Evidence Repository Integration Proposal

Final report

Innovations for Poverty Action

June 2025

Innovations for Poverty Action

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Introduction

There remains a persistent gap between research evidence and education policymakers and practitioners, often hindering the implementation of effective, evidence-based practices and policies within education systems. Despite the wealth of existing literature, findings are frequently underutilized in policy development due to obstacles such as misaligned timelines, weak capacity, barriers to research access, and lack of clear and actionable takeaways. This disconnect can lead to policies and practices that are not grounded in the best available evidence, limiting the potential for meaningful improvements in educational quality and learning outcomes and reducing the effectiveness of resources invested in education.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has actively worked to bridge this gap between research evidence and education policymakers in the UK by producing an accessible evidence repository and evidence-based toolkits and resources. Through this initiative, the EEF aims to ensure that educational policies and practices are grounded in solid evidence, ultimately improving outcomes for students. This work is also complemented by global efforts to develop a new user centered evidence synthesis infrastructure – particularly through the work of the Evidence Synthesis Infrastructure Collaborative (ESIC).

Expanding the accessibility and relevance of research education globally is essential to address complex education challenges, particularly in low and middle-income countries (LMICs). But connecting education policymakers with research evidence requires more than providing access to databases – it demands direct, thoughtful engagement to ensure that evidence is understood, trusted, and meaningfully applied. Without active engagement, research may be perceived as abstract, irrelevant, or misaligned with on-the-ground realities.

The IPA Embedded Evidence Lab program exemplifies this strategy of building meaningful connections between education policymakers and research evidence through direct, collaborative engagement. Rather than merely providing access to data, IPA works with policymakers to co-design "Embedded Evidence Labs" within government agencies, ensuring that evidence is integrated into the policymaking process. These labs work alongside policymakers to identify key challenges, generate relevant data, and apply insights to improve policies and programs. By embedding research capacity within government structures, these labs foster a

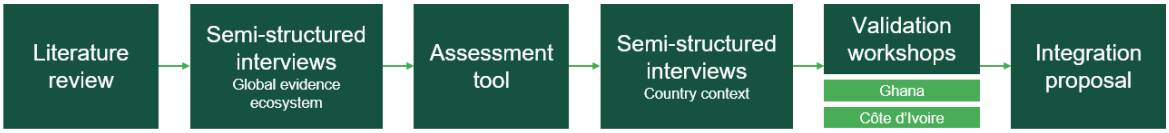
culture of data-informed decision-making, ensuring that evidence is not only accessible but also actionable and sustainable.

This report seeks to outline a strategy for collaboration between IPA's Embedded Evidence Labs (and Labs in general) and EEF's Research Database and broader evidence repositories in order to strengthen data and evidence use within global education systems. The EEF database was established in the United Kingdom to provide practical guidance on education-based educational practices. As the global scope of this work has grown, EEF is looking to understand how to best address questions around policy relevance in the Global South by understanding the potential of "embedded" models such as IPA's work in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire. By combining EEF's research resources with Embedded Evidence Labs, this strategy aims to create a dynamic feedback loop between global evidence and local implementation. Through this partnership, policymakers can be supported not only with high-quality evidence but also with the tools and relationships needed to adapt that evidence to their specific contexts. This approach has the potential to drive more context-sensitive, impactful, and evidence-based improvements to the global education system.

The rest of this report provides an overview of the project methodology and key concepts (evidence repositories, evidence synthesis, embedded labs). It then provides a brief discussion of the current context of the Embedded Labs in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, before outlining an Integration Proposal that captures the current challenges and opportunities within each of these labs related to both evidence synthesis and engagement with evidence repositories. These recommendations are largely focused on the Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire EdLabs, as they are both compelling cases that overlap with both IPA and the Jacob Foundation's portfolios, but the implications and conclusions are broadly applicable across other EdLab contexts (as validated in other interviews). The appendixes provide additional guidance and tools for the concrete implementation of these recommendations more broadly, offering a manual for other Embedded Labs. Together, these sections provide both an overview of the current state and a blueprint for future development.

Methodology

For this report, IPA conducted a literature review, two rounds of semi-structured interviews (35 in total), and two workshops in the selected countries. The literature review and the initial round of interviews served as a foundation to frame the topic and develop a tool to assess EdLab's readiness to use and conduct evidence synthesis. This tool was implemented during the second round of interviews, and its findings were validated in the workshops.



Literature & Document Review

For the literature review, we conducted searches in academic journal archives (e.g., JSTOR, Elsevier, ProQuest) and also searched for grey literature—other reports and unpublished studies—using search engines (e.g. Google, Google Scholar). Both of these searches revolved around the implementation and the potential impact of evidence repositories and evidence synthesis use. As such, we used the following key search terms: *evidence repository, evidence repository integration, education repositories, evidence repositories impact, repository evaluation, repository usage, evidence synthesis, systematic reviews in policymaking, and rapid reviews in policymaking.* Additionally, we consulted the websites and repositories of several of the stakeholders identified during the interview-mapping process and examined the reports, publications, evaluations, and other resources they have produced on evidence repositories and the strategies employed to promote evidence use among policymakers, practitioners, and other end-users.

As part of this process, the EEF synthesis team provided an introduction and training to the IPA team on the use of the EEF evidence repository. This training focused on the back-end structure, the hosting software, and the overall processes involved in coding, updating, and maintaining the repository. Following the training, the IPA team explored the available tools of the EEF repository to develop a deeper understanding of its structure and functionalities. Additionally, we examined key documents provided by EEF related to the repository's development and

maintenance, such as the *EEF Evidence Database: Protocol and Analysis Plan* and the *EEF Evidence Database Coding Guides.*

Interviews: First Round

In the first round of interviews, IPA aimed to better understand the global evidence ecosystem, the role of the evidence repositories, and the current state of the Education Embedded Labs. For this purpose, we mapped the key stakeholders involved in the evidence repositories ecosystem, identifying four main stakeholder categories:

1. ***Owners***: actors who produce or aggregate evidence into repositories.
2. ***Intermediaries***: those who utilize evidence from one or more repositories to create products designed for end-user consumption.
3. ***Education labs***: viewed as potential intermediaries.
4. ***End users***: the intended audience for the outputs of both owners and intermediaries.

For each stakeholder category, we identified specific actors—either organizations or individuals. In some cases, EEF facilitated both the identification of these actors and the initial contact with them. The final sample of the first round of interviewees included representatives from the *owner*, *intermediary*, and *lab* categories. In total, IPA conducted 13 interviews: seven with repository owners, two with intermediaries, and four with EdLabs.[1]

Despite orienting around these four major roles, the interviews largely focused on the specific functions within the evidence synthesis and repository development process rather than the individual roles, as these may vary somewhat between contexts. For instance, some Ministries might rely on EdLabs to deliver actionable evidence synthesis, while others have internal teams that are able to provide this support – the more important consideration is that this function exists and is implemented well, no matter who is doing it. In particular, Labs occupy a unique position in the evidence ecosystem, situated at the intersection of international evidence and local context. This positioning can enable them to play a critical role as both intermediaries and producers of evidence and synthesis in the global-local evidence value chain, as they draw from global approaches to address pressing contextual challenges.

[1] For the list of organizations interviewed, see Annex 2.

Interviews: Second Round

For the second round of interviews, IPA focused on understanding the national ecosystem for the use of evidence synthesis and evidence repositories in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, including the extent to which these resources were demanded and utilized; the country-level processes, institutional structures, capacities, and resources in place to support their use; and the role of Embedded Labs in this ecosystem. For this second round, we included policy makers as end users.

As part of this effort, we mapped key stakeholders involved in these processes within the Ministries of Education in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. For this round, we organized interviewees into three stakeholder categories: Embedded Labs members, ministry policymakers, and external partners. We developed specific questionnaires for each group. In total, IPA conducted 11 interviews with stakeholders in Côte d'Ivoire and 11 in Ghana.[2]

Regarding the interview protocol for both rounds of interviews, we developed a set of general questions as well as tailored questions specific to each stakeholder category and their respective roles within the evidence ecosystem. These questions served as a guiding framework for conducting the interviews.[3]

Assessment Framework Development

In addition to the practical project activities defined above, the team developed a theoretical framework to both organize the project work and provide a clear structure to communicate insights. Specifically, this involved the creation of an "Assessment Framework" to capture the level of development of EdLabs and their host ministries in terms of their ability to implement evidence synthesis and support evidence repositories. This framework is available in Annex 5 of this document.

The framework is based on the four core aspects of Embedded Lab institutionalization which can be applied to research processes such as evidence synthesis:

- Process: The overall process of evidence synthesis or repository development and maintenance, adapted to the specific context and current state of the government agency in question.

[2] For the distribution of interviews by type of stakeholder, see Annex 3.
[3] For the interview questionnaires, see Annex 4.

- Structure & Governance: The composition of the team responsible for implementing each step in the process, as well as the broader set of stakeholders who engage with the evidence repository or synthesis.
- Capacity: The ability of the core team and relevant stakeholders to engage effectively throughout the process, including individual team knowledge and skills, as well as the capabilities to engage with the broader stakeholder community such as local researchers.
- Resources: Financial and legal frameworks that can sustain both the team and the process, including committed political and financial support to ensure long-term viability.

These aspects have been tested and validated through more than 2-dozen Embedded Lab engagements, demonstrating not only technical validity but practical applicability in project implementation. While the specific topics and descriptions within each of these areas have been adapted to align with key areas within evidence synthesis and repositories (rather than Embedded Labs work more broadly) we are confident in the overall structure

The specific topics and their definitions within the framework were iterated upon throughout the project. An initial mapping was created based on the IPA team understanding of the key components of evidence synthesis and repository development, based on the team's understanding of the relevant processes and years of expertise in Embedded Lab support. This mapping was further updated based on the literature review, and through a series of revisions based on the interviews – while the initial framework was used to structure the interview guide, the interviews themselves helped to continue to update and improve the framework.

The result was a set of criteria categorizing EdLabs and their host ministries based on their level of development:

1. Emergent: Evidence synthesis and repository activities are either completely nonexistent or haphazardly implemented by individual staff members, rather than being a key component of policymaking.
2. Developing: These activities are performed, even sometimes at a high level, but the teams lack a clear process and structure that can ensure consistency of results.

3. Best-Practice: Activities are well-structured and consistently implemented at a high level. While occasional issues may arise, overall these EdLabs and ministries can serve as an example for others.

Using this approach to deliver an assessment is based on applying a series of related tools:

1. Interview Guides: The interview guides aim to capture the perspectives of EdLabs as intermediaries, Policymakers as end users, and External partners as supporters of evidence synthesis and use.
2. Analytical Matrix: The Analytical Matrix provides a way to triangulate between the three categories of users, synthesizing common challenges and strengths expressed in the interviews. This matrix is captured in a spreadsheet (available upon request) that maps interview questions to the key aspects and topics described above.
3. Rubric: Based on the answers provided in the interviews, it is up to the assessing team to make a determination based on their best judgement of the level of development as outlined above. These impressions should then be confirmed through a Validation Workshop with the key Ministry stakeholders, as outlined below.

Going forward, we anticipate that this framework and approach can serve as a useful tool for EdLabs and the broader sector to understand the key challenges with the implementation of evidence synthesis and repositories. This can allow teams to identify issues and work to address them, measuring progress towards “best practices” over time. The framework itself can also continue to be updated and revised, as it continues to cover additional contexts and ministries.

Validation Workshops

Interview findings were further validated through in-person workshops in both Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire. These workshops were tailored to their local contexts, and included participants from the ministries, interviewees, and other stakeholders The content included:

- Project Overview – Connecting Evidence & Policy: A presentation from IPA introducing the workshop and contextualizing the core challenge of connecting global evidence with policy decisions and education practice.
- Diagnostic Findings – Understanding the Current State: IPA shares reflections on current areas of strength and challenges within the Ministry related to the use of evidence repositories.
- Next Steps: Breakout groups reflected together on the diagnostic findings, and aligned on practical next steps for addressing the identified challenges.

During the workshops, the communication of findings with the Labs primarily focused on a summary of key challenges rather than covering each topic area within the assessment framework. This helped to ensure that the teams focused on the most critical topics for their specific context. These workshops were well-received by the participants, who reported that they provided a roadmap for future evidence uptake efforts.

Project Overview

Evidence repositories and embedded EdLabs are part of an international evidence architecture, where they interact with multiple stakeholders. This section aims to present an overview of the characteristics, challenges and opportunities of the repositories and Embedded Labs in Education in this evidence ecosystem, based on our literature review and interviews.

Evidence Repositories

During our literature review, we found that the field of evidence repositories as well as their interaction with other actors within the broader evidence ecosystem remains relatively underexplored. Nevertheless, it is an area of growing academic interest (Russell & Day, 2010). Overall, evidence repositories are described as structured collections that curate, organize and synthesize evidence to support policy decision-making (Finney, S. and Buchan, H., 2021).

These repositories aim to enhance decision-making by providing timely, accessible, and rigorous information. They support this effort by creating access points to relevant evidence and by the provision of products and tools that facilitate the translation of evidence into actionable interventions. As a result, they go beyond simple document storage. The repositories function as comprehensive platforms specifically designed for evidence synthesis, knowledge translation, and dissemination. Repositories achieve this through the use of well-defined methodologies and procedures such as (Finney & Buchan, 2021; Russell & Day, 2010):

1. **Systematic categorization**: Evidence is categorized by topic, methodology, population, or other relevant criteria to facilitate easy retrieval.
2. **Quality assessment**: Most repositories include assessments of study quality, methodological rigor, and potential biases.
3. **Standardized extraction**: Information from original studies is extracted using consistent frameworks to enable comparison.
4. **Synthesis capabilities**: Many repositories provide tools or methodologies to combine and analyze findings across studies.
5. **Accessibility features**: Repositories typically include search functions, filters, and user-friendly interfaces to help users find relevant evidence.

Evidence repositories support the generation of a variety of outputs that stem from evidence synthesis processes such as evidence summaries, policy briefs, reports, evidence gap maps, and other tools specifically designed to support decision-making (Shahmoradi et al., 2017). In all of these outputs, evidence synthesis is used to integrate diverse strands of empirical data with local insights that might be relevant to specific contexts (Head, 2015).

However, evidence repositories face significant challenges in ensuring that the outputs they produce are effectively used. There is broad agreement in the literature that building both individual and organizational capacity is essential for tools like evidence repositories to have a lasting and meaningful impact—particularly within organizations such as evidence or policy labs (Hawkes et al., 2015).

At the individual level, it is important that users and potential users possess basic skills to interpret, analyze, and apply evidence—for example, statistical knowledge or methodological literacy. In addition, to facilitate the effective use of these tools, users should have a basic understanding of the repository's structure, functions, and technical features. At the institutional level, the presence of collaborative networks among key stakeholders—such as between labs and government agencies, or between labs and policymakers—encourages and facilitates the use of evidence (Burns, 2024).

Evidence Synthesis

There is not a standard definition of evidence synthesis, however, they are generally understood as a rigorous, systematic process that identifies, selects, and integrates findings from multiple sources. Various evidence synthesis methodologies exist—ranging from non-systematic to systematic approaches—each differing in process, level of rigor, and approach to summarizing the evidence base (Cooper, H., Hedges, L., & Valentine, J., 2019).

Systematic reviews follow predetermined, transparent protocols with explicit methodologies designed to minimize bias and ensure reproducibility. Their goal is to comprehensively identify, evaluate, and synthesize all relevant evidence on a specific question. In contrast, non-systematic reviews—such as narrative reviews—lack standardized methodologies and are more susceptible to selection bias and incomplete evidence identification. While often faster and more flexible, they tend to produce less reliable and comprehensive syntheses.

These two approaches reflect a fundamental trade-off between rigor and efficiency. Systematic reviews offer greater credibility, reduced bias, and a more robust synthesis of evidence by employing exhaustive search strategies and transparent methods. However, they require substantial time (typically 6–24 months), resources, and specialized expertise, making them most suitable for high-stakes policy decisions or clinical guidelines. Ministries or EdLabs are also able to commission these reviews from external parties to take advantage of available expertise.

On the other hand, non-systematic reviews are faster, more adaptable, and cost-effective, enabling the rapid synthesis of emerging topics and the integration of expert opinion. Yet, this comes at the cost of reduced methodological rigor, potential selection bias, and limited reproducibility.

The choice between systematic and non-systematic reviews depends on the urgency of the research question, the availability of resources, and the consequences of potential bias. Systematic reviews are preferable when robust, unbiased evidence is critical for decision-making, whereas non-systematic reviews may be more appropriate when timely insights are needed and resource constraints are a key consideration.

In the following section, we briefly discuss two types of synthesis that are particularly relevant to the integration of EdLabs and evidence repositories.

Systematic reviews

Systematic review is a methodology that extracts and categorizes findings from different evidence sources to respond to specific research or policy questions. The main objective of these reviews is to describe the effectiveness of specific interventions based on the most credible and rigorous evidence available (Finney, S., and Buchanan, H. 2021).

These reviews are typically designed around a protocol that details the research question, inclusion and exclusion criteria, comprehensive search strategies, and methods of data extraction and synthesis to minimize bias and enhance reliability. These syntheses often incorporate a diverse combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. As a result, they demand substantial skill, time, and financial resources, which inevitably impacts the overall cost and feasibility of conducting a high-quality review (Cooper, H., Hedges, L., & Valentine, J., 2019).

Rapid reviews

Rapid reviews include a group of methodologies specifically tailored to address pressing decision-making needs with little time to be conducted, but still striving to preserve core elements of methodological rigor. These reviews adopt strategic shortcuts—such as narrowing the research question, limiting the range of databases searched, and selectively omitting parts of the detailed quality assessment—to produce synthesized evidence within a considerably shorter time frame than traditional systematic reviews (Haby et al., 2016).

Similar to the distinction between systematic and non-systematic approaches, systematic reviews and rapid reviews differ primarily in their rigor and reproducibility. Systematic reviews are guided by comprehensive protocols with clearly defined inclusion criteria and standardized data extraction methods. In contrast, rapid review methodologies often rely on the authors' expertise to select studies, making them more susceptible to selection bias. While rapid reviews can provide timely and valuable insights for exploring emerging topics, they lack the methodological rigor required to produce robust and reproducible findings.

Practitioner Toolkits

We focus on evidence synthesis and repositories from the perspective of policymakers because it has become clear that direct teacher engagement with practitioner toolkits is not a likely pathway at this stage—at least in our focus countries of Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. There are several reasons for this.

First, the toolkits and resources emerging from synthesis efforts need to be contextualized—ideally by an evidence broker with local knowledge and strong ties to the education system—in order to ensure they align with national priorities, existing teacher needs, and the current curriculum. In this regard, efforts by organizations such as eBASE, which have contextualized toolkits for the sub-Saharan African context, are extremely valuable and could be leveraged.

Second, introducing new materials or approaches in these countries must go through the relevant government departments responsible for managing pedagogical content and teacher strategies, so that proper support can be provided. As such, any materials or strategies aimed at teachers should be integrated into existing delivery unit infrastructure, where alignment, scalability, and sustainability can be better ensured.

This could be a project that the EdLab considers within its learning cycle, supporting the relevant ministry unit in evaluating and monitoring the implementation of toolkits in the national context.

Embedded Labs

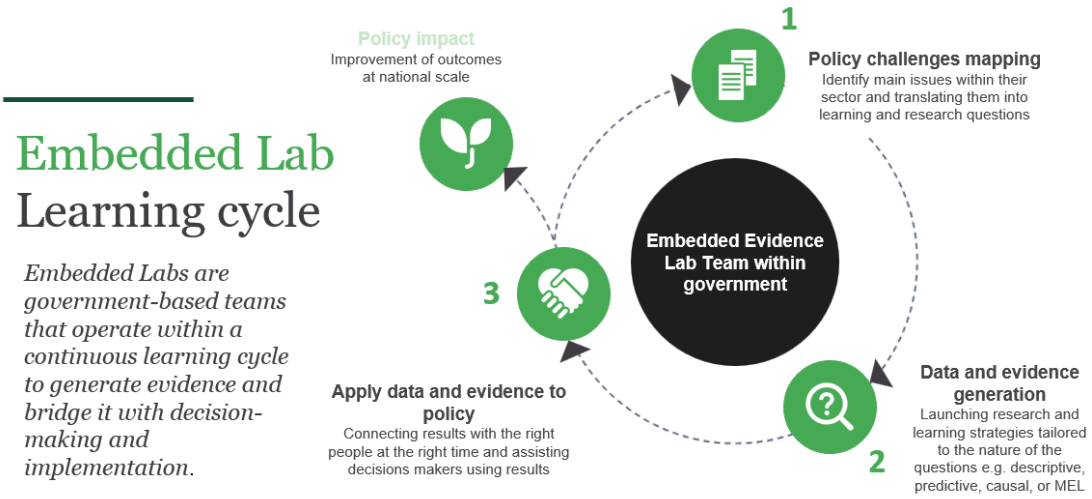
Embedded Labs are one of IPA's flagship policy engagements, defined as teams working within government agencies to promote the institutionalization of evidence and data use in the policymaking process. They are part of the broader category known as Policy Labs, which encompasses a wide variety of organizations that aim to bring the use of scientific evidence and data closer to the policymaking process (Kim, Wellstead & Heikkila, 2022).

IPA Lab members collaborate closely with policymakers and other decision-makers to design and implement innovative interventions. IPA also works hand-in-hand with host government agencies to embed the lab within existing governmental structures, with the ultimate goal of enabling the lab to operate independently of IPA's support (IPA, 2025).

Embedded Labs structure their evidence generation and use facilitation activities around a three-step cycle.

1. **Policy challenges mapping**: The Lab assists in identifying the main issues within its sector and translating them into learning and research questions.
2. **Data and evidence generation**: The Lab launches learning and research strategies tailored to the nature of the questions, such as descriptive analysis, predictive analytics, impact evaluations, or Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) practices.
3. **Applying data and evidence to policy**: The Lab connects results with the right people at the right time and assists decision-makers in using evidence to improve policy.

The following figure graphically illustrates these stages:



This learning cycle structure provides an overarching framework for the wide variety of services that Embedded Labs deliver – from the design and development of MEL and information systems, through coaching and dissemination events to connect data and insights to policy decisions. This can also include integration with Evidence Synthesis, as outlined below.

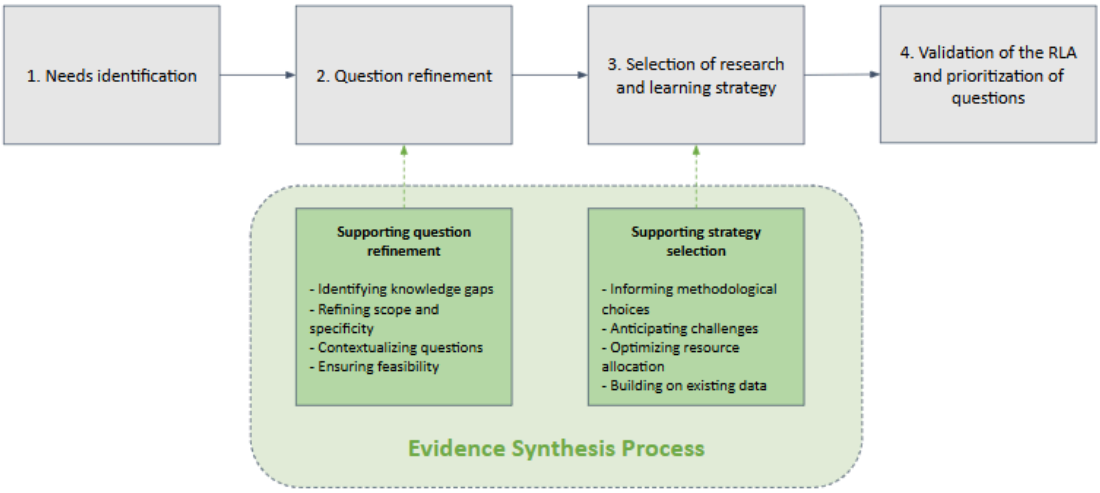
Evidence synthesis in the Embedded Lab learning cycle

Throughout a Lab's learning cycle, multiple decision-making moments emerge where leveraging pre-existing evidence is essential. Integrating an evidence synthesis process within the Lab presents a valuable opportunity to enhance these decision-making points by providing timely and relevant insights. This integration allows Labs to access high-quality evidence while also improving efficiency – instead of conducting evidence synthesis from scratch for each policy question, Labs can rely on a ready-to-use system for storing, processing, and presenting information.

Step 1: Policy challenges mapping

The initial phase of the Embedded Lab's learning cycle involves the identification of sector-specific needs and priorities, and the development of a Research and Learning Agenda (RLA), a structured document that consolidates and articulates these priorities. During this process, there are two moments where evidence

synthesis proves particularly valuable, and is commonly employed by Labs: refining research questions and selecting appropriate research and learning strategies.



During the question refinement stage, evidence synthesis helps transform preliminary questions into more focused, actionable inquiries that are grounded in existing knowledge. This involves conducting a rapid assessment of the available evidence base related to the initial questions.

In the selection of research and learning strategies, evidence synthesis informs the choice of appropriate methodologies to answer the refined questions. This includes determining whether to use qualitative research, data analysis, pilot interventions, or other relevant approaches.

Step 2: Data and evidence generation

Once the research and learning questions have been refined and prioritized, and an initial set of approaches has been proposed to address them, the next step for the Lab team is to implement these strategies. At this stage, new opportunities for evidence synthesis emerge, taking different forms depending on the selected research approach:

- Evidence synthesis as a primary method: In some cases, the RLA may include questions for which an initial assessment indicates a high level of confidence that evidence synthesis would be sufficient to address them. In

these cases, it is essential to determine which specific type of synthesis (e.g. rapid review, systematic review) will be conducted based on a number of factors: research question, available evidence, and intended use of the findings. Systematic reviews suit questions of effectiveness, while narrative or scoping reviews fit exploratory needs or sparse data. Time, resources, and team expertise also play key roles—comprehensive reviews require more time and specialized skills, while rapid assessments offer quicker, resource-efficient alternatives.

- Evidence synthesis as a complementary Method: This is the most common scenario in which evidence synthesis is applied within broader research strategies such as impact evaluations or descriptive studies. In these cases it is standard practice to include an evidence synthesis component to inform study design by highlighting unresolved gaps in the literature, thereby enhancing the focus and relevance of the study. Furthermore, it informs methodological decisions by drawing on lessons learned from similar evaluations, guiding key aspects such as sampling strategies, analytical approaches, relevant outcomes and indicators, and potential implementation challenges.

Step 3: Apply data and evidence to policy

Once the research and learning strategies have been implemented, the Lab team deploys targeted approaches to support decision-making and implementation based on the resulting findings. A key feature of this step is that it crystallizes the learning process by demonstrating how the results address the original Research and Learning Agenda (RLA) developed in Step 1. In doing so, the Lab generates new knowledge that builds on the evidence base previously mapped, contributing to a cumulative understanding of what works.

Beyond the Learning Cycle

Going beyond the role of the Lab within a Ministry's learning cycle, Labs can play an important role in furthering the use of evidence globally through their unique position between global networks and local actors:

- Local Evidence Curators: Labs can collect, organize, and preserve locally generated evidence that might otherwise be lost.
- Global Contributors: Labs can ensure that local evidence and experiences are represented in global repositories and initiatives.

At the national level, there is a body of impact evaluations and descriptive studies conducted by local researchers or ministry officials. These studies often focus on locally relevant and context-specific questions, some of which are less frequently addressed by international researchers or funders, such as those related to implementation. As a result, they can offer high value for informed decision-making.

However, it is common for these studies to remain unpublished. In the case of studies led by public officials, high staff turnover often leads to the loss of institutional memory, making it difficult to access or use these studies. In some cases, the studies may be permanently lost. Consequently, they are often overlooked during evidence synthesis efforts, limiting the ability to respond to policy questions with contextually grounded evidence.

Labs can play a crucial role in addressing this gap by identifying, compiling, and curating these studies in accessible repositories for future reference and use. Labs may maintain their own local repositories while promoting them and linking them to international platforms.

Country Context

This section provides general context on the IPA Embedded Labs in both Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. This context is important for understanding the general implementation state of the labs, the current evidence practices and opportunities for evidence repositories in these contexts.

Côte d'Ivoire

This EdLab primarily supports the Ministry of National Education and Literacy (MENA) in integrating the use of evidence into its daily activities. It does so through three main strategies:

1. Producing and sourcing policy-relevant research aimed at guiding policy decisions and practices;
2. Coordinating evidence generation efforts by fostering partnerships with researchers, policymakers, and other relevant stakeholders within the national education ecosystem;
3. Conducting evidence synthesis exercises to respond to specific questions from the Ministry and producing concise and actionable policy briefs.

The lab's approach is oriented toward a proactive evidence provision model, where it seeks to supply the Ministry with relevant evidence based on its internal Research and Learning Agenda, which is guided by seven core values:

1. **Grounded in policy priorities**: Research is based on Côte d'Ivoire's education policy priorities.
2. **Translatable to policy**: All research produced must have a clear and direct link to policy decision-making.
3. **Builds on existing evidence**: The lab bases its studies on existing research to avoid duplication and strengthen the validity of its findings.
4. **Collaboration**: A collaborative approach between researchers and policymakers facilitates the identification of evidence gaps and the dissemination of findings.
5. **Research quality**: The lab's research processes ensure that the evidence produced is credible and reliable.
6. **Innovation in teaching and learning**: The research agenda seeks to deepen knowledge of innovative teaching practices and pedagogical approaches to improve educational outcomes in Côte d'Ivoire.
7. **Dissemination**: Research findings are shared with key actors in the education ecosystem, including policymakers, educators, and learners.

This EdLab is in an advanced stage of institutionalization, having defined its processes and assigned Ministry teams to lead its activities. The Lab has a Research and Learning Agenda (RLA) that maps the Ministry's research priorities. To date, the Lab has delivered multiple evidence generation and use services, including descriptive research, the establishment of MEL routines, and evidence syntheses aligned with the RLA.

Regarding evidence synthesis, the Lab operates under a commissioning model, outsourcing reviews to external researchers. Through this approach, two evidence syntheses have been conducted.

The Côte d'Ivoire EdLab has also developed its own operational evidence repository. Its goal is to compile and organize evidence produced by local stakeholders, relevant international studies, and research and data used by the Ministry in its decision-making processes, and present it in a user-friendly format. This repository houses both pre-existing evidence and briefs or synthesis products generated by the Lab—all designed to make relevant evidence easily accessible and usable by decision-makers, policymakers, and senior Ministry officials.

Ghana

The Ghana Education Evidence and Data Lab (GEEDLab) is the EdLab of the Ministry of Education of Ghana. It has five key objectives:

- Ensure rapid access to evidence
- Harmonise education datasets
- Promote data literacy
- Reduce research in silos
- Bridge the research-policy gap

These objectives are pursued through four main components:

- The Research and Learning Agenda (RLA)
- The Education Research Repository
- The Education Database (quantitative and qualitative education datasets)
- Capacity Building and Training Activities

Currently, GEEDLab is at an earlier stage of implementation compared to the Ministry of Education's EdLab in Côte d'Ivoire. While the GEEDLab design has been finalized and the Ministry is preparing for its rollout, activities to date have primarily been led by the Statistics, Research, and Information Management (SRIM) Directorate, which hosts the Lab. However, a dedicated team to lead GEEDLab has not yet been appointed.

As a result, the Lab currently operates under a demand-driven model, responding to opportunities identified by the Ministry to improve policies through evidence synthesis inputs. In terms of evidence synthesis, the EdLab conducts "deep dives"—a rapid research approach that combines both primary and secondary research methods, including synthesis (usually narrative reviews).

On the other hand, the team is also in the process of designing an evidence repository similar to that of Côte d'Ivoire; however, it is still in the design phase and has not yet been implemented.

Embedded Lab Integration Proposal

Overview

The table below outlines the key insights from the country-level Evidence Synthesis and Repository Use Assessment. This tool was informed by data collected through country-specific interviews and workshops across the focus EdLabs and covered dimensions such as Evidence Synthesis Processes, Evidence Repositories, and related Structures, Capacity, and Resources.

Interview participants included EdLab members, policy decision-makers from the host ministries, and external stakeholders such as universities, implementing organizations, and multilateral partners. Based on these interviews, an analysis was conducted to assess the status of evidence synthesis and evidence repositories in each country.

This analysis was subsequently presented and validated during in-person workshops held in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, attended by many of the interviewees and other local partners. During the workshops, the findings and recommendations—summarized in the table—were discussed and refined collaboratively.

The structure of the table organizes findings into four columns: Topics, Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities. The topics largely follow the structure of the original assessment tool but are grouped into three overarching categories:

1. Evidence Synthesis Process,

2. Evidence Synthesis Structures, Capacity, and Resources, and

3. Evidence Repositories Process, Structures, Capacity, and Resources.

This grouping reflects the overlapping nature of several identified challenges and opportunities. In the case of evidence repositories—given the relatively limited information available—all related components have been grouped together under a single category. Unless otherwise specified, the findings presented apply to both the Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana EdLabs.

Picture. Ghana Validation Workshop

Picture. Cote d'Ivoire Validation Workshop.

Topic	Strengths	Challenges	Opportunities
Evidence Synthesis: Process	**Existing Demand:** There is demand—and some use—of evidence synthesis by policymakers to inform decision-making.	**Confused Terminology:** There is not a clear understanding of key concepts around evidence repositories or synthesis. **Ad-hoc Requests and Short Timelines (Ghana):** Policymakers request quick-turnaround syntheses to address urgent needs, which limits the opportunity to map strategic questions and reduces the depth and rigor of the evidence synthesis.	**Link synthesis process to RLAs (Ghana):** Developing a Research and Learning Agenda (RLA) and linking it to the evidence synthesis process can help balance urgent requests with long-term strategic needs. **Establish Clear Process and Institutionalize it:** Link evidence synthesis to country priorities through a structured, institutionalized process that ensures the relevance, quality, and effective use of synthesis results.
Evidence Synthesis: Structure, Capacity, and Resources	**Baseline Capacity:** Ministry of Education (MoE) teams possess foundational capacity to synthesize evidence for informing policy decisions, although approaches and levels of expertise vary across countries.	**Clear Structures and Roles (Ghana):** No specific team has been designated to lead or conduct evidence synthesis. **Absence of Guidelines:** Current approaches to evidence synthesis are ad hoc and lack clear protocols, standards, and procedures. **Lack of a Comprehensive Capacity Strengthening Strategy:** So far, ad hoc training has been provided. **Limited Resources:** Resources are limited, or difficult to access, resulting in low production of evidence syntheses and lack of access to paid journals.	**Establish Structure with Roles and Responsibilities (Ghana):** Designate a team to lead and specialize in evidence synthesis. **Produce guidelines:** Institutionalize best practices and guidelines, including protocols, standards and procedures to support quality synthesis **Support Capacity Strengthening:** Connect teams to ongoing learning and capacity-strengthening opportunities, including through strategic partnerships with external organizations. **Identify and Link Funding Opportunities to Synthesis:** Connect the Research and Learning Agenda (RLA) and evidence synthesis efforts to research funding opportunities within or outside the ministry to unlock resources for planned synthesis activities.
Evidence Repositories: Process, Structure, Capacity & Resources	**Local Repository Development:** Both countries are in the process of implementing repositories of local evidence (including grey literature).	**Low Global Repository Use:** Syntheses typically rely on search engines but rarely engage with global evidence repositories.	**Setting up Structures, Capacity, and Resources:** Adopt a holistic approach to the design, implementation, and institutionalization of evidence repositories addressing processes, structures, capacities, and resources. **Integrate Global Repositories into the Local Synthesis Process and Global Existing Platforms:** Disseminate international repositories and integrate them into local evidence synthesis processes, guidelines, and capacity-strengthening strategies, as well as into international Lab exchange platforms such as Communities of Practice (CoPs) and Cross-Country Learning Exchanges. **Connect Global-Local Repositories:** Explore opportunities to articulate local knowledge such as evidence and implementation information with global evidence architecture.

Evidence Synthesis Process

In this section, we discuss aspects related to user alignment—specifically, how evidence synthesis priorities are shaped by policymaker needs, and how policymakers use insights from these syntheses to inform decision-making—as well as the methodologies employed for evidence synthesis. These range from rapid literature reviews to comprehensive systematic reviews, each with its own timeframe and level of rigor.

Overall, the main challenge identified in the evidence synthesis process is the need to embed this tool within a broader framework that not only responds to urgent, short-term questions but also addresses more strategic, long-term priorities for the education sector—such as through a Research and Learning Agenda (RLA). Additionally, evidence synthesis should be integrated into a broader learning cycle that positions it within a holistic strategy. This approach would ensure that it addresses relevant questions for the education system, is conducted with the expected level of quality, and that the findings are linked to efforts supporting decision-making and the implementation of recommendations—for example, through the Labs' learning cycle. Finally, there must be a clear vision for institutionalization to ensure the long-term sustainability of the process.

Topic	Strengths	Challenges	Opportunities
Evidence Synthesis: Process	**Existing Demand:** There is demand—and some use—of evidence synthesis by policymakers to inform decision-making.	**Confused Terminology:** There is not a clear understanding of key concepts around evidence repositories or synthesis. **Ad-hoc Requests and Short Timelines (Ghana):** Policymakers request quick-turnaround syntheses to address urgent needs, which limits the opportunity to map strategic questions and reduces the depth and rigor of the evidence synthesis.	**Link synthesis process to RLAs (Ghana):** Developing a Research and Learning Agenda (RLA) and linking it to the evidence synthesis process can help balance urgent requests with long-term strategic needs. **Establish Clear Process and Institutionalize it:** Link evidence synthesis to country priorities through a structured, institutionalized process that ensures the relevance, quality, and effective use of synthesis results.

Strengths – Existing Demand: In both countries, there is a generally positive perception of the importance of evidence in decision-making. Interviewees agreed that there is demand for evidence among policymakers, and in some cases, among educators as well. Respondents in both countries noted that this demand occasionally translates into efforts to synthesize existing research and use it. For example, in Ghana, one interviewee mentioned an evidence synthesis conducted on the integration of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in the kindergarten curriculum. In Côte d'Ivoire, a synthesis related to the Programme National d'Amélioration des Premiers Apprentissages Scolaires (PNAPAS)—which combines structured pedagogy with differentiated learning—was cited as a relevant case. However, in both contexts, the number of actual syntheses being conducted—whether within the Labs or the Ministries—appears to be low, according to the respondents.

Challenge – Confused Terminology: While respondents expressed a generally positive view of the demand for evidence and for evidence synthesis, discussions revealed that among Lab members, ministry policymakers, and external partners, there is a lack of clear understanding of what constitutes an evidence synthesis. This includes confusion about the different types of synthesis and their implications for methodological rigor and risk of bias. Similarly, there is a misunderstanding regarding evidence repositories, which were often mistaken for data repositories or search engines. These findings point to a need for targeted information-sharing and capacity-building efforts (see next section) to strengthen understanding of how to use existing evidence, and the role that evidence syntheses and repositories play in supporting evidence-informed decision-making. This can also help increase demand for evidence synthesis.

Challenge – Ad hoc Requests and short Timelines (Ghana): One of the key challenges faced by the teams when conducting evidence syntheses is that policymakers often make ad hoc requests with little advance notice and require a quick turnaround. These are time-sensitive windows of opportunity to which the Labs must respond.

This results in three main consequences. First, the opportunity to proactively identify more strategic and long-term questions for the sector is lost, confining the Labs primarily to reactive work. Second, in EdLabs where evidence synthesis is commissioned rather than conducted in-house, this reactive approach limits the ability to establish and sustain partnerships for commissioning synthesis with external actors. Finally, it often restricts Labs to less rigorous, non-systematic methodologies (e.g., narrative or rapid reviews), which carry a higher risk of bias. This challenge is particularly relevant in the context of Ghana, as described below.

Opportunity – Link synthesis process to RLAs (Ghana): EdLabs typically identify key challenges faced by stakeholders and translate these into research questions. These questions are then consolidated into a Research and Learning Agenda (RLA), which helps manage the research process through prioritization and monitoring. These agendas are updated periodically; for example, labs such as MineduLab update theirs annually.

Some of these research questions may relate to short-term issues, while others address more structural or long term challenges. In both cases, some questions can be addressed through evidence synthesis or through a combination of synthesis and other research methods.

These RLAs present an opportunity to link the evidence synthesis process to a structured set of national priorities. This enables the development of a balanced portfolio of synthesis efforts—addressing both short-term, urgent policy questions through rapid synthesis approaches, and longer-term, structural issues using more rigorous, systematic synthesis methods.

Indeed, the Lab's process of mapping educational system challenges and translating them into research questions creates new opportunities for the use of evidence synthesis. For example, in Côte d'Ivoire, during the formulation of research questions, the Lab conducted a preliminary evidence review—similar to a rapid evidence scoping—to assess the existing evidence base for each question. This exercise helped refine the questions to better align with the available literature and informed decisions about the most suitable research methods to apply.

Among the EdLabs considered in this study, both have RLAs although in the case of Ghana is being finalized. However, in Côte d'Ivoire, the EdLab has already begun activities to address RLA questions, such as the synthesis related to the PNAPAS program mentioned above. Therefore, our main recommendation in this area focuses on Ghana. We propose advancing the establishment of the GEEDLab and strengthening the Education Sector Research Group and its Education Sector Research Agenda (as the RLA is known in Ghana) to map strategic priorities for the sector and to organize evidence synthesis processes that can be based on more rigorous strategies.

Opportunity – Establish Clear Processes and Institutionalize it: Along with linking synthesis efforts to an RLA that maps country-level priorities, it is also necessary to establish a process that addresses the relevance, quality, and use of the produced synthesis. The Labs' learning cycle offers an opportunity for this, as it allows each evidence synthesis project to be connected to the three steps of the cycle, which in turn involve different activities for the Lab:

1. A research question identified through the RLA—ensuring the relevance of the synthesis;
2. A synthesis generation process—following the expected steps to achieve a quality synthesis;
3. A dissemination and technical assistance process to support the use of the results.

Furthermore, to ensure the sustainability of this process, it must be institutionalized—that is, integrated into the core processes of both the EdLab and the Ministry—so that it is routinely and systematically applied in evidence synthesis efforts. The design and institutionalization of this process should address key elements such as structures, capacity, and resources, as described in the following section.

Although the EdLab in Côte d'Ivoire is more advanced than the one in Ghana, this recommendation is also relevant for the Côte d'Ivoire Lab. It should review its planning and incorporate actions aimed at strengthening the institutionalization of evidence synthesis processes to inform public policy.

Evidence Synthesis Structure, Capacity & Resources

In this section, we combine the dimensions of structure, capacity, and resources. Regarding structure, the analysis focuses on the teams responsible for conducting the synthesis processes. In terms of capacity, we examine the skills, knowledge, and

experience of the human resources involved, as well as the knowledge resources that support the synthesis process. Finally, we consider resource-related aspects such as time and financial resources, along with other factors including technical tools and systems.

Overall, the findings from the interviews highlight the need to define a team with clear roles and responsibilities, and to align capacity-strengthening strategies around this structure. These include the development of guidelines to standardize processes, as well as onboarding strategies and continuous training. Current limitations in these areas can affect the quality of the syntheses and their use in decision-making. Finally, this structure and capacity-building strategy must be supported by adequate funding to sustain and advance synthesis activities.

Topic	Strengths	Challenges	Opportunities
Evidence Synthesis: Structure, Capacity, and Resources	**Baseline Capacity:** Ministry of Education (MoE) teams possess foundational capacity to synthesize evidence for informing policy decisions, although approaches and levels of expertise vary across countries.	**Clear Structures and Roles (Ghana):** No specific team has been designated to lead or conduct evidence synthesis. **Absence of Guidelines:** Current approaches to evidence synthesis are ad hoc and lack clear protocols, standards, and procedures. **Lack of a Comprehensive Capacity Strengthening Strategy:** So far, ad hoc training has been provided. **Limited Resources:** Resources are limited, or difficult to access, resulting in low production of evidence syntheses and lack of access to paid journals.	**Establish Structure with Roles and Responsibilities (Ghana):** Designate a team to lead and specialize in evidence synthesis. **Produce guidelines:** Institutionalize best practices and guidelines, including protocols, standards and procedures to support quality synthesis **Support Capacity Strengthening:** Connect teams to ongoing learning and capacity-strengthening opportunities, including through strategic partnerships with external organizations. **Identify and Link Funding Opportunities to Synthesis:** Connect the Research and Learning Agenda (RLA) and evidence synthesis efforts to research funding opportunities within or outside the ministry to unlock resources for planned synthesis activities.

Strength – Baseline Capacity: During the interviews and workshops, it was found that both countries report having staff with foundational capacity to commission or conduct evidence synthesis. There is a shared perception that teams within both the EdLabs and the Ministries possess a basic understanding of what evidence synthesis involves, are familiar with some synthesis methodologies, and have experience with simpler synthesis processes. However, this knowledge is largely limited to non-systematic or rapid review methods, and in practice, the Labs rely almost exclusively on these types of syntheses.

Challenge (Ghana) – Clear Structures and Roles: A fundamental aspect of a clear and well-defined process is the presence of a team with clearly assigned roles and responsibilities at each step. The specific roles of the team will depend on the functions they are expected to perform. For instance, in some contexts, the EdLab's role may be to commission evidence syntheses, while in others, the team itself may be responsible for conducting them.

The former is the model adopted by the EdLab in Côte d'Ivoire, where the team has already been formally established. Although the EdLab oversees the steps of the learning cycle, it does not directly produce the evidence syntheses. Instead, the team commissions these tasks to external partners. This model is therefore based on building partnerships with external specialists in evidence synthesis.

In contrast, in Ghana, this aspect remains less clearly defined. As the EdLab has not yet been fully institutionalized, there is no dedicated team responsible for leading or commissioning evidence synthesis and delivering it to the Ministry. As a result, responsibilities are currently dispersed across multiple actors, which hinders the development of specialized capacity and institutional expertise.

Challenge – Absence of guidelines: To support the roles that EdLab teams are expected to perform, it is essential to equip them with clear guidelines as well as the necessary skills and knowledge—whether they are commissioning syntheses or conducting them directly.

However, current approaches to evidence synthesis within EdLabs are largely ad hoc and lack systematized protocols (e.g., to determine the appropriate type of synthesis), standards (e.g., for quality assurance), and procedures (e.g., defined steps to follow).

Developing and implementing guidelines is critical to ensuring the quality of synthesis processes. These guidelines provide clarity on roles and responsibilities, outline key steps and quality assurance mechanisms, and serve as a foundation for planning capacity-strengthening strategies.

In the absence of such guidelines, the risk of bias increases, and the overall effectiveness of decisions informed by the syntheses may be compromised. The following quote from an interviewee illustrates this:

> *There is no standard methodology. [We use] ordinary methodologies [...] to search for evidence on the internet, by typing in the subject that interests us, and then looking at the lists of scientific work that has been done on the issue. - EdLab member*

Challenge – Lack of a Comprehensive Capacity Strengthening Strategy: While some ad hoc training has been provided—for instance, in Ghana, where EdLab members have received training on evidence synthesis—a more comprehensive and systematic capacity-strengthening strategy is required. This strategy should be clearly articulated, underpinned by defined guidelines, aligned with the specific roles and

responsibilities of the EdLab team, promote continuous learning, and account for staff turnover within the ministry to ensure both continuity and long-term sustainability.

Challenge – Limited Resources: During the interviews, EdLab members and Ministry officials from Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire noted that there is no dedicated budget for evidence synthesis activities. This issue is particularly critical in models where external research is commissioned to conduct evidence synthesis, as is the case in Côte d'Ivoire, but it is also relevant for capacity-building activities.

Related to this, Lab teams face challenges in accessing evidence. Interviewees reported that due to lack of funding, the Labs do not have access to specialized journals or digital libraries behind paywalls. This limited access to international evidence constrains the EdLabs' ability to conduct rigorous evidence synthesis exercises.

In some cases, limited resources are not due to their absence, but rather to the complexity of government bureaucracy, which makes them difficult to access. In fact, both Labs have identified strategies to tap into these resources; however, the process can be slow and administratively burdensome.

Opportunity (Ghana) – Establish Structure with Roles and Responsibilities: To consolidate capacity and knowledge management functions, it is recommended that agencies establish a designated team responsible for evidence synthesis and repository management. This team should have clearly defined roles and responsibilities, with profiles aligned to the functions envisioned—for example, the ability to manage the learning cycle and effectively commission evidence syntheses.

In this context, the term "designated" does not imply that these are the only functions the team performs—they may also be responsible for other data collection, analysis, and dissemination activities, as is the case with an Embedded Lab.

Opportunity - Produce Guidelines: As mentioned above, both Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire lack manuals and standards to guide the selection of synthesis methods, methodological steps, and quality assurance criteria. As a result, the evidence syntheses conducted to date vary in both quality and process.

To address this, it is recommended that Labs develop or revise guidelines—such as Manuals and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)—aligned with their proposed synthesis processes. These documents should provide detailed guidance on each step of the synthesis process, including criteria for method selection and quality assurance. They also serve as a foundational resource for onboarding new staff and supporting ongoing training efforts.

Whenever possible, Labs should integrate these procedures into existing manuals or SOPs rather than creating separate documents. This approach promotes alignment with

existing workflows, reduces redundancy, and enhances knowledge management across the institution.

Opportunity – Support Capacity-Strengthening: In addition to the existence of manuals and specialized teams, continuous training represents a key opportunity to improve and sustain the quality of evidence syntheses. The type of training required will depend on the model used to manage the evidence synthesis process, but it should aim to complement existing guidelines and deepen understanding of the different types of synthesis and the quality standards they require. Given the frequent turnover of ministry staff in both countries, it is important to consider strategies that help maintain and build team capacity over time. These could include ongoing training through platforms like Moodle and participation in communities of practice with other organizations engaged in evidence synthesis. In this regard, the existence of manuals and guidelines could be especially useful when paired with onboarding processes for new staff.

Another strategy for conducting high-quality evidence syntheses—rather than building full in-house capacity—is to follow the model used in Côte d'Ivoire, where partnerships are established with researchers or external organizations. This model could be particularly explored by the Ghana EdLab as it develops its institutional capacity. In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, the existing approach could be expanded by broadening partnerships to address more of the questions outlined in the RLA.

Opportunity – Identify and Link Funding Opportunities to Synthesis: As previously mentioned, it is necessary to allocate appropriate resources to ensure the effective operation of evidence synthesis production and management processes. In both EdLabs, the available funding sources and how to connect with them to support synthesis activities are currently being defined.

In Côte d'Ivoire, teams from Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), the Jacobs Foundation, and MENA are in the process of establishing a research funding mechanism. This mechanism aims to facilitate increased engagement with external partners, including both local and international researchers.

In the case of Ghana, the vision is that activities will be funded through the Ghana Accountability for Learning Outcomes Project (GALOP). GALOP is a five-year initiative aimed at improving the quality of education in low-performing basic schools and enhancing equity and accountability in Ghana's education sector. This initiative is linked to a partnership between the Ghanaian Ministry of Education and the Jacobs Foundation, which recently launched the System Change Architecture for Learning Excellence (SCALE). SCALE is designed to build on and significantly enhance the impact of GALOP.

Additionally, the scenario where EdLabs establish partnerships with external entities, such as development partners, can be considered to collaborate in the synthesis process and its use with external funding.

These strategies will be critical to institutionalizing the use of evidence synthesis in decision-making processes.

Evidence Repositories (Process, Structure, Capacity & Resources)

In this section, we analyze the findings related to evidence repositories. Two scenarios are considered: first, the extent to which EdLabs are utilizing existing international evidence repositories to conduct evidence syntheses more efficiently; and second, the scenario in which EdLabs manage their own local repositories. In this latter case, we explore the motivation behind establishing local repositories and assess the extent to which they are prepared to manage and maintain them effectively.

Overall, the development of local evidence repositories by the EdLabs in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana represents a step toward addressing gaps left by global repositories. These efforts respond to the need for better preservation of access to locally generated research, and the inclusion of diverse types of evidence—such as implementation insights—not typically found in international databases. While both repositories are still in early stages, they offer promising opportunities to complement global resources, foster more context-sensitive evidence use, and promote collaboration between local and global evidence communities. To fully realize this potential, it will be essential to invest in structures, capacities, and strategies that support the repositories' sustainability, integration with global platforms, and adaptation of international evidence to local contexts.

Topic	Strengths	Challenges	Opportunities
Evidence Repositories: Process, Structure, Capacity & Resources	**Local Repository Development:** Both countries are in the process of implementing repositories of local evidence (including grey literature).	**Low Global Repository Use:** Syntheses typically rely on search engines but rarely engage with global evidence repositories.	**Setting up Structures, Capacity, and Resources:** Adopt a holistic approach to the design, implementation, and institutionalization of evidence repositories that addresses processes, structures, capacities, and resources. **Integrate Global Repositories into the Local Synthesis Process and Global Existing Platforms:** Disseminate international repositories and integrate them into local evidence synthesis processes, guidelines, and capacity-strengthening strategies, as well as into international Lab exchange platforms such as Communities of Practice (CoPs) and Cross-Country Learning Exchanges. **Connect Global-Local Repositories:** Explore opportunities to articulate local knowledge such as evidence and implementation information with global

			evidence architecture.

Strength – Local Repository Development: The Cote d'Ivoire EdLab and the Ministry of Education in Ghana have identified an opportunity to develop local evidence repositories to compile national research that is often not captured by international repositories. This gap exists because such evidence is often not published in peer-reviewed journals, due to structural challenges faced by researchers in the Global South—such as limited funding, inadequate research infrastructure, and a lack of incentives for publication. Consequently, relevant local evidence can be excluded from evidence syntheses.

Additionally, in the case of Côte d'Ivoire, the EdLab team noted that some policy questions go beyond identifying the causal effect of interventions; they are instead related to how to implement programs or which issues are most relevant in a given context. In such cases, studies conducted within ministries—often referred to as grey literature—may be lost when officials leave the institution, as these documents are frequently stored on personal computers.

This has prompted both ministries in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana to begin developing their own evidence repositories to address this gap and preserve institutional knowledge. In the words of one interviewee:

> *"For us, the idea of this repository came from two main reasons. The first one, the Ministry, it was difficult for us to know what type of studies that the Ministry had in the past. We built the research and learning agenda, so we wanted to know if there are some studies that have been already done so we don't need to do that. The second one is the fact that we realize that there is a high turnover in the Ministry, so as soon as someone leaves, it's difficult to find what exists."*

The status of these repositories varies by country. In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, the repository has already been launched and includes 40 studies conducted by the Ministry and its partners, accompanied by summaries that aim to make technical reports more accessible to decision-makers. However, its current functionalities are limited—it functions more as a basic library that compiles studies, without features such as quality control, classification, or advanced search capabilities. According to the EdLab team, they are currently focused on collecting more studies before expanding to other functionalities. In contrast, Ghana's repository is still in the design phase.

Although still in the development phase, these efforts represent a promising opportunity to complement global evidence sources with local knowledge management. However, they also present certain challenges, which we address below.

Challenge – Low Global Repository Use: Our interviews explored whether country-level stakeholders make use of existing evidence repositories such as EEF, 3ie, EdTech Hub, or ESSA's Africa Education Research Database, among others. We found that these repositories are not well known and remain an underutilized resource for the EdLabs. Interviewees indicated that teams in both ministries typically rely on search

engines like Google Scholar or Scopus to find evidence. However, this approach is inefficient, as it requires more time to locate relevant information and may compromise the quality of the synthesis.

Notably, only one interviewee in Côte d'Ivoire reported using global repositories such as EEF or 3ie. This person also noted that they attempted to use these sources to conduct a review on school feeding programs but were unable to carry it out due to a lack of available information, and therefore reverted to using search engines. As mentioned previously, the interviewee emphasized that while causal evidence is valuable, ministries often require other types of information—such as data on the implementation of interventions—which are not typically found in these repositories.

Opportunities– Setting up structures, capacities and resources for repository implementation and maintenance: Since both repositories are still in the design and implementation phase, it is too early to provide specific recommendations. However, this note aims to offer a general recommendation: to incorporate a comprehensive perspective that includes process, structure, capacity, and resources in their design, implementation, and institutionalization.

A holistic planning approach would help ensure that the repository's functions are aligned with the teams and their capacities, and that the necessary resources are identified for its long-term operation and maintenance. This is an area that both the Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana teams are actively working to develop.

Opportunity – Integrate Global Repositories into the Local Synthesis Process and Global Existing Platforms: There is a clear opportunity to strengthen the dissemination of existing international repositories and integrate them into local evidence synthesis processes, guidelines, and capacity-strengthening strategies, as discussed in previous sections. An important aspect to consider in this integration is the development of frameworks that allow for the adaptation of international evidence to the local context, such as generalization frameworks.

In addition, existing platforms—such as IPA's Embedded Labs Community of Practice (CoP) and the Cross-Country Learning Exchange (CCLE)—can be leveraged to build a baseline understanding of key concepts among a broad network of policymakers, evidence synthesis teams, and other evidence users. The Embedded Labs team can also engage in targeted outreach efforts, working directly with specific ministries to raise awareness of available evidence repositories and their potential value. This dual approach—combining broad awareness-building with focused engagement—can help enhance the uptake and effective use of global evidence resources.

Opportunity – Connect Global-Local Repositories and Evidence: An area worth exploring is the integration of local knowledge—both in the form of research evidence and implementation insights—into the global evidence community. For instance, this

could involve expanding the evidence base on a topic that has only been studied locally, contributing data on an intervention that has been evaluated but in a new context, or sharing implementation strategies for an evidence-based intervention. Some organizations, such as EEF, the Embedded Evidence Network (EEN), and the What Works Hub for Global Education (WWHGE), are advancing in this area by incorporating implementation information alongside impact evidence in their studies. The EEF database also codes for implementation factors where available, and the EEN Toolkits include synthesized evidence on implementation from local qualitative or stakeholder feedback, even if not fully “banked” into the broader database.

In this context, the EdLabs can serve as a bridge between local knowledge and the international community, for example, by using their local repositories to collect and share such information. The remaining questions are: What features should local repositories have to connect with the global evidence architecture? And what platform would be most appropriate to enable this integration?

Conclusions

Embedded Labs (EdLabs), as government-based teams with a global infrastructure, can play a pivotal role in incorporating international evidence into national decision-making processes through evidence synthesis and the development and use of international and local evidence repositories. Our deep-dives in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire have helped identify how Labs follow a learning cycle that enables them to identify policy-relevant questions which can be addressed through evidence synthesis, while also implementing activities that support the uptake of findings. However, despite its promise, this integration faces several country-level challenges, which stem both from the developmental stage of the Labs and from broader contextual factors.

The first challenge is that a reactive approach to evidence synthesis—focused on responding to time-sensitive windows of opportunity—can help connect synthesis to real-time decision-making. Yet, this approach has limitations: it may overlook opportunities to address more strategic, long-term sector priorities, and typically allows little time to carry out the synthesis, often leading to the use of less rigorous, more bias-prone methods. Moreover, in models where the EdLab commissions the synthesis rather than conducting it in-house, this reactive approach can hinder the Labs' ability to build sustained partnerships with external evidence providers. A more strategic approach—one that connects sectoral priorities (e.g., through a Research and Learning Agenda, RLA) with a clear synthesis process aligned to policy needs and geared toward evidence uptake—could broaden the scope of questions addressed and enhance the quality and impact of the synthesis work.

Additionally, while linking synthesis efforts to the RLA can be beneficial, it must be supported by aligned structures, capacities, and resources to ensure quality implementation and sustainability. The absence of specialized teams with clearly defined roles, capacity-strengthening strategies, and the necessary resources to form partnerships and access relevant information can significantly limit the effectiveness of evidence synthesis. A comprehensive strategy should address all these dimensions and their interactions.

Finally, there are several challenges related to the use of international repositories. The most immediate is the lack of awareness about these resources and the absence of their systematic use within synthesis processes. In many cases, it is also important to acknowledge the limitations of global repositories: they often fail to capture locally generated evidence or non-causal information, such as data on implementation practices. Local repositories, currently being developed by the EdLabs, seek to address this gap by capturing and preserving this type of local knowledge. Moving forward, a key challenge will be to determine how global evidence can be effectively contextualized and complemented with local information, and how local repositories can be integrated into the broader global evidence architecture.

Annexes

Annex 1. General Guidance on Implementation of EdLab Integration

This section covers practical steps for implementing the integration proposal through an Embedded Lab. It describes both the Evidence Synthesis and Evidence Repository elements, according to the four key areas of the assessment: Process, Structure & Governance, Capacity, and Resources. While the above sections focus largely on the specific challenges in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana, this section outlines general guidance to deliver on these objectives, and can be used to directly assist future EdLab teams in the implementation of evidence synthesis & repository functions.

Process

Across both Evidence Synthesis and Evidence Repositories, it is important for Labs to help establish consistent and replicable processes. On the Synthesis side, these processes can cover the creation and dissemination of both rapid and systematic reviews. On the Repository side, they cover the development and maintenance of local repositories, and contributions to global repositories as relevant. In both cases, it is also essential to establish alignment with users of the synthesis or repositories by ensuring timely and collaborative input into the process.

Establishing Manuals & SOPs to Strengthen Synthesis Processes

As mentioned above, Labs should aim to establish clear and detailed manuals and SOPs to ensure consistent delivery of evidence synthesis. Relevant documentation of processes may include the following elements:

- Synthesis protocols and templates: Standardized frameworks for various synthesis types, adapted to time constraints and contextual realities of Embedded Labs.
- Quality assessment tools: Structured tools for evaluating evidence quality appropriate to different research designs common in education research.
- Decision support frameworks: Guidelines to help Lab teams select appropriate synthesis approaches based on question type, evidence availability, and resource constraints.

While the specific process and documentation will vary depending on the government agency, Labs can help to ensure that these processes are established and documented, including initial testing and refinement with the government agency team.

Creating a Standard Process for Policymaker Engagement

Establishing a standardized process for the collaborative development of a Research & Learning Agenda (RLA) is essential to ensuring that synthesis efforts are relevant to policy decisions. A typical process will involve:

- Initial Consultations: key materials for this step of the process include initial stakeholder mapping guidance, as well as interview guides covering policymaker's timelines and priorities to inform the workshop design
- Collaborative Workshops: key materials include workshop slides and facilitation guidance to help bring in diverse stakeholder perspectives
- Prioritization and Finalization: material include written guidance on how to implement final prioritization and approval of the RLA
- Regular Updates: a cadence for revisiting the RLA, ideally tied to regular policy cycles

Standardizing the RLA process in this manner also contributes to internal consensus across teams, and embedding this process within existing SOPs helps ensure that evidence synthesis is not dependent on individual relationships or ad hoc requests.

Repository Creation & Maintenance

When developing and maintaining repositories, Ministry and Lab teams should seek to align with the established standards and best-practices, such as the Education Endowment Foundation Evidence Database: Protocol and Analysis Plan. Where there are deviations from these standards to conform with local contexts, the guidance should still cover all key elements, including:

- Clearly defined inclusion/exclusion criteria
- Coding guidelines and codebooks
- Definitions of key outcomes
- Process flows

This also goes for local contributions to global repositories, which should seek to align with their respective processes, timelines, and quality standards.

Ensuring Repository Alignment with User Needs

There are two primary users of evidence repositories – the team who is charged with actually implementing the Lab synthesis (whether a Lab or other agency team), and "external" stakeholders such as researchers or policymakers who may use the repository in an ad-hoc manner. Both of these users should be considered, and there are different strategies to ensure that their input is considered in the ongoing development and maintenance of the repository. Strategies for capturing this input may include:

- Members of the Synthesis Team: periodic internal reflections, ideally as part of an annual or biannual planning process.
- External Audiences: user feedback integrated into repository use, or through periodic user surveys

Embedded Labs can help establish a regular cadence for these reflections, which may need to be more frequent during the initial development process, but then can become less frequent as time goes on.

Structure

Establishing a Designated Team

Designated analysis teams can be drawn from existing members of the agency staff if they have the requisite capacity (discussed in the below section), or by hiring new staff in coordination with the Embedded Lab. Labs should consider various staffing approaches:

- Dedicated synthesis specialist: Ideally, Labs would include at least one team member with specific expertise in evidence synthesis methodologies who can lead these activities and build capacity in others.
- Research partnership networks: Developing relationships with local universities, research institutions, and international partners who can provide methodological support or collaborate on synthesis projects.

- Consultant engagement: For more complex synthesis projects or when specialized expertise is required, engaging short-term consultants with relevant methodological backgrounds.

Global Repository Relationships

Ensuring uptake into global repositories may depend on formal relationships with existing repository owners and other stakeholders in evidence synthesis. These may include:

- Communities of practice: Networks connecting Lab teams across countries to share methodological innovations and lessons learned in evidence synthesis.
- Expert advisory groups: Access to methodological advisors who can provide guidance on challenging synthesis questions or quality assurance.

During the formation of the evidence synthesis or repository initiative, Labs should seek to initiate contact with these groups as relevant. Typically a formal MoU is not necessary, but participating in regular meetings and correspondence is encouraged.

Capacity

It is important for the members of the evidence synthesis/repository team to have the relevant expertise and skills to be able to successfully implement the processes described above. This section outlines several of the key areas of competency required, as well as strategies for Labs to build this expertise.

Key Capacities

There are a number of key skills and capabilities that this team should possess.

- Information literacy skills: Lab teams need at least one member with advanced information literacy skills, including the ability to design effective search strategies, navigate academic and grey literature databases, and critically appraise sources. This foundational capacity enables efficient identification of relevant evidence and appropriate filtering of low-quality sources.
- Analytical and synthesis abilities: The ability to extract key insights from diverse evidence sources, identify patterns and contradictions, and

synthesize findings into coherent narratives is crucial. Staff should be able to move beyond merely summarizing individual sources to generating higher-level insights that directly inform question refinement and research strategy selection.
- Contextual knowledge: Evidence synthesis requires sufficient understanding of the sectoral context to appropriately interpret findings and assess their relevance to local realities. Labs should combine technical evidence synthesis skills with deep knowledge of the sector's institutional landscape, history, and current priorities.

Capacity Building Strategies

Where these skills are not already present, there are a variety of strategies that Labs can use to develop them:

- Training and mentorship: Lab teams can develop evidence synthesis capacity through targeted training programs, ideally combining formal instruction with hands-on application to real RLA questions. Pairing less experienced staff with skilled mentors during initial synthesis activities accelerates capacity development.
- Documentation and knowledge management: Developing standardized templates, protocols, and guidance materials helps institutionalize good practices and supports knowledge transfer between team members. These resources also ensure consistency across RLA cycles and reduce reliance on individual expertise.
- Strategic partnerships: Partnerships with academic institutions, research organizations, or knowledge brokers can supplement internal capacity, particularly for specialized methods or complex syntheses. These partnerships can be structured to include capacity building components that strengthen internal skills over time.

Given existing resource constraints, developing these capacities will not happen overnight, so it is recommended that Labs adopt a progressive approach:

- Initial Phase: Focus on developing core search and appraisal skills while using simpler synthesis methods like literature reviews.
- Intermediate Phase: Build capacity for more structured approaches like rapid evidence assessments with quality assurance mechanisms.

- Advanced Phase: Develop capabilities for conducting or commissioning more complex synthesis methods as needs and resources allow.

Sustainability Strategies

Once these skills are developed, it will be essential to maintain them over time through a variety of sustainability strategies:

- Train-the-trainer models: Develop internal champions who can train new team members as staff turnover occurs.
- Documentation practices: Create detailed process guides that preserve institutional knowledge about synthesis methods.
- Embedded learning: Incorporate evidence synthesis training into standard onboarding and professional development for all Lab staff.

Together, these strategies can support teams to develop and maintain the relevant capacities for evidence synthesis and repository development and maintenance.

Resources

Both Evidence Synthesis and the development of Evidence Repositories have financial resource implications. Financial resources should be allocated for:

- Capacity development: Training for Lab team members in evidence synthesis methodologies and tools.
- Database access: Subscriptions to necessary information resources and synthesis software.
- External expertise: Funding for specialist support when needed for complex synthesis activities.
- Knowledge translation: Resources for converting synthesis findings into accessible formats for policy makers.

Funding for these activities can draw from two main types of sources:

- Government funding: usually funding that comes from budgets of the agency hosting the Lab.
- External funding: can be through donations or grants provided by donors.

The use of external funding has limitations and benefits. In general, funding from the government can be considered more sustainable as it is programmed annually,

while external funding depends on the agendas of international donors, incorporating a higher degree of uncertainty. On the other hand, government funding may be limited due to scarce resources, so the services that can be funded may be limited. While initial funding will likely be from external sources, co-developed with the Lab team, ideally teams should aim to align fundraising efforts with the agency's annual budgeting process in order to strengthen the sustainability of funding. The specific approach to building these relationships and budget inclusion will likely depend on the specifics of the target agency, and inclusion in this process should be considered as part of the initial team structure.

Annex 2. Stakeholder interview summary

Organization	Stakeholder category
3ie	Owner
Côte d'Ivoire EdLab	Lab
Durham University	Owner
eBASE Africa	Intermediary
EdTech Hub	Owner
Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) - synthesis team	Owner
Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) - policy team	Owner / Intermediary
Education sub-Saharan Africa (ESSA)	Owner
Ghana EdLab	Lab
Jacobs Foundation	Owner
Uganda EdLab	Lab
What Works Hub for Global Education (WWHGE)	Owner
Zambia EdLab	Lab

Annex 3. Interviews by stakeholders

Stakeholder category	Ghana	Côte d'Ivoire
EdLab members	7	3
Policymakers	2	5
External partners	2 (University of Ghana and University of Cape Coast)	3 (UNESCO, UNICEF, and World Bank)

Annex 4. Interview guides

First round of interviews questionnaire

Owners

Vision/Theory of change

1. What is the main objective of [organization's evidence repository]?
    a. Has this changed over time? Why?
2. What is [organization's] vision for who should be using this evidence repository, and in what contexts?
3. Can you describe the value chain for evidence repositories until the end user? (e.g. what activities and products are achieved at each step).
4. Can you describe where your organization is positioned in this chain? What are the activities you perform?
5. How does your organization envision the repository being used beyond the context of [repository's focus region/country]?
6. What role do you see your organization playing in adapting the repository to these other contexts?
    a. Or "localizing" the repository?

Use cases

7. From [organization]'s perspective, how can evidence repositories be useful for improving policy and practice in education?
    a. At the global or regional level?
    b. At the country level?
        i. How can policymakers in a particular country use it?
            1. What challenges might arise for this particular use? How can they be addressed?
        ii. How can educators in a particular country use it? How can they be addressed?
            1. What challenges might arise for this particular use?
8. Can you describe the main use cases for your organization's repository?
    a. Direct repository use
    b. Translation into synthesis products, toolkits, etc.
    c. Expected users, contexts.
9. How does your organization connect the repository to potential users? To other evidence repository owners?

    a. Do you provide any specific support? (eg. identifying their issues and connecting them with existing applicable solutions)
10. What is necessary to connect evidence repositories with those users/use cases?
    a. Ask for specific examples of skills, knowledge, resources if not mentioned.
11. What are the main challenges [organization] has identified for users to effectively identify and implement solutions from the repository?
    a. At the school level
    b. At the policy-maker level
12. Does [organization] process the evidence repository into any specific products? (Eg. evidence synthesis, toolkits, etc.)
    a. How are these products defined? (demand vs supply driven)
13. Are there any specific moments in the policy process where users incorporate evidence from the repository? For example, during the design of new programs, to adapt or improve existing ones, etc.
14. Has [organization] identified any specific needs for better localization and responsiveness to end users that are not being met by your organization?
    a. How could a local intermediary (ie. EdLabs) support in fulfilling this need?
15. Embedded Labs - are teams within governments that connect evidence with decision makers - given that they are localized in a country and close to decision makers:
    a. Where in the value chain can they be more helpful?
    b. Why and how?
16. What are the limitations of the evidence repositories?
    a. In general
    b. When it comes to the articulation of the local level? (e.g. contextualization, missing information, etc.)
    c. How can we address these limitations?

<u>General repository management</u>

17. What are the criteria to include new research in the repository?
    a. Who defines these criteria? (specifically, are potential users included?)
    b. Are they ever updated?
18. Can you tell me about the process for keeping the repository updated?
    a. How often is this carried out?

19. Are there other recurrent or important processes? Can you describe them?
20. What is the structure of the repository's technical team?
21. What is the structure of the repository's user-facing team?

Backend + frontend (*only for specific technical profiles*)

1. Map the evidence repository's "lifecycle"
2. Where is the repository hosted?
3. How does searching and indexing work?
4. What was the process for designing the current user interface?
5. How are the studies in the repository coded?
    a. What data is included? (Effect sizes, implementation data, etc.)
6. What is the usability of the repository? (Who has access, what can they access)

Intermediaries

EEN members

Overall evidence use

1. What is the central mission of your organization?
2. In what ways does [organization] usually incorporate evidence into planning, programming and problem-solving?
3. What are some challenges [organization] has encountered in finding evidence that is relevant to the issues you are facing, and to your context?
4. What are the main resources [organization] uses when incorporating evidence?

Relationship to EEF's repository

5. Can you describe the main cases in which your organization uses the EEF repository?
6. Do you use other evidence repositories in addition to the EEF repository? Or overall, other sources of evidence?
    a. Why? In what cases?
7. [*Depending on above answer*] Do you proactively integrate evidence produced in your region/country of focus into your organization's evidence synthesis products?
8. Does [organization] identify any specific research or evidence needs not covered in the EEF repository?

9. Has [organization] identified any challenges in adapting the evidence included in the EEF repository to your region/country of focus?
10. Do you perceive the EEF repository is demand driven (responds to your evidence needs) or supply driven (integrates evidence as it is generated either by EEF or other sources)?
11. [*If interviewee directly accesses the EEF repository*] How do you perceive the usability or user-friendliness of the EEF repository?

<u>Use cases for their products</u>

12. Who are the main users of the products [synthesis, toolkits] your organization creates based on the EEF repository?
13. How does your organization connect these products to potential users?
    a. Do you provide any specific support? (eg. identifying their issues and connecting them with existing applicable solutions)
14. How does your organization define the evidence needs of these potential users?
    a. How are these needs incorporated into deciding what products your organization will produce/adapt/synthesize from the repository?
15. Are there any specific moments in the policy process where users incorporate evidence from the repository? For example, during the design of new programs, to adapt or improve existing ones, etc.
16. What are the main challenges [organization] has identified for users to effectively implement the products or tools you provide?
    a. At the school level
    b. At the policy-maker level
17. Has [organization] identified any specific needs for better localization and responsiveness to end users that are not being met by your organization?
    a. How could a local intermediary (ie. EdLabs) support in fulfilling this need?

EdLabs

1. In what ways does your host agency usually require your Lab to incorporate evidence into decision making and implementation (eg. planning and problem-solving)?
2. Are there any particular evidence sources the Lab usually consults? (specific journals, organization's reports, etc.)

Using pre-existing evidence

3. Does your Lab use pre-existing evidence aggregations/compilations—for example, literature reviews, rapid reviews, evidence synthesis, systematic review, meta analysis (evidence that has not been generated through a research process that you have implemented)?
    a. If so, please, can you describe what source you used?
        i. Existing papers to produce a review
        ii. Leveraging existing evidence synthesis
        iii. Leveraging an existing evidence repository
4. Does your Lab produce evidence synthesis products?
    a. What kind?
    b. In what contexts are they used?
    c. Which methods do you use?
        i. Systematic reviews (highly rigorous)
        ii. Meta Analysis (highly rigorous)
        iii. Rapid reviews (evidence reviews, literature reviews, etc.)
5. Do any of these sources consider local evidence?
    a. To what degree there is local evidence that could be used for this purpose?
    b. Is that evidence accessible?
6. In what contexts has your Lab you used each of these different types of pre-existing evidence?
    a. What decisions did you aim to inform?
        i. Complement descriptive or causal analysis
        ii. Identify policy challenges
        iii. Design a policy
        iv. Scale up and evidence based policy
        v. Change an existing policy or process
        vi. Others?
    b. To achieve these objectives
        i. Who did you share the review with? (end user)
        ii. What format did you use?
7. Are there any specific topics for which you have found evidence compilations/synthesis particularly useful?
8. What is the time-frame the Lab usually has to provide evidence to decision makers? (explore relation between time and method for evidence synthesis)
    a. Follow up with different time frames if all examples are longer term, eg. immediate, short-term, medium-term

9. If your Lab does not use pre-existing evidence, why?
10. If your Lab has not used systematic review or meta analysis, why? (Follow up questions)

Evidence repositories

11. Does your Lab have an internal evidence compendium or repository? If so,
    a. Why did your lab develop this repository?
    b. Do you update it with any regularity?
    c. If not, are you planning to produce one?
        i. Why yes or not?
12. Can you describe the value chain for evidence repositories until the end user? (e.g. what activities and products are achieved at each step).
13. Has your Lab used external evidence repositories? (to confirm that did not miss it)
    a. How? (in case was not captured above)
    b. Which ones?
14. Has your Lab used evidence synthesis produced by other organizations (products coming out from repositories)? (to confirm that did not miss it)
    a. How? (in case was not captured above)
    b. Which ones?
15. Do you consider evidence repositories useful for your Lab objectives? (regardless of whether they use it or not)
    a. Why?
    b. When is it appropriate to use them?
    c. Opportunities
    d. Limitations
16. How do you think evidence repositories can be useful for improving policy and practice in education?
    a. At the global or regional level?
    b. At the country level?
        i. How can policymakers in a particular country use it?
            1. What challenges might arise for this particular use? How can they be addressed?
        ii. How can educators in a particular country use it? How can they be addressed?
            1. What challenges might arise for this particular use?
17. What are the limitations of the evidence repositories?
    a. In general

b. When it comes to the articulation of the local level? (e.g. contextualization, missing information, etc.)
c. How can we address these limitations?

End users

18. Who do you think are the main users for evidence repositories?
19. Do you think educators and middle managers would benefit from accessing evidence repositories? (different from products coming out from evidence repositories).
20. What is necessary to connect evidence repositories with those users/use cases?
    a. Ask for specific examples of skills, knowledge, resources if not mentioned.
21. If they have not mentioned it, do you see a role for the EdLab in connecting products coming out from evidence with educators and middle managers?
    a. If not, who should do it?

Role of EdLab in global architecture

22. Do you think your Lab can contribute to the global architecture of evidence repositories?
    a. For example, complementing the evidence with local evidence?
23. Who sets/should set the evidence synthesis agenda for the EdLabs?

Second round of interviews questionnaire

Policymaker questions

Process and demand

Demand for evidence and Evidence based action

1. How important do you think it is to use evidence in policy making or for running a program?
    a. Why?
2. In what ways do you usually incorporate evidence into planning and problem-solving? [*clarify it can be for designing a new policy or to adjust the implementation and management of existing programs*]
3. What are the main sources of evidence you use? [*follow up by asking for both internal MoE sources and published research or reports if they only mention either internal or external sources*]

4. In what contexts do you consult internal or external experts with requests for contextually relevant evidence on a particular topic?
    a. How often?
5. How do you identify relevant sources of evidence for a given policy question or program implementation challenge?
6. Does your Ministry have an internal evidence compendium or repository? If so,
    a. [*if yes*] Do you use it?
    b. Why did your Ministry or Institution develop this repository?
    c. Do you update it with any regularity?
    d. [*if no*] Are you planning to develop one?
    e. Why yes or why not?
7. What are some challenges you have encountered in finding evidence that is relevant to the issues you are facing, and to your context?

Capacity

8. Do you think your team is well equipped to use evidence?
9. Does your team use any specific methodologies to search for and summarize evidence for use in policy or implementation decisions?
    a. Which methodologies?
10. How much does your team know about evidence synthesis?
    a. For example the types of evidence synthesis that there are?

Structure and governance

<u>Designated Team & Mandate</u>

11. Who within the Ministry usually carries out searches for evidence, evidence reviews, or evidence synthesis?
12. Are these tasks part of their official or formal job responsibilities, or do they do this in addition to their official responsibilities?
13. In what cases or contexts do they carry out evidence reviews or synthesis?
14. How does the evidence synthesis team or individuals who carry out evidence synthesis within your Ministry or agency engage with policymakers or program managers like you?

<u>Reporting & Visibility</u>

15. How often do you or your peers within the Ministry request the support of the team or individuals carrying out evidence reviews or synthesis?
16. What percentage of persons within your Ministry or agency that could use this service are aware of it? (just provide your best estimate)

<u>Connections with Middle Tier</u>

17. [*if interviewee is aware of an evidence synthesis team*] Does the Ministry team involved in evidence reviews or synthesis engage directly with implementing staff such as teachers, head teachers, or district supervisors?
18. What could be the benefits of educators and middle managers directly connecting with this team or individuals, or directly accessing the outcome of the evidence synthesis ?

Resources

Permanent Budget

19. Does your Ministry or agency have a dedicated budget for evidence generation activities, research, or evidence synthesis?

Lab team-member questions

Process and demand

Demand for evidence

1. How often do policymakers approach you with specific requests for contextually relevant evidence on a particular topic?
2. What is the time-frame the Lab or technical officers usually has to provide evidence to decision makers? (explore relation between time and method for evidence synthesis)
    a. *Follow up with different time frames if all examples are longer term, eg. immediate, short-term, medium-term*
3. What percentage of persons within your Ministry or agency that could use this evidence synthesis or evidence gathering service are aware of it?
4. How do you identify relevant sources of evidence for a given policy question?

Evidence synthesis use cases

5. Are there any specific topics for which you have found evidence compilations/synthesis particularly useful?
6. How useful do you think evidence synthesis is for informing the decision-making processes of the Ministry of Education and school practices?
    a. Who do you think could benefit from consuming evidence synthesis?
        i. Do you believe policymakers can benefit from using evidence synthesis?
            1. If yes, how?
            2. If not, why?
        ii. Do you think middle managers, school principals (headteachers), and teachers could benefit from access to evidence syntheses?
            1. If yes, how?
            2. If not, why?

Designated Team & Mandate

7. Who within the Ministry usually carries out searches for evidence, evidence reviews, or evidence synthesis?
8. Have they had formal training on evidence synthesis?
9. Are these tasks part of their official or formal job responsibilities, or do they do this in addition to their official responsibilities?
10. In what cases or contexts do they carry out evidence reviews or synthesis?
11. How does the evidence synthesis team within your Ministry or agency engage with policymakers?

Synthesis Capacity

[Some of these questions may have been already answered above]

12. Does your Lab use pre-existing evidence aggregations/compilations—for example, literature reviews, rapid reviews, evidence synthesis, systematic review, meta analysis (evidence that has not been generated through a research process that you have implemented)?
    a. If so, please, can you describe what source you used?
        i. Existing papers to produce a review
        ii. Leveraging existing evidence synthesis
        iii. Leveraging an existing evidence repository

13. Does your team use any specific methodologies to search for and summarize / synthesize evidence for use in policy decisions?
    a. Which methodologies? Which methods do you use? For example:
        i. Systematic reviews (highly rigorous)
        ii. Meta Analysis (highly rigorous)
        iii. Rapid reviews (evidence reviews, literature reviews, etc.)
14. How do you identify relevant sources of evidence for a given policy question?
    a. What are the evidence sources the Lab or individuals that conduct evidence synthesis usually consults? (specific journals, organization's reports, etc.)
    b. Does the team or individuals assigned to evidence synthesis have access to journals and databases to review research evidence as necessary?
15. What steps do you follow for conducting evidence synthesis?
16. How are these steps documented? Is there an official agency manuals/SOPs?
17. What software tools does the team use to perform evidence synthesis?
18. What skills and capabilities do Lab team-members or officials assigned to evidence synthesis have for doing this?
19. What is the process for onboarding new members to the evidence synthesis team or officials?
20. Is there funding available to support the team's evidence synthesis efforts?

21. How does the evidence synthesis team engage with local researchers or universities? Do they support your evidence synthesis activities?
22. Aside from evidence synthesis - Does your Lab or evidence synthesis officials produce evidence synthesis products such as toolkits for teachers based on evidence or similar?
    a. If so, what kind?

Evidence synthesis use

23. For a previous evidence synthesis conducted, how was it used?
24. Did it inform any changes in policy or practice?
25. Do policymakers consistently use the results of evidence synthesis in their decision-making? If not, why not?
26. Does your institution or individuals in charge of evidence synthesis engage directly with implementing staff such as teachers, head teachers, or district supervisors?
27. What happens to the results of evidence synthesis, such as evidence summaries or toolkits?

Challenges of evidence synthesis

28. What are some challenges you have encountered in finding evidence that is relevant to the issues you are facing, and to your context?
29. Do any of these sources consider local evidence?
    a. To what degree or percentage is there local evidence that could be used for this purpose?
    b. Is that evidence accessible?

Evidence repositories

30. In your view, are evidence repositories useful for informing decision-making and educational practice at the country level?
31. Do you think international evidence repositories in education have limitations when it comes to informing local decision-making and practice?
32. Are local repositories needed?
    a. If yes, why?
    b. If no, why not?
33. Are you aware of any local repositories in education?
    a. What are some of the local repositories in education that you are aware of?
34. Are you aware of any other initiatives aimed at building a local evidence repository in education?
    a. If yes, what are these initiatives?
35. Does the Lab, Ministry or Institution have an internal evidence compendium or repository?
    a. [*if yes*] Why did your Lab, Ministry or Institution develop this repository?
    b. [*for institutionalized Labs*] Was this initiated by the Lab?

c. Do you update it with any regularity?
d. [*if no*] Are you planning to produce one?
e. Why yes or not?

36. Do you look to include new evidence (particularly local sources) in evidence repositories?

External Partner questions

Process and demand

Demand for evidence

1. In what cases do you usually collaborate with [country]'s MoE?
2. How often do policymakers approach you with specific requests for contextually relevant evidence on a particular topic?

Evidence Synthesis and Its Use in Education Decision-Making

3. Are there any specific topics for which you have found evidence compilations/synthesis particularly useful?
4. How useful do you think evidence synthesis is for informing the decision-making processes of the Ministry of Education and school practices?
    a. Who do you think could benefit from consuming evidence syntheses?
        i. Do you believe policymakers can benefit from using evidence synthesis?
            1. If yes, how?
        ii. Do you think middle managers, school principals (headteachers), and teachers could benefit from access to evidence synthesis?
            1. If yes, how?
5. Have you observed the Ministry of Education using evidence synthesis?
    a. If yes:
        i. How was the evidence synthesis used?
        ii. Did it inform any changes in policy or practice?
        iii. What type of evidence synthesis was used? (e.g., systematic review, rapid review, literature review)
        iv. What sources do they rely on?
            1. If not mentioned, please confirm:
                a. Do they use international evidence repositories?
                b. Do they use local evidence repositories?
        v. Who conducted the evidence synthesis? Was it carried out by a Ministry team or an external organization?
        vi. Would you say the synthesis was conducted to an acceptable quality standard?

vii. In addition to these examples, do you see other opportunities for using evidence synthesis?

b. If no evidence synthesis has been used:
    i. Do you see opportunities for incorporating evidence synthesis into the Ministry's decision-making processes?
    ii. Could you describe some of these opportunities?

6. What challenges does the Ministry of Education FACE (if they produce and use synthesis) or MAY FACE (if they don't do it now but could in a future produce and use):
    a. Producing or commissioning evidence synthesis?
        i. Can they find relevant evidence for addressing the questions they are interested in?
        ii. Are timelines a challenge?
        iii. Do they follow a clear protocol?
        iv. Does the team have the necessary skills and experience?
        v. Do they have sufficient resources?
        vi. Any other challenges?
    b. Using evidence synthesis?
        i. Are there timeline constraints?
        ii. Do staff have the skills and experience to interpret and act on the evidence?
        iii. Any other challenges?

[The respondent may have already answered some of these questions during the previous section, so please feel free to skip those that were already addressed if that is the case.]

7. Does your organization produce evidence synthesis products?
    a. What kind?
    b. In what contexts are they used?
    c. Which methods do you use?
        i. Systematic reviews (highly rigorous)
        ii. Meta Analysis (highly rigorous)
        iii. Rapid reviews (evidence reviews, literature reviews, etc.)
    d. What are the evidence sources your organization usually consults? (specific journals, organization’s reports, etc.)
    e. Do any of these sources consider local evidence?
        i. To what degree there is local evidence that could be used for this purpose?
        ii. Is that evidence accessible?
    f. What are some challenges you have encountered in finding evidence that is relevant to the issues you are facing, and to your context?

8. Do you have a clear set of priorities for evidence synthesis based on national/context specific needs?
    a. How were these priorities defined?
    b. Do these priorities change over time? How frequently?
9. Do you use evidence synthesis in your work with the Ministry of Education?
    a. If yes:
        i. How have you used it?
        ii. How do you identify relevant sources of evidence for a given policy question?
            1. If not mentioned, please confirm:
                a. Do they use international evidence repositories?
                b. Do they use local evidence repositories?
        iii. Does your institution or individuals in charge of evidence synthesis engage directly with implementing staff such as teachers, head teachers, or district supervisors?
        iv. What challenges have you faced?

<u>Evidence repositories</u>

10. In your view, are evidence repositories useful for informing decision-making and educational practice at the country level?
    a. If yes, how?
    b. If not, why not?
11. Have you seen evidence repositories being used at the country level to inform decision making or education practice at the ministry of Education?
    a. If so, how?
12. Do you think international evidence repositories in education have limitations when it comes to informing local decision-making and practice?
    a. If yes, what are those limitations?
13. Do you look to include new evidence (particularly local sources) in evidence repositories?
14. Are local repositories needed?
    a. If so, why?
15. Are you aware of any local repositories in education?
    a. If yes, what are some of the local repositories you are aware of.
16. Does your organization have an internal evidence compendium or repository?
    a. [*If yes*]:
        i. Why did your organization decide to develop this repository?
        ii. Do you update it regularly?

b. [*If no*]:
    i. Are you planning to develop one?
    ii. Why or why not?

17. Are you aware of any other initiatives aimed at building a local evidence repository in education?

Annex 5. Readiness Assessment Tool

Evidence Repository Use Assessment Tool

Overview

This Evidence Repository Assessment Tool is used to understand the capacity for two key functions related to the use of evidence repositories:

1. **Evidence Synthesis:** the use of evidence repositories to inform policy making and program management within the context of a given government agency such as a Ministry of Education. It includes elements from across the value chain of evidence repository uptake – from the initial user demand for repository evidence through the consistent use of the evidence.
2. **Repository Development:** the capacity to create, manage, and maintain evidence repositories at the local or institutional level. This includes the technical infrastructure, governance structures, data curation practices, and stakeholder engagement needed to ensure repositories are relevant, accessible, and sustainably supported within the local context.

The Assessment Tool is comprised of several components:

- **Criteria** are the overall organizational framework of the Tool, based on a comprehensive and well-tested Embedded Lab framework that assesses the 4 key aspects of general capabilities for data and evidence use.
- **Topics** are based on themes that emerged during the interviews with evidence repository owners, intermediaries, and users as being key characteristics of effective Evidence Repository synthesis and data-use processes.
- **Assessment Questions** are based on a selection of the questions that were asked in IPA's semi-structured interviews, with a focus on the questions that were most effective in determining the effectiveness of the given process. These questions could also be adapted for use in an asynchronous survey.
- **Stages** are based on both external literature and feedback from interviewees on the elements that, in their experience, have enabled effective use of evidence repositories to inform key policy decisions

Together, these components both define and assess the key elements of the effective use of evidence repositories to inform education policy and practice. To use this Tool, the Assessment Questions should be posed to a variety of actors within the value chain of a given agency's engagement with an Evidence Repository, including (but not limited to):

- End Users, such as policymakers or middle-tier implementers such as head teachers or district managers
- Intermediaries such as Evidence Brokers or Embedded Labs teams who serve as the Evidence Synthesis team
- Repository Owners, including those who are charged with maintaining local repositories

Based on their responses, it is possible to categorize the evidence repository value chain as Emergent, Developing, or Best-Practice in accordance with the Stages criteria.

Evidence Synthesis

Criteria	Topic	Description	Stages of Evidence Repository Engagement		
			1. Emergent	2. Developing	3. Best-Practice
Process	**Synthesis Methodologies**	The various approaches with their respective timeframes, ranging from quick literature reviews to comprehensive systematic reviews.	Evidence synthesis is performed in an ad-hoc way.	There is a methodology for evidence synthesis, but it is not documented or followed consistently.	Evidence synthesis process is methodologically strong, well-documented, and consistently followed.
	User Alignment	Evidence synthesis priorities are based on policymaker needs, and policymakers use the insights from evidence synthesis to inform decision-making.	Limited or no engagement with policymakers in shaping synthesis priorities or use.	Some engagement with policymakers, but synthesis is not useful or used.	Systematic engagement with policymakers means evidence needs are routinely assessed and results are consistently used in decision-making.
Structure & Governance	**Designated Team**	There is a team with a clear mandate to perform evidence reviews and synthesis for the agency.	There is no consistent team engaging with existing evidence, leading to dilution of capacity, duplicative efforts, and poor knowledge management.	Various individuals engage with existing evidence, but they are not connected through a designated team or internal COP or working group.	There is a team who has a clear mandate to support the synthesis and use of external evidence (even if in addition to other responsibilities).
Capacity	**Human Resources & Expertise**	The essential skills and expertise needed, including information retrieval, critical	Team capacity is poor – they have the ability to compile evidence, but lack	Team is able to synthesize evidence, but may make methodological mistakes	Team has the essential skills and expertise needed, including

		appraisal capabilities, synthesis methodology knowledge, and contextual analysis skills	the technical skills to generate insightful and comprehensive synthesis.	that undermine agency trust in their findings.	information retrieval, critical appraisal capabilities, synthesis methodology knowledge, and contextual analysis skills.
	Knowledge Resources	The supporting materials and networks like synthesis protocols, quality assessment tools, decision frameworks, and communities of practice.	Few or no tools/protocols in use.	Some tools and templates in use; limited sharing or institutionalization.	Well-established tools, frameworks, and access to external networks or COPs.
Resources	**Time & Resource Allocation**	The practical considerations for planning and budgeting, including realistic timeframes for different synthesis methods and resources for capacity development.	There is no funding available to support evidence synthesis.	There is some funding available within departmental budgets, but amount varies year-to-year.	There is a budget line for evidence synthesis efforts that is consistently funded.
	Technical Infrastructure	The technical tools and systems required, such as database access, document management systems, repository platforms, and specialized software.	Team lacks the necessary software and hardware to perform evidence synthesis.	Some members of the team may have the required evidence synthesis tools, but gaps remain.	The team had adequate tools for accurate and actionable evidence synthesis.

Evidence Repository Development

Criteria	Topic	Description	Stages of Evidence Repository Engagement		
			1. Emergent	2. Developing	3. Best-Practice
Process	**Repository Creation & Maintenance**	Processes for curating, uploading, organizing, and periodically reviewing repository content to ensure it remains relevant and high quality.	Repositories are created inconsistently or as one-off initiatives without sustainability planning.	There are processes for repository development, but they are applied inconsistently.	Repositories are consistently updated, curated, and maintained according to a clear, documented process.
	User Alignment	Repository content and design are informed by user needs, with mechanisms in place for ongoing feedback and user engagement.	Repositories are developed without input from intended users, and usability is low.	Some engagement with users; repositories may include relevant content but are not fully aligned with user workflows.	Regular engagement with users informs design, content selection, and updates; repositories are widely used and valued.
Structure & Governance	**Designated Team**	There is a clearly designated team responsible for the development and management of the repository.	No designated team; repository tasks are informal and ad hoc.	A team exists but roles and responsibilities are unclear.	A clearly designated team is responsible with defined roles for content management, user engagement, and technical maintenance.
	Inputs into Global Repositories	Local evidence is integrated into regional or global evidence repositories.	Local evidence is not integrated into the global evidence base.	Local evidence is sometimes integrated into global repositories, but this process is not consistent or prioritized.	The evidence base is a “two-way-street,” with consistent local contributions to global evidence.

Capacity	**Human Resources & Expertise**	The team has skills in areas such as metadata standards, taxonomy, information architecture, and content curation.	Staff lack the technical expertise required to build and manage a quality repository.	Team has partial expertise; may depend on external support for technical elements.	Team includes or has access to experts in all key areas needed to maintain a high-quality, user-centered repository.
	Connection with Research Community	The evidence synthesis team engages with local researchers or universities?	There are no connections with local researchers.	There is some engagement with local or global researchers.	There is an established network of local and global experts available to support evidence synthesis efforts.
Resources	**Time & Resource Allocation**	The time, funding, and planning allocated to build and sustain the repository over time.	No consistent resources; repository is unfunded or dependent on short-term projects.	Some resource allocation, but insufficient for long-term sustainability.	Dedicated and sustainable resources for repository management and improvement.
	Technical Infrastructure	The systems and platforms used for storing, accessing, and managing repository data, including user interface design and backend architecture.	Repository relies on basic or non-purpose-built tools (e.g., spreadsheets, basic cloud storage).	Uses non-purpose-built tools, but has a high-quality integration or workflow.	Robust, user-friendly, and scalable infrastructure with strong backend systems and intuitive user interfaces.

Annex 6. EdLabs assessment

Evidence Synthesis

Criteria	Topic	Assessment score	
		Ghana	Côte d'Ivoire
Process	**Synthesis Methodologies**	**Emergent**: Evidence synthesis in performed in ad-hoc way	**Developing**: There is a methodology for evidence synthesis, but it is not documented or followed consistently.
	User Alignment	**Developing**: Some engagement with policymakers, but synthesis is not useful or used	**Developing**: Some engagement with policymakers, but synthesis is not useful or used.
Structure & Governance	**Designated Team**	**Emergent**: There is no consistent team engaging with existing evidence, leading to dilution of capacity, duplicative efforts, and poor knowledge management.	**Developing**: Various individuals engage with existing evidence, but they are not connected through a designated team.
Capacity	**Human Resources & Expertise**	**Emergent**: Team capacity is poor – they have the ability to compile evidence, but lack the technical skills to generate insightful and comprehensive synthesis.	**Emergent**: Team capacity is poor – they have the ability to compile evidence, but lack the technical skills to generate insightful and comprehensive synthesis.
	Knowledge Resources	**Emergent**: Few or no tools/protocols in use.	**Emergent**: Few or no tools/protocols in use.
Resources	**Time & Resource Allocation**	**Emergent**: There is no funding available to support evidence synthesis.	**Emergent**: There is no funding available to support evidence synthesis.

	Technical Infrastructure	**Emergent**: Team lacks the necessary software and hardware to perform evidence synthesis.	**Emergent**: Team lacks the necessary software and hardware to perform evidence synthesis.

Evidence Repository Development

Criteria	Topic	Assessment score	
		Ghana	**Côte d'Ivoire**
Process	**Repository Creation & Maintenance**	**Developing**: There are processes for repository development, but they are applied inconsistently	**Developing**: There are processes for repository development, but they are applied inconsistently.
	User Alignment	**Developing**: Some engagement with users; repositories may include relevant content but are not fully aligned with user workflows.	**Developing**: Some engagement with users; repositories may include relevant content but are not fully aligned with user workflows.
Structure & Governance	**Designated Team**	**Emergent**: No designated team; repository tasks are informal and ad hoc.	**Developing**: A team exists but roles and responsibilities are unclear.
	Inputs into Global Repositories	**Emergent**: Local evidence is not integrated into the global evidence base.	**Emergent**: Local evidence is not integrated into the global evidence base.
Capacity	**Human Resources & Expertise**	**Emergent**: Staff lack the technical expertise required to build and manage a quality repository.	**Developing**: Team has partial expertise; may depend on external support for technical elements.
	Connection with Research	**Emergent**: There are no connections with local researchers.	**Emergent**: There are no connections with local researchers.
Resources	**Time & Resource Allocation**	**Emergent**: No consistent resources; repository is	**Developing**: Some resource allocation, but

		unfunded or dependent on short-term projects.	insufficient for long-term sustainability.
	Technical Infrastructure	**Emergent**: Repository relies on basic or non-purpose-built tools (e.g., spreadsheets, basic cloud storage).	**Emergent**: Repository relies on basic or non-purpose-built tools (e.g., spreadsheets, basic cloud storage).

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