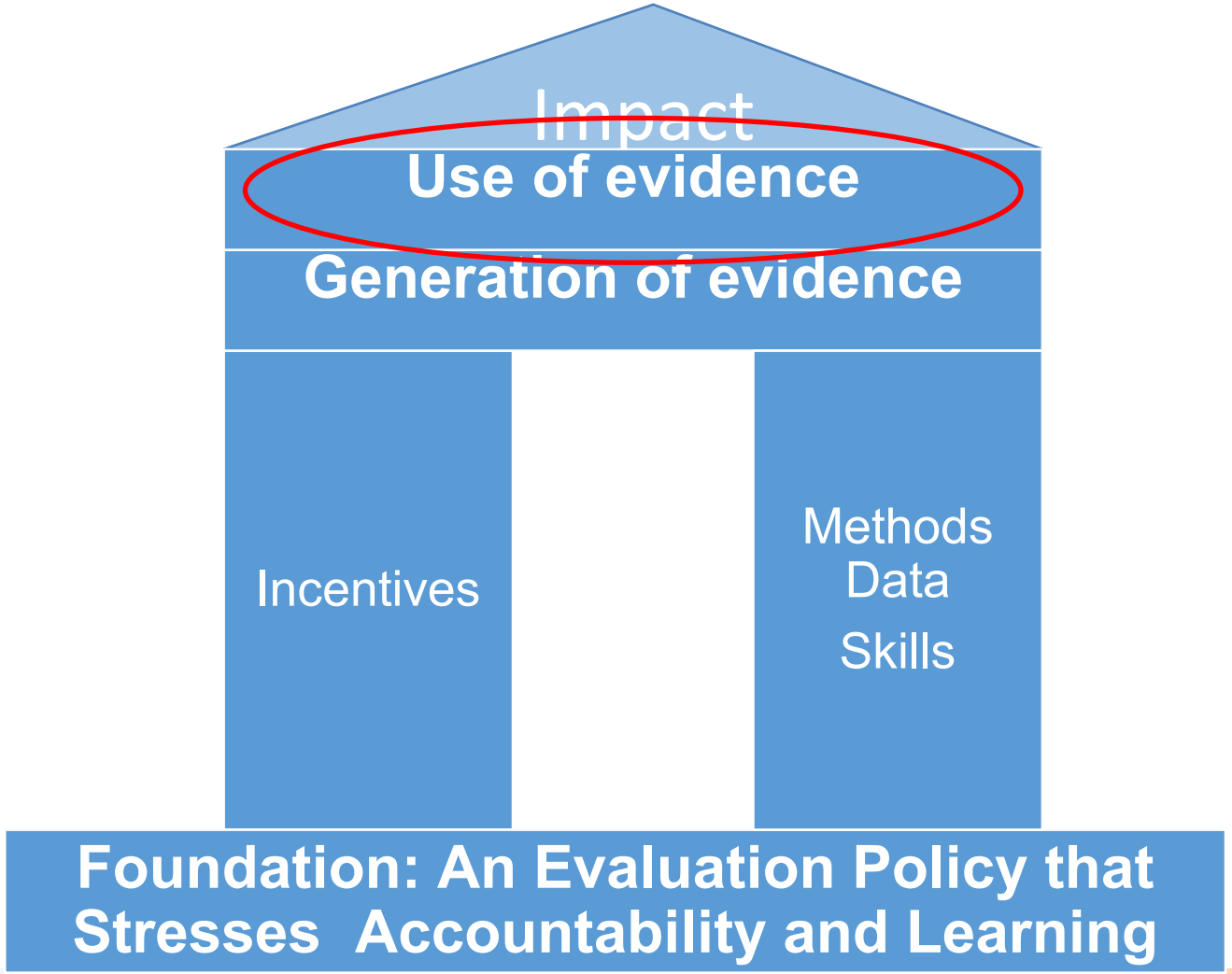
Locations of 33 ADB-supported Projects

Economic growth Without Project	Economic growth With Project	Difference-in-Difference
6%	11%	5%

On average, 45% of the growth rate can be attributed to the 33 projects

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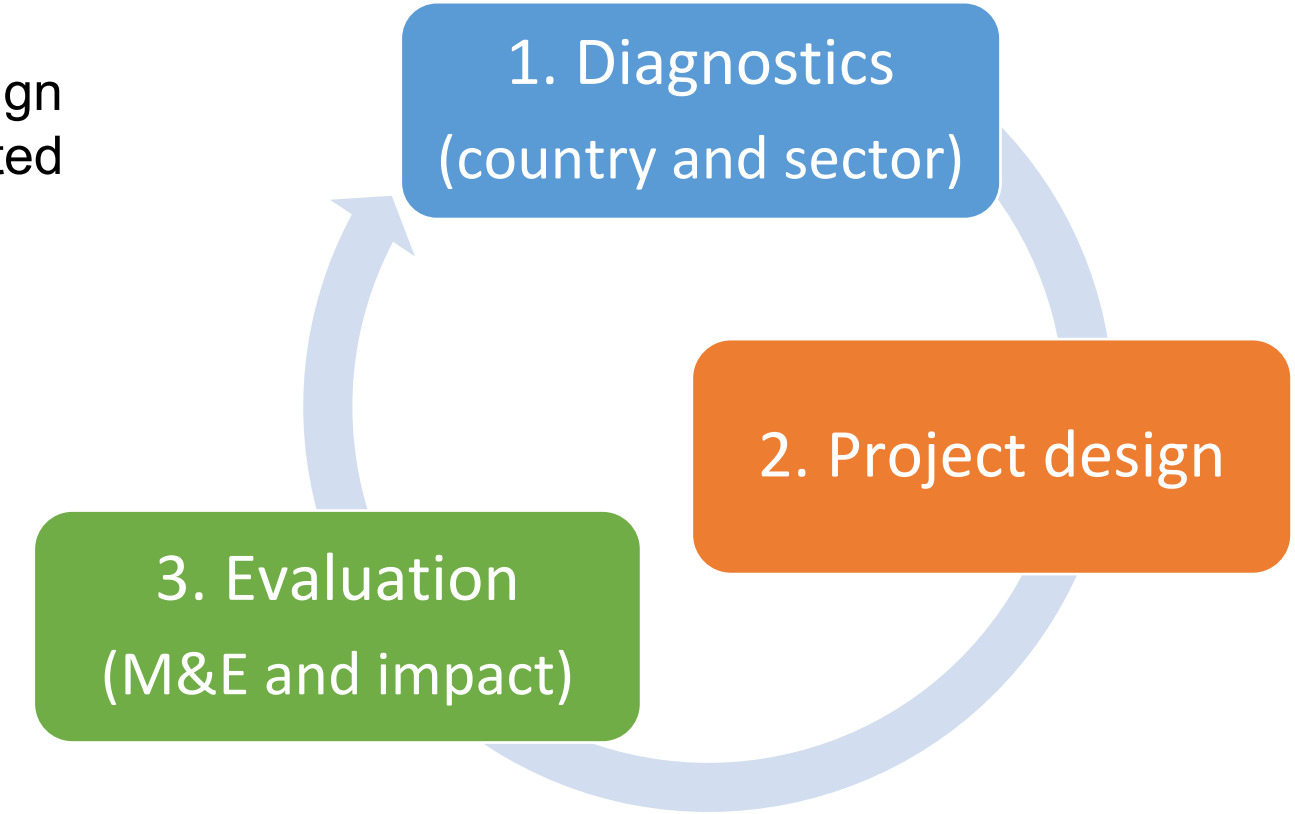
Building a culture of evidence at MDBs



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1. Embed evidence-based thinking early

- **Ex-Ante**
  - Use evidence on what has worked in design
  - Build Theory of Change in design supported by capacity building with appropriate incentives
  - Design and implement M&E into the projects and address given limited stakeholder capacity.
- **Ex-Post**
  - Updating guidelines on validations and evaluations
  - Capacity building



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2. Facilitate access to existing evidence



EVA

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT
EXTREME TEAMWORK

Identify and Synthesize existing evidence:

Use AI to harvest lessons

- Project preparation: Fully referenced project-level lessons for use in new project preparation
- Inputs for evaluation: Fully referenced downloadable table of lessons for further analysis
- Synthesis: Fully referenced high-level summary of lessons on trends, what worked, and what did not work



Your text here

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3. Monitor use of evidence



- ADB's online platform for tracking and reporting management actions on accepted IED recommendations from high-level evaluations
- Plays critical role in oversight and governance by linking independent evaluation to management action and institutional change

MARS Performance Indicators, Reporting Year 2020-2025

On average, 96% of recommendations accepted and 75% fully or largely implemented

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4. Engage on evaluation: communications





- Independent but not isolated.
- Don’t disseminate, communicate:
  - Plan outreach strategy early, define stakeholders and tailor messages accordingly
  - Ensure messages are well-communicated and constructive
  - Use multiple communications platforms

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Summary lessons

- A well articulated structure for evaluating its impact is based on a foundation of accountability and learning
- Evaluation functions focus on not only generating the right evidence but also to maximize its use in decision-making
- Lessons from the generation of evidence
  - Incentivize realism in self-assessments
  - Use broad methodological toolkit
  - Employ technological advances like big data
- Lessons from the use of evidence
  - Embed evaluative thinking early in the design of projects and rograms
  - Use AI to help access the evidence
  - Monitoring the use of evaluation can incentivize it
  - Communication often and well



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