STRENGTHENING COMPETENCIES

for Evidence-Based Biodiversity Programming

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USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

OVERVIEW

This resource is for staff providing technical assistance to support evidence-based approaches in United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Program Cycle processes for biodiversity programs, including project and activity design, activity start-up, monitoring, evaluation, and adaptive management. Using and generating evidence are important elements of learning and adapting, two key components in USAID's **Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) Framework**.

Cover Image: Community managed lands in Kenya provide critical grazing habitat for wildlife near Kilimanjaro. Photo by Matthew Erdman

About This Resource

This resource helps technical assistance staff think about how evidence-based approaches operate in biodiversity and integrated programming and the functions that support effective and efficient use and generation of evidence in program decision-making. When using this resource technical assistance staff can ask themselves:

WHO **Who do I engage with that serves in this function?**
(The answer may be yourself!)

WHAT **What are the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to succeed in this function?**

HOW **How well is this function currently operating in the program context? Do the stakeholders collectively performing this function have the requisite competencies?**

WHAT **What can I do to introduce and reinforce knowledge and skills for using and generating evidence with the stakeholders I engage in technical assistance?**

Technical assistance can support effective and efficient use and generation of evidence in biodiversity programs.

LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT USING EVIDENCE IN USAID PROGRAMMING?

Evidence in Action introduces practitioners to evidence-based approaches in USAID biodiversity programs. (Or explore the online resource **Acting on the Evidence**.)

Using Evidence to Inform All Stages of the Project Cycle provides a short overview of evidence-based project planning.

The **USAID Learning Lab** toolkits contain guidance and tools for USAID processes used to operationalize evidence-based approaches in the USAID Program Cycle. Specifically, **USAID's CLA Toolkit** contains many resources to overcome barriers and support enabling conditions for using and generating evidence.

How to Use This Resource

This resource recognizes three unique **functions** that are associated with a set of Foundational Principles and Competencies for using and generating evidence in biodiversity programming. These functions focus on supporting, applying, and facilitating evidence-based decision-making (see Table 1, page 5). All three functions are needed to operationalize and sustain evidence use and generation across USAID's biodiversity portfolio.

Part I of of this resource describes stakeholder competencies that support each evidence function. The competencies describe what stakeholders who effectively perform the function *know, understand,* and *do* as part of their work. Technical assistance staff can use these competencies to guide their own development and help them recognize where stakeholders' existing knowledge and understanding may create inefficiencies in the use and generation of evidence in biodiveristy programming.

The competencies are cumulative: Supporter competencies provide a foundation for Practitioner competencies, which provide a foundation for Facilitator competencies (Figure 1). Evidence-based biodiversity programming is the result of collaboration among the stakeholders supporting the three evidence functions.
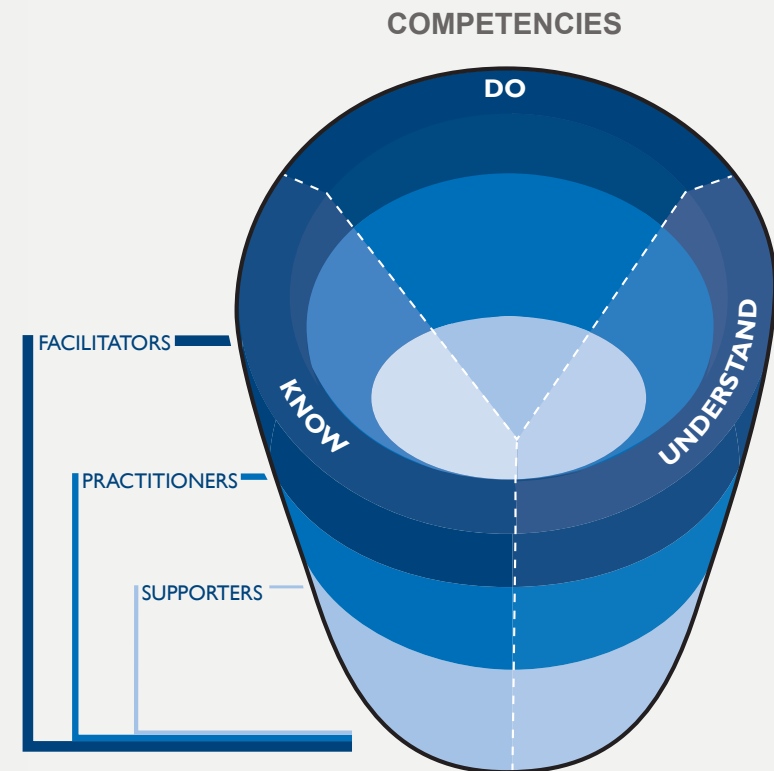

Figure 1. The competencies describe what stakeholders collectively need to know, understand, and do to realize different evidence functions. The competencies are cumulative across the different functions. For example, Facilitator competencies build on Supporter and Practitioner competencies as prerequisites.

How to Use This Resource

Part 2 of this resource looks at challenges that can appear when an evidence function is not fully realized and provides tips to address these challenges. The tips point to ways technical assistance staff can use technical assistance to introduce and reinforce competencies in support of the corresponding evidence function (see Figure 2). Technical assistance staff can use these tips to inspire uptake of the competencies and adapt technical assistance to the existing functional context.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Assumptions:

- Agency policy and operations set expectations for evidence-based decision-making
- Operating Units have flexibility to optimize business processes to accommodate evidence use and generation
- Adequate resourcing is available

FACILITATED

APPLIED

Practitioners use the 5As (see p. 6) to strengthen decision-making in biodiversity programs

Evidence-based decision-making is

Technical assistance staff introduce and reinforce competencies for the three evidence functions

Stakeholders develop and practice competencies

SUPPORTED

Supporters use policies and business processes to enable and resource evidence use and generation

Better programming decisions

Evidence-based decisions improve conservation outcomes
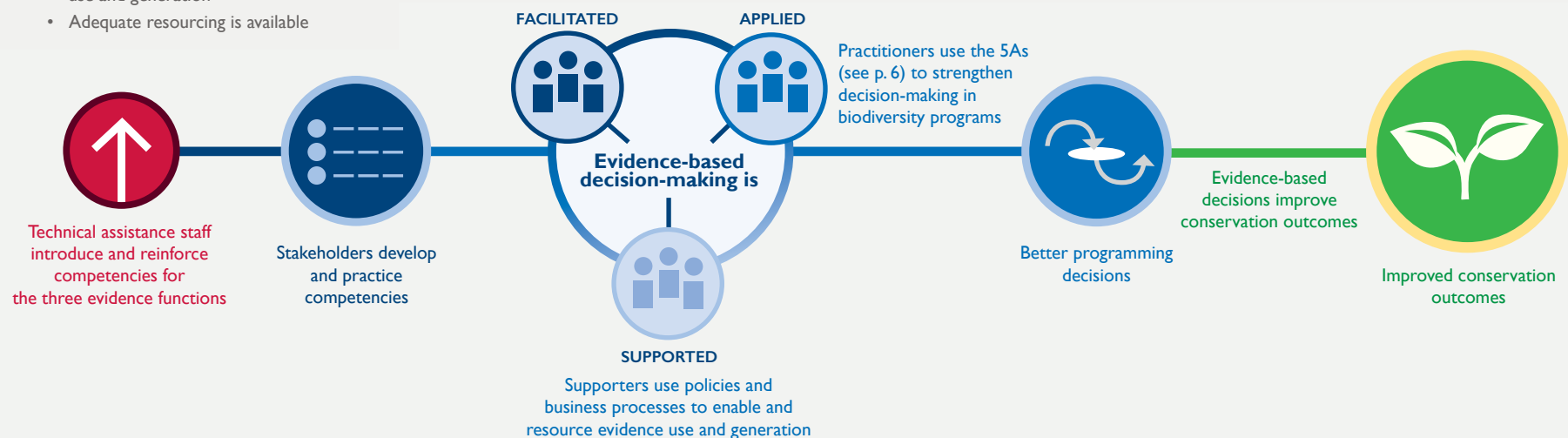
Improved conservation outcomes

Figure 2. Technical assistance provides an opportunity to introduce and reinforce appropriate competencies through engagement with the stakeholder groups expected to perform the different evidence functions.

Table 1: Evidence Functions in USAID Biodiversity Programs

EVIDENCE FUNCTION	BIODIVERSITY PROGRAMMING STAKEHOLDERS
Supporters influence the enabling environment in which evidence is used and generated—for example, by applying policies and allocating resources in ways that minimize barriers to using evidence to make decisions.	Supporters include individuals who engage with biodiversity programming through strategic planning, procurement, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting. Technical assistance staff may engage with **Mission program experts** (Program Officers, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning [MEL] Specialists, and CLA Advisors), **Mission procurement professionals** (Contracting Officers), **strategic leaders** (Mission Directors), and **technical teams** (Office Directors) in this function.
Practitioners use evidence to inform policy and programmatic decisions. They are responsible for executing evidence skills directly or with technical assistance.	Practitioners include both USAID staff and implementing partners responsible for managing and implementing biodiversity programs. Technical assistance staff typically engage with **technical teams** (Foreign Service Nationals and Foreign Service Officers) and **implementing partners** in this function.
Facilitators help biodiversity teams incorporate evidence into program decisions, including advising, facilitating, and providing additional capacity for using and generating evidence.	Technical assistance staff typically facilitate processes that support evidence-based decision-making. Facilitators include USAID **technical officers** and **implementing partners** that provide technical expertise to USAID teams managing biodiversity programs and partners implementing biodiversity activities (e.g., USAID Biodiversity Advisors and other technical assistance staff).

The goal is to improve decision-making through targeted use and generation of evidence.

Evidence Use and the 5As

The competencies refer to **five skills** used to incorporate evidence into programming called the **5As**: **Ask**, **Acquire**, **Appraise**, **Apply**, and **Assess**. The 5As may be applied to any decision that can be informed by evidence, and as such, they complement but do not replace the tools and practices used to implement biodiversity programs described in the **Biodiversity How-To-Guides**. The 5As are applied during program design and implementation to support key decision points.

In biodiversity programming, the value of evidence is measured by its utility for decision-making.

ASK
Ask answerable, decision-relevant questions.

ACQUIRE
Acquire evidence by accessing existing evidence or generating new evidence.

APPRAISE
Appraise evidence critically for relevance and credibility.

APPLY
Apply evidence when making the programming decision.

ASSESS
Assess the application of these evidence skills in the decision context.

When to Use the 5As

Biodiversity teams use the 5As when they face a decision characterized by a high degree of **uncertainty**. Uncertainty arises from an information need that can be resolved by acquiring evidence. Uncertainty is not the same as ambiguity, which makes decisions hard for other reasons, such as when there is lack of agreement on the values or criteria used to evaluate decision options or on the objectives of the decision being made.

The 5As play out in decisions throughout the Program Cycle. A **decision path** shows how the evidence skills are used to connect **information needs** to **decision points** (Figure 3). There are many different ways to create decision paths, but a decision path always has two parts that must be aligned for evidence-based decision-making: A team must acquire evidence (the gray arrow) before they can apply evidence to a decision (the blue arrow). A decision path can exist even when these parts occur in different stages of the Program Cycle. Thus, Facilitators may find themselves helping teams identify and connect touchpoints across the Program Cycle that will be used to create decision paths for upcoming (known and anticipated) program decisions.

The 5As help resolve uncertainty, not ambiguity.

KEY EVIDENCE-INFORMED DECISIONS IN BIODIVERSITY PROGRAMS

In biodiversity programs, key decisions typically informed by evidence include: 1) where to work, 2) which threats to biodiversity to address, 3) which stakeholders to engage, 4) which strategic approaches to use, and 5) when and how to implement or adjust the technical approach. Use of evidence begins at the design stage, where biodiversity teams use evidence to establish the prevalence of the problem, understand its causes, and explore solutions that have been used to address the problem. Evidence use continues into implementation where teams use evidence to monitor and adapt.
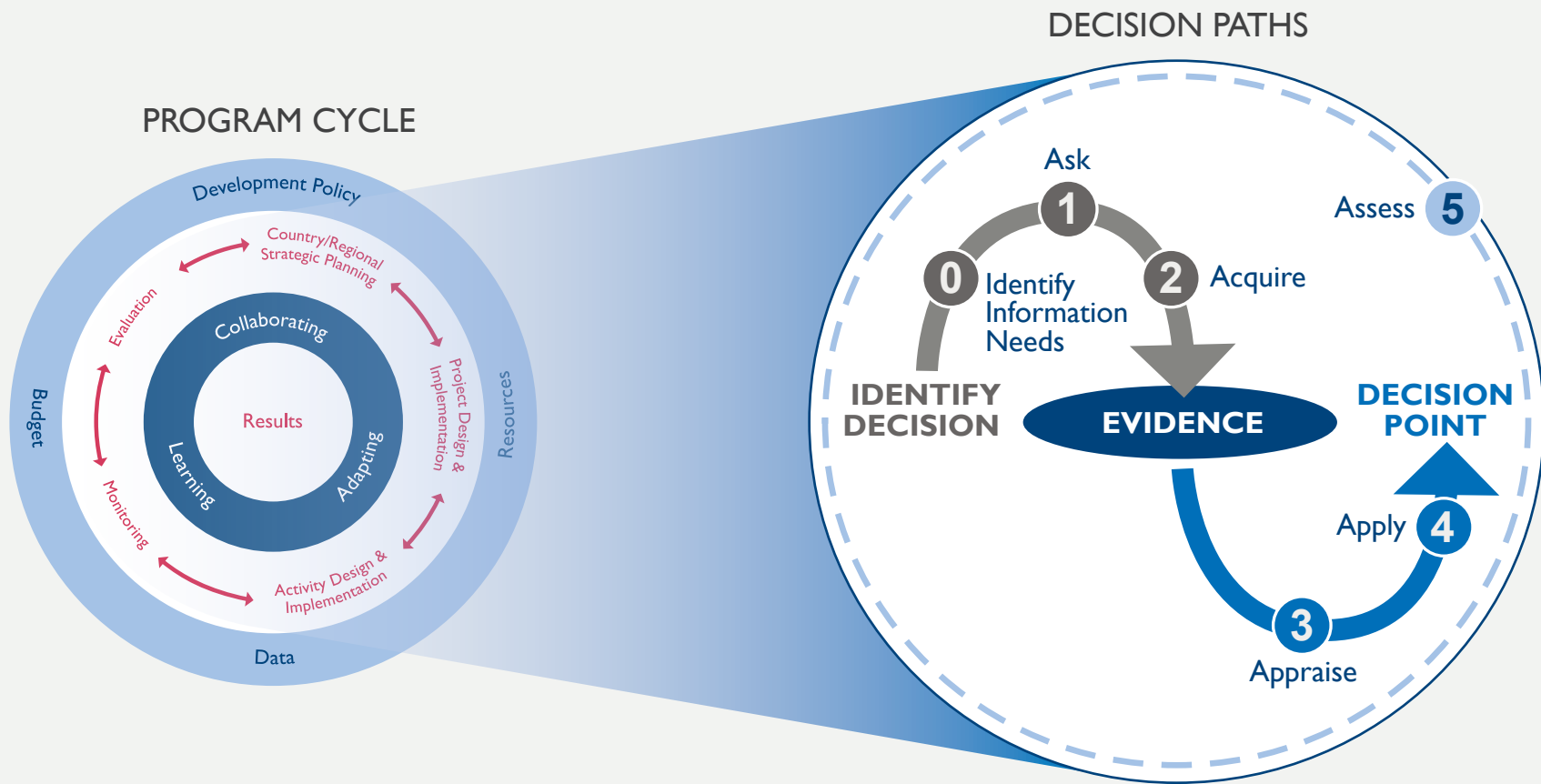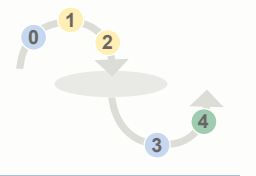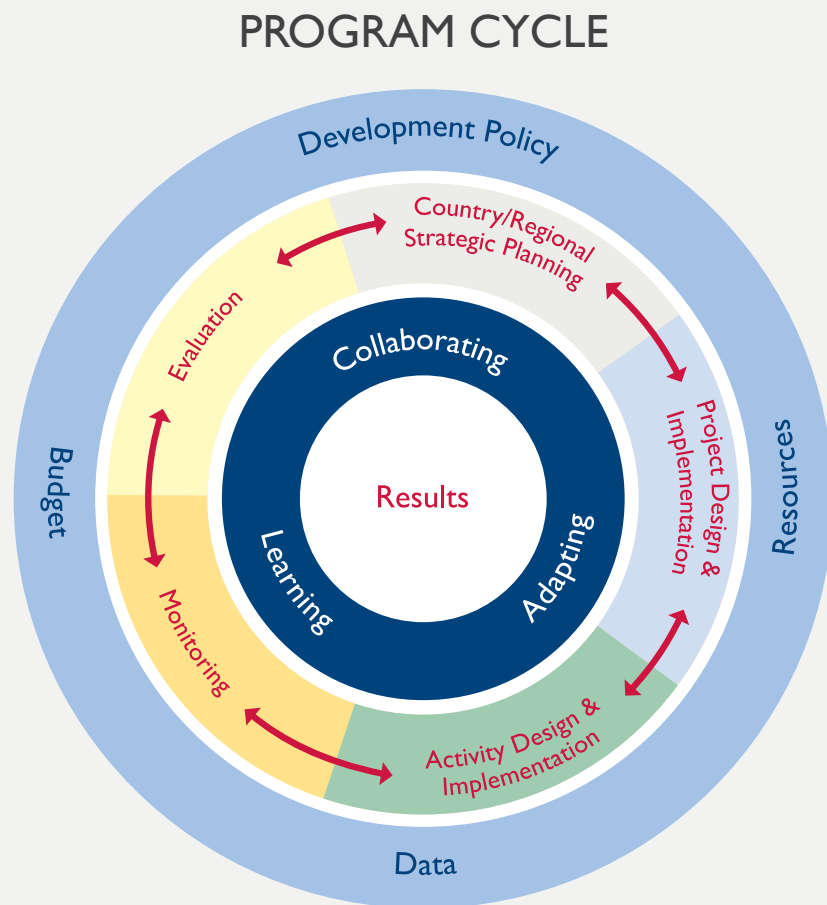
Decision Paths and the Program Cycle

Figure 3. The 5As play out in decision paths across the USAID Program Cycle. In adaptive management, decisions get revisited and adjusted after the original decision point; subsequent decisions initiate new decision paths.

PROGRAM CYCLE

EXAMPLE 1: A Decision Path Using an Impact Evaluation

0 The Mission identifies an **information need** in its biodiversity portfolio about the use of ranger patrols to address wildlife crime.

1 The Mission plans an impact evaluation in parallel with activity implementation. The evaluation includes a question **asking** if the use of ranger patrols was effective in reducing illegal primate hunting in protected areas.

2 The impact evaluation **generates** new evidence about the effectiveness of anti-poaching patrols.

3 The Mission **appraises** the body of evidence on the efficacy of the intervention. The appraisal suggests that anti-poaching patrols are likely to be beneficial when implemented alongside other interventions.

4 Activity teams **apply** the evidence to new designs, deciding to expand ranger patrols in protected areas where illegal primate hunting is a significant threat.

Figure 4. Four examples illustrate different ways that decision paths map to the Program Cycle. The numbers refer to the 5As shown on the decision path and are color coded to indicate the stage of the Program Cycle used to execute the skill.

PROGRAM CYCLE
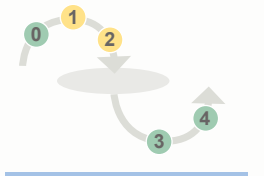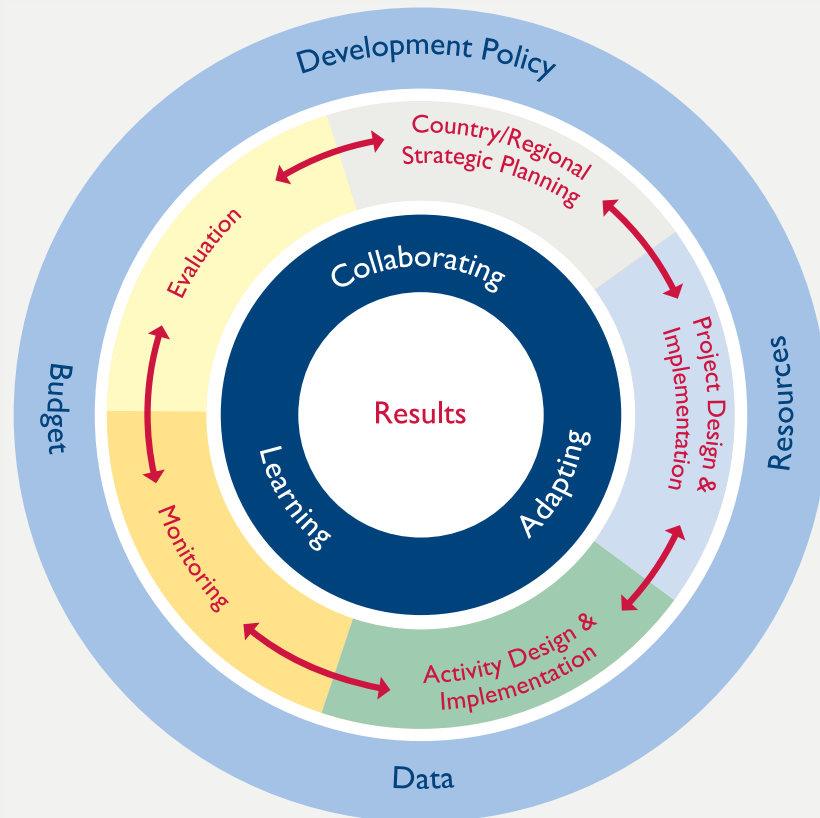
EXAMPLE 2: A Decision Path Informing Activity Implementation

0   Implementers identify an **information need** in activity start-up about whether distributing fuel-efficient cookstoves to local residents will decrease demand for fuelwood.

1   Implementers **ask** this question in their MEL plan and develop a monitoring protocol.

2   During the first year of implementation, households are surveyed to **acquire** evidence about fuelwood collection and use.

3   Implementers **appraise** the evidence in a pause and reflect activity. Survey data suggest that fuelwood demand has not decreased. Rather, households with efficient cookstoves are selling their extra fuelwood.

4   Implementers **apply** evidence to the Year 2 work plan, deciding to implement direct payments for school attendance since children largely collect fuelwood for their families.

Figure 4 (continued). Four examples illustrate different ways that decision paths map to the Program Cycle. The numbers refer to the 5As shown on the decision path and are color coded to indicate the stage of the Program Cycle used to execute the skill.
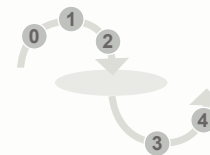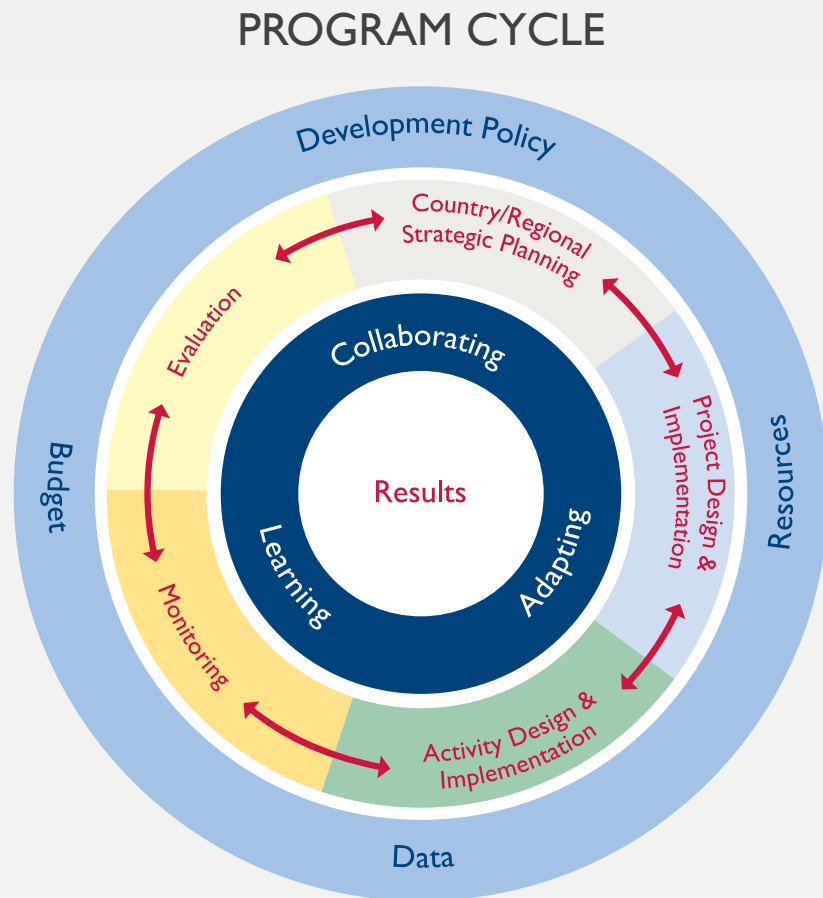
PROGRAM CYCLE

EXAMPLE 3: A Decision Path Informing the Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS)

0 The Mission identifies **information needs** about the threats and drivers of biodiversity loss, as required in the 118/119 assessment.

1 The biodiversity team **asks** about the relative severity of marine-origin threats versus upland watershed threats to marine biodiversity.

2 The assessment team **acquires** evidence from various sources, including literature, expert interviews, and monitoring data from a broad sample of interventions across donors.

3 The assessment team **appraises** this body of evidence, which suggests the greatest threat to reef biodiversity comes from watershed impacts including sedimentation and eutrophication.

4 The Mission **applies** the evidence by integrating improved agriculture and biodiversity programming into a development objective in its CDCS.

Figure 4 (continued). Four examples illustrate different ways that decision paths map to the Program Cycle. The numbers refer to the 5As shown on the decision path and are color coded to indicate the stage of the Program Cycle used to execute the skill.
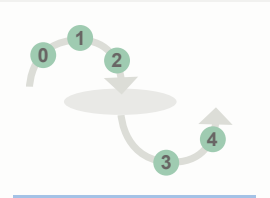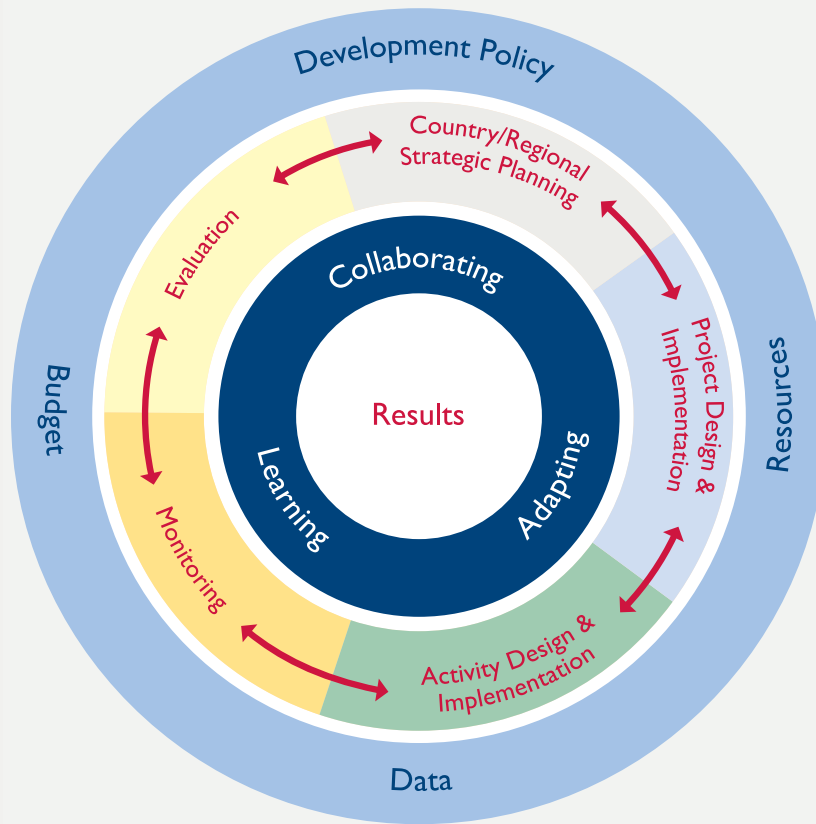
PROGRAM CYCLE

EXAMPLE 4: A Decision Path Informing an Activity Co-Design

0 A co-design team for a biodiversity Global Development Alliance, including the Mission, implementing partners, and private sector partners, identifies an **information need** about the design of its community-based approach for reducing threats to forest ecosystems. The co-design team's theory of change assumes that community members who have management responsibility for and secure rights to local forest resources will be incentivized to adopt sustainable forestry practices. The team is aware that some programs have been more successful at promoting similar types of behavior change than others and wants to understand what specific features should be incorporated into its technical approach.

1 The co-design team **asks**: Which aspects of program design are associated with successful behavior change outcomes in community conservation programs?

2 The co-design team conducts a key word search in Google Scholar to **acquire** existing evidence about how community conservation programs elicit conservation behaviors. The team pays particular attention to evidence syntheses that summarize the existing evidence base.

3 The team finds a fairly recent systematic review on the topic. The review clearly identifies the methodology used to search for and **appraise** evidence, allowing the team to consider the reliability of the findings and their relevance to the program context. The co-design team is particularly interested in the finding that capacity building appears to be an important feature of community-based programs that achieve sustainable behavior change. The Mission validates this finding with observations from other community-based programs in its portfolio that achieved successful natural resource use and management outcomes.

4 The co-design team **applies** the evidence to the activity design by allocating additional resources to the capacity building component of its community-based program for forest management.

Figure 4 (continued). Four examples illustrate different ways that decision paths map to the Program Cycle. The numbers refer to the 5As shown on the decision path and are color coded to indicate the stage of the Program Cycle used to execute the skill.

COMPETENCIES FOR EVIDENCE-BASED DECISION-MAKING IN BIODIVERSITY PROGRAMMING

Foundational Principles

This page presents the foundational principles for using and generating evidence in biodiversity programming in relation to the three stakeholder groups. Stakeholders who effectively contribute to their evidence function share a common understanding about what evidence-based decision-making is and how it operates in biodiversity programming. Technical assistance staff can introduce and reinforce these foundational principles in their messaging to stakeholders.

SUPPORTERS

- The use and generation of evidence is **required** in USAID programs and is reflected in USAID's Biodiversity Policy.

- Biodiversity teams encounter the need for evidence-informed decisions **throughout the Program Cycle**.

- Evidence helps teams **reduce risk** and **improve outcomes** in biodiversity programs.

- Biodiversity programs can fail when they do not devote **adequate resources** to using and generating evidence.

PRACTITIONERS

- The **right evidence**, used well, benefits decision-making by reducing risk and improving outcomes.

- Evidence-based approaches use questions to elicit evidence that informs a decision by **supporting or refuting a claim** on which the decision is based.

- Some questions can be answered by **accessing existing evidence**; others are better answered by **generating new evidence**.

- Evidence-based approaches keep a narrow focus on **decision-relevant evidence**. Not all evidence relevant to a problem or theory of change will be useful for decision-making.

- Applying evidence to program decisions involves **judgment** and **inference**.

FACILITATORS

- Facilitating evidence use and generation frequently involves helping teams **clarify decision points**, **identify and prioritize information needs**, and **allocate resources** to address information needs.

- The 5As require a **range of analytical skills**, including question formulation, literature review and synthesis, data collection design and analysis, and scientific inference.

- The presence or absence of **enabling factors**—such as supportive leadership, availability of time and resources, and proficiency in skills for using and generating evidence—strongly influence execution and outputs of the 5As.

Competencies for Evidence Stakeholders

These competencies describe what Supporters, Practitioners, and Facilitators know, understand, and do as effective contributors to their evidence functions. Thinking about skills for using and generating evidence in this way can help technical assistance staff identify opportunities to introduce and reinforce audience-appropriate factual knowledge, initiate engagements that promote understanding, and look for and cultivate behaviors that demonstrate the application of this knowledge.

FACTUAL KNOWLEDGE

CONCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE

APPLIED KNOWLEDGE
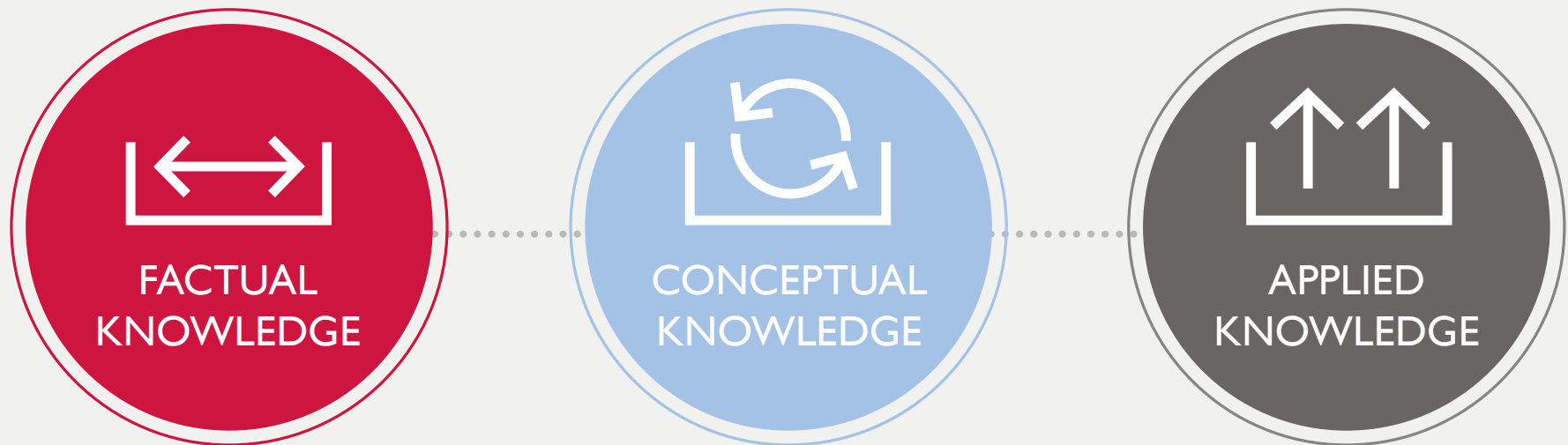
EVIDENCE SUPPORTERS

Supporters Know That:

- **Evidence is the body of information** used to make programmatic and strategic decisions.

- Biodiversity teams need **time and resources** to generate and access evidence *before* applying it to decisions. An evidence-based approach is a systematic effort to acquire, appraise, and apply the best available evidence in decision-making.

- Using evidence is required in USAID's Automated Directives System 201 and is supported by USAID policy and programming guidance (e.g., the **USAID Evaluation Policy**, USAID **Scientific Research Policy**, and **CLA**).

Supporters Understand That:

- Evidence use and generation **iterates within and across Program Cycle stages**. When biodiversity teams encounter uncertainty in program decisions, they must determine whether and how to acquire additional evidence.

- Evidence-based approaches strengthen biodiversity teams' decision-making. Yet aligning the timing of evidence acquisition with its application—often in different stages of the Program Cycle—requires intentional effort.

- **Supportive environments** help teams use and generate evidence more effectively. Available **resources** and previous decisions (e.g., procurement language, decision timelines) enable or constrain evidence use and generation.

Supporters Will:

- Use USAID policies and contracts to **enable evidence use and generation** in biodiversity programs and **identify barriers to and benefits of using evidence** for their programs.

- Expect biodiversity programs to **draw on existing evidence** and to **contribute evidence** to the broader evidence base. Supporters value evidence for learning alongside accountability.

- **Identify and mobilize resources**—expertise, time, budget—that biodiversity teams need to use and generate evidence at various Program Cycle stages.

EVIDENCE PRACTITIONERS

Practitioners Know That:

- Using evidence involves **executing the 5As**: Ask, Acquire, Appraise, Apply, and Assess.

- An **information need** is what decisionmakers don't know that, if known, would help them make a more informed decision. **Questions** are formalized expressions of information needs.

- There are different ways to **acquire** evidence. Some approaches will be a better fit than others depending on the decision context, the needs of decisionmakers, and the relative importance of the decision to program success.

- Critical appraisal is the process of examining evidence to determine its **relevance** and **quality** for a decision.

- Evidence is **applied** to problem analysis, to improve understanding of the proposed solution, and to inform design and adaptive management of strategic approaches.

Practitioners Understand That:

- Evidence is key when teams face decisions constrained primarily by a **lack of information** about some aspect of the program context.

- Questions used to express information needs are **answerable** and designed to generate information that informs current or future program decisions.

- Evidence acquired *after* a decision **informs related future decisions**, rather than the original decision.

- Bias affects the validity of findings and their use in decision-making. **Systematic biases** arise from how evidence is produced; **cognitive biases** are reasoning errors leading to subjective interpretations of evidence.

- Biased or misleading evidence can create a **false sense of confidence** in the certainty of decision outcomes.

Practitioners Will:

- Develop questions addressing **priority information needs**. Prioritization should reflect the utility of information for assessing decision alternatives and the level of risk acceptable to the team.

- Consider **consequence and risk** in evaluating the utility and feasibility of acquiring evidence *before* (e.g., a literature review to inform design) or *after* (e.g., a robust evaluation of implementation) a decision.

- **Execute or manage** appropriate processes to acquire and appraise evidence.

- Consider the **relevance and quality** of different evidence sources, especially if they conflict, when integrating newly acquired evidence into program decisions.

- Intentionally **reflect on and develop skills** for using and generating evidence.

EVIDENCE FACILITATORS

Facilitators Know That:

- Decision-making means **selecting an option** from one or more alternatives. Good decision-making minimizes the risk of poor outcomes.

- **Uncertainty introduces risk** into decision-making: It describes a lack of information or low confidence in the information available to inform decisions.

- Uncertainty in decision outcomes is associated with the **claims or assumptions** on which a decision is based. Identifying claims underpinning decision logic helps decisionmakers **surface information needs**.

- Approaches to acquire evidence may vary in time, resources, transparency, and rigor. Understanding these **tradeoffs** helps teams identify preferred options for acquiring evidence.

- The 5As are **skills** that can be practiced and learned.

Facilitators Understand That:

- Evidence can resolve uncertainty about a claim *before* **or** *after* **a decision**, which can help decisionmakers evaluate a fuller range of options for acquiring evidence.

- **Using the 5As does not eliminate uncertainty**. Teams making decisions with imperfect information can **mitigate decision risk**, e.g., by using monitoring data to decide whether to adapt implementation.

- Decisionmakers' perceptions of **relevance**, **credibility**, and **legitimacy** influence their use of evidence. Challenges arise when disconnects emerge between perceptions and objective measures of these attributes.

- **Critical appraisal** allows decisionmakers to use evidence reliably and efficiently.

- Implementing the 5As is often **constrained by mismatches** between decision timelines and evidence generation and access processes.

Facilitators Will:

- Help teams anticipate **how additional evidence will inform decisions**.

- Be realistic about **operational constraints** that influence a team's ability to execute the 5As.

- Facilitate processes that help teams **set priorities** for acquiring additional evidence during both design and implementation.

- **Support processes to acquire evidence** through access of existing evidence and generation of new evidence, as appropriate.

- Actively **facilitate the apply skill** by working with teams to understand, use, and share evidence.

USING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO STRENGTHEN COMPETENCIES FOR EVIDENCE-BASED DECISION-MAKING

Working with Different Evidence Stakeholders

Common challenges can occur when one or more competencies is not fully realized and an evidence function is not optimized. The tips identified in this section are intended to **expand and strengthen competencies** through engagement between technical assistance staff and evidence stakeholders.

CHALLENGES

WHAT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE STAFF CAN DO

PROMPTS

BUILDING SUPPORT

Mission program experts (Program Officers, MEL Specialists, and CLA Advisors), **Mission procurement professionals** (Contracting Officers), **strategic leaders** (Mission Directors), and members of **technical teams** (Office Directors) are important Evidence Supporters. They use what they know and understand about evidence use and generation to cultivate the **appropriate culture** and environment for evidence-based decisionmaking. Supporters enable evidence use and generation in biodiversity programming by allocating resources, enforcing policies, championing good practices, and addressing organizational barriers to uptake.

⚠ CHALLENGES	➦ WHAT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE STAFF CAN DO	(⊙) PROMPTS
Different interpretations and uses of key terms can lead to **inaccurate** or **incomplete understanding** of evidence concepts.	Develop a **shared vocabulary** about evidence in biodiversity programs. For Supporters, understanding that evidence includes **internal and external evidence** from a wide variety of sources opens opportunities for using evidence to inform programs across the Program Cycle.	Ask stakeholders to clarify what they mean by evidence and their expectations for evidence use in the technical assistance request.
Using and generating evidence is seen as overly **costly** or resource intensive.	**Convey the benefits** of evidence-based approaches in biodiversity programming compared to the cost of failed designs that could be avoided. Teams using evidence should not expect to address every uncertainty. Strategically acquiring the **right evidence at the right time** balances the costs of acquiring additional evidence with its utility for decision-making.	Ask stakeholders to reflect on Program Cycle processes they can leverage for evidence use and generation (e.g., 118/119 assessments, design workshops, monitoring, evaluation, and pause and reflects).
Evidence-based approaches are viewed as overly **prescriptive**.	Share examples of the **many ways to acquire evidence**, e.g., systematic literature searches, key informant interviews, commissioned studies, monitoring, and evaluation. Approaches vary in required time and resources, as well as transparency, repeatability, and susceptibility to bias. Awareness of these **tradeoffs** helps teams decide how to allocate resources in a given decision context.	Share several scenarios for how teams can use or generate evidence in a given decision context to illustrate flexibility. Ask stakeholders to clarify contextual factors like timelines, resources, and other constraints that can help the team identify a preferred approach.

PROMOTING UPTAKE

Evidence Practitioners include **technical teams** and **implementing partners** managing and implementing biodiversity programs. They use evidence to inform decisions about the design and implementation of biodiversity programs in service of Agency **learning**. Practitioners execute the 5As directly or with technical assistance.

⚠ CHALLENGES	⬛ WHAT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE STAFF CAN DO	◉ PROMPTS
Practitioners are overwhelmed with **information needs**.	Facilitate discussions with Practitioners about the **decisions they need to make** and use those decisions when identifying information needs. When the decision is unclear, Practitioners may find it difficult to identify information needs.	What are the big decisions to be made? What is essential to know now and what can be learned later? Would the decision change if the team had some key evidence?
More evidence does not always increase its use in decision-making.	Ask Practitioners to consider how a question's answer would be **acted on and by whom**. Knowing the decisions a team is trying to resolve and where, when, and by whom evidence will be (or has been) generated strengthens essential linkages between evidence use and generation within the Program Cycle.	Who has authority to act on this evidence? How and when will evidence be shared with and accessed by those decisionmakers? When would they need the evidence to act on it?
Using and generating evidence becomes an **"extra" job** that is no one's responsibility.	**Delineate evidence roles and responsibilities**. For evidence acquired via formal analyses and evaluations, Practitioners have established mechanisms to clarify roles and responsibilities. However, technical assistance staff are likely to encounter evidence applications without formal mechanisms, where identifying and documenting who is responsible for using and generating evidence may not be clear.	Has the team considered who will be responsible for various evidence-related tasks? What time and resources are available to the team and when?
Decisions remain vulnerable to **various sources and types of bias** in evidence.	**Discuss inferences and conclusions** the team is drawing from evidence and how they influence decisions at hand. **Appraisal** considers sources of bias and how they influence the validity of conclusions drawn from evidence.	How representative is the evidence discussed? Are any key evidence sources excluded? Are conclusions (or beliefs, in participatory settings) well-supported by the evidence? How do findings apply (or not) to the decisions in the program context?

STRENGTHENING FACILITATION

Evidence Facilitators include **USAID technical officers** and **implementing partners who provide technical assistance** to Practitioners. Facilitators can also expand capacity by applying evidence skills directly as part of their role advising and facilitating processes for using and generating evidence.

⚠ CHALLENGES	⤵ WHAT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE STAFF CAN DO*	((○)) PROMPTS
The team has not **identified their information needs** in their technical assistance request.	**Help teams define what they need to know and why.** Technical assistance includes helping teams identify decision points, describe uncertainty and its risks, prioritize information needs, and decide whether to acquire additional information.	Is a lack of evidence at the root of the decision problem or is the decision difficult for other reasons? Will additional evidence influence the team's decision, or is it just something that would be "nice to know"?
The way that decisions **overlap and nest** in the Program Cycle may not be intuitive.	Use the 5As to help teams **connect existing Program Cycle processes to decision-making**. As a general rule, how evidence is acquired shifts as programs move from design to implementation, with a stronger emphasis on accessing existing evidence in design and generating new evidence during implementation.	What CLA practices are already in use? If evidence is being generated, what decisions will it inform? What sources of evidence are available and can be accessed within the decision time frame?
External and internal constraints impose barriers to executing the 5As.	**Discuss internal constraints** related to time, resources, and access to technical capacities to set an achievable plan for using and generating evidence. Biodiversity teams operate within constraints that may limit some options for executing the 5As. **Including Supporters in these conversations** may mitigate some of these constraints.	What are the different scenarios for how a team might use or generate evidence in the given decision context? What factors help identify the best path, such as feasibility, cost, or timeline implications? Has the team considered these trade-offs (e.g., time, resources, transparency, and rigor)?

* Technical assistance staff can find additional **facilitation resources** by choosing **Facilitation** in the **CLA Framework** dropdown in the CLA Toolkit search bar at: **https://usaidlearninglab.org/cla-toolkit**