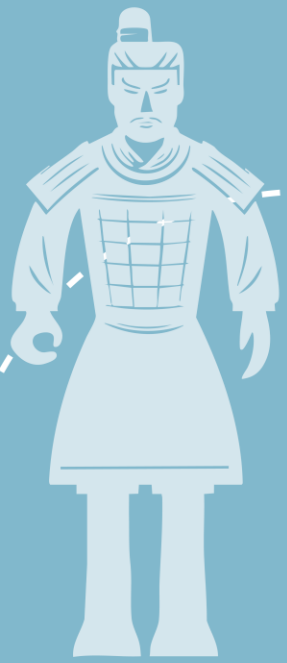
ASIAN EVALUATION WEEK 2025



10TH YEAR

1-4 SEPTEMBER

Xi'an, People's Republic of China

#AsianEvaluationWeek
#AEW2025

Independent Evaluation ADB

亚太财经与发展学院
Asia-Pacific Finance and Development Institute

AEW website

10TH YEAR

ASIAN EVALUATION WEEK 2025

Strengthening theories of change (ToCs) for rigorous and actionable evaluations

2 SEPTEMBER
PARALLEL SESSION 6

EMILY SHARP
Director, Strategy Performance and Learning
Pacific Community

MARIE GAARDER
Executive Director
International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)

MITCHELL RAKUSIN
Senior Results Management Specialist
Asian Development Bank

NEETA GOEL
Senior Evaluation Specialist
Asian Development Bank

DIVYA PANDEY
Senior Evaluation Specialist
International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)

SESSION TAKEAWAY

This panel will explore how robust, context-sensitive Theories of Change (ToCs) can strengthen the design and effectiveness of evaluations.

Speakers from research, government, and international financial institutions will discuss the role of ToCs in clarifying outcomes, embedding monitoring and learning, anticipating risks and unintended consequences, and enabling course corrections in policy and program implementation.

The session will emphasize cross-sectoral collaboration and institutional incentives as critical for making ToCs both technically rigorous and operationally relevant.

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ASIAN EVALUATION WEEK 2025

NAVIGATING CRISES: BUILDING ON SUCCESSES

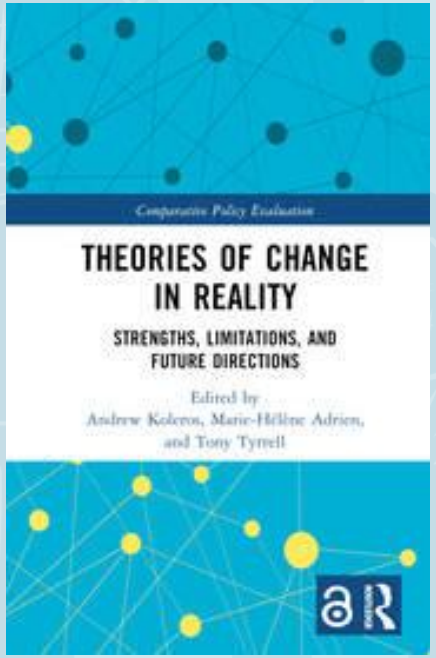
1-4 September 2025
InterContinental Xi'an Hi-Tech Zone
People's Republic of China

Theories of Change in Reality:
Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Edited by: Andrew Koleros, Marie-Helene Adrien, and Tony Tyrrell

An open access publication within Routledge/Taylor & Francis Comparative Policy Evaluation book series.

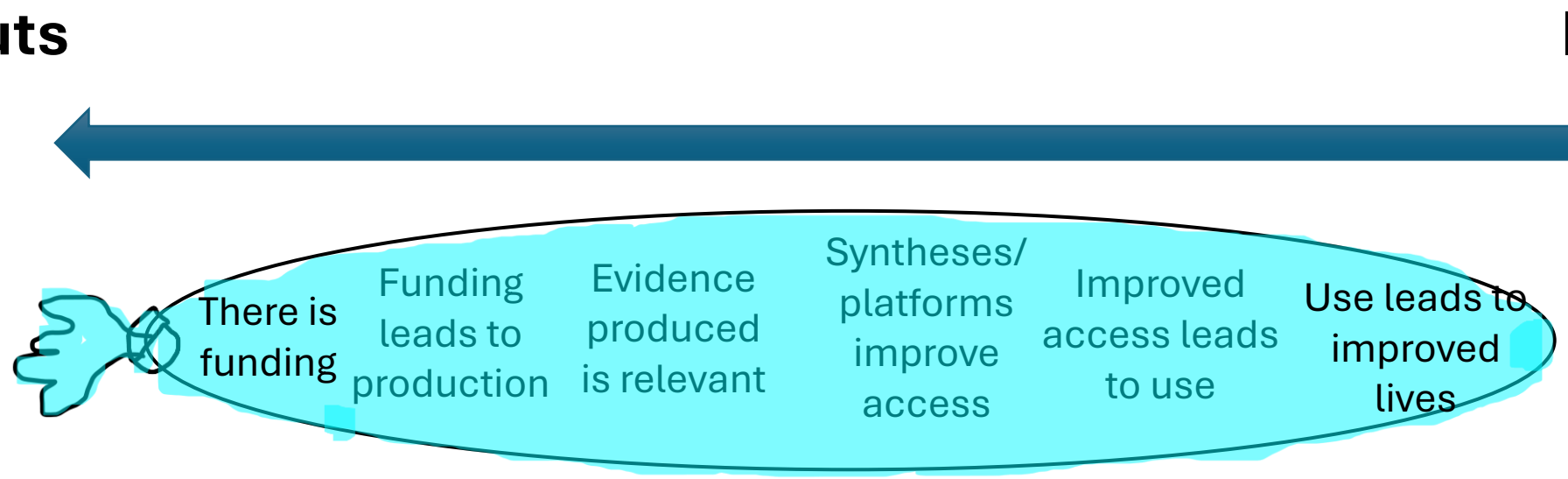


Download the Open Access version of the book here or use the QR Code below .

10TH YEAR

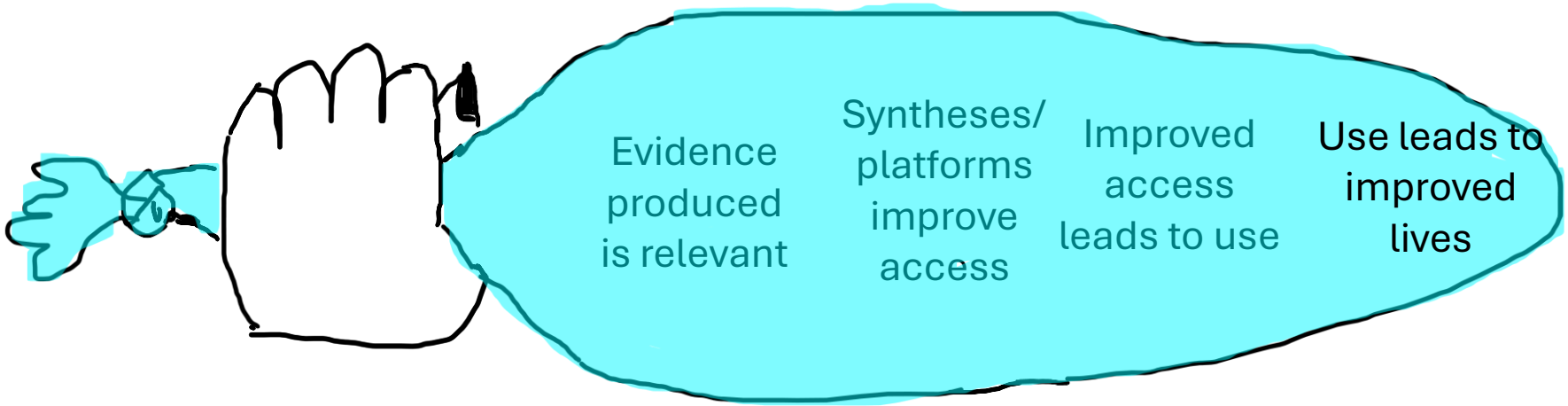
‘Balloon-squeezing’ approach to TOC

Bylaws (charitable purpose): „contribute to the fulfillment of wellbeing by encouraging and funding the research, production and evidence from rigorous impact evaluations for policy decisions that improve social and economic development programs in low- middle-income countries“ (3ie, 2008a: 1).



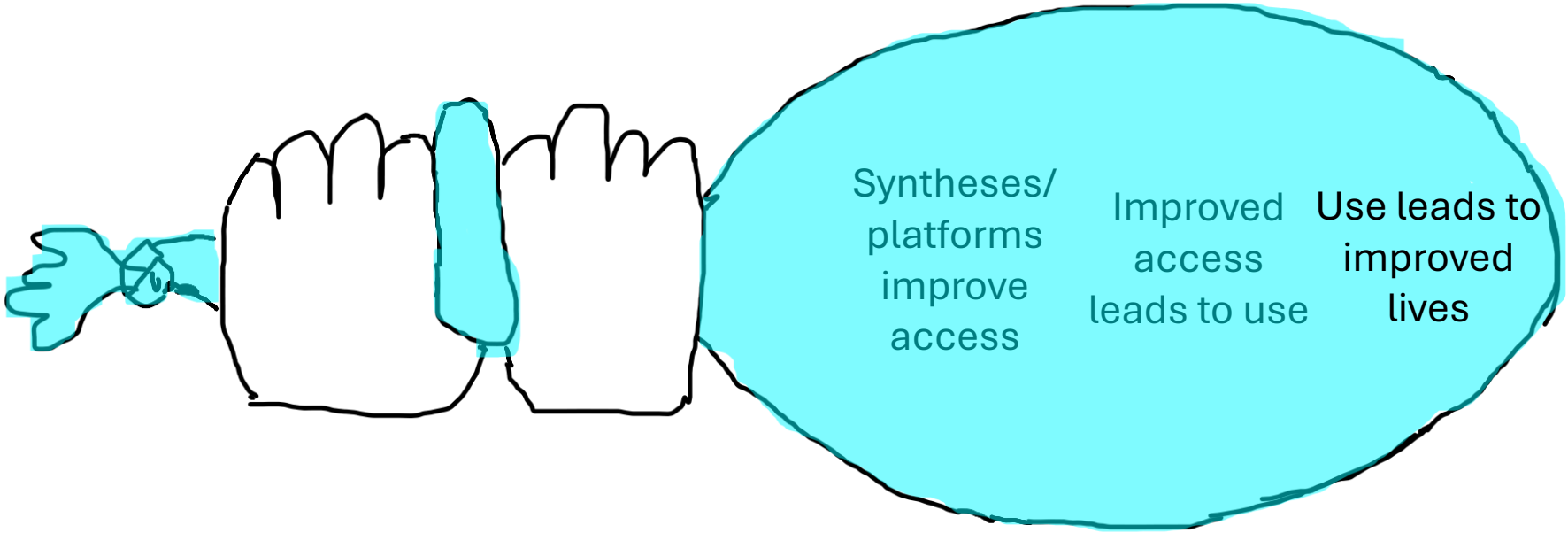
- When you squeeze a balloon the air gets displaced within the balloon but doesn’t leave it
- Air in the balloon = obstacles to using evidence to improve development policies and programs
- Squeezing the balloon = test one of the underlying hypotheses

Squeeze 1: Funding leads to production



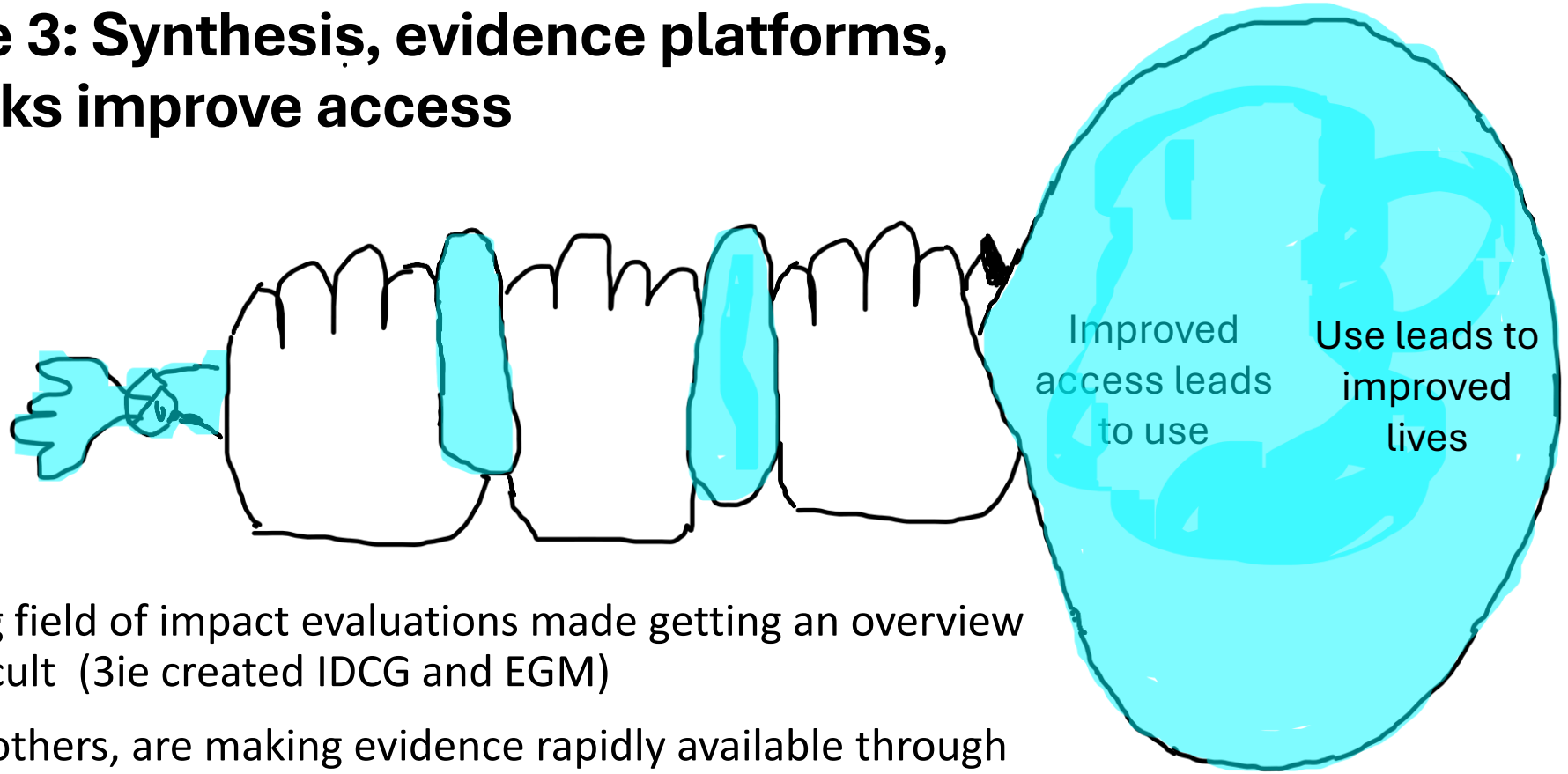
- Body of evidence has exploded (3ie's DEP > 10000 studies)
- # of institutions who are able to carry out impact evaluations has also multiplied, reducing production bottle-necks
- **Squeeze one has been successful** though gaps still exist in many sectors and the initial funding enthusiasm may now be waning

Squeeze 2: Evidence produced is relevant



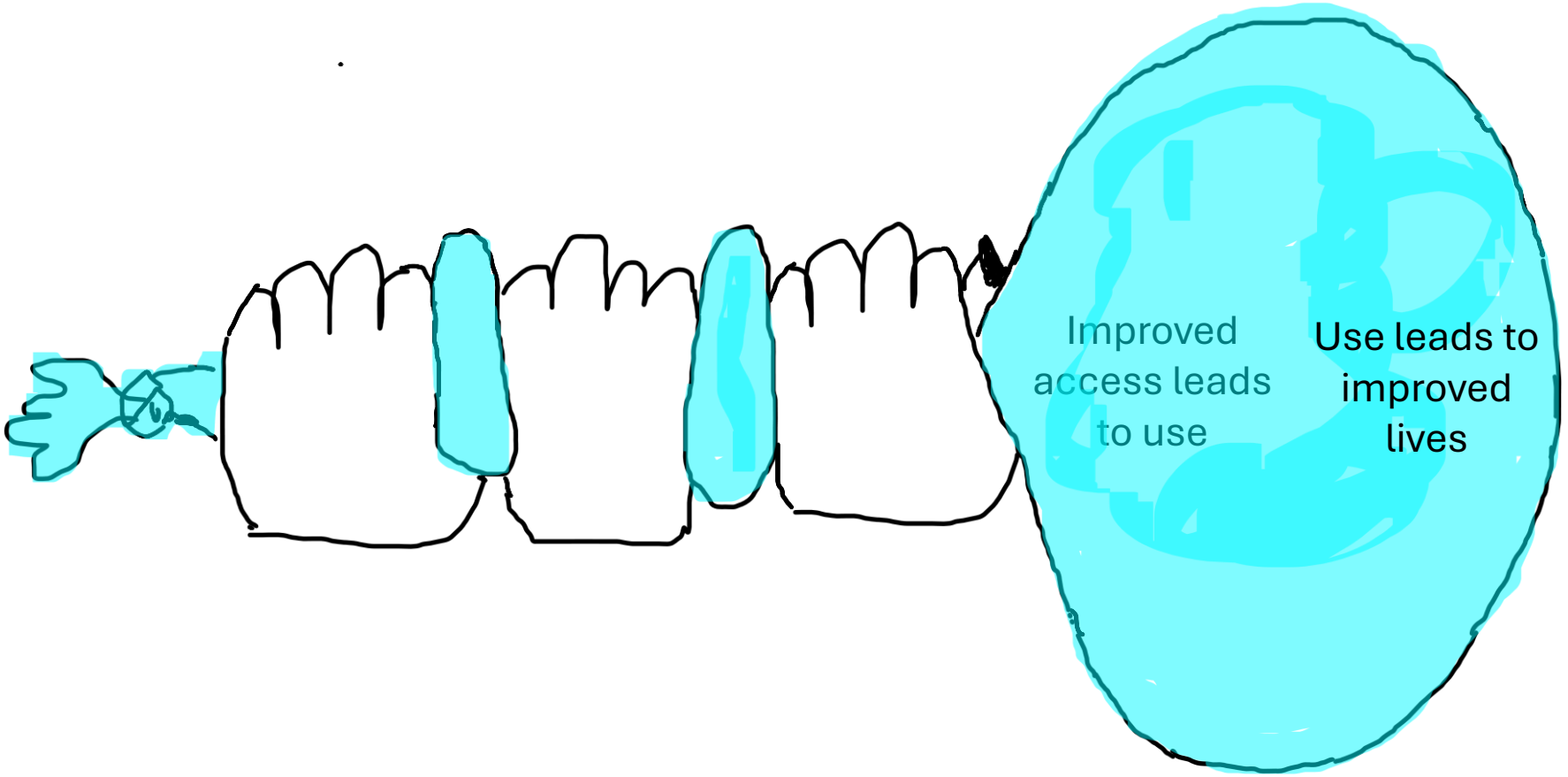
- As the evidence field exploded, various shortcomings of the early crops of impact evaluations also became apparent
- 3ie has been playing an important role in pushing for improvements: TRE, cost-analysis, responsiveness and engagement with stakeholders, unintended consequences
- **Squeeze two is work in progress…**

Squeeze 3: Synthesis, evidence platforms, helpdesks improve access



- Exploding field of impact evaluations made getting an overview very difficult (3ie created IDCG and EGM)
- We, and others, are making evidence rapidly available through reviews/syntheses, helpdesks, rapid evaluations
- We are seeing a marked uptake and interest in such products from the donor and funding side as well
- **Squeeze three on the rise!** Access has increased dramatically, lowering further any barrier to use by decision-makers, **BUT….**

Squeezes 4 and 5 ongoing! Improved access leads to use which leads to improved lives...

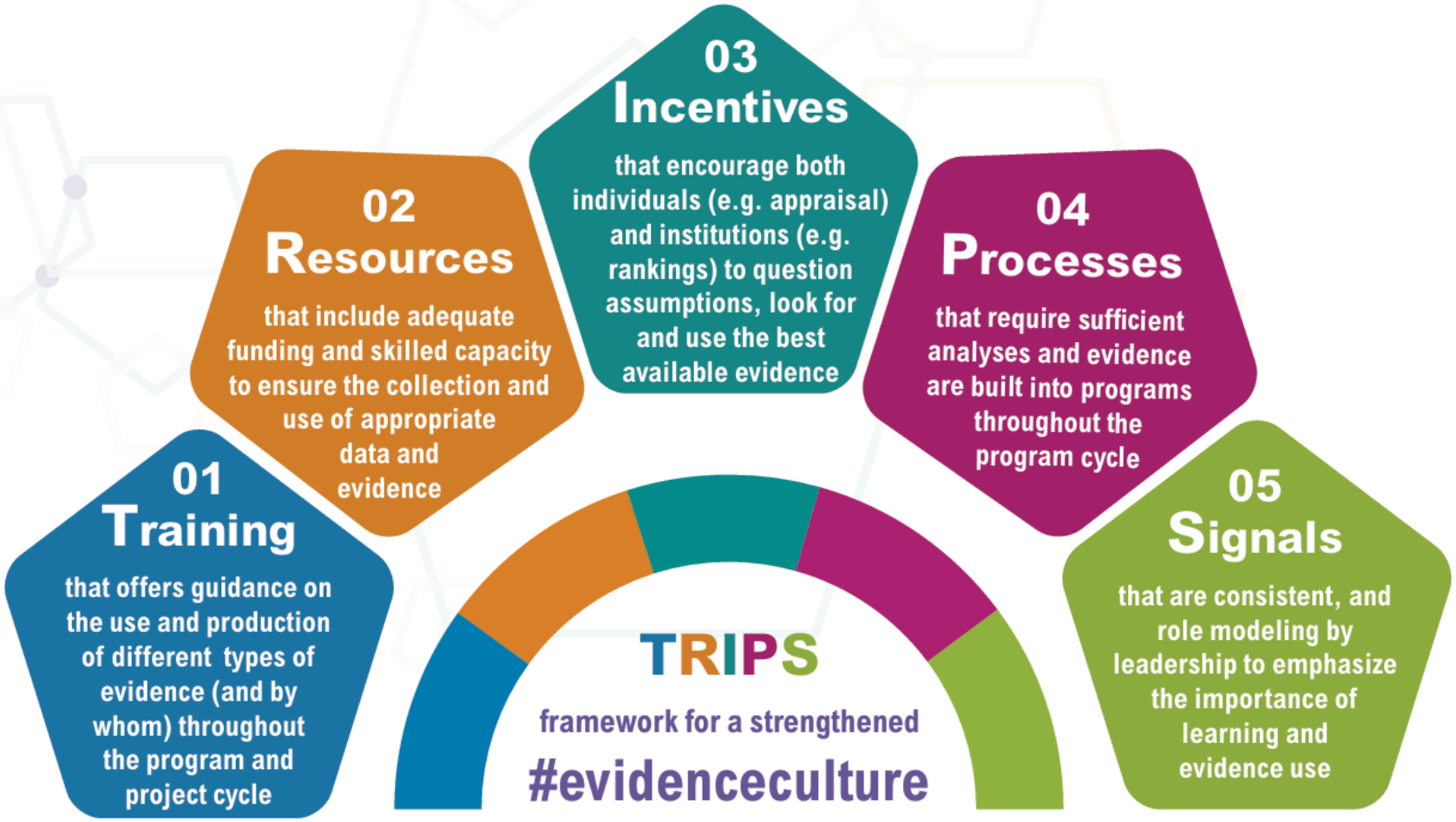


Squeezes 4 and 5 ongoing! Improved access leads to use which leads to improved lives…

Research, assess, learn, pilot:

- 3ie and University of Birmingham led FCDO RCC **research program on evidence-informed policy-making**. One stream of research looks at how research has been used (or not) in public decision-making, and a second stream evaluates the effectiveness of evidence brokering-organizations and -tools in increasing evidence use: https://www.grtd.fcdo.gov.uk/research/understanding-evidence-use-in-policymaking-in-sub-saharan-africa-and-south-asia/
- What moments in a project or policy cycle are amenable to being evidence-informed and by what type of evidence? **PIR methods menu** (with MCC): https://www.3ieimpact.org/pir-methods
- **Global Evidence Commitment**: Work with partners to help build cultures and practices of critical thinking and evidence use: https://www.3ieimpact.org/events/global-evidence-commitment-first-annual-convening
- **TRIPS framework**: https://www.3ieimpact.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/TRIPS-guidance-note.pdf

Figure 1: A visual representation of 3ie's TRIPS framework



Source: In March 2022, 3ie's Marie Gaarder introduced the TRIPS framework to guide conversations around strengthening the evidence culture in international development organizations

2025 AEW Feedback Form