

Acting on the Evidence



Welcome to [*Acting on the Evidence*](#), an interactive learning resource based on the document [*Evidence in Action: Using and Generating Evidence about Effectiveness in Biodiversity Programming*](#). *Evidence in Action* provides in-depth guidance and practical applications of the use and generation of evidence to improve the effectiveness of biodiversity programs.

Acting on the Evidence is intended to be a tool you can continue to come back to as you encounter questions, challenges, and issues around using evidence in program design and implementation.

Begin by **selecting a problem** from the list on the following page.

This work is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the terms of its requisition number REQ-EGAT- 12-000014 (Measuring Impact) implemented by Environmental Incentives, LLC; Foundations of Success; ICF International; and Training Resources Group, Inc. Measuring Impact has been issued under contract number AID-OAA-C-12-00078 and supports the same program objectives as described in RFP number SOL-OAA-000050. Measuring Impact is funded and managed by the USAID Bureau for Economic Growth, Education, and Environment Office of Forestry and Biodiversity.

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How and when to use this resource

This resource helps USAID staff and implementing partners use and generate evidence about the effectiveness of biodiversity programs. After exploring the interactive learning resource, users may wish to consult *Evidence in Action* for expanded coverage of the following topics.

Unit 1: Understanding an Evidence-Based Approach provides an introduction to evidence and evidence-based approaches to biodiversity programming in the context of the USAID Program Cycle.

[DOWNLOAD UNIT 1](#)

Unit 2: Using Evidence focuses on the critical review and use of evidence to increase the effectiveness of biodiversity programs.

[DOWNLOAD UNIT 2](#)

Unit 3: Generating Evidence identifies Program Cycle processes that teams can use to generate credible evidence about the effectiveness of biodiversity programs.

[DOWNLOAD UNIT 3](#)

Unit 4: Building the Evidence Base highlights ways in which evidence can be shared and applied to strengthen biodiversity programs across USAID.

[DOWNLOAD UNIT 4](#)

Where does evidence fit in to designing biodiversity programs?

When teams design programs for biodiversity conservation, they make a series of decisions about what the problem is, the solutions available to address it and how to implement those solutions. Without evidence about what works and what doesn't work, teams are susceptible to missing opportunities to replicate successes by continuing to invest in programs with a low track record of success.

Sometimes, a team identifies these information needs upfront. Other times, the need becomes apparent during implementation.

This resource will help you use evidence to better understand program effectiveness¹ and covers **three places** where lack of evidence can affect the success of biodiversity programs.

- **When analyzing the development problem,** teams need evidence to support assumptions² about the influence of threats and drivers on the status of biodiversity focal interests.³
- **When identifying the development solution,** teams need evidence to support assumptions underpinning the relationships between results along the theory of change for a particular strategic approach.⁴
- **When developing implementation plans,** teams need evidence that the actions they are planning will achieve desired results in their program context.



¹ **Effectiveness:** The degree to which an implemented project or activity achieves intended outcomes. Understanding the effectiveness of a strategic approach involves testing the assumptions that underlie a program's design.

² **Assumptions:** Used in this resource and *Evidence in Action* to refer to the logical connections between drivers, threats, and the status of biodiversity focal interests in a problem analysis or those that underlie anticipated results articulated in a program's theory of change.

³ **Biodiversity focal interests:** The species, habitats, and/or ecosystems that a program is working to conserve.

⁴ **Strategic approach:** A set of actions with a common focus that work together to address specific threats, drivers, and/or opportunities in order to achieve a set of desired results.

Continue to Lesson 2 for an overview of evidence and the use of evidence-based approaches in biodiversity programming.

[GO TO LESSON 2](#)

Go to Lesson 3 if your team is ready to use evidence to increase their understanding of the biodiversity problem.

[GO TO LESSON 3](#)

Go to Lesson 4 if your team is ready to explore approaches used to address the biodiversity problem.

[GO TO LESSON 4](#)

How do you define “evidence” and an “evidence-based approach?”



Children in Sakhalin Island, Russia study forests and biodiversity and their vulnerability to impacts from climate change and human activities. Photo credit: Lada Milchenko, Mikhail Zatsarinny, Alexandra Vtyurina

Faced with finite resources and great demand, it makes sense to ask tough questions about the effectiveness of biodiversity programs. It is not only important to know if a program achieved its expected outcomes, it is also important to understand how and why a program achieves success. Using and generating evidence about **what works, what doesn't** and **in which contexts** can help teams make **better programming decisions**.

Evidence is more than information

Evidence is the “[b]ody of facts or information that serve as the basis for programmatic and strategic decision making in the Program Cycle”

– ADS Chapter 201 definition of evidence, page 145.

The term "evidence" is used in two ways in this resource:

Evidence is (1):
individual findings or pieces of information that are used to help make a decision or support a conclusion.

Evidence is also (2):
(2) the body of findings providing support for (or countering) a belief or claim.

Evidence-based approaches support decision-making

Evidence-based approaches have been promoted in many different fields (e.g., conservation, medicine, and education) in the last several decades to inform decision-making and design effective interventions. An evidence-based approach is the **explicit use of current best evidence in making decisions**. It integrates practitioner expertise with the best available evidence from internal and external sources to determine what approaches are likely to work in a given context.

Using and generating evidence are critical components of *adaptive management*¹ and important elements of program accountability. Teams adopting an evidence-based approach to biodiversity programming use evidence to support their analysis of the problem, their understanding of the solution, and the design of strategic approaches. They will also consider the evidence supporting their understanding of how social and political factors in the program context are likely to influence the results leading to threat reduction.

¹ **Adaptive management:** An intentional approach to making decisions and adjustments in response to new information and changes in context (ADS Chapter 201, page 140). Evidence is an important source of information for adaptive management.

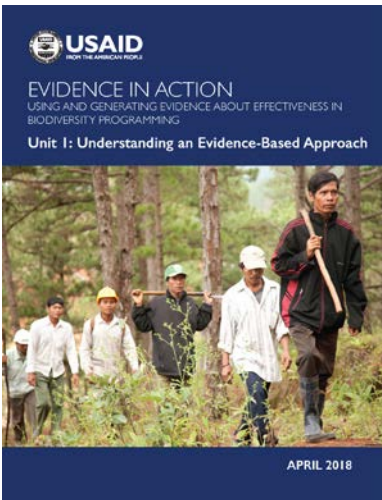
“[Basing decisions on experience alone] is not necessarily bad, but it is less likely to be effective and does not provide a framework upon which knowledge can develop.” – [Pullin and Knight \(2001\)](#)

A study involving conservation managers showed that **when presented with an evidence synopsis**, they were more likely to **choose effective interventions** and **avoid ineffective ones**. – [Walsh et al. \(2014\)](#)

Reducing uncertainty

Effective biodiversity conservation programming requires **targeting limited resources to achieve maximal impact**. Understanding which approaches are most likely to work and in which contexts is key to efficient management of conservation investments. Failing to consider the best available evidence in program design and implementation can lead to:

- 1 Missing opportunities to implement strategic approaches that have been shown to be (more) effective
- 2 Investing in strategic approaches that have not been shown to work



Looking for more information on this lesson? Read the following sections in *Unit 1: Introduction to Evidence-Based Approaches*:

- [Section 3: What is Evidence?](#)
- [Section 4: What is an Evidence-Based Approach to Biodiversity Programming?](#)

Continue to Lesson 3 if your team is ready to use evidence to increase their understanding of the biodiversity problem.

GO TO LESSON 3

Go to Lesson 4 if your team is ready to explore approaches used to address the biodiversity problem.

GO TO LESSON 4

What if we do not have enough information about the biodiversity conservation problem?

Before your team starts searching for evidence, you need to **know the right questions** to ask. There are specific information needs that your team is likely to encounter in the problem analysis. In the early stages of program design, you and your team are likely to ask information-gathering questions about the biodiversity problem and context. Generally, you should ask these questions before thinking about which approaches are likely to be effective.

For example, you might start by asking a question such as:

What political, social, and cultural factors influence the use of natural resources in the Amazon rainforest?

Understanding threats and drivers

You can then ask questions that will increase your understanding of the threats and drivers acting against the biodiversity focal interests. If the wrong threats and drivers are identified, implementing a strategic approach designed to change one or more of those threats or drivers is unlikely to achieve desired results.

A question you might ask as you identify threats and drivers is:

What are the main threats responsible for freshwater biodiversity loss in the Peruvian Amazon? What are the main drivers of these threats?

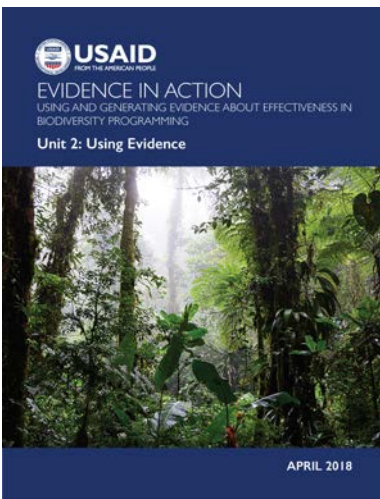
Validating assumptions in the problem analysis

As your understanding of the problem context increases, you should consider asking questions that will **elicit evidence about specific assumptions** in the problem analysis.

For example, to address your assumption that over-exploitation is driven by lack of community rights, you might ask:

Is the over-exploitation of forest resources in the Amazon rainforest associated with a lack of community rights?

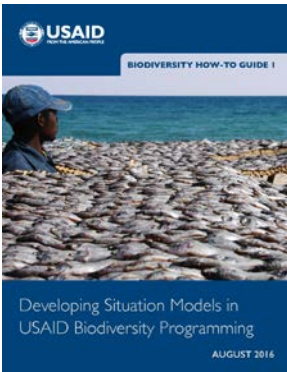
Once your team has figured out which questions to ask, you are ready to **explore your options** for addressing those evidence needs. Those options include gathering existing information from the evidence base and generating evidence to fill important evidence gaps.



Looking for more information on this lesson? Read the following section in *Unit 2: Using Evidence*:

- [Section 3: Asking Questions of the Evidence Base](#)

Related resource



Your team can learn how to use situation models to map out the biodiversity problem in [*Biodiversity How-To Guide 1: Developing Situation Models in USAID Biodiversity Programming*](#).

Continue to Lesson 4 to learn about information needs your team is likely to encounter in the design of strategic approaches.

GO TO LESSON 4

Go to Lesson 5 for help prioritizing your information needs if your team has a large number of questions about the assumptions in the problem analysis.

GO TO LESSON 5

Go to Lesson 6 if your team is ready to gather and appraise evidence.

GO TO LESSON 6

Go to Lesson 7 if your team is ready to review evidence in proposals and other documents submitted by partners.

GO TO LESSON 7

Go to Lesson 8 if your team is considering generating evidence to fill important evidence gaps.

GO TO LESSON 8

What if we do not have enough information to address the biodiversity conservation problem?

Once your team has a solid understanding of the biodiversity conservation problem, you can begin asking questions that will increase your understanding of viable programming options. Your team may start out with information-gathering questions about the range of approaches available for addressing the biodiversity program.

For example:

Which strategic approaches have been used to address over-exploitation of forest resources in the Amazon rainforest?

Understanding effectiveness

Your team should then consider asking **questions about the effectiveness of specific strategic approaches** being considered.

For example, to assess the effectiveness of community-based natural resource management as an approach to reducing deforestation, your team might ask:

How does adoption of community-based natural resource management affect local deforestation in the Amazon rainforest?

Validating assumptions in the strategic approach

Then you can ask questions that will build your understanding of how the strategic approach is expected to work. Gathering evidence about the **relationships between results along the theory of change** for a particular

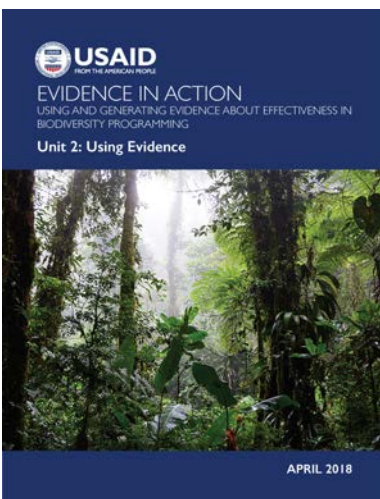
strategic approach can give your team more certainty that results will lead to conservation outcomes.

For example, to address the assumption that attitudes towards conservation will improve if benefits are generated for local communities, your team might ask:

Does receiving financial benefits generated by use of community forestry strategic approaches affect individual attitudes about protection of forest resources?

Finally, your team may want to ask questions that will elicit evidence that can be used to evaluate the appropriateness of proposed actions. Knowing which actions are likely to achieve desired results will help teams evaluate proposals and implementation plans. Design teams may gather this evidence themselves or ask bidders to provide evidence that the actions they are planning are likely to achieve desired results.

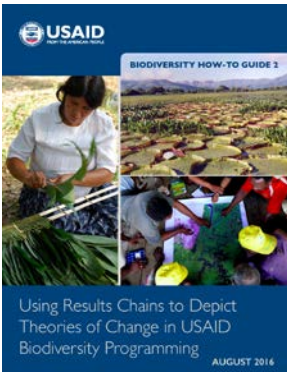
Once your team has figured out what questions to ask, you are ready to **explore your options** for addressing those evidence needs. Those options include gathering existing information from the evidence base and generating evidence to fill important evidence gaps.



Looking for more information on this lesson? Read the following section in *Unit 2: Using Evidence*:

- [Section 3: Asking Questions of the Evidence Base](#)

Related resource



Your team can learn how to diagram strategic approaches using results chains in [Biodiversity How-To Guide 2: Using Results Chains to Depict Theories of Change in USAID Biodiversity Programming](#).

Continue to Lesson 5 for help prioritizing your information needs if your team has a large number of questions about the assumptions in the theory of change.

GO TO LESSON 5

Go to Lesson 6 if your team is ready to gather and appraise evidence from the evidence base.

GO TO LESSON 6

Go to Lesson 7 if your team is ready to review evidence in proposals and other documents submitted by partners.

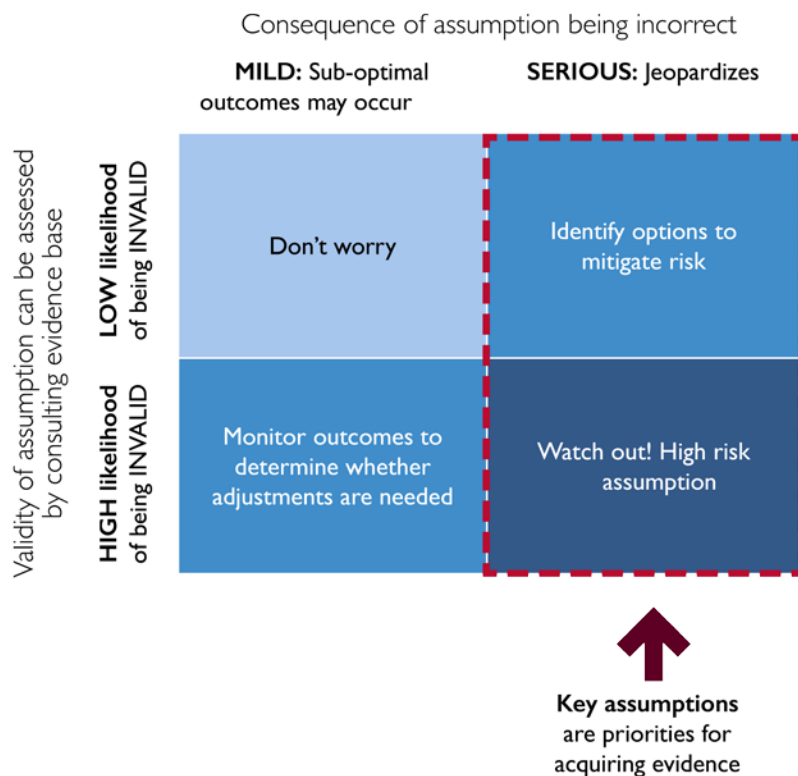
GO TO LESSON 7

Go to Lesson 8 if your team is considering generating evidence to fill important evidence gaps.

GO TO LESSON 8

How do we set priorities for gathering evidence about different program assumptions?

Gathering evidence requires an investment of time and resources. Therefore, it is important for your team to be able to **focus your search on critical information needs**. Faulty assumptions in your program's theory of change, including those based on weak evidence, can pose risk to achieving successful outcomes. A risk framework, similar to that used to identify [risky assumptions](#) in the Country Development Cooperation Strategy, can help your team identify a smaller set of program assumptions that are priorities for gathering evidence. A risky assumption is one that both has a high likelihood of being invalid and would jeopardize the program's success if invalid. Focusing on gathering evidence about assumptions with serious consequences can help your team establish whether an assumption poses a high risk to program success.



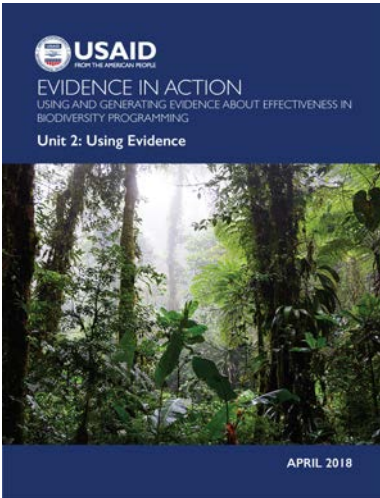
Assumptions with serious consequences are high priorities for gathering evidence. The evidence base can help the team assess their confidence in the validity of the assumption, thereby informing their understanding of risks to program outcomes.

Prioritizing assumptions

The following types of assumptions are high priorities for gathering evidence because they are likely to jeopardize program success if invalid:

- 1 Assumptions about the driver of biodiversity loss that a strategic approach is designed to directly influence.** For example, a team chooses a strategic approach focused on increasing household income because they assume economic needs drive the use of unsustainable fishing practices. If this assumption is incorrect, they may select the wrong strategic approach.
- 2 Assumptions about the immediate cause of the threat to biodiversity.** A team chooses to promote the uptake of improved fishing methods because they assume that the use of unsustainable fishing practices is the primary cause of overfishing. If this assumption is incorrect, they will be focused on achieving changes in behavior that have little effect on the status of the biodiversity focal interests.
- 3 Assumptions with doubtful causality in the theory of change.** A team assumes that economic benefits alone will drive behavior changes with respect to local fisheries management. If this assumption is incorrect, their investments will not be sufficient to achieve desired changes in behavior.
- 4 Assumptions about the effectiveness of actions comprising the strategic approach.** A team assumes that stakeholders will use microloans to establish conservation enterprises rather than invest in additional unsustainable practices. If this assumption is incorrect, they may select inappropriate actions to implement the strategic approach.

Once your team has identified assumptions that are high priorities for evidence, you are ready to pose questions and explore your options for addressing those evidence needs. Those options include gathering existing information from the evidence base and generating evidence to fill important evidence gaps.



Looking for more information on this lesson? Read the following section in *Unit 2: Using Evidence*:

- [Section 3: Asking Questions of the Evidence Base, see “Setting Priorities for Gathering Evidence”](#)

Return to Lesson 3 for help posing questions about assumptions in the problem analysis.

GO TO LESSON 3

Return to Lesson 4 for help posing questions about assumptions in the strategic approach.

GO TO LESSON 4

Continue to Lesson 6 if your team is ready to gather and appraise evidence from the evidence base.

GO TO LESSON 6

Go to Lesson 8 if your team is considering generating evidence to fill important evidence gaps.

GO TO LESSON 8

What USAID resources can help us gather and use evidence in biodiversity programs?

Good news! There are lots of resources!

A core activity of an evidence-based approach is gathering objective external information. For program managers, this necessitates a commitment to checking information gained from personal experience, and even long-held beliefs, against other sources. An evidence-based approach requires critically examining the most credible and relevant evidence to answer questions, including and going beyond the team's experience. Evidence can come from many sources including peer-reviewed scientific journal articles, grey literature reports and notes, program evaluations, and expert opinions.

Where are you now?

Once your team has identified questions to guide your search, you can turn to gathering evidence from the evidence base. Of course, a first stop is USAID's [Development Experience Clearinghouse](#), the largest online resource for USAID-funded technical and program materials, including research reports, evaluations and assessments, and other policy and planning documents. USAID's [Knowledge Services Center](#) can provide additional library and reference services to help your team gather evidence from internal and external sources. Your team can also take advantage of online indexing services such as Web of Science (available to USAID staff through the Knowledge Services Center) and [Google Scholar](#) to broadly search for scholarly literature.

Biodiversity-specific resources are available through the [USAID Biodiversity Conservation Gateway](#). USAID's [Office of Forestry and Biodiversity \(E3/FAB\)](#) maintains the Biodiversity Conservation Gateway as a publicly available information portal with a rich repository of USAID experience implementing commonly used strategic approaches. The Gateway includes access to a [searchable collection](#) of USAID-funded [research products in the area of research and development](#). The Gateway also hosts USAID's [Biodiversity Cross-Mission Learning Program](#), which provides an opportunity for USAID staff to share

evidence and learning about common biodiversity strategic approaches. E3/FAB supports [research activities](#) with the [Center for International Forestry Research](#), focused on forests and food security, and bushmeat (wild meat) consumption, marketing, and sustainability.

Additionally, a growing body of environmental evidence syntheses is available to support and inform biodiversity programming. Synthesis products have the advantage of summarizing findings across multiple studies on a particular topic and can help teams filter out useful information from the evidence base. The journal [Environmental Evidence](#) focuses entirely on systematic reviews, a type of literature review that uses established protocols to acquire, critically appraise, and synthesize all available evidence relevant to a specific question. Subject matter journals such as [Conservation Biology](#) and [Biological Conservation](#) frequently publish meta-analyses and other types of literature reviews that synthesize findings on topics relevant to biodiversity programs. Evidence syntheses can be used to corroborate findings from other sources, including evaluations and monitoring reports, syntheses of practitioner experience (e.g., “stocktaking” guides and reports), and reports published by donors and non-governmental organizations.

Appraising evidence

As your team builds their understanding of the evidence base, you will need to decide whether and how to apply these findings to program decisions. A frequent misapplication of evidence is concluding that factor X causes factor Y without fully considering whether that evidence excludes alternative or “rival” explanations. Your team should pay careful attention to the *quality*¹ and *strength*² of evidence that is available, noting where the evidence is weak (i.e., there is little or no evidence that directly informs specific questions) or mixed (i.e., different sources contain contradictory findings).

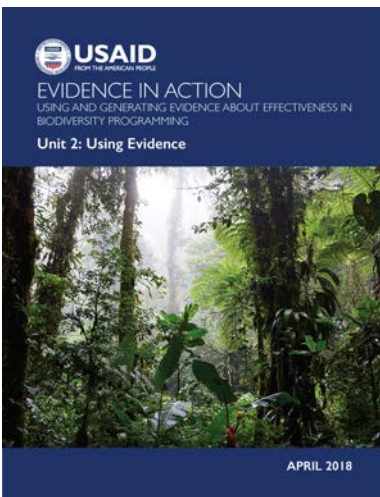
A weak evidence base does not automatically mean that you would decide not to implement a particular strategic approach, but these investments may be at risk if fundamental assumptions turn out to be incorrect. Your team should integrate knowledge from the evidence base with your own understanding of the socio-political and biological context to make informed decisions. When making decisions in evidence-poor environments, you will want to carefully consider the costs and benefits of action versus inaction and your risk tolerance for alternative outcomes when making decisions about whether to proceed.

The role of partners

Your team should expect partners to play a role in gathering and appraising evidence, especially in relation to questions about the effectiveness of strategic approaches and actions that have been proposed.

¹ Quality of evidence: A measure of the extent to which a study’s design is able to rule out alternative explanations for observed outcomes.

² Strength of evidence: A measure of confidence in the evidence base (i.e., the aggregated findings from available studies) supporting or refuting a belief or claim.



Looking for more information on this lesson? Read the following sections in *Unit 2: Using Evidence*:

- [Section 4: Gathering Evidence, see “Evidence in the USAID Context”](#)
- [Section 5: Appraising the Quality and Strength of Evidence](#)
- [Section 6: Using Evidence in USAID Biodiversity Programs, see “Considerations when the Evidence Base is Limited”](#)

Continue to Lesson 7 for more information about reviewing evidence as part of activity procurement.

GO TO LESSON 7

During procurement, how do we ensure that we receive enough evidence to properly evaluate proposals?




Implementing partners and stakeholders in Guinea collaborate to plan community forestry activities. Photo by Stephanie Otis, USFS International Programs

During procurement, staff should focus on the review and *critical appraisal*¹ of the use of evidence in the proposals, implementation plans, and other documents submitted by partners. The same rigor that USAID staff apply to using evidence in project and activity design should be expected from bidders and implementing partners.

When reviewing proposals, managers can evaluate whether and how effectively implementing partners are using evidence to support their technical solutions.

Managers can ask the following questions to assess the use of evidence during proposal review:

- 1 Does the proposal reference existing evidence about what has worked and not worked in similar contexts? Is this information consistent with the proposed activities? When proposed actions are supported by a weak evidence base, the proposal should **provide a rationale for using the proposed actions** instead of any known alternatives.
- 2 Have key assumptions (i.e., [those with the potential to be high-risk](#)) been identified and has the uncertainty in the validity of those assumptions been appraised? A strong proposal may contain information gaps or rely on assumptions that lack strong evidence, but it will identify those information gaps as high priorities for monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

 **1 Critical appraisal:** The process of assessing findings from scientific research to judge their value and relevance in a particular decision-making context.

Continue to Lesson 8 if your team is considering generating evidence to address information gaps that have been identified in proposals.

GO TO LESSON 8

How do we set priorities for generating evidence when there are multiple evidence needs?



Chobe National Park, Botswana. The success or failure of Tropical Forest Conservation Act initiatives like KAZA has significant implications for the world's largest populations of elephants. Photo by Mark Atkinson, Wildlife Conservation Society

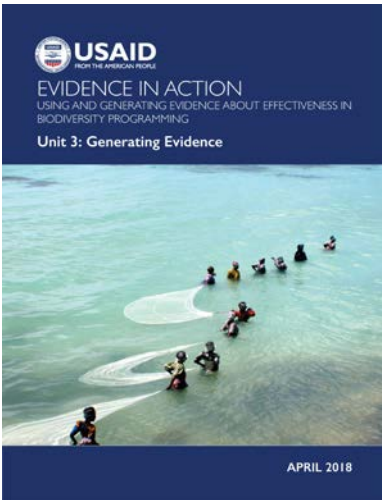
In many cases, relevant evidence may be scarce or non-existent, or it may not be applicable to your program's specific social, economic, political or ecological contexts. If this is the case, you can consider **allocating resources to generate evidence** to address specific evidence needs. This may be accomplished by procuring research activities or through deliberate design of monitoring and evaluation activities.

A starting point for generating evidence

An **information need** is a disparity or gap between what is known and what would ideally be known for a program design or adaptive management decision. If your team has identified important information gaps, the first step should be to **determine if there is readily accessible evidence** that can help you fill those gaps. When the evidence base is weak or uncertain in the program context, your team should consider generating evidence that tests important assumptions in the program context.

Your team should prioritize generating evidence that strengthens your understanding of:

- 1 The problem analysis:** Is the diagnosis of the problem and assessment of the context correct? Your team should consider testing assumptions in the problem analysis where there is low confidence that the correct drivers have been identified. For example, a team may need evidence that verifies a program assumption that economic benefits are an important driver of stakeholder behavior in the program context.
- 2 The theory of change:** Is the understanding of how change happens correct? Your team should consider testing the validity of key assumptions in the theory of change that have a limited evidence base. For example, a team may need evidence that verifies a program assumption that regional overfishing is sensitive to changes in local fishing practices.
- 3 Implementation:** Are appropriate actions being used to implement the strategic approach? Your team should consider assessing the effectiveness of actions that have an uncertain or low track record of achieving desired results. For example, a team may need evidence that verifies a program assumption that microloans will be an attractive option to stakeholders involved in conservation enterprises.



Looking for more information on this lesson? Read the following section in *Unit 3: Generating Evidence*:

- [Section 3: Setting priorities for generating evidence](#)

Go back to Lesson 5 if your team has a large number of information needs that have not been addressed by the existing evidence base. You can use the approach presented in Lesson 5 to identify priorities for generating evidence about assumptions that have a weak or limited evidence base in the program context

GO TO LESSON 5

Continue to Lesson 9 if your team is ready to explore options for generating evidence.

GO TO LESSON 9

What are our options for generating evidence?



Women fishing in the Terai region of Nepal. The USAID PAANI Program is enhancing Nepal's ability to manage water resources to meet many needs, including adaptation to climate change and conservation of freshwater biodiversity. Photo by Olaf Zerbock, USAID

There are **three general approaches** within the Program Cycle that program managers can consider using to generate evidence about program effectiveness:

- 1 Commissioning research** through existing mechanisms or partnerships. Commissioned research can be a particularly relevant approach for testing assumptions in the problem analysis.

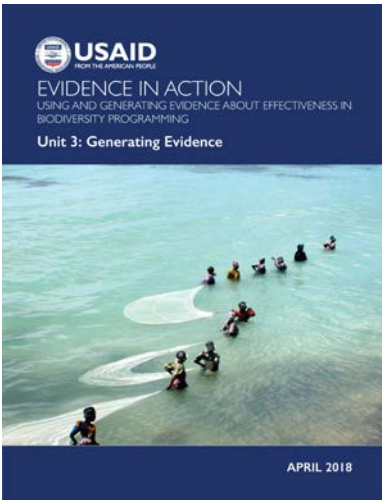
- 2 **Designing evaluation questions** to strengthen understanding of the theory of change and its implementation.
- 3 **Collecting relevant data as part of monitoring** during implementation of activities. Monitoring data are particularly helpful for testing assumptions in the theory of change and the appropriateness of actions taken to implement the strategic approach.

Required assessments, such as the [Gender Analysis](#), the [Biodiversity and Tropical Forestry \(Foreign Assistance Act 118/119\) Assessment](#), and the [Climate Change Risk Assessment](#), can help teams align their efforts with known information gaps. Part III of [USAID's Biodiversity and Development Handbook](#) also identifies broad priorities for research that address information gaps in program design and conservation action.

Maximizing your investments

Regardless of the approach your team uses to generate evidence, taking the time to **carefully articulate questions** can help your team ensure that the selected approach will elicit evidence that addresses specific information needs you have identified. The evidence should be **actionable**, meaning that having that evidence will help you make particular program decisions.

In addition to focusing your questions on actionable evidence, you should also ensure that your questions **can be answered with the time and resources available**.



Looking for more information on this lesson? Read the following section in *Unit 3: Generating Evidence*:

- [Section 4: Selecting an Approach for Generating Evidence](#)
- [Section 5: Generating Evidence About Effectiveness](#)

Continue to lesson 10 to learn more about how evidence-based approaches support learning at USAID.

GO TO LESSON 10

How can we use evidence to promote learning at USAID?



Snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*) in Sacred Himalayan Landscape. Photo credit: WWF

Evidence-based biodiversity conservation is a **learning process** for acquiring knowledge about what works and what doesn't so program managers can make better program decisions. Within organizations, the **exchange of knowledge among practitioners** is important because it facilitates learning at broader scales. Knowledge relevant to decisions in one context may be applicable in similar contexts, but without mechanisms for transferring knowledge created by individuals and groups to the larger organization, there is little opportunity for organizational learning.

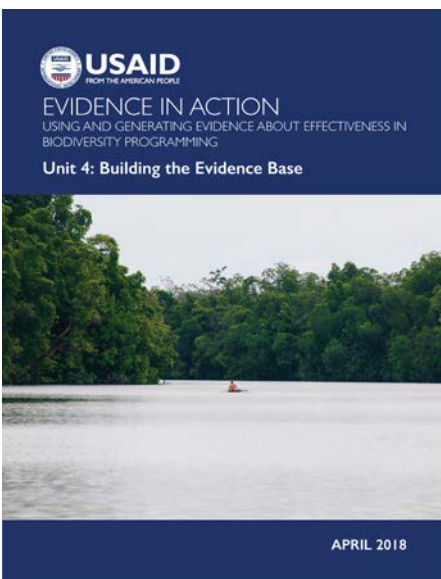
[Organizational learning](#) increases the efficiency of evidence-based approaches because it increases the availability of and access to knowledge for program managers and other decision makers within the organization. Within USAID, there are a number of efforts and processes that support learning across programs and organizational units. For example:

Portfolio reviews provide an opportunity to assess the generalizability of assumptions across various program contexts.

Office of Forestry and Biodiversity Integration Working Groups promote learning processes by identifying evidence gaps, commissioning targeted research, and engaging in evidence dissemination activities within and beyond USAID.

The [Biodiversity Cross-Mission Learning Program](#) systematically captures and shares lessons on theories of change for common conservation strategic approaches in the USAID biodiversity portfolio.

[Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting \(CLA\)](#) is how USAID operationalizes adaptive management in the Program Cycle and is a holistic approach to organizational learning.



Looking for more information on this lesson? Read the following sections in *Unit 4: Building the Evidence Base*:

- [Section 4: Building an Actionable Evidence Base](#)
- [Section 5: Evidence in Organizational Learning](#)

 You've reached the end of *Acting on the Evidence*!

Glossary of terms

Adaptive management: An intentional approach to making decisions and adjustments in response to new information and changes in context (ADS Chapter 201, page 140). Evidence is an important source of information for adaptive management.

Assumption: Used in this resource and *Evidence in Action* to refer to the logical connections between drivers, threats, and the status of biodiversity focal interests in a problem analysis or those that underlie anticipated results articulated in a program's theory of change.

Biodiversity focal interests: The species, habitats, and/or ecosystems that a program is working to conserve.

Critical appraisal: The process of assessing findings from scientific research to judge their value and relevance in a particular decision-making context.

Effectiveness: The degree to which an implemented project or activity achieves intended outcomes. Understanding the effectiveness of a strategic approach involves testing the assumptions that underlie a program's design.

Quality of evidence: A measure of the extent to which a study's design is able to rule out alternative explanations for observed outcomes.

Strategic approach: A set of actions with a common focus that work together to address specific threats, drivers, and/or opportunities in order to achieve a set of desired results.

Strength of evidence: A measure of confidence in the evidence base (i.e., the aggregated findings from available studies) supporting or refuting a belief or claim.