



West African countries are embracing better accountability in public policies: opportunities and challenges to keep from falling behind

Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo

Poverty in West Africa remains stubbornly high, particularly in francophone and lusophone countries, despite worldwide economic growth. Addressing the region's needs requires effective public policies from national governments and their international partners. As marked by last year's Nobel Prize in economics, development efforts now focus on understanding which policies alleviate poverty and why. The region's policymakers need evidence from well-implemented impact evaluations.

The West Africa Capacity Building and Impact Evaluation (WACIE) program, a partnership between 3ie and the Government of Benin, was launched to help build evaluation capacity in the eight countries that comprise the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU): Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo.

Policymakers are under pressure to demonstrate accountability and results, while funders are increasingly required to show the effects of their investments. Rigorous evaluations can help provide answers.

To understand the constraints and opportunities regarding impact evaluations in the WAEMU region, WACIE conducted an in-depth scoping study on those eight countries. This brief highlights those findings.

The study found wide variability in the availability and quality of research in the WAEMU countries. Work remains to increase evaluation capacity to meet international standards, raise the profile of local

researchers at the international level and enable governments to plan their own policy evaluations.

Despite these difficulties, governments have a deep interest in increasing capacity in impact evaluation methodology and incorporating evidence in their national planning agendas. By raising the profile of local research, we can increase government support for evidence-based policymaking and better development.

Understanding the state of evaluations

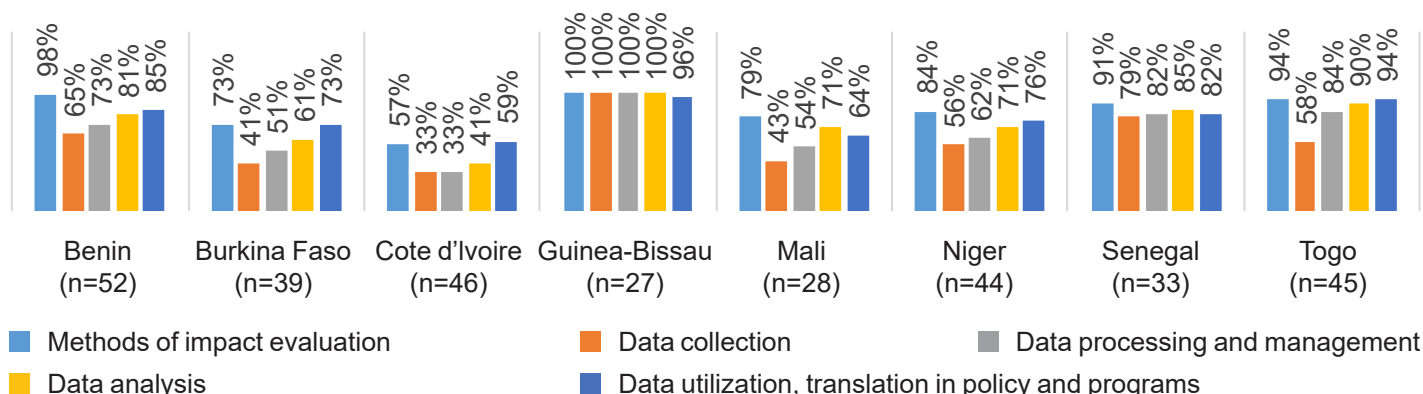
Over the past decade, impact evaluations have moved to the forefront of development planning because they can help policymakers understand what works, for whom, why and at what cost. Although the production and use of rigorous evaluation data has increased across the world, capacity in West Africa lags behind that in other regions, particularly francophone and lusophone countries. This knowledge gap risks leaving these countries further behind in development.

WACIE began by conducting an in-depth scoping study and literature review to understand the status of impact evaluations in WAEMU countries. These efforts mapped evaluation stakeholders, assessing local capacity to conduct, analyze, and ensure the updating of rigorous evidence, and identified what policymakers are looking for in evaluations.



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Figure 1: Demand for evaluation capacity building



Main findings

A strong majority of interview respondents in all WAEMU countries expressed a desire for capacity building on evaluation methodology and data analysis, as shown in Figure 1 on the previous page. However, 82 per cent of respondents said their organizations did not have a plan to build that capacity.

Despite the importance of using local researchers for conducting impact evaluation research, promoting understanding of findings and encouraging evidence uptake, West African researchers often play a secondary role. Although many studies include local researchers as co-authors, deeper analysis shows that most lead authors are from outside the region. Often, local researchers only play the role of sector experts, consultants or data collectors.

Knowledge of impact evaluation methods using international standards is low and varies across the region, representing an opportunity to harmonize standards. Many studies labeled as impact evaluations do not meet the criteria for establishing causal inference. For example, a majority of respondents in Burkina Faso report experience with sophisticated experimental or quasi-experimental research designs. However, in Senegal and Togo, the vast majority report using simpler research designs.

No WAEMU governments funded impact evaluations up to the time the scoping study was conducted. Evaluation funding comes primarily from outside the region.

Local researchers are often poorly connected and need better exposure. Lack of English language fluency can limit international reach, and language barriers can result in fewer funding opportunities.

Figure 2: Experience with impact evaluations by country

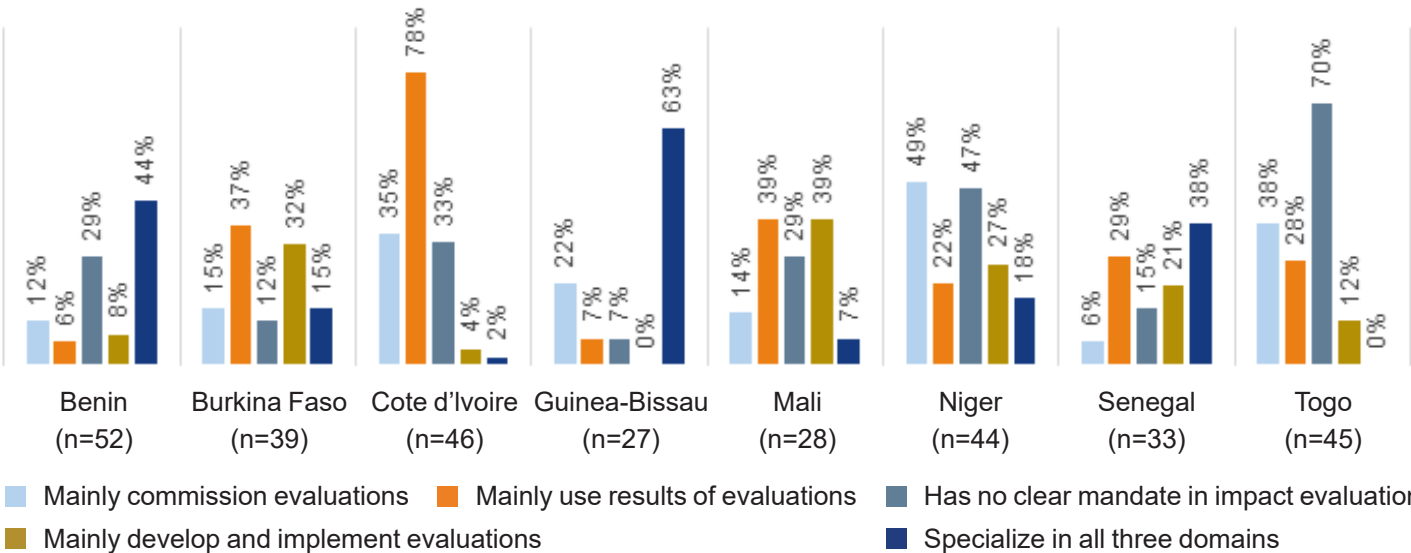
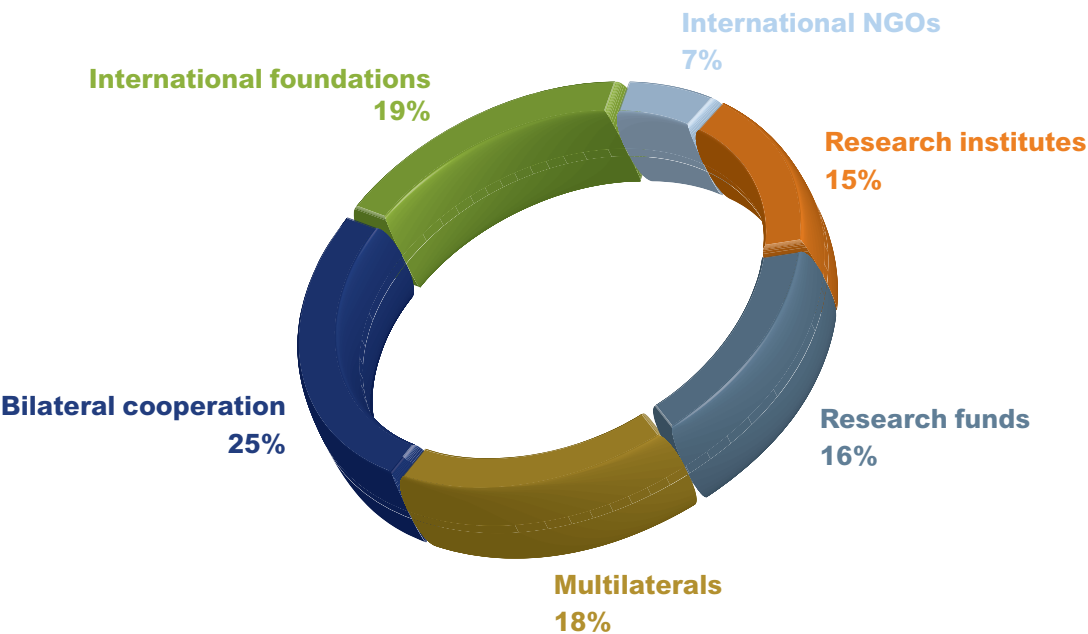


Figure 3: Funding of impact evaluations by type of institution



Next steps

Funders, NGOs and governments in the WAEMU region are already working to increase capacity and promote evidence-based decision-making. Connecting those who commission, conduct and use evaluations will go a long way toward harmonizing quality. WACIE is working with a number of stakeholders in the region, including IDinsight and CLEAR, to help policymakers and local researchers lead studies while collaborating to overcome the “siloeing” of expertise.

Based on the scoping study, WACIE is working with the WAEMU governments and others in the region to meet the demand for capacity building in impact evaluation. The program is also working on bridging the language barrier and helping policymakers translate data for actionable policies.

Ongoing WACIE activities

- WACIE is launching a new help desk that will provide rapid synthesis and evidence translation for West African policymakers to help bridge information asymmetries.
- WACIE and its partners in the region are launching a comprehensive guide to technical evaluation terminology, harmonized between English and French.
- WACIE-organized capacity building workshops have trained dozens of evaluation staff and other policymakers in Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal. Additional workshops are planned.

About this learning summary

Researchers affiliated with Johns Hopkins University conducted the scoping study through in-person interviews in each country. The researchers interviewed representatives from 323 institutions, including government institutions, NGOs, and multilateral, bilateral and financial partners. The WACIE secretariat conducted the literature review using a systematic review protocol. The secretariat reviewed 22,710 studies, identifying just 145 impact

evaluations for WAEMU countries. This brief summarizes the main findings from this study. For more information on 3ie or the WACIE program, please visit www.3ieimpact.org.

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