The role of different types of evidence synthesis in providing users in the science-policy interface with the information they need

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Decisions effect many

Research evidence

Maximising benefits

Balancing trade-offs
Evidence synthesis – one source

Maximising benefits

Reducing harm

Many better than one - evidence syntheses
The world according to evidence synthesis
Different ways to synthesise evidence

- Literature reviews
- Systematic reviews
- Rapid Evidence Assessments
- Evidence maps
Evidence synthesis: Literature reviews

• Discuss body of knowledge
• Make normative statements

BUT

• Not based on scientific search—scientist can cherry-pick studies
• No critical appraisal of included studies
• No weighting of studies
• No structured synthesis

➢ Most literature reviews describe existing knowledge, they don’t generate new knowledge; synthesis is about aggregating and configuring existing knowledge to create new knowledge.
Evidence synthesis: Systematic reviews

• Appraise and synthesise body of knowledge
• Make normative statements

BUT

• Are a form of research in its own right and therefore take time and are resource-intensive
• Follow a well-established methodology that has been iterated and experimented with (quality control vs. rigidity)
Evidence synthesis: Systematic reviews

• Examples from CEE
Synthesis: Rapid evidence assessments

• Appraise and synthesise body of knowledge when we need to know which way to take quickly

• Are a systematic review that follows all core steps but not to the same rigour

BUT

• Doesn’t search as thoroughly

• Narrow inclusion criteria

• Rapid critical appraisal

• Synthesis only around one question
Synthesis: Rapid evidence assessments

• Examples from the Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) project at the Africa Centre for Evidence
  • What is the impact of marine resource management on multidimensional poverty alleviation in Sub-Saharan Africa?
  • What is the impact of governance types in protected areas on multidimensional poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa?
Synthesis: Evidence maps

• Appraise and synthesise body of knowledge

**BUT**

• Don’t make normative statements

• Synthesis is more about patterns and structures in the research landscape

• Evidence maps have developed in an attempt to make systematic reviews more policy-relevant
Synthesis: Evidence maps

• Examples from CEE
How does all this support mainstreaming the science-policy interface?

• Co-producing can lead to mutual learning
• Working on real-world problems [jointly as part of interdisciplinary teams on complex problems]
• Building relationships to support science-policy interface
• What about the policy-science interface?
  • Example:
    ➢ CEE Joburg collaborating with decision-makers on a bid to pilot a responsive evidence service from 2018
Collaboration for Environmental Evidence at the Africa Centre for Evidence University of Johannesburg

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