

Factors Affecting the Use of Evidence in Public Sector Programmes in South Africa: A Systematic Review of Outcome 8 programmes

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Abstract. The effective use of evidence is crucial for improving public sector programmes' design, implementation, and outcomes, particularly in addressing the complex challenges developing countries like South Africa face. Outcome 8 of the National Development Plan (NDP), which aims to transform human settlements and improve the quality of life for South African citizens, has been the subject of multiple evaluations since its introduction in 2010. Despite the availability of extensive evaluation data, integrating findings into policy and practice has often been inconsistent, with recurring issues identified across various evaluation cycles. This study systematically reviews the factors affecting the use of evidence generated from these evaluations in Outcome 8 programmes, specifically focusing on evaluations conducted from 2010 to the present. The review synthesizes government evaluations, policy reports, and academic literature to identify key barriers and facilitators in using evidence for policy-making and programme implementation. The findings reveal several barriers to evidence use, including political interference, which often influences the prioritization and implementation of evidence-based policies; limited capacity within government departments, hindering the interpretation and application of evaluation findings; and challenges in data consistency across national, provincial, and local government levels. Additionally, the review identifies that public sector programmes often rely predominantly on quantitative metrics, which may overlook the value of qualitative insights that could offer more context and a deeper understanding of policy impacts and outcomes. On the other hand, facilitators of evidence use, such as establishing strong institutional frameworks, forming evidence networks to promote knowledge exchange, and enhancing collaboration between evaluators and policymakers, were also highlighted. These facilitators help create an environment where evidence is more likely to inform policy decisions, leading to more effective governance and better programme outcomes. The review concludes by recommending strategies to address these barriers and improve the integration of evidence into policy-making and programme implementation. Key recommendations include strengthening the capacity of public sector officials to interpret and apply evaluation findings, promoting collaboration between evaluators and policymakers, and institutionalizing the use of evidence across government departments. Overcoming these challenges is crucial for improving the effectiveness of Outcome 8 programmes, advancing the broader goals of human settlement transformation in South Africa, and enhancing the impact of public policies.

Keywords. Evidence-based policy-making, public sector programmes, Outcome 8, National Development Plan, South Africa, human settlements, evaluation findings, systematic review.

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1. Introduction and background

Evidence-based policymaking (EBPM) is a vital governance approach that emphasizes the systematic use of data and evaluation findings in the design and implementation of public policies. The core objective of EBPM is to ensure that policy decisions are made based on solid empirical evidence, as opposed to being influenced by political

pressures, ideology, or conjecture [1; 2]. This approach is grounded in the idea that public policies should be informed by expert knowledge and responsive to real-world data and research outcomes. EBPM aims to improve policy efficiency, effectiveness, and equity by aligning decisions with the best available evidence [3; 4]. As the global trend towards data-driven governance continues, the focus on evidence as a key driver of policy formulation and implementation has gained momentum, particularly in addressing socio-economic challenges in developing countries like South Africa [5; 6]. This strategy is intended to help governments make informed choices that ultimately improve public service delivery and citizen well-being, ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently to the most needed areas.

In South Africa, the application of EBPM has been institutionalized in recent years as part of the government's efforts to address socio-economic challenges, especially in the post-apartheid era. The government has recognized the value of utilizing evidence to guide decision-making processes, which is reflected in the establishment of various frameworks, such as the National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP) [7; 8]. The NDP, introduced in 2010, serves as a long-term blueprint for transforming South Africa's socio-economic landscape, with a clear emphasis on using evidence to tackle the country's most pressing issues, including poverty, inequality, and unemployment [8]. While these frameworks are designed to guide evidence integration, their implementation has often faced significant challenges, particularly in translating the insights from evaluations into tangible policy changes [9; 10]. The evidence generated by government evaluations is crucial in this context, as it informs the continuous improvement of public sector programmes, yet its full potential remains underutilized in policy and programme execution.

Outcome 8 of the NDP, which focuses on transforming human settlements, has been the subject of numerous evaluations aimed at assessing the success of various interventions designed to address South Africa's housing crisis. This outcome aims to reduce the country's significant housing backlog, improve the quality of housing stock, and ensure that marginalized communities have access to sustainable living environments [8]. Several key programmes have been implemented under Outcome 8, including the Upgrading of Informal Settlements Programme (UISP), the Emergency Housing Programme (EHP), Rural Housing Programmes, the Enhanced People's Housing Process (EPHP), and the Integrated Residential Development Programme (IRDP) [11; 12]. These initiatives are central to addressing the housing needs of South Africa's growing population, particularly in underserved areas. While evaluations of these programmes have generated considerable evidence on their successes and shortcomings, the findings have not always been integrated into policy decisions, leading to inefficiencies in programme implementation [13; 9]. Despite the existence of frameworks intended to promote the use of evidence, these evaluations have identified recurring issues, including delays in housing delivery, insufficient infrastructure development, and inadequate service provision, that have yet to be fully addressed.

The motivation for this study arises from recognizing that despite multiple evaluations, the same findings continue to emerge across the various Outcome 8 programmes. The repeated nature of these findings suggests systemic issues in the way evaluations are conducted and how their findings are integrated into subsequent policymaking. The lack of effective translation of evaluation results into policy adjustments has led to the persistence of challenges that undermine the impact of Outcome 8 programmes. Several key evaluation reports from the Department of Human Settlements (DHS) and the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) have documented these findings across various evaluation cycles. Yet, the effectiveness of policy adjustments based on these findings has been inconsistent. For example, despite identifying problems such as inadequate coordination between national, provincial, and local authorities, many evaluations found that these issues were not sufficiently addressed in follow-up programmes [11; 9]. This issue underscores the need for a more comprehensive understanding of why evidence is not fully integrated into policymaking.

The core problem this study seeks to address is the persistent gap between the evaluation findings and their integration into policy and practice, specifically within Outcome 8 programmes of South Africa's National Development Plan. Despite multiple evaluations conducted on these programmes since 2013, evidence generated from these assessments has not been consistently translated into actionable policy. The lack of a systematic and institutionalized approach to utilizing evaluation results means that valuable insights are often overlooked or underutilized, preventing the programmes from reaching their full potential in transforming human settlements. This study examines this disconnect and aims to identify the systemic barriers preventing the effective use of evaluation evidence. The table below summarises recurring findings across various Outcome 8 evaluation reports, highlighting the repeated issues that continue to hinder progress despite the availability of evaluation data. These

findings underscore the need for a deeper exploration of the factors that prevent evidence from driving meaningful change in public policy and programme outcomes.

Table 1: Summary of Recurring Findings Across Various Outcome 8 Evaluation Reports

Evaluation Report	Recurring Findings Identified	Year(s) of Recurrence	Evaluation Report
DHS, 2013: Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact Assessment Framework	Inconsistent implementation of recommendations, poor interdepartmental coordination	2013, 2016, 2019	DHS, 2013: Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact Assessment Framework [11]
DHS, 2014: Rapid Appraisal of Outcome 8	Delayed housing delivery, lack of clear policy implementation framework	2014, 2017, 2021	DHS, 2014: Rapid Appraisal of Outcome 8 [12]
DHS, 2016: Impact Evaluation of Affordable Housing Approaches	Data collection inconsistencies, gaps in tracking programme beneficiaries	2016, 2019, 2023	DHS, 2016: Impact Evaluation of Affordable Housing Approaches [13]
DPME, 2017: National Evaluation Plan Review	Ineffective oversight mechanisms, lack of actionable policy integration	2017, 2018, 2020	DPME, 2017: National Evaluation Plan Review [9]
DHS, 2019: Performance Evaluation of Outcome 8 Programmes	Inconsistent policy application, inadequate monitoring systems	2019, 2021, 2023	DHS, 2019: Performance Evaluation of Outcome 8 Programmes [14]
DHS, 2021: Baseline Evaluation of Informal Settlements Upgrading	Lack of community participation, incomplete baseline data	2021, 2023	DHS, 2021: Baseline Evaluation of Informal Settlements Upgrading [15]
Goldman et al., 2015: Evaluation of Evidence Utilization in Housing Policy	Minimal use of evaluation findings for policy change	2015, 2018, 2021	Goldman et al., 2015: Evaluation of Evidence Utilization in Housing Policy [16]

The current study aims to address this critical gap by investigating the factors that prevent the systematic and consistent use of evidence in policymaking for Outcome 8 programmes. Specifically, the study seeks to explore the institutional, political, and organizational dynamics that contribute to the underutilization of evaluation findings, focusing on identifying the barriers that hinder evidence use and the enablers that could facilitate better integration. By thoroughly examining these factors, the study aims to provide actionable insights into how these recurring issues can be addressed, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of Outcome 8 programmes. Ultimately, the study aspires to contribute to the broader objectives of human settlement transformation in South Africa, supporting the achievement of sustainable, inclusive, and impactful development outcomes in the housing and human settlements sector.

The structure of this paper is organized into several key sections to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the factors affecting the use of evidence from evaluations in Outcome 8 programmes in South Africa. Following this introduction and background, the second section outlines the methodology, detailing the systematic review approach, selection criteria for documents, and the sources of evidence, which include government evaluations, policy reports, and academic literature. The third section presents the findings from the review, identifying the key barriers and facilitators to using evidence in Outcome 8 programmes, focusing on political, institutional, and organizational factors. The fourth section provides a detailed discussion of these findings, exploring how these factors impact the integration of evaluation results into policy and practice and how the relationship between evaluators and policymakers influences evidence use. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the main findings, reflects on their broader implications for public governance in South Africa, and suggests areas for further research.

to improve the use of evidence in public sector programmes. The paper will integrate references to key literature, and government reports to support the analysis and provide context for the discussion.

2. Methodology

This study employs a systematic review methodology to investigate the factors influencing the use of evidence in public sector programmes, with a specific focus on Outcome 8 under South Africa's NDP. Outcome 8 is a critical case study for examining how evaluation findings are utilized in policy-making and programme implementation. A systematic review is a widely recognized research method that synthesizes evidence from multiple sources to provide a structured and objective analysis of a specific research problem [17]. This approach is particularly suited for this study as it identifies, selects, synthesises, and interprets existing evaluations, policy reports, and academic literature related to using evidence in Outcome 8 programmes. The review follows the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework, which provides a transparent and rigorous process for conducting systematic reviews [18]. The primary objective of this systematic review is to explore the factors that enable or hinder the effective integration of evaluation findings into public sector decision-making, with a specific focus on the human settlement programmes under Outcome 8.

By adopting Outcome 8 as a case study, the research examines how evidence from evaluations conducted between 2010 and 2024 has influenced policy and programme implementation in South Africa's housing and human settlement sector. The systematic review process involved multiple stages: data collection, eligibility screening, thematic synthesis, and interpretation. Key government evaluation reports, grey literature, and peer-reviewed academic studies were analyzed to determine recurring themes related to evidence use. A thematic analysis was applied to categorize emerging themes, ensuring that both conceptual and empirical insights were captured. This study provides a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the systemic factors affecting the use of evidence in public governance, particularly emphasising the challenges and opportunities within Outcome 8 programmes. The findings will contribute to the broader discourse on EBPM in South Africa and other developing countries, where similar governance and policy implementation challenges persist.

2.1 Emergent question

The research is guided by the following core question: *What factors influence the use of evidence in public sector programmes, with a specific case study of Outcome 8 under South Africa's NDP?* This question addressed a critical gap in the literature on EBPM in the South African public sector. While evaluations play an essential role in shaping policy, their integration into real-world policy decisions remains inconsistent. Focusing on Outcome 8 as a case study, the review seeks to identify the systemic, institutional, political, and operational factors determining whether evaluation findings are utilized or disregarded in policy-making. The study aims to provide insights into the mechanisms that enhance evidence use and those that act as obstacles, ultimately informing strategies to improve the uptake of evaluation findings in public governance.

2.2 Search strategy

To ensure the review was methodologically rigorous and comprehensive, searches were conducted across multiple academic databases and institutional repositories to include both peer-reviewed academic literature and grey literature. The selected databases for the search were Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, and Google Scholar, which provide extensive coverage of public administration, policy analysis, and evaluation studies. In addition to academic sources, relevant government reports and policy evaluations were retrieved from the DHS website and DPME repositories. These sources provide valuable firsthand insights into evaluating Outcome 8 programmes, which focus on human settlements and housing in South Africa. Manual searches were also performed using Google Scholar and government document portals to identify additional reports and studies that may have been missed during the initial search.

The SPIDER tool was employed to structure the search process. This framework was selected because it is particularly well-suited for qualitative and mixed-methods research [19]. Unlike the PICO tool, which is commonly used in clinical research to assess interventions and control groups, SPIDER is tailored for social sciences research, emphasizing the exploration of experiences, processes, and policy impacts [20]. This made the SPIDER tool ideal for this review, which sought to examine how evaluation findings are integrated into policy-making and decision processes within Outcome 8 programmes. The SPIDER components guided the search strategy, focusing on key components such as public sector programmes in Outcome 8, the use of evaluation findings, and institutional and

political factors influencing evidence integration (see Table 2).

Table 2: SPIDER framework components for the search strategy

Component	Description
S [Sample]	Public sector programmes under Outcome 8, which focus on housing and human settlements in South Africa.
PI [Phenomenon of Interest]	The use of evaluation findings in South Africa’s public sector and evidence-based policy-making (EBPM).
D [Design]	Qualitative research designs, such as case studies, document analysis, and thematic evaluations of government reports.
E [Evaluation]	Factors influencing the integration of evaluation findings into policy decisions, including institutional barriers, political considerations, and capacity constraints.
R [Research Type]	Qualitative and mixed-method studies focusing on evidence use, governance, and policy implementation.

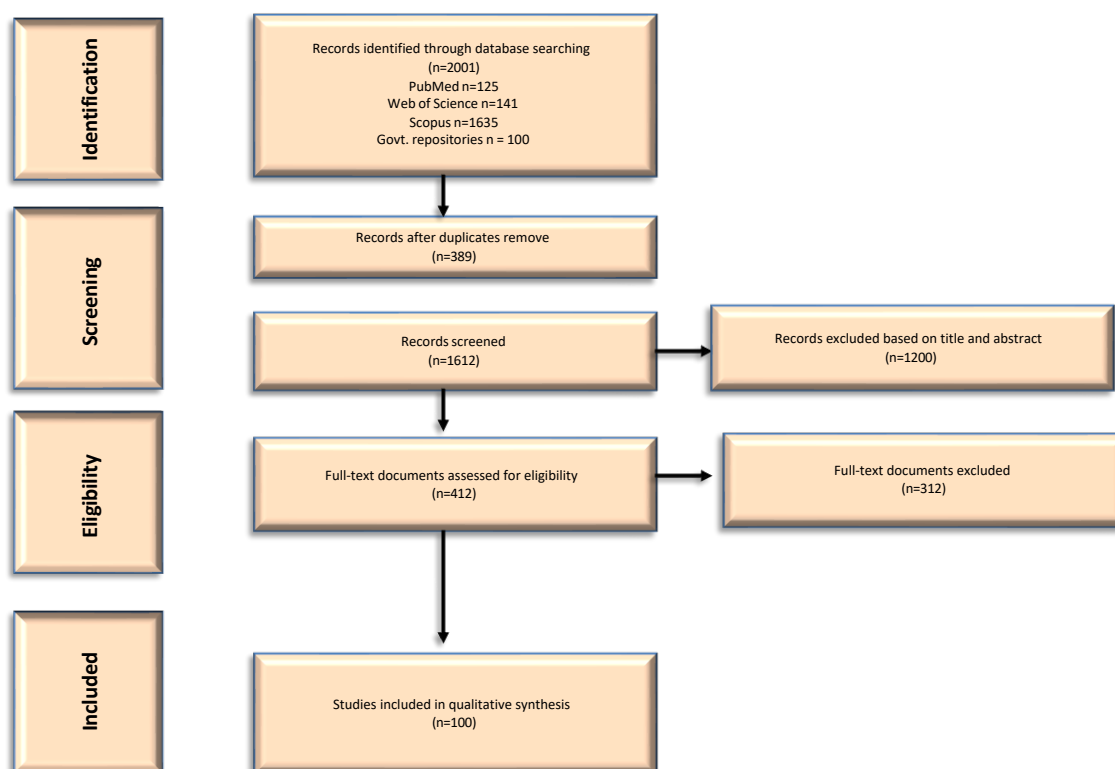
The search utilized specific search terms and Boolean operators across the databases to ensure consistency and capture the most relevant studies. The search terms included combinations of Outcome 8, human settlements, South African housing policy, and phrases related to evaluation findings, evidence-based policy, and decision-making. This combination enabled the identification of studies focused on evaluation utilization, governance challenges, and evidence-based policymaking in South Africa’s housing sector.

The search process unfolded in three stages: First, an initial broad search was conducted to capture a wide range of relevant sources. Then, title and abstract screening was performed to exclude irrelevant articles. Finally, full-text screening was conducted, applying thematic analysis to assess the relevance of each study to the research questions. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were strictly applied to ensure that only the most relevant and high-quality studies were included in the review.

2.3 Selection criteria

The selection criteria for this systematic review were designed to ensure that only the most relevant and high-quality studies were included in analyzing evidence use in Outcome 8 programmes in South Africa. The review examined how evaluation findings are integrated into public sector decision-making, particularly in housing and human settlements, which are central to Outcome 8 of South Africa’s NDP. The focus was on identifying barriers and facilitators to evidence use in policy and programme implementation, particularly in addressing South Africa’s socio-economic challenges. The search began with retrieving 2001 records from academic databases and government repositories. These records were sourced as follows: PubMed (n=125), Web of Science (n=141), Scopus (n=1635), and Government repositories (n=100). After removing 389 duplicates, 1612 unique records remained for title and abstract screening. At this stage, 1200 papers were excluded due to irrelevance based on their focus or title. The remaining 412 studies underwent full-text review, excluding 312 studies that lacked sufficient relevance to the research question. Ultimately, 100 papers were included in the final analysis. These comprised evaluations from the DHS, which provided insights into housing and settlement-related interventions, and peer-reviewed articles from academic journals, which contributed theoretical and empirical perspectives on evidence-informed policymaking in South Africa.

Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection



The inclusion criteria for the studies selected were based on specific characteristics. First, only studies published between 2010 and 2024 were considered to align with the implementation of the NDP, which began in 2012. Studies had to focus on public sector programmes in South Africa, specifically Outcome 8 (housing and human settlements). They had to address evaluation findings used in policymaking or programme implementation within these sectors. Additionally, only qualitative and mixed-methods studies, such as case studies, thematic evaluations, and policy reviews, provided rich insights into evidence use in governance. Studies must also be published in English to maintain consistency and inclusivity. Studies that did not focus on public sector governance or were unrelated to South Africa were excluded. Furthermore, studies published before 2010 were excluded, as they did not align with the NDP's timeline. The inclusion criteria and their specifications are outlined in Table 4, which summarizes the key aspects that guided the study selection process.

Table 3: Inclusion Criteria for Study Selection

Criteria	Description
Publication Date	Studies published between 2010 and 2024, aligning with the introduction of the National Development Plan (NDP).
Study Focus	Studies that focus on public sector programmes in South Africa, particularly those related to Outcome 8 (housing and human settlements).
Study Type	Only qualitative and mixed-methods studies (e.g., case studies, thematic evaluations, policy reviews) were included.
Language	Studies published in English were considered to ensure consistency and inclusivity.
Exclusion Criteria	Studies not focused on public sector governance or unrelated to South Africa or Outcome 8 were excluded.

The 100 studies were thoroughly analyzed to identify the barriers and facilitators to using evaluation findings in Outcome 8 programmes. The studies were categorized according to their design and research focus to ensure a

comprehensive understanding of qualitative and mixed-methods perspectives on evidence-based decision-making in South Africa’s public sector. Table 4 summarizes the distribution of the types of studies included in the review, providing an overview of the research focus and methodology of the selected studies.

Table 4: Distribution of Studies by Type

Type of Study	Number of Studies	Description
Government Evaluations	28	Reports from the Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation (DPME) and other government-led evaluations of Outcome 8, offering direct insights into policy implementation and impact.
Academic Journal Articles	30	Peer-reviewed articles focusing on the use of evidence in governance and public sector policy-making, particularly in housing and human settlements.
Case Studies	20	Studies examining specific Outcome 8 programmes or pilot projects, analyzing factors that facilitate or hinder evidence-based decision-making.
Policy Reports and Briefs	12	Reports from governmental and non-governmental bodies, including policy analysis on evidence-based governance and programme evaluations.
International Comparative Studies	10	Reports from organizations such as the World Bank and UN-Habitat comparing the use of evidence in public sector governance across various countries.

2.4 Quality assessment

The quality of the studies included in this systematic review was assessed independently by two reviewers using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist. The CASP checklist is widely used to assess the methodological rigour of qualitative research. It provides a structured approach to evaluating the risk of bias and the appropriateness of the study design, data collection methods, and analysis procedures [21]. The checklist evaluates several key aspects of the study, including the clarity of the research question, the appropriateness of the methodology, and the transparency of the analysis.

For this review, the quality of each study was classified into three categories: strong, moderate, and weak. Studies classified as strong demonstrated a clear and relevant research question, appropriate research design, well-executed data collection methods, and a thorough and transparent analysis. These studies provided robust and reliable evidence relevant to the review’s research questions. Studies rated as moderate exhibited some limitations in their design or analysis but still provided useful insights into the barriers and facilitators to evidence use in Outcome 8 programmes. These studies were included in the review, albeit with caution, given the limitations in their methodology. Studies rated as weak were excluded from the review due to concerns about methodological rigour, insufficient transparency, or potential bias in the study design or data analysis.

The quality appraisal process ensured that only studies with a high level of methodological rigour were included in the final analysis. This approach allowed for a more accurate synthesis of the factors affecting the effective use of evidence in public sector programmes under Outcome 8. Including both strong and moderate-quality studies ensured that the review was grounded in reliable evidence while acknowledging the limitations of some studies. The CASP checklist was chosen for this review because it is widely regarded as a reliable tool for evaluating qualitative studies, particularly in the context of public policy and governance [21]. By using this tool, the reviewers ensured that the studies included in the review met rigorous standards of methodological quality and that the findings were both relevant and trustworthy.

2.5 Data analysis and meta-synthesis

The study employed a meta-synthesis approach to systematically integrate qualitative findings from various evaluation reports, policy documents, and academic literature related to Outcome 8 of South Africa’s National Development Plan (NDP). Meta-synthesis, unlike meta-analysis which statistically aggregates quantitative

findings, focuses on interpreting and conceptualising qualitative evidence to generate deeper contextual and theoretical insights [21; 22; 23; 24]. This method is particularly apt for social science and public policy research, where institutional complexity and human decision-making processes require nuanced synthesis [25; 26]. The choice of meta-synthesis was justified by the study's aim to uncover how evaluation findings are used—or neglected—in policy and programme implementation, particularly in contexts influenced by political, institutional, and organisational dynamics [27; 28]. Prior research also supports the use of meta-synthesis in policy studies for its ability to identify patterns across diverse evaluations and highlight recurring barriers and facilitators of evidence use [29; 30]. Through this approach, the study captures a comprehensive view of the structural and operational constraints affecting evidence uptake in Outcome 8 programmes.

The analytical process was guided by Grounded Theory (GT), which supports the development of new theories directly from systematically analyzed data [31; 32]. GT was well-suited to explain the institutional behaviours and social processes surrounding the use of evaluation findings in government policy [33; 34]. The analysis followed three stages: (1) open coding to categorize emerging themes such as institutional barriers, political interference, and capacity constraints [37; 38]; (2) axial coding to examine how these categories relate and interact—particularly how governance structures and political dynamics influence evidence use [39; 40]; and (3) selective coding to build a theoretical framework that explains how institutional processes and political incentives shape the (non)use of evidence in Outcome 8 [41; 42]. The use of MAXQDA 2020 software enhanced data management by supporting thematic mapping and relational coding [43], while constant comparative analysis ensured the refinement and validation of emerging themes [44; 45]. This rigorous analytical process resulted in a structured synthesis of the key factors influencing evidence integration in public sector programmes under Outcome 8.

Table 5: Codes Extracted in the Systematic Review and Meta-Synthesis of Studies

Main Classifications	Main Categories	Sub-Categories	Code
Institutional Barriers	Institutional Capacity	Lack of trained personnel, ineffective resource allocation	[9; 10]; [11; 12]; [13]; [14]; [15]; [16]; [17]; [18]; [11]; [9]; [13]; [19]; [20]; [16]; [13]
Governance and Organizational Barriers		Fragmented governance, poor coordination	[11; 12]; [19]; [9; 10]; [21]; [16]; [13]; [17]; [16]; [20]; [13]; [18]; [19]; [17]; [13]; [22]
Political Dynamics	Political Interference	Influence of political agendas on policy decisions	[20]; [13]; [18]; [19]; [17]; [14]; [13]; [20]; [9]; [19]; [11]; [14]; [10]
Shifting Priorities		Changes in government priorities affecting evidence uptake	[11; 18]; [9]; [14]; [16]; [19]; [13]; [16]; [10]; [12]; [13]; [18]; [11]
Data and Knowledge Management	Data Availability	Gaps in data across various levels of government	[10]; [13]; [16]; [11]; [20]; [19]; [18]; [13]; [9]; [18]; [19]; [14]; [17]; [13]; [13]
Data Consistency and Integration		Inconsistencies in data collection and integration	[9]; [11]; [16]; [13]; [14]; [19]; [18]; [16]; [19]; [17]; [13]; [17]; [11]; [16]; [13]; [18]
Capacity Constraints	Technical Expertise	Lack of skilled evaluators within government departments	[20]; [18]; [13]; [19]; [11]; [17]; [14]; [10]; [13]; [11]; [19]; [13]; [13]; [16]; [17]
Training and Development		Limited institutional training opportunities	[13]; [11]; [16]; [14]; [17]; [13]; [16]; [17]; [19]; [10]; [13]
Collaboration and Networks	Evaluator-Policymaker Collaboration	Weak interaction and feedback between evaluators and policymakers	[11]; [19]; [16]; [13]; [14]; [16]; [10]; [18]; [17]; [20]; [19]; [11]; [19]; [14]; [13]
Inter-Sectoral Collaboration		Lack of collaboration across	[9]; [11]; [19]; [13]; [16]; [12]; [13]; [22]; [19]; [18]; [13]; [16];

The findings from the meta-synthesis indicate that institutional barriers, political dynamics, and capacity constraints significantly affect the integration of evaluation findings into Outcome 8 programmes. These factors interact in complex ways, shaping how policymakers interpret and apply evidence in governance. The structured relationships between these elements are visualized in Figure 2, which presents the Grounded Theory Framework of evidence integration in Outcome 8.

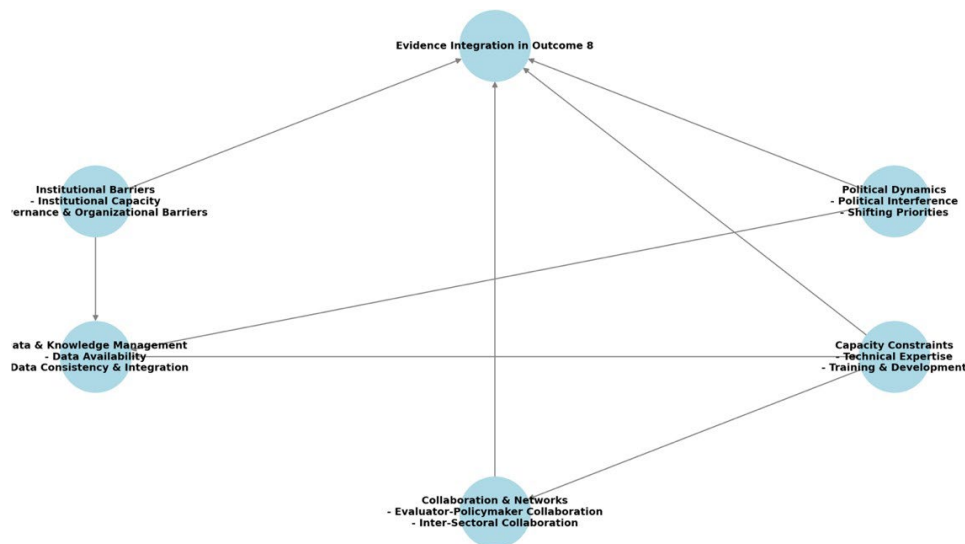


Figure 2: Grounded Theory Framework of Evidence Integration in Outcome 8 Programmes

The results of this meta-synthesis provide a theoretically grounded understanding of the processes governing evidence use in Outcome 8 programmes. The findings demonstrate that while institutional frameworks and political will are critical in facilitating evidence use, persistent challenges such as data inconsistencies, limited capacity, and weak collaboration between policymakers and evaluators continue to hinder effective implementation. These results contribute to a growing body of literature on evidence-based policymaking, reinforcing the need for strategic reforms that address governance inefficiencies and promote stronger institutional support for evidence integration in South Africa's public sector programmes.

3. Findings

2.1 Institutional barriers

A critical finding from reviewing Outcome 8 evaluation reports is that institutional weaknesses remain a persistent obstacle to integrating evidence into policy decisions. Across multiple evaluation cycles [9; 12; 14; 15], recurring issues such as inadequate institutional coordination, weak monitoring structures, and inconsistent implementation of evaluation recommendations were observed. Despite the existence of evaluation frameworks, most reports failed to demonstrate how findings were used to inform programme adjustments, highlighting a gap between evaluation production and its actual application in decision-making [9; 17]. This disconnect suggests that the institutional architecture for evidence use is either ineffective or inconsistently applied across different levels of government.

A further issue identified is that government departments responsible for implementing Outcome 8 programmes lack the necessary expertise to conduct and interpret evaluations effectively. Several evaluations noted that while data collection mechanisms exist, the analytical capacity to process and synthesize findings into actionable policies remains weak [10; 15]. Similar findings were reflected in broader research on evidence use in public sector decision-making, which has consistently pointed to the absence of evaluation literacy as a key barrier [11; 13]. The limited technical capacity of public officials to engage with evaluations reduces the likelihood that findings will be

utilized effectively, reinforcing the problem of evaluations being produced as compliance exercises rather than tools for policy learning [19; 20].

2.2 Political Dynamics

The review of evaluation reports revealed that political interference continues to be one of the most significant constraints to the effective use of evidence in Outcome 8 programmes. Across multiple evaluation cycles, there was a pattern of policy shifts and inconsistent implementation due to changes in political leadership [12; 14; 17]. The reports indicate that while evidence-based recommendations were formulated, many were either selectively applied or ignored due to political considerations rather than technical merit. This aligns with broader literature on governance challenges in South Africa, which highlights how short-term political pressures frequently override long-term, evidence-driven decision-making [18; 16; 13].

Another critical finding is that evaluation reports rarely address how political agendas influence evidence uptake. While some reports acknowledge that policy continuity is disrupted due to shifting government priorities [10; 15], they do not explicitly assess the role of political leadership in determining whether findings are implemented. This omission suggests a gap in framing evaluations—avoiding politically sensitive topics while focusing more on technical issues. Yet, the inability to critically engage with political factors results in evaluations that fail to explain why certain policies remain ineffective despite multiple assessments confirming their weaknesses [17; 14; 19].

2.3 Data Inconsistencies

One of the most striking patterns emerging from the evaluation reports is the persistent issue of data inconsistencies across national, provincial, and municipal levels. Multiple evaluations reviewed noted discrepancies in data collection, classification, and reporting standards, ultimately affecting policy assessment reliability [12; 15; 17; 19]. In particular, gaps in baseline data were repeatedly cited, making it difficult to measure progress or draw definitive conclusions on the effectiveness of Outcome 8 interventions [9; 17]. These findings are consistent with broader research showing that South African government departments struggle with integrating data across different levels of administration, leading to fragmented evaluation results [11; 13].

The inability to generate consistent and comparable data across evaluation cycles suggests a deeper structural issue with knowledge management in the public sector. While evaluation reports acknowledge this challenge, they rarely propose concrete solutions beyond recommending improved data management systems [12; 17]. However, external research points to deeper causes, such as the lack of standardization in how indicators are defined and measured across different evaluations [19; 16]. The evaluations fail to interrogate why these inconsistencies persist despite repeated recommendations, reinforcing concerns that evaluations serve more as retrospective exercises rather than forward-looking mechanisms for systemic reform [18; 13].

2.4 Capacity Constraints

A recurring theme across the evaluation reports was government departments' lack of capacity to effectively utilise evidence. Despite multiple recommendations for strengthening institutional capacity, the reports indicate that technical expertise in evaluation methods, data analysis, and evidence translation remains limited [9; 12; 17]. While some training initiatives were documented, their impact was not systematically assessed, making it unclear whether these efforts led to meaningful improvements in evidence use [10; 15].

Additionally, the lack of dedicated evaluation units within many government departments was identified as a critical weakness in the system [12; 15]. While policy frameworks such as the National Evaluation Policy Framework [9] provide guidelines for evidence use, these structures appear to lack the enforcement mechanisms needed to ensure compliance [11; 19]. The absence of institutionalized evaluation teams means that many recommendations are left to be implemented ad hoc, further limiting their effectiveness.

2.5 Collaboration and Networks

A key finding from the analysis of Outcome 8 evaluation reports is the weak interaction and feedback mechanisms between evaluators and policymakers, which significantly undermine the integration of evaluation findings into policy decisions. Despite the existence of formal evaluation frameworks, evaluators are often excluded from the policy development process, resulting in their recommendations being underutilized or ignored altogether [12;

17]. This lack of integration was evident in both DHS and DPME reports, which identified a critical feedback gap where evaluators were not consistently engaged during key policy formulation stages [9; 17]. The absence of structured platforms for sustained interaction between evaluators and policymakers further compounds the issue, weakening the impact of evidence on policy design [11; 19; 14]. While the importance of collaboration is widely recognized in literature on evidence-informed policymaking [20; 18; 19], the evaluations themselves rarely outlined practical mechanisms to foster such collaboration. The failure to institutionalize these engagements results in evaluations that have limited influence over the policymaking process, as highlighted by Cairney [20], Goldman et al. [18], and Strydom et al. [19], who note that irregular or informal engagement leads to inconsistent and fragmented evidence use [13; 14; 17].

Equally concerning is the lack of inter-sectoral collaboration across government departments involved in human settlements policy. Although human settlements inherently require coordinated efforts across housing, infrastructure, and service delivery sectors, departments frequently operate in silos, which undermines the integration of evaluation findings across policy areas [12; 17]. Evaluations by DHS and DPME show that misalignment between national, provincial, and local government departments hinders the systemic application of evidence, resulting in fragmented implementation and reduced policy effectiveness [9; 22]. This challenge is mirrored in broader governance literature, which emphasizes that weak interdepartmental coordination remains a core barrier to effective governance and evidence uptake [13; 19]. While DPME and Griessel et al. [17; 18] have proposed clearer governance frameworks and joint working structures, the review notes that these remain largely unimplemented. The continued failure to establish cross-departmental teams or institutionalized channels for collaboration reflects a missed opportunity to enhance the impact of evaluations. Without stronger inter-sectoral coordination, the potential of evidence to inform cohesive, multi-dimensional responses to South Africa's housing challenges under Outcome 8 remains unrealized [20; 11; 13; 16].

4. Discussions with Correct Reference Numbers

The findings of this study underscore that institutional barriers remain a significant obstacle to the effective use of evidence in Outcome 8 programmes under South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP). Evaluations consistently pointed out issues such as fragmented governance, weak institutional capacity, and inconsistent application of evaluation recommendations across government levels [62; 65; 69]. These institutional barriers hinder the integration of evaluation findings into policy decisions and prevent evidence from being translated into actionable changes. As [44] noted, the lack of skilled personnel to engage with complex evaluation data is a major contributor to this issue. The absence of trained evaluators and analysts within key government departments means that despite the availability of evaluation reports, their findings are not properly understood or utilized. Similarly, [64] and [62] have argued that inadequate institutional coordination between departments is another key factor limiting evidence-based policymaking's impact. To address these barriers, studies have emphasized the importance of institutionalizing evaluation processes through the creation of dedicated evaluation units, which would ensure consistent engagement with evaluation findings and foster better decision-making [33; 56]. Therefore, a critical enabler of evidence use would be strengthening institutional frameworks, ensuring the systematic use of evaluations, and providing departments with the necessary training and resources to engage with these findings effectively.

Political dynamics, particularly political interference, have been highlighted as another key constraint to effectively using evidence in Outcome 8 programmes. The review observed that political agendas often superseded evidence-based recommendations, with political actors prioritizing short-term gains over long-term, evidence-driven solutions [68; 60]. Shifts in political leadership or changes in governmental priorities often led to inconsistent implementation of policies, making it difficult for evaluation findings to shape policy decisions. These findings are consistent with the literature on evidence-informed policymaking, which shows that political factors, such as the lack of political will and political interference, frequently undermine the effectiveness of evidence use in policymaking [38; 57]. Establishing strong political will and leadership that prioritizes evidence-based policy over political considerations is an enabling factor in overcoming political barriers. For instance, studies have suggested that when policymakers commit to long-term strategies based on evidence, the integration of evaluation findings becomes much more feasible [101; 73]. Moreover, fostering a culture of evidence use among political leaders could significantly reduce the influence of partisan politics and lead to more consistent implementation of evaluation findings.

Data inconsistencies have been identified as a recurring challenge in the evaluation reports, undermining the

reliability of evidence used in policy-making [64; 49]. These inconsistencies—particularly the lack of standardized data collection processes across different government levels—pose a significant barrier to evidence-based decision-making. As found in the review, gaps in baseline data and discrepancies in reporting between local, provincial, and national levels made it difficult for policymakers to assess programme outcomes and make informed decisions [54; 11]. The lack of standardized data management and reporting systems is a significant issue that has been recognized in the broader literature on governance and evidence use [29; 76]. One key enabler to improving data use in policy decisions is establishing a centralized and standardized data management system that ensures consistency across all levels of government. Implementing data standardization protocols would allow for more reliable evidence to inform policy decisions, thus overcoming one of the primary barriers identified in this review. Moreover, creating an integrated national database for human settlement data would enable more effective tracking and monitoring of programme outcomes, facilitating more informed, evidence-driven decision-making [38; 55].

Capacity constraints, particularly the lack of skilled personnel and technical expertise, were another major barrier identified in the review. While some capacity-building efforts have been made, many government departments still struggle to employ the necessary skills for effective evaluation and data analysis [61; 17]. These findings are supported by global research, which indicates that insufficient evaluation capacity in government departments often leads to the underutilization of evaluation findings, as public officials lack the expertise to interpret and act on the results [10; 82]. Building evaluation skills through targeted training programs and establishing dedicated evaluation teams within government departments is critical to overcome these capacity constraints. Evaluators and policymakers must be provided with the tools and resources to engage with evaluation findings fully [81]. Furthermore, integrating capacity-building initiatives into government policy could enable officials to understand evaluation reports and apply them effectively in decision-making, ensuring that evaluation findings lead to substantive policy improvements [67; 59].

Collaboration between evaluators and policymakers was found to be weak, further limiting the effective use of evidence in Outcome 8 programmes [54; 69]. The review observed that evaluators were often not actively involved in the policy-making process, leading to a disconnect between the evidence produced and its application in decision-making. The importance of evaluator-policymaker collaboration in successfully integrating evidence into policy has been extensively documented [54; 53]. Creating more structured platforms for interaction and feedback between evaluators and policymakers could significantly enhance the impact of evaluations on policy decisions. As [60] suggested, establishing regular, formalized interactions between evaluators and policymakers would help ensure that evidence is continuously applied in the policy process. This could involve setting up joint task forces or committees that work together throughout the evaluation and decision-making process, ensuring that evidence-based recommendations are actively considered during policy formulation and implementation. Such collaboration would also foster a culture of evidence use within the public sector, ultimately leading to more effective governance and improved policy outcomes [62; 40].

Finally, the review identified weak inter-sectoral collaboration as another significant barrier to the effective use of evidence in Outcome 8 programmes. Despite the multi-disciplinary nature of human settlements policy, government departments often work in silos, leading to fragmented policy implementation and a lack of coordinated action [67; 56]. This issue of siloed working was particularly evident in the DHS and DPME evaluations, where failure to align efforts between national, provincial, and local governments hindered the effective application of evaluation findings [86; 79]. Establishing clear inter-sectoral governance frameworks and cross-departmental coordination mechanisms is crucial to overcome this barrier. According to research on governance in South Africa [60; 69], creating joint working groups or committees that span across various sectors would facilitate the integration of evaluation findings into comprehensive, multi-sectoral solutions. This would ensure that evidence is used more effectively to address complex human settlement and housing challenges, ultimately leading to better outcomes under Outcome 8. Strengthening inter-departmental collaboration would improve the quality of policy decisions and enhance government departments' ability to work together towards achieving shared goals.

5. Conclusion

Outcome 8 of South Africa's NDP, which focuses on transforming human settlements, remains a critical area for improving living conditions and addressing the housing backlog in the country. This study sought to explore the factors influencing the use of evidence in the design, implementation, and evaluation of Outcome 8 programmes. A

key finding of the study is the persistent challenge of integrating evaluation findings into the policy-making process. Despite a wealth of evaluations conducted over the years, the utilization of evidence in shaping policies for human settlement transformation has often been inconsistent, resulting in the recurrence of similar challenges across multiple assessment cycles. The study critically examined the recurring issues highlighted in evaluations of Outcome 8 programmes, identifying the factors that hinder the full utilization of evaluation results in policy and practice. These factors include weak institutional frameworks, inadequate government-level coordination, and a lack of capacity to interpret and apply evaluation findings. However, the study also pointed out several enablers, such as the establishment of strong institutional frameworks, enhanced inter-sectoral collaboration, and capacity-building initiatives that could significantly improve the use of evidence in shaping public policies. The study's findings underscore the need for more robust systems to ensure that evaluation evidence is produced and effectively used to guide decision-making, ultimately improving the effectiveness of Outcome 8 programmes. South Africa can strengthen its evidence-based policy-making approach by addressing these systemic barriers and fostering collaboration between evaluators and policymakers, ensuring that human settlement interventions are more effective and aligned with the country's development goals. This study contributes valuable insights into how evidence can be better integrated into public sector programmes, offering practical recommendations for improving the integration of evaluation findings into policy-making. The findings can potentially inform future strategies aimed at overcoming the challenges in implementing Outcome 8 programmes and enhancing their impact on human settlement transformation in South Africa. Ultimately, this study serves as a roadmap for improving evidence utilization in the public sector, contributing to better governance and more effective public policies.

CITING RELATED WORK

There are no in the current document.

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