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Producing policy-relevant evidence to address global challenges

Thursday 13th February 2025

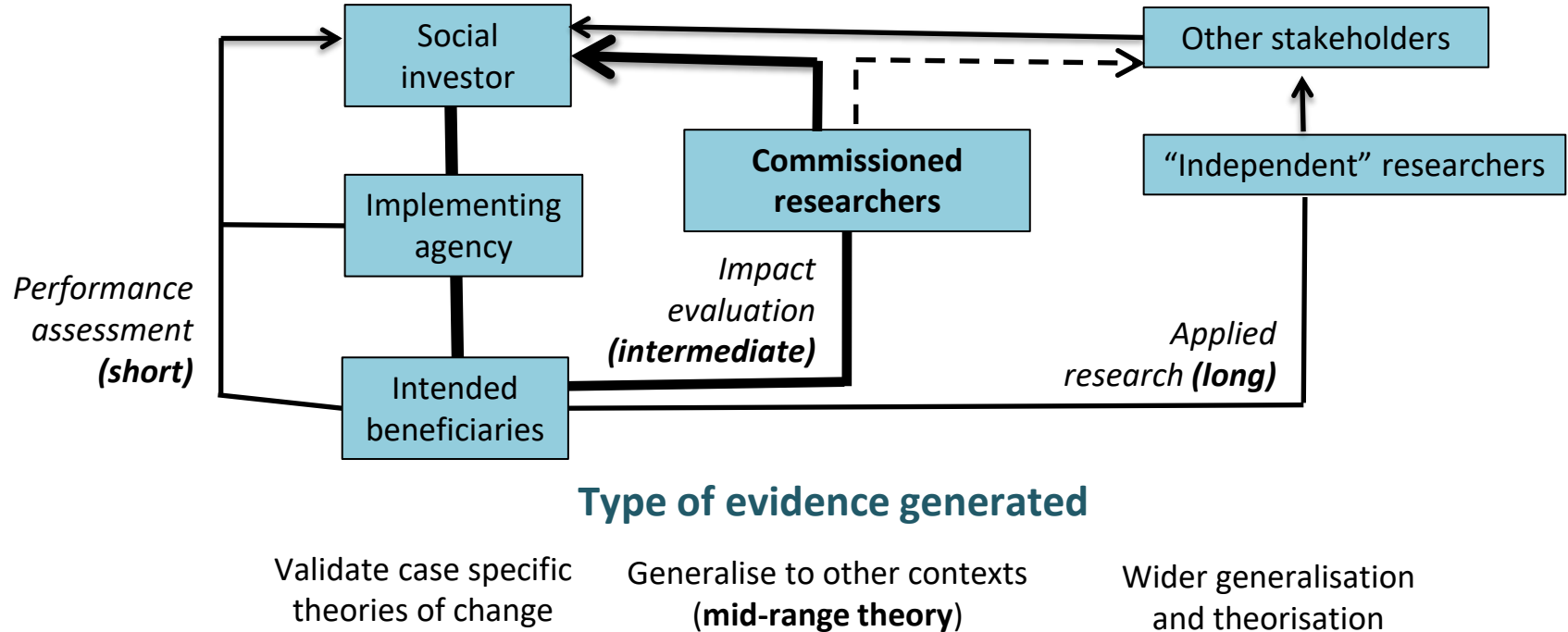**Producing policy-relevant evidence to address global challenges**

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In my ten minutes, I aim to reaffirm the value of pragmatic, pluralistic, solidarity-based, *bricolage* (including mixed method) approaches to producing evidence of impact in the face of political assaults on the very idea of development assistance.

Context – multiple feedback loops

| Social investor | Other stakeholders |

Commissioned researchers

"Independent" researchers

Implementing agency

*Performance assessment **(short)***

Intended beneficiaries

*Impact evaluation **(intermediate)***

*Applied research **(long)***

Type of evidence generated

Validate case specific theories of change

Generalise to other contexts (**mid-range theory**)

Wider generalisation and theorisation

How to produce impact evidence?

Method	Potential weaknesses and trade-offs
Performance management (including routine reviews of operational data)	Positional biases Mission drift Lack of credibility to others
Quantitative impact assessment (including randomized controlled trials)	Untimely, expensive, extractive Narrowly framed (limited relevance) Average effects – not why, how, for whom
Theory led qualitative impact evaluation (including QuIP)	Less precise (about extent of impact) Methodological confusion
Qualitative social research (including ethnography & participatory methods)	Can be expensive and slow Lack of transparency to non-participants; Too broadly framed (limited relevance)

No one approach is perfect
So how to mix them well?

QuIP studies 2016-2024

(My own evidence base!)

www.bathsdr.org

What?

Nutrition & child development
Climate change adaptation
Community mobilisation
Early famine response
Sexual & reproductive health rights
Safety of women & girls

Labour working conditions
Housing improvement
Microfinance & digital finance access
Agriculture & rural livelihoods
Organisational support & training
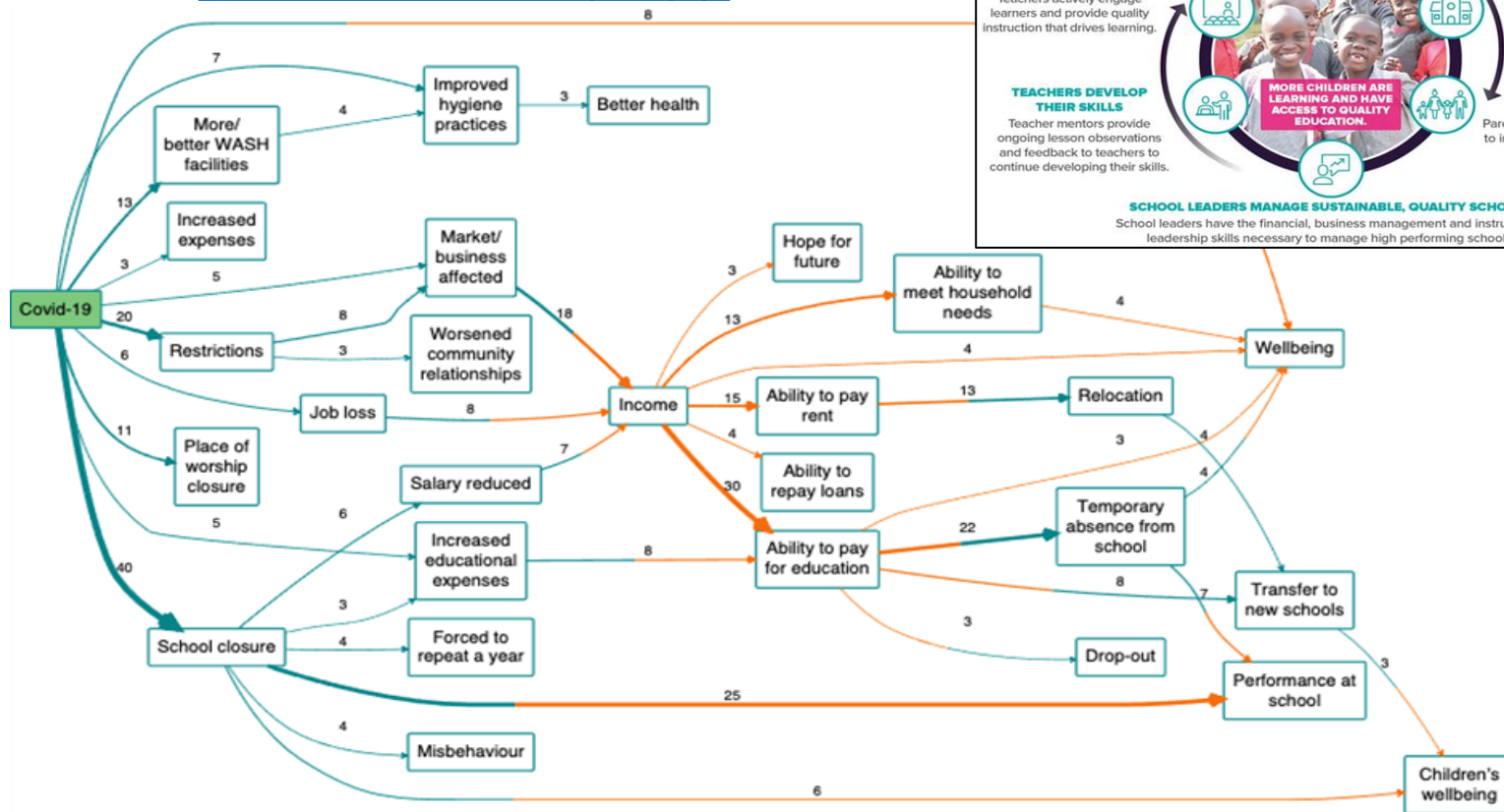Value chain improvement

For whom?

Where?

Bolivia
Burkina Faso
Cameroon
Côte d'Ivoire
DRC
Ethiopia
Ghana
Kenya
India
Indonesia
Malawi
Mauritania
Mexico

Mozambique
Nepal
Pakistan
Rwanda
Serbia
Sierra Leone
Tanzania
Tajikistan
Uganda
UK
Zambia
Zimbabwe

Example: validating a theory of change
www.causalmap.app

What a QuIP does and does <u>not</u> provide

Does provide...
Self-reported experience of change, and their causes
Maps of causal pathways from drivers to outcomes
Attribution of outcomes to selected interventions
Transparent aggregation of evidence from multiple sources
Variation in experience (e.g. by location, gender, age).

Does not provide...
Estimates of the <u>magnitude</u> of average treatment effects
Statistically representative frequency counts
Objective 'facts'
Recommendations for action

Three important distinctions

Need for evidence (in relation to uncertainty)	Exploratory (theory building, 'saturation') Confirmatory (theory testing, 'Bayesian')
How to address the attribution problem	Statistical inference Self-reported attribution
Mixed method design	Quant-led (high degree of certainty) Qual-led (high degree of uncertainty)

Two approaches to mixed methods

	Quant led	**Qual led**
Role of Quant	**Statistically inferred attribution** Baseline & endline survey comparisons of key variables	*To inform case selection and interpretation of qual findings*
	⬇	⬆
Role of Qual	*To identify variables and causal mechanisms to explain quant correlations*	**Self-reported attribution** To incrementally test, update, and enrich prior causal theories

Producing policy-relevant evidence to address global challenges

Bond Event – 13/02/2025

Dr Aurelie Charles

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What can be done when evidence is scarse?

ADDRESSING GLOBAL CHALLENGES THROUGH THE LOCAL CONTEXT BUT EVIDENCE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IS OFTEN SCARSE – WHAT TO DO?

BEWARE OF COGNITIVE BIAS IN DATA COLLECTION AND INTERPRETATION

Addressing global challenges through the local context – issues with disaggregated data

- Surveys tend to exclude groups and individuals at the top and the bottom of the income range

- Many groups are not represented properly in the data– e.g. people with disabilities and mental health issues, older people, children who are not part of the biological family

- Other groups being left out from surveys: children living outside households, minority ethnic groups, migrants.

- Disaggregated data is demanded by many of the Sustainable Development Goals targets

Ideas and Actions for Public Good

1. Addressing global challenges with local priorities context– what to do when evidence is scarce ?

Community-generated knowledge: "indigenous" knowledge (e.g. map below)

Existing domestic and international academic research statistics (e.g. systematic reviews, case studies..)

Stakeholder mapping, consultation and analysis including local surveys, ethnography, interviews and focus groups (e.g.: Essex Renewal Project)

Expert knowledge: collaboration with local University (e.g. Sustainability Doctors), thinktank...
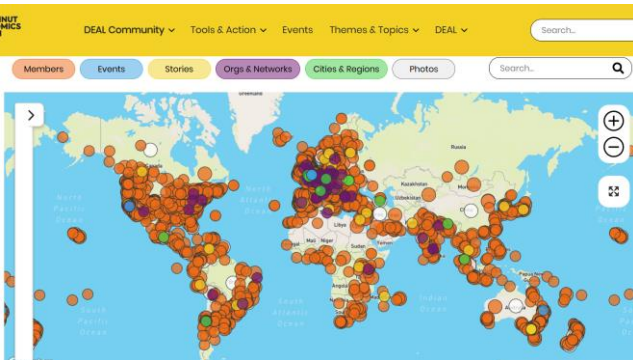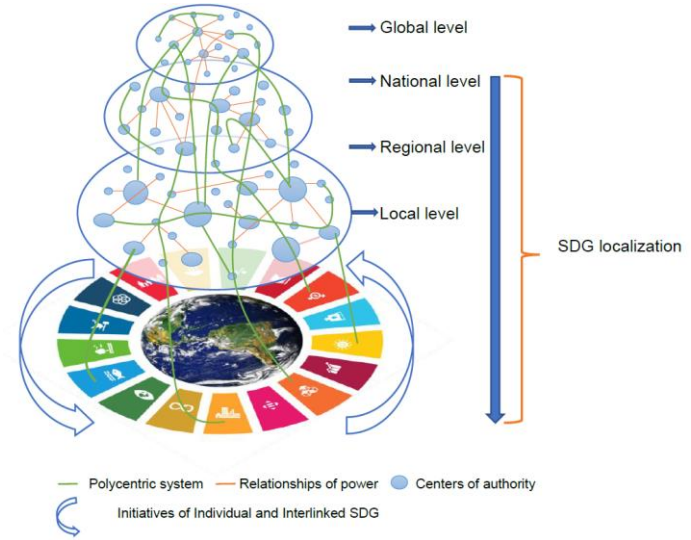
Cultivating Islands of SDG excellence from local priorities to regional, national and global SDGs priorities

- Using the SDGs wheels as compass for policy priorities at different levels does have its synergies and trade-offs but **the local level provides an ecological anchor**

- The Dynamics of the UN Voluntary Local Review using Causal Mapping within and across the Sustainable Development Goals

2. Beware of cognitive bias in data collection and interpretation

- **Group bias** ("groupthink") leads to the exacerbation of inequality
- **Confirmation bias** leads you to look at the evidence supports what you already believe and not giving attention to contrary evidence
  - **Optimistic bias** means that you believe to be able to achieve a policy target regardless of the evidence to the contrary
  - → over-optimistic evaluations of cost, time and benefits
- **Loss aversion**: overinvesting time in a project where you have already invested time and money, even when evidence shows the project to be ineffective
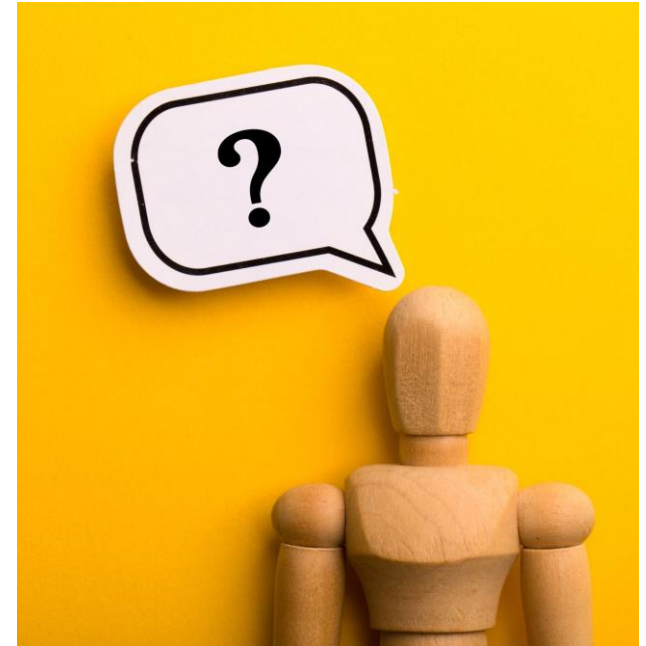
Concluding remarks

If we are not collecting data on the missing groups, invisible voices then do not show in the end policy: reinforcing inequality

Which in turn further reinforces cognitive biases

Diversity and inclusivity of voices from Day 1in the design and assumptions of data collection

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PROMOTING **EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY**
Reflections on experiences and challenges in Indonesia

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(2025)

Moving from the academia to the policymaking world – or rather, living both– is a *challenge* in itself.

On (public) policy

- "… anything a government chooses **to do** or **not to do**" (Dye, 1972)
- (Public) policy is always linked to certain issue(s) or problem(s) that become the concern of the society.
- Government's horizon is limited: there are **priorities**. No policy can satisfy everyone.
- There are **four main factors** determining the process of policymaking:
    (1) The political environment,
    (2) The economic environment,
    (3) The social and cultural environment, and
    (4) The administrative environment.
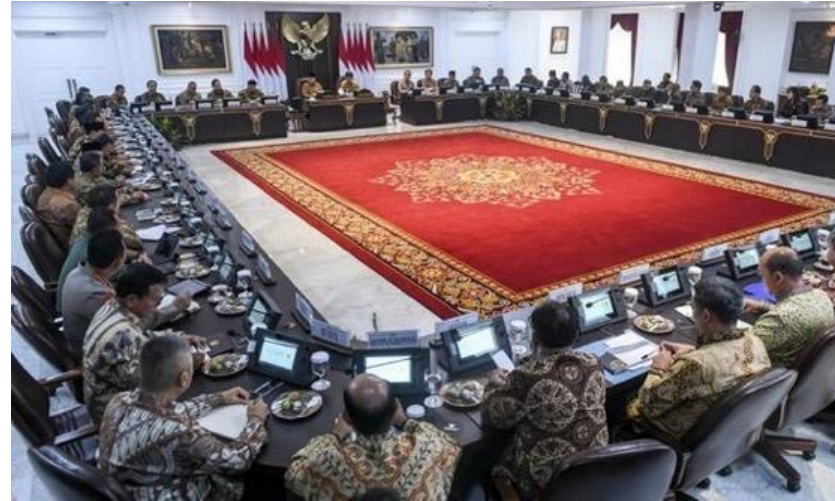
See prominent works of Dewey (1927), Laswell (1950), Easton (1965), Sharkansky (1970), Dye (1972), Anderson (1984, 1979), Lester & Stewart (1996), Lemay (2002), Somit & Peterson (2003), Friedrich (2007), Kraft & Furlong (2018), among many others

Again: From 'knowledge' to 'policy'

Research and policy: *Non sequitur*?

o   Research   : intellectual moments

o   Policy   : political moments

Research/knowledge is often assumed to have **positive links** with policy.

Is this assumption correct?

Some questions

Policy
The *content*, *substance* and mechanism. What is done, and what are the effects?

Source: Edler, 2008

Politics
The *process* by which policy is decided upon and implemented

Polity
The *institutional framework* (including political culture) in which policies are defined and implemented
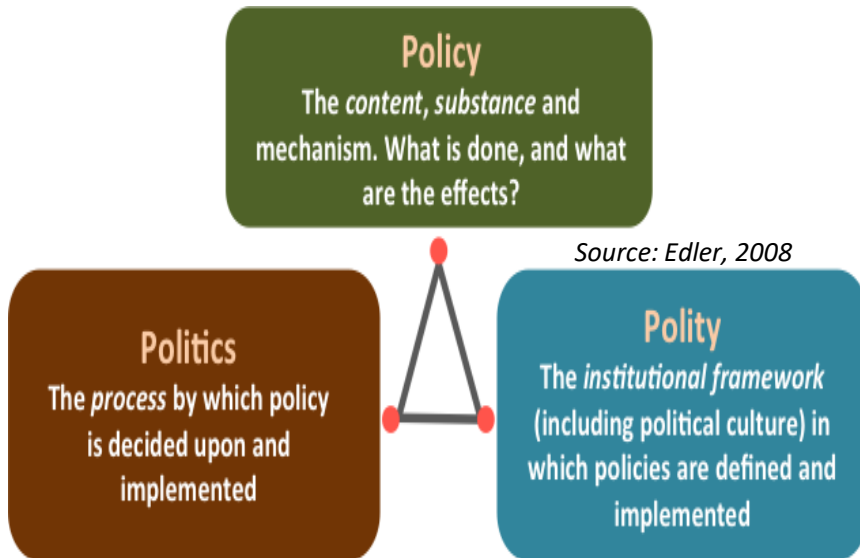
To what extent does <u>research</u> contribute to the policymaking processes?

- How do(es) research influence ***policy***?
- How do(es) research (and researchers) influence ***politics***?
- How do(es) research become, or facilitate ***polity***?

The context of evidence–based policymaking

Evidence-based policymaking (EBP):
- not new in Indonesia, but its adoption has been an uphill battle;
- decisions were often influenced by political instincts, vested interests, or immediate concerns;
- challenging status quo and fostering a paradigm shift where policy decisions are informed by reliable data, rigorous analysis, and stakeholder engagement.

Initiatives have been taken, but the road ahead remains long, particularly when evidence confronts the political realities of policymaking.

Experience #1: Executive Office of the President

Executive Office of the President:
- 2009 – 2014 the first delivery unit for the president: **President's Delivery Unit for Development Monitoring and Oversight**
- 2014 – 2019 **Executive Office of the President** - delivery and a policy analysis unit (thinktank) to the President. Focused on high-stakes decisions, e.g. expansion of social protection, UHC, agrarian reform, rural development.
- Continued to 2019-2024 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic:

However,
- not without resistance;
- many were initially sceptical of external expertise influencing policy
- yet over time the credibility of evidence-based interventions earned trust.

MENDORONG PEMBUATAN KEBIJAKAN BERBASIS BUKTI
Pengalaman Kantor Staf Presiden dan Prioritas Pembangunan 2015-2019

Agustus 2020

Experience #2: Integrating SDGs into NDP

**Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**
- Mainstreamed into national development planning
- Adopted a multi-tiered approach:
    - embedding SDG targets into national and sub-national development plans,
    - aligning them with national and sub-national priorities,
    - creating dashboards to monitor progress
        - sdgs.bappenas.go.id/dashboard;
        - sdgs.bappenas.go.id/repository.

One notable success was in **combating stunting and efforts in eradicating extreme poverty** (although not 100%)
- leveraging data from surveys and gGIS
- identified stunting and poverty hotspots
- prioritized resource allocation to those areas.

This data-driven approach has led to significant improvements in child health indicators and extreme poverty alleviation.

National achievement: **43%** (global 17% and AsPac 14.4%) – **the highest among upper MICs**.
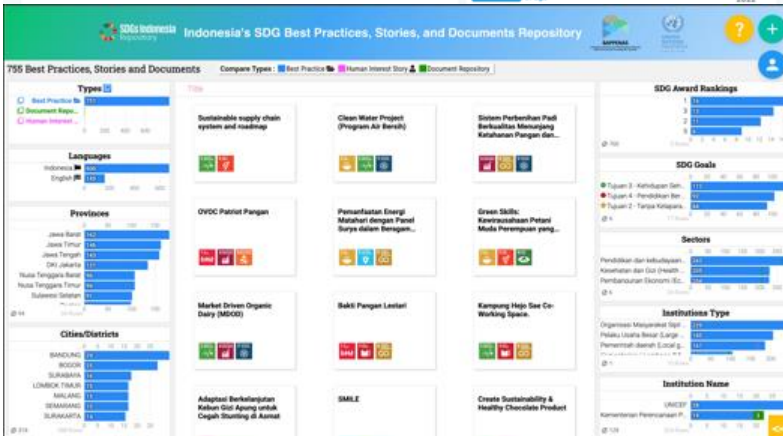
Experience #3: Leveraging Digital Technology

Digital governance reforms to improve **data integration, policy coordination, and public service efficiency**, i.e.

1. ***Satu Data Indonesia* (One Data Indonesia)**
   - Aims to ensure **data standardization, interoperability, and accessibility** across government institutions
   - Addresses issues of **fragmented, inconsistent, and inaccessible data**, which hinder effective policymaking
   - Government institutions follow **standardized data formats,** use a **single data reference**, and **share information across agencies**.

2. ***Sistem Pemerintahan Berbasis Elektronik* (e-government)**
   - Focuses on **digitizing government services and processes**
   - Aims to integrate **electronic governance systems across ministries, local governments, and public institutions**, reducing bureaucratic inefficiencies and promoting data-driven policymaking.
   - Includes **e-government services, cybersecurity frameworks, and digital platforms** to enhance service delivery.

3. ***Kebijakan Satu Peta* (One Map Policy)**
   - Addresses the issue of **overlapping land-use policies** by consolidating **geospatial data** from multiple institutions
   - Mandates the integration of **sectoral maps into a single national geospatial database**, ensuring that **land-use planning, infrastructure projects, and environmental management are based on accurate, conflict-free data**.
   - Essential for reducing conflicts over land ownership, enhancing investment certainty, and supporting sustainable development.
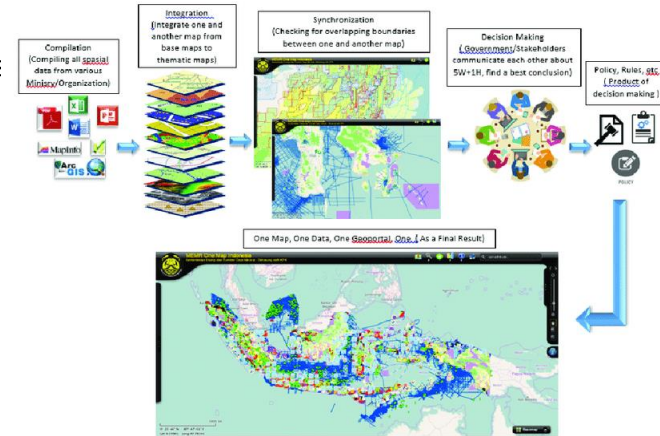
Challenges: Persistent barriers to EBP

1. Data Challenges
- Progress has been made in data collection …
- … but challenges remain in terms of reliability, standardization, and accessibility.
- In remote areas like Papua and Maluku, data gaps are severe → policies fail to address local realities.
- Data fragmentation across ministries and agencies hinders holistic policymaking.

2. Political Economy of Decision-Making
- Evidence v. political considerations (e.g. subsidy reforms backed by evidence v. resistance and pushback)
- Politicians reluctant to champion policies w/ long-term benefits but immediate costs, esp in an electoral cycle

3. Capacity Constraints
- Significant gap in technical capacity at subnational level
- Local officials lack trainings to interpret data or apply it effectively in policymaking
- Compounded by high turnover rates, which disrupt institutional continuity

4. Public Trust and Engagement
- Policymaking is not just about evidence but also about perception
- Communities, especially the marginalized, are sceptical of policies formulated in distant capitals
- Bridging trust gap requires better communication of evidence and genuine community involvement

Lessons learned and way forward

1. Building Coalitions for Change
- Evidence alone cannot drive policy change; it requires champions at every level of government and society.
- Building coalitions (CSOs, academics, and the private sector) invaluable to amplify the credibility and impact.

2. Investing in Capacity Development
- Sustainability of EBP depends on the skills of policymakers; capacity-building programs is crucial.
- Partnerships with universities to train officials in data analytics and evidence interpretation → needs scale-up.

3. Harnessing Technology
- Digital transformation strengthens EBP: Big data, AI, engagement platform, etc. help close data gaps, enhance policymaking, and build trust.
- Requires significant investment in infrastructure and digital literacy.

4. Adapting Evidence to Context
- Policymaking is not one-size-fits-all; evidence must be contextualized to realities.

5. Communicating Evidence Effectively
- Evidence must be communicated to policymakers and the public.
- Simplifying data into actionable insights and narratives can help bridge the gap between evidence and action.

THANK YOU

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(2025)

Attachments

Indonesia: The political-technocratic contexts 2024-2029

8 visions "Asta Cita"	17 priorities	8 quick wins
1. State ideology Pancasila, democracy, and human rights. 2. Defence and state self-sufficiency through food self-provision, energy, water, creative economy, and blue and green economies. 3. Quality jobs, entrepreneurship, creative industry, and infrastructure. 4. Human capital, science, technology, education, health, sport achievements, gender equality, role of women, youth and people with disabilities. 5. Downstreaming and industrialisation 6. Village development, economic equality, and poverty reduction. 7. Reforms of politics, law, and bureaucracy; prevention and eradication of corruption and drugs. 8. Harmony with nature, environment, and culture; religious tolerance; social justice and welfare.	1. Self-sufficiency in food, energy, and water. 2. State revenue system. 3. Reforms of politics, laws, and bureaucracy. 4. Prevention and eradication of corruption. 5. Poverty alleviation. 6. Prevention and eradication of drugs. 7. Universal health coverage, health insurance, medicines. 8. Education, science & technology, digitalisation. 9. Defence and International Relations. 10. Preservation of environment. 11. Gender equality, rights of women, children, and people with disabilities. 12. Fertilisers, seeds, and pesticides for farmers. 13. Affordable housing and sanitation for villages and people. 14. Downstreaming and industrialisation based on natural and maritime resources for job creation. 15. Economic equality, MSMEs and New Capital. 16. Religious tolerance, freedom of worship, places of worship. 17. Arts and culture, creative economy, and sport.	1. Providing free lunch and free milk at schools and boarding schools, nutrition for U5 and expecting mothers. 2. Creating and increasing productivity of farms through food barns in subnational and national levels. 3. Expansion of existing social welfare and entrepreneurship programmes. 4. Continuing village infrastructures, cash transfer, and providing affordable houses with sanitation. 5. Free health examinations, halving TBC cases in 5 years, and quality hospital in municipals. 6. Building integrated superior schools in each municipals, and renovating existing schools. 7. Increasing remuneration of civil service (esp teachers, lecturers, and health workers), military, police, and state officials. 8. Establishing State Revenue Agency and increasing the ratio of state income to GDP to 23%.

Thank you