

# Interventions to Promote Inclusive Governance for Underserved Populations in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Evidence and Gap Map

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## Abstract

**Background:** Inclusive governance ensures that institutions, policies, and practices allow marginalized and underserved groups to participate meaningfully in decision-making at all levels. It is defined by equitable participation, transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and effectiveness. Historically, women, youth, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, and low-income rural and urban populations have faced exclusion due to structural inequalities and weak institutions, resulting in poverty, disempowerment, and social unrest. However, inclusive governance fosters peace, empowerment, and economic growth. In sub-Saharan Africa, it is a key priority in Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 16 and Agenda 2063, although interventions have yielded mixed results. Therefore, it is essential to enhance the discoverability of research on these interventions.

**Objectives:** To map evidence on inclusive governance interventions for underserved populations in sub-Saharan Africa.

**Search Methods:** In 2024, the following databases were searched, limited to English language results: CAB Abstract, Web of Science, Dimensions, and Scopus. Additionally, gray literature sources, including organizational databases, Google Scholar, and registries, were utilized.

**Selection Criteria:** Two reviewers independently screened the titles, abstracts, and full texts of potentially eligible articles for inclusion based on the outlined eligibility criteria.

**Data Collection and Analysis:** We developed and pilot-tested a data extraction tool in EPPI-Reviewer, where data was extracted and coded individually. We did not assess the quality of the reviews, as there were none available, nor did we evaluate the quality of the primary studies.

**Main Results:** A total of 88 articles (all primary studies) were included in this Evidence and Gap Map which assessed the interventions for underserved populations aimed at inclusive governance. Most studies looked at CSO's advocacy, and public policy and government agencies interventions. Civic participation, and movement and coalitions, & CSO's activities and achievement were the most studies outcomes leading to inclusive governance. Most research was conducted in Eastern Africa, particularly in Kenya and Uganda. Major gaps were identified in access to information and capacity building initiatives interventions, in addition to use of key government information as an outcome that address inclusive governance. Most of the evidence relies on non-experimental studies, and we could not identify any experimental or systematic review studies, highlighting a significant gap for future research.

**Authors' Conclusions:** The Evidence and Gap Map (EGM) consolidates and enhances the visibility of research on inclusive governance interventions, providing a single, accessible resource for policymakers, researchers, and funders. It primarily draws from impact and summative evaluations, encompassing over two decades of studies across 48 sub-Saharan African countries, particularly in Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, and Ghana. The findings indicate evidence concerning civic participation, movements, coalitions, and civil

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society organization (CSO) activities, while areas such as the use of government information remain under-researched. Furthermore, regional imbalances persist, with Eastern Africa dominating the research landscape. Overall, the EGM identifies evidence clusters, highlights significant gaps, and offers guidance for future evaluations and policy planning.

### **Plain Language Summary**

This Evidence and Gap Map on interventions aimed at promoting inclusive governance for underserved populations found the evidence is distributed disproportionately and lacks comprehensive systematic reviews.

This EGM reviews and discusses the available evidence on interventions aimed at underserved populations to promote inclusive governance in SSA. Sub-Saharan Africa has a significant number of underserved populations, with notable challenges in service delivery and in government accountability to its citizens. By concentrating on this region, the EGM identifies context-specific interventions and evidence in areas where enhancing inclusive governance is essential for promoting equity, participation, and sustainable development.

It highlights that much of the evidence focuses on the advocacy efforts of civil society organizations (CSOs) and their initiatives to achieve inclusive governance outcomes, particularly in civic participation. Most of this evidence originates from countries in Eastern Africa.

**What is this EGM about?**

Due to structural inequalities, weak institutional capacity, and a lack of transparency, many underserved populations are often excluded from political, economic, and social decision-making processes. Inclusive governance interventions can help these marginalized groups have their voices heard and empower them. Policymakers increasingly seek to identify effective interventions that promote equitable and non-discriminatory participation, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, and overall effectiveness in inclusive governance. This EGM addresses that need by systematically identifying and organizing research on inclusive governance interventions for underserved populations in sub-Saharan Africa.

**What is the aim of this EGM?**

To present evidence from studies on interventions that promote inclusive governance for underserved populations in sub-Saharan Africa.

**What studies are included?**

The EGM comprised 88 articles, all of which were primary studies evaluating interventions aimed at achieving inclusive governance. These studies specifically focused on interventions designed for underserved populations in sub-Saharan Africa.

**What are the main findings of this gap map?**

The evidence presented in this EGM highlights the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in advocacy, particularly in public policy, government agency engagement, and grassroots movements that promote inclusive governance. Specifically, there are clusters of evidence focusing on alliance building, advocacy and lobbying efforts, and the active participation of women and youth in CSO advocacy. Additionally, multiple studies have examined the development and strengthening of grassroots movements through collective actions and campaigns.

Most of the evidence originates from Eastern African countries, including Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, with no systematic reviews included in the mapping.

Over 35% of the studies reported outcomes related to civic participation. Furthermore, there were 7 and 8 studies assessing interventions aimed at enhancing the use of key government information and influencing policy and policymakers, respectively. While all regions of sub-Saharan Africa were represented, the majority of studies came from Eastern Africa (44.9%), with only a small proportion from Central Africa (4.1%). Most interventions in Eastern and Western Africa focused on CSO advocacy, with fewer studies addressing access to information and capacity-building initiatives.

**What do the findings of the map mean?**

This EGM aims to identify effective interventions for achieving inclusive governance among underserved populations. While there is limited evidence available, much of the research is concentrated in Eastern Africa, although Western and Southern Africa also have a significant number of studies, albeit without comprehensive reviews. This map helps build an evidence base in the field, enabling funders and researchers to identify existing gaps and prioritize future research efforts.

**How up-to-date is this EGM?**

We conducted a search for relevant studies up to September 17, 2024.

*Keywords:* inclusive governance, underserved population, policy intervention, evidence and gap maps, sub-Saharan Africa

## Background

### The Problem, Condition or Issue

Inclusive governance refers to systems, institutions, practices, policies allow all individuals and groups especially those typically marginalized or underserved to participate meaningfully in decision making at all levels including local, national and international levels. Its key features include equitable and non-discriminatory participation, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, and effectiveness. For instance, persons with disabilities can participate actively and directly in politics ensuring that institutions are responsive to their needs, legal framework protect their right and accountability mechanisms function effectively (OECD, 2016).

Historically, women, youth, and ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, rural dwellers, and urban slum dwellers have been excluded from political, economic and social decision-making. Such exclusions are often exacerbated by structural inequalities, weak institutional capacity, and lack of transparency. Persistent exclusion reinforces poverty amongst them, disempowerment and inequality. It can also fuel grievances that escalate into social unrest and violence. Moreover, underutilization of human resources such as women or youth can constrain economic growth. In contrast, inclusive governance ensures that conflicts are reduced, and peace prevails, and marginalized groups are empowered leading to growth in the economy.

In sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), inclusive governance has been central to national and regional development agendas. The Sustainable Development Goal 16 emphasizes peace, justice, and strong institutions. The Africa Union's Agenda 2063 also emphasizes the region's goal of prioritizing inclusive governance. Despite these commitments, interventions aimed at inclusive governance have however produced mixed results. Some initiatives have successfully enhanced citizens' engagement, whereas others have not been sustainable or have rather had a negative effect on the population it sought to include. This inconsistency highlights the need to synthesize existing evidence to identify effective approaches, gap in the literature and guidance for policy and research decisions.

This Evidence and Gap Map (EGM) shows a visual overview of the evidence on inclusive governance interventions. Using a systematic approach, both published and unpublished literature sources are used to find studies on inclusive governance, mapping interventions against outcomes, and an EGM supports policymakers, practitioners, and researchers in policymaking and research showing where future investments are need and areas for further research.

### The Intervention

This Evidence and Gap Map (EGM) presents a structured overview of interventions aimed at promoting inclusive

governance for underserved populations in sub-Saharan Africa. Underserved population is defined as groups that experience systematic barriers to accessing essential services such as healthcare, education, economic and political opportunities. The classification and framing of the interventions were based on the conceptual framework outlined in the published protocol (Nyan et al., 2025) and informed by guidance on evidence and gap map methodology (Snilstveit et al., 2016; White et al., 2020). These interventions are theorized to contribute to four intermediate outcomes: movement and coalition activities and achievements; independent and pluralistic media; access to and use of key government information; and changes in policy and policymakers' attitudes and behaviors which ultimately support more inclusive, effective, and accountable governance.

The first intervention category focuses on grassroots movements. These involve efforts to develop and strengthen grassroots organizations and coalitions, mobilize resources, and coordinate collective actions and campaigns. Such movements have historically played a vital role in challenging inequities and elevating the voices of marginalized populations (Chetkovich & Kunreuther, 2006). When supported effectively, they can influence public discourse and policy agendas, especially when linked to broader civil society platforms.

The second category involves civil society organization (CSO) advocacy. This includes interventions that develop local philanthropic networks, build alliances, conduct lobbying, and increase the participation of women and youth in civic movements. CSOs often act as intermediaries between communities and the state, working to ensure that underserved populations can engage meaningfully in governance (Ghaus-Pasha, 2005; McGee & Gaventa, 2011). Strengthening CSO advocacy capacities has been shown to improve accountability and responsiveness in policymaking.

A third intervention area targets public policy and government agencies. Interventions in this domain aim to create inclusive and responsive governance frameworks, raise awareness of governance mechanisms, and support domestic policy efforts that reflect the needs of marginalized and underserved communities. These strategies are intended to institutionalize inclusivity and improve service delivery in often fragmented or exclusionary governance systems (Charbit, 2011).

Media interventions constitute the fourth category. These are essential for democratizing access to information and creating inclusive public spheres. Key strategies include liberalizing media spaces, producing diverse and representative programming, elevating underserved voices, and fostering gender- and inclusion-sensitive cultures within media institutions. Media reforms of this kind can promote civic engagement, challenge elite capture, and support pluralistic debate (Freedom House, 2021; Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2020).

The fifth intervention category concerns access to information. These interventions promote transparency by making government-held information more accessible to underserved populations. Activities include translating official documents into local languages, publishing key information at national and local levels, and implementing or strengthening right-to-information policies (Mapadimeng, 2013; Snilstveit et al., 2016). Access to information is foundational for holding public institutions accountable and enabling informed participation in governance processes.

Finally, capacity-building initiatives span all sectors. These interventions strengthen the ability of civil society actors, government agencies, and media personnel to advance inclusive governance. Examples include training for grassroots organizers, support for public officials at national and local levels, and technical assistance for journalists and media houses (Lane et al., 2023; Malhotra et al., 2021). Effective capacity-building is essential for institutionalizing inclusive practices and ensuring sustainability of governance reforms.

Together, these intervention categories reflect the multi-dimensional strategies used to promote inclusive governance in complex and often unequal political environments. They provided the framework for the inclusion and coding of studies in this EGM, aligning with our objective to support evidence-informed policy and research prioritization (Saran & White, 2018; White et al., 2020).

## Why it is Important to Develop the EGM

Since 2000, the concept of governance and inclusivity has become a major issue in the global development system (Annahar et al., 2023), hence, it is imperative to know the breadth of evidence on inclusive governance, particularly for the underserved in sub-Saharan Africa. This will help to know the trends of evidence, gaps, and the effects of the interventions and the outcome to ensure inclusive participation.

This evidence and gap map that tackles inclusive governance will help all users to identify the size and quality of the evidence base of interventions in sub-Saharan African countries, identify the gaps to be filled with high-quality evidence to provide a strategic-policy-oriented approach in research for development.

### Existing EGMs and Relevant Systematic Reviews

Although several Evidence and Gap Maps (EGM) and Systematic Reviews (SRs) exist on inclusive governance and social inclusion, they differ in terms of interventions and or outcomes examined in the present study. For instance, Gross et al. (2020) in their systematic review assessed multifaceted interventions to support community participation among adults with disabilities. A review also by Saran et al. (2023) examines the effectiveness of interventions to improve social inclusion for people living with disabilities (PWDs) in low- and middle-income countries.

Other studies include interventions on social and financial inclusion, however, their interventions and outcomes of interest do not align directly with those considered in this EGM. In addition, much of the existing literature focuses predominantly on persons with disabilities (PWDs), with comparatively limited attention to other underserved populations.

This study adopts a broader perspective by including a wider range of underserved groups. These include: (i) socio-economic groups such as smallholder or peasant farmers and women (particularly those in disadvantaged contexts); (ii) geographically disadvantaged populations, including individuals in rural areas and urban informal settlements; and (iii) socially marginalized or minority groups, such as ethnic and sexual minorities, the Fulbe community, young people, and politically underrepresented populations.

This EGM to our knowledge is the first to examine and map evidence on interventions to promote inclusive governance for underserved populations (including women, ethnic and sexual minorities, politicians (we define this group as elected and appointed public decision-makers who may be underrepresented in certain governance contexts (e.g., local-level actors, women politicians, or those operating in resource-constrained settings), smallholder farmers, the Fulbe community, and young people from certain geographic areas).

## Objectives

The aim of this EGM is to map the available evidence on inclusive governance interventions for underserved populations in sub-Saharan Africa.

The specific objectives are to:

- Identify and highlight evidence from primary studies and systematic reviews regarding inclusive governance.
- Determine the evidence gaps that necessitate new high-quality studies, including systematic reviews.

## Methods

We developed the evidence and gap map following the Campbell Collaboration guidelines (White et al., 2020), as outlined in our published protocol (Nyan et al., 2025).

## Evidence and Gap Map: Definition and Purpose

An Evidence and Gap Map (EGM) is a type of synthesis product which provides thematic synthesis of evidence which are ideally structured around a framework known as PICOS (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome and Studies). They are products obtained from a systematic synthesis of evidence, providing relevant available evidence to the specific issue worked on (White et al., 2020). EGMs are made of rows and columns, which comprise of filters to enable the

exploration of the map to a particular focus (study design, population, countries, interventions, outcomes, etc) (Campbell et al., 2023).

EGMs serve to provide an overview of lack of evidence on a particular issue and complement existing synthesis including mapping approaches (Snilstveit et al., 2016; Campbell et al., 2023). EGMs also support evidence-informed policymaking and serve as accessible resources for decision-makers, researchers, etc. (Campbell et al., 2023). Snilstveit et al. (2016) assert that EGMs provide thematic collections of evidence, which is essential for a particular sector.

This EGM presents a map of studies of interventions to promote inclusive governance for underserved populations in sub-Saharan African countries.

### Framework Development and Scope

The scope of this EGM followed several structured steps, from training on EGM to mapping the evidence. At the outset, all researchers who were part of the development of this EGM were trained on the steps to EGM production and the use of the software in EGM production: the EPPI-Reviewer and EPPI-Mapper. The PICOS framework was defined to guide the development of the EGM, after which the Title and Registration Form (TRF) was completed and submitted to the Campbell Collaboration Review.

The team then drafted and submitted a standard protocol for an EGM to the Campbell Collaboration Review Journal for publication, as prescribed by the Campbell Collaboration, after the TRF was accepted. Next, the team of researchers developed a screening and coding tool to guide the identification of relevant studies to be included in the EGM production. We identified relevant academic databases and organizational websites to help with the search for salient materials. Additional training for the team was provided by Howard White in 2024. Throughout the EGM production, the Campbell Collaboration was engaged through the PICOS, TRF, protocol and, EGM development. Howard White, Ashrita Saran, and Takyiwa Manuh provided weekly advice to the team. Rodney Malesi served as the information specialist with support from the team on the searches on academic databases and Google Scholar.

The EGM's preliminary results were presented at the Evidence to Action conference (E2A) in 2025. It was then uploaded on the International Centre for Evaluation and Development (ICED's) website for public access and feedback.

### Stakeholder Engagement

We consulted with development practitioners, academics, and policymakers from various organizations, including AfroBarometer, the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) Ghana, the African Population Health Research Council, the University of Ghana, the STAR Ghana Foundation, Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and

Organizing (WIEGO), the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection. These experts, familiar with the subject matter, provided insights on the scope, design, and production of the Evidence Gap Map (EGM). With support from Campbell Collaboration, we conceptualized, designed, and produced the map, incorporating feedback from stakeholders at every stage to ensure it is fit for purpose and useful for informing future research, policy, programs, and funding decisions related to inclusive governance. These stages were from framework development and validation to the dissemination of results. These stakeholders also guided us on dissemination pathways, pinpointing key ministries and civil society networks for targeted engagement. The final map has been widely disseminated among relevant organizations, institutions, and networks for practical use and application.

### Conceptual Framework

The framework presents how the various interventions lead to the development of the outcomes, with the underlying assumptions. There are six (6) main interventions that this study looked at: grassroots movements; CSOs advocacy; public policy and government agencies; media, access to information; and capacity building initiatives. The EGM's framework shows how interventions for inclusive governance for underserved populations lead to either short or intermediate-term outcomes, and consequently, long-term outcomes. The assumption is that interventions could lead to short- or long-term outcomes.

Another intervention of interest to promote inclusive governance is capacity building initiatives, whether for grassroots and CSOs, national, public, and local-level agencies, or media personnel and media, Training programs, and leadership development. These interventions lead to improved skills, knowledge, and organizational capacity of the stakeholders (policymakers and other key actors), which also influence their understanding, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors (Akambadi et al., 2023; Grossman et al., 2014; Jin, 2020).

According to Grossman et al. (2014), interventions aimed at structuring and supporting the development of grassroots movements lead to short-term outcomes such as increased awareness among people in a given district, community or region and community engagement. This also strengthens coalitions and enhances social inclusion which eventually leads to enhanced movements and coalition's activities and achievements. Securing the needed assets (both financial and non-financial resources) also empowers underserved populations which lead to strengthened coalitions and movements (Abdi & Madut, 2019).

Public policy and government agencies' interventions also promote the long-term effect of inclusive governance. Hern (2017) reveals that creating awareness of public policies to influence laws, policies and government procedures lead to

policy reforms and adoption. These adopted policy reforms become inclusive policy frameworks because these interventions were designed through the active participation of all stakeholders to hold governments accountable. This leads to the long-term outcome of meaningful active participation and influence, and public awareness and education.

Advocacy efforts and initiatives of CSOs relates to philanthropic networks either at the community, regional or national level; advocacy and lobbying; active participation of women and children in coalitions and movements also foster inclusive governance outcomes including policy changes; leadership roles and advocacy efforts in movement and coalitions. Lobby efforts and advocacy campaigns also influence policy changes that benefit underserved populations (Fioramonti & Fiori, 2010).

Interventions aimed at making media spaces available to all at all levels lead to inclusive governance. These interventions include liberalization of media spaces, strategies that seek to diversify media programs and content in many formats and platforms, elevating the voices of populations considered underserved and supporting the development of gender sensitive culture in the media space. According to Mauyakufa and Pradhan (2018), making media spaces available to a growing number of users by setting up several local radio stations leads to an intermediate outcome of diverse media landscape and improved debate, dialogue and tolerance. This has a long-term effect on the realization and existence of independent and pluralistic media. Diverse media providers where there exists the operation of varied media contents, respect for freedom of expression in policy, legislation and practice and media coverage of underserved groups becomes the reality (Akambadi et al., 2023; Beyene, 2011; Fombad & Jiyane, 2019).

Access to information approach to ensuring inclusive governance is not limited to actions which ensure that all people who are not fluent in the official languages have access to information on government policies, programs, laws or services in local languages. These interventions lead to immediate outcomes of government transparency, state accountability and responsiveness and the long-term outcome of use of key information by underserved populations to support their activities and aspirations (Adu, 2021; Kock & Gaskins, 2014).

The Figure 1 shows the causal relationship between the interventions and outcomes.

## Dimensions

The key dimensions of this EGM are interventions, outcomes, evaluation types, and study designs. Interventions and outcomes are organized in a matrix format, with interventions listed in rows and outcomes in columns. Each cell of the matrix displays the number of studies corresponding to each combination of intervention and outcome categories. The

evaluation types and study designs are represented as segments within the study counts in each cell.

The outcome dimension encompasses several areas, including outcomes that affect the formation of Movement and Coalitions, CSO activities and achievements, Civic Participation, Capacity, Independent and Pluralistic Media, Use of Key Government Information, and Policy and Policymakers, along with sub-domains for each outcome (See Table 2 for Outcome domain, sub-categories, and examples).

The intervention dimension consists of six primary categories: Grassroots Movement, CSOs' Advocacy, Public Policy and Government Agencies, Media, Access to Information, and Capacity Building Initiatives, along with sub-categories under each. (See Table 1 for a list of Intervention categories, sub-categories, and definitions).

Multiple coding of studies was allowed to report evidence across different dimensions of the EGM. This EGM includes studies from various types of evaluations, including formative and process evaluations.

## Types of Study Design

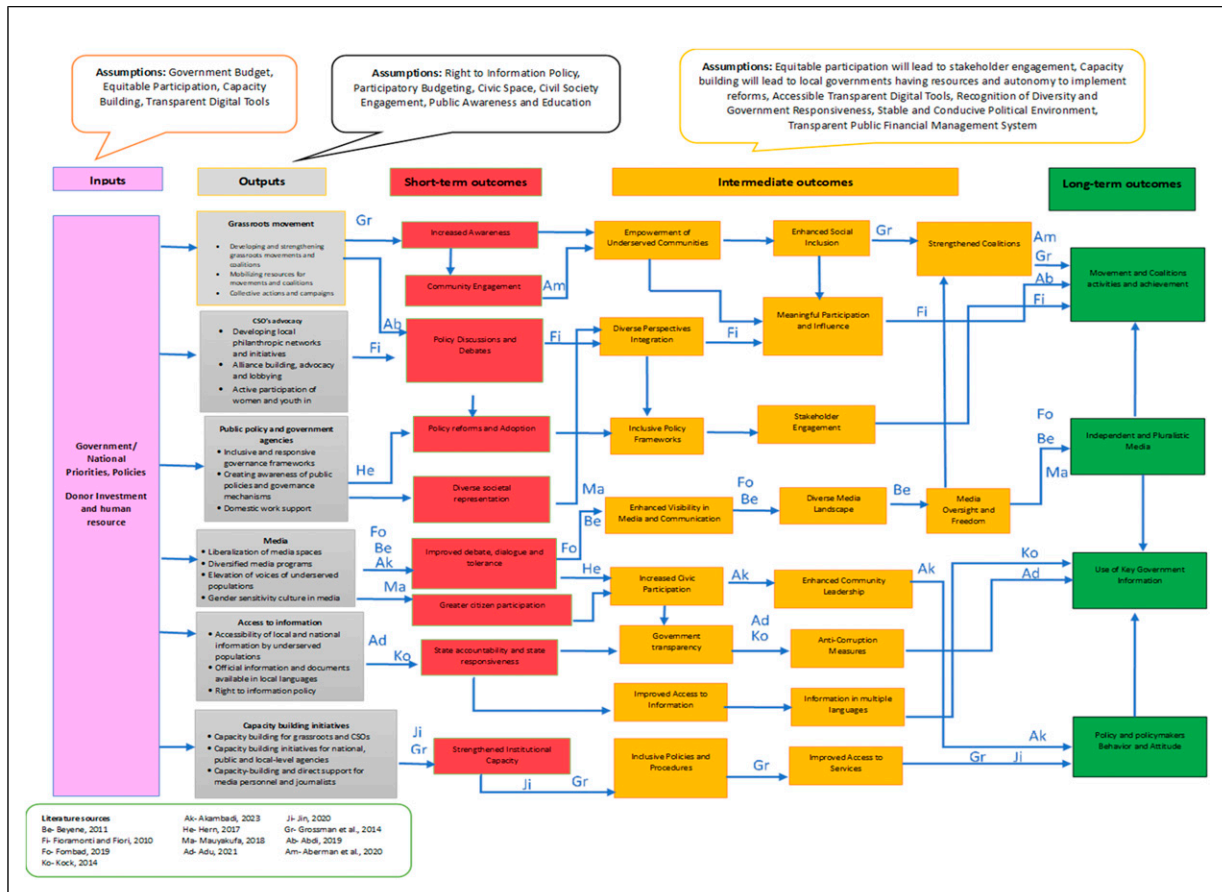
This Evidence and Gap Map (EGM) includes a range of study designs that provide evidence on inclusive governance interventions and outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa. The EGM covers primary studies, review studies, and modelling studies, including both completed and ongoing research, all of which were coded accordingly.

For primary studies, all designs were eligible provided they used empirical (primary) data. Review studies were limited to scoping reviews, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses, while other review types were excluded due to lack of methodological rigor. Modelling studies were included if they used real-world data from relevant geographic contexts within the study scope to simulate or estimate intervention outcomes.

The included study designs were grouped into five main categories:

- **Experimental Analysis:** This category includes studies that use experimental designs to measure outcomes, such as randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and randomized field trials. These designs were included because they provide strong evidence for causal inference by minimizing bias and controlling for confounding factors.
- **Non-experimental Analysis:** This category covers quantitative studies that do not use randomized designs but apply robust statistical methods to assess relationships between interventions and outcomes. These include quasi-experimental approaches (e.g., difference-in-differences, regression discontinuity), matching techniques (e.g., propensity score matching, synthetic controls), and regression-based methods (e.g., ordinary least squares, instrumental variables, panel data models, and endogenous switching regression). These

**Figure 1**  
Conceptual Framework



approaches were included as they can provide evidence on causal relationships while addressing bias through statistical controls.

- **Qualitative Studies:** This category encompasses studies that use qualitative methods to explore experiences, perceptions, and processes related to the outcomes of interest. Methods include interviews, focus group discussions, case studies, participatory approaches, and narrative or exploratory designs. These studies provide in-depth insights into the lived experiences of both participants and non-participants.
- **Reviews:** This category is limited to systematic reviews, scoping reviews, and meta-analyses, as these follow transparent, rigorous, and structured methodologies, including predefined search strategies, inclusion criteria, and quality appraisal processes. Other review types, such as narrative reviews and general literature overviews, were excluded.
- **Modelling Studies:** This category includes studies that use modelling techniques to estimate or simulate the effects of interventions on outcomes. These may involve simulation models, predictive models, economic models, or other analytical approaches. Such studies

were included because they offer valuable insights into potential or projected impacts, complementing empirical evidence within the EGM.

### Types of Intervention/Problem

The EGM covers a broad range of initiatives implemented by grassroots movements, civil society organizations (CSOs), media actors, and policymakers. These interventions aim to empower underserved populations to effectively engage in governance processes, advocate for policies that reflect their needs, and participate meaningfully in decision-making. In addition, the map includes interventions designed to strengthen the capacity of grassroots movements, CSOs, policymakers, and media to deliver inclusive governance services and support improved civic engagement. Table 1 provides a concise summary of all intervention categories included in this EGM.

### Types of Population (As Applicable)

The Evidence and Gap Map (EGM) centres on underserved and historically marginalized populations in sub-Saharan

**Table 1***Intervention Categories, Sub-Categories, and Definitions*

Intervention Categories	Sub-categories	Definitions
Grassroots movement		Highlights the development and support to grassroots social movements, including their organization, campaigns, and resource mobilization.
	Developing and strengthening grassroots movements and coalitions	Interventions aimed at structuring and supporting the development of grassroots movements and coalitions to advance their objectives and address social, political, or environmental issues.
	Mobilizing resources for movements and coalitions	Securing the necessary assets, both financial and non-financial, to support the activities and objectives of social movements and coalitions. This typically involves strategies and actions aimed at obtaining funding, expertise, and support from various sources, including individuals, organizations, and government agencies.
	Collective actions and campaigns	A grassroots campaign is one that uses the people in a given district, region or community as the basis for a political or economic movement. Grassroots movements and organizations use collective action from the local level to implement change at the local, regional, national, or international levels.  Forming alliances or partnerships between diverse individuals, groups, or organizations to undertake strategic efforts or advocate to bring about awareness, change, or action of government responsiveness to their needs.
CSOs' advocacy		This category focuses on advocacy efforts and initiatives of CSOs aimed at promoting inclusive governance. This includes activities related to philanthropic networks, alliance building, and ensuring the participation and influence of youth and women through advocacy and lobbying.
	Developing local philanthropic networks and initiatives	Efforts to establish and strengthen networks of philanthropic organizations and individuals at the community or regional level. These initiatives aim to foster collaboration, resource sharing, and strategic giving to address local challenges and support community development.
	Alliance building, advocacy and lobbying	A collaborative partnership or network formed among multiple Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) enabling them to combine their efforts, share resources, and amplify their collective impact, ultimately enhancing their ability to address and influence significant social, political, or economic issues.  Developing advocacy campaigns and lobbying efforts to influence policy changes that benefit underserved populations.
	Active participation of women and youth in coalitions and movements	Active engagement and the impact women and youth have within the collective efforts to bring about social, political, or cultural change. E.g. Leadership roles, advocacy efforts, and decision-making within the coalitions and movements.
Public policy and government agencies	Inclusive and responsive governance frameworks	Having a governance framework and approach that prioritizes the active involvement of diverse stakeholders, particularly marginalized and underrepresented groups, in the decision-making and policy development processes of a government or institution.
	Creating awareness of public policies and governance mechanisms	Creating awareness to influence the laws, policies, and procedures that regulate how governments run, how resources are distributed, and how public services are provided. For stakeholders including grassroots movements, women and youth to actively participate in the governance of their societies and hold governments accountable, they must be aware of public policies and governance procedures.
	Domestic work support	Encompass regulations, labor rights, and protections for domestic workers, including minimum wage laws, working hour limits, and provisions for occupational safety and health. These measures aim to ensure fair and dignified working conditions for domestic workers.

*(continued)*

**Table 1***(continued)*

Intervention Categories	Sub-categories	Definitions
Media	Liberalization of media spaces	Interventions designed to make media spaces accessible to a growing number of users and also to increase broadcasting at all levels. E.g., setting up of local radio stations.
	Diversified media programs	Strategies that seek to offer a variety of content and programmes in many formats and platforms to increase the coverage and range of issues
	Elevation of voices of underserved populations	Ensuring the coverage of content of particular relevance and interest to underserved populations and increase their access to and control of media spaces in order to bridge knowledge and participation gaps.
	Gender sensitivity culture in media	Support the development of a culture of gender/GESI sensitivity and safeguarding within the media space, with a special focus on women, young persons and PWDs.
Access to information	Accessibility of local and national information by underserved populations	Actions to increase access to and understanding of official information and data, to enable underserved populations participate actively in national and civic life. (Are made possible by access to information for people, lawmakers, researchers, and the media. It is crucial for encouraging openness, responsibility, and knowledgeable judgment in a democratic society).
	Official information and documents available in local languages	This approach aids in ensuring that all individuals, including those who might not be fluent in the official or dominant language, have access to information on policies, programs, and services provided by the government.
	Right to information policy	A system of rules, laws, or regulations that control the public's right to access data and records maintained by the government. By enabling people (underserved population), journalists, researchers, and organizations to seek and access information stored by government agencies and public bodies, with the aims to advance transparency, accountability, and openness in government.
Capacity building initiatives	Capacity building for grassroots and CSOs	Efforts aimed at enhancing the skills, knowledge, resources, and organizational capacity of underserved groups, CSOs, grassroots organizations, and collective movements and alliances. Examples: training programs, leadership development, strategic planning.
	Capacity building initiatives for national, public and local-level agencies	Activities and initiatives designed to increase the resources, capabilities, and expertise of government agencies and organizations. These initiatives are essential for enhancing the efficiency and responsiveness of state institutions and agencies in providing public services, carrying out policies, and attending to the requirements of their citizens.
	Capacity-building and direct support for media personnel and journalists	Interventions aimed at helping county-based journalists adopt evidence-based data journalism on issues affecting underserved populations in their diversity.

Africa, in line with the concept of inclusive governance as the meaningful participation of groups often excluded from decision-making (OECD, 2016). Accordingly, the populations included underserved women, youth, ethnic and sexual minorities, persons with disabilities, rural communities, residents of urban informal settlements, smallholder and peasant farmers, political actors in disadvantaged contexts, and culturally distinct groups such as the Fulbe community, as outlined in the EGM framework. These populations were included because they face structural barriers linked to inequality, discrimination, and limited access to civic space, which align with broader concerns that exclusion reinforces poverty, disempowerment, and conflict. In line with

recommended EGM practice, the population eligibility criteria remained broad enough to capture intersectional vulnerabilities such as gender, age, ethnicity, and disability status where these influenced the relevance or design of inclusive governance interventions (Snilstveit et al., 2016; White et al., 2020).

Studies were considered eligible when they targeted any of the underserved population groups identified in the EGM protocol and conceptual framework (Nyan et al., 2025). Evidence was excluded when the study population did not align with these groups, a criterion that resulted in substantial exclusions at the full-text screening stage ( $n = 117$ ) due to ineligible target groups. In assessing population relevance, particular attention was given to equity considerations,

ensuring that interventions addressed the needs of those whose exclusion arises from systemic or context-specific marginalization consistent with accountability and inclusiveness principles emphasized in governance literature (McGee & Gaventa, 2011; OECD, 2016). The population criteria thus ensured that the EGM captured interventions aimed at expanding voice, participation, and access to information for groups whose experiences are central to understanding inclusive governance dynamics in sub-Saharan Africa.

## Types of Outcome Measures (As Applicable)

As shown in Table 2, the primary outcomes comprised six domains identified in the conceptual framework: (1) movements and coalitions' activities and achievements, (2) civic participation, (3) capacity of grassroots movements, civil society organizations (CSOs), media, and policymakers, (4) independent and pluralistic media, (5) use of key government information, and (6) policy and policymakers' knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors. These domains were defined using sector-relevant, consensus-based descriptions. Acceptable measures included quantitative indicators (e.g., engagement rates, funding flows, participation metrics, media diversity indices), qualitative assessments (e.g., perceptions of influence, narratives of collective action), and mixed-method evaluations, reflecting the broad range of evidence eligible for inclusion. This aligns with established practice that EGMs adopt flexible but clearly operationalized outcome definitions to accommodate diverse study designs and data types (Saran & White, 2018).

Across the included studies, outcomes were coded when they directly reflected changes in participation, accountability, information use, or governance responsiveness affecting underserved populations. The EGM also considered unintended or adverse outcomes where reported, such as reduced civic space, backlash against civil society, or exclusionary effects emerging from poorly implemented governance reforms; however, few studies explicitly documented such harms, and none were used as standalone eligibility criteria. Studies were excluded when outcomes fell outside the predefined domains, contributing to 60 exclusions at full-text screening for ineligible outcomes. The outcome framework ensured that the EGM captured evidence relevant to strengthening inclusive governance processes while maintaining consistency with existing governance and accountability literature (McGee & Gaventa, 2011; OECD, 2016).

## Other Eligibility Criteria

The EGM applied additional eligibility criteria focused primarily on geographical setting, location, and context of implementation, restricting inclusion to studies conducted exclusively within sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries, in

alignment with the scope outlined in the protocol and methods sections. Studies were excluded when conducted outside SSA, contributing to 104 exclusions at full-text screening due to ineligible geographical locations. Eligible settings included any governance, civic, policy, media, or community environments in which interventions sought to promote inclusive governance for underserved populations, for example grassroots spaces, CSO environments, public-sector agencies, media institutions, and community-level civic initiatives, all consistent with the intervention categories defined in the EGM (e.g., grassroots movements, CSO advocacy, access-to-information reforms, and media pluralism initiatives). No restrictions were placed on urban versus rural settings, allowing inclusion of diverse contexts such as rural communities, urban informal settlements, and mixed administrative jurisdictions, provided the interventions targeted marginalized and underserved groups. Conversely, studies conducted in settings unrelated to governance processes, such as purely educational, private-sector, or non-civic service delivery contexts, were excluded when they did not contribute to the EGM outcomes or target populations. This approach ensured that the EGM remained tightly focused on evidence relevant to inclusive governance systems in SSA, consistent with methodological guidance emphasizing clearly defined spatial and contextual eligibility boundaries (Snilstveit et al., 2016; White et al., 2020).

## Search Methods and Sources

The protocol that guided the development of this EGM was published in the Campbell Systematic review database (Nyan et al., 2025). It included the list of databases intended to be searched, along with other sources that were used for retrieving papers for this EGM. The protocol also included a list of journals that were hand searched to see if there were any studies that are eligible for inclusion in the EGM.

### Search Strategy

The studies included in this EGM were identified through a systematic and comprehensive search across multiple sources. Four major academic databases were systematically searched: CAB Abstracts, Scopus, Web of Science (Core collection citation database) and Dimensions as detailed in the Appendices (Appendix B, C, D and E) with the dates searched. In addition a total of 26 institutional databases and academic journals, including google scholar and registries were searched to ensure a broad coverage of relevant literature. These include:-

Institutional databases:

- Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL)
- World bank economic Review
- World bank - Independent Evaluation Group (IEG)
- World Bank Documents and Reports
- Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA)

**Table 2***Outcome Domain, Sub-Categories, and Examples*

Outcome domain	sub-categories	Definitions/Examples
Movement and coalitions activities and achievement	Funding to movements and coalitions	Strategies aimed at enhancing their effectiveness, resilience, and ability to achieve their goals. The process of empowering these collective entities to better advocate for their causes, mobilize support, and drive positive change. Securing adequate financial resources and support for social or advocacy movements and coalitions. This outcome signifies the success of efforts to raise funds and resources to sustain the activities and advocacy work of these collective efforts.
	Participation of local communities in the activities and campaigns of movements and coalitions	Active engagement and involvement of community members, particularly, women and youth, in the various initiatives, actions, and advocacy efforts led by social or advocacy movements and coalitions.
Independent and pluralistic media	Enhanced Civic Space	A diversity of media providers, a variety of opinion-forming media content within a medium, or a combination of both to enable a free and democratic public opinion-forming process, regardless of the form of a medium's offer. It is intended to both monitor government and reflect the perspectives of underserved populations. Civic space is the respect for the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly, and expression in policy, legislation, and practice, as well as the degree to which the state upholds fundamental rights. It further encompasses the freedom to access, gather, and share knowledge and ideas of all types across boundaries and through all mediums.
	Media coverage of undeserved groups	Media coverage is the attention and exposure that a person, brand, event, or topic receives across a variety of media outlets, including print, broadcast, and online. It covers all types of information that highlights and discusses the topic, including news pieces, interviews, features, reviews, and other types of content that are relevant for underserved groups.
	Use of key government information	Outcomes that enable underserved populations to use government data and information to support their activities and aspirations. The use of key government information that includes data, documents, reports, statistics, and other forms of information generated or collected by government agencies and bodies at various levels of government by underserved populations.
	Global right to information rating	The global right to information is the leading global tool for assessing the strength of national legal frameworks for accessing information held by public authorities (i.e., the right to information or RTI). It is widely used by inter-governmental organisations, RTI advocates, government, legislators, lawyers, academics, and others. <a href="https://www.rti-rating.org">https://www.rti-rating.org</a>
	Rule of law index	The rule of law index is a quantitative assessment tool designed to offer a comprehensive picture of the extent to which countries adhere to the rule of law. <a href="https://www.oecd.org/mena/governance/45447873.pdf">https://www.oecd.org/mena/governance/45447873.pdf</a>
	Public participation in budgets	Participatory budgeting is a form of citizen participation in which citizens are involved in the process of deciding how public money is spent. Local people are often given a role in the scrutiny and monitoring of the process following the allocation of budgets.
	Corruption perception index	The Corruption perceptions index (CPI) is an index which ranks countries "by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, as determined by expert assessments and opinion surveys." The CPI generally defines corruption as an "abuse of entrusted power for private gain". <a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021">https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021</a>
	Global open data index	The global Open data index tracks whether data is actually released in a way that is accessible to citizens, media and civil society and is unique in crowd-sourcing its survey of open data releases around the world.

*(continued)*

**Table 2***(continued)*

Outcome domain	sub-categories	Definitions/Examples
Policy and policymakers	Knowledge, attitude, or behavior of policymakers, the public, or other key actors	Measurable and demonstrable changes in the understanding, perceptions, or actions of policymakers, the public, or other key actors who play a crucial role in public policy. Examples: Knowledge Outcome: demonstrable increases in awareness, understanding, or knowledge on the needs underserved populations among policymakers, the public, or other relevant stakeholders. Attitude Outcome - Measurable shifts in the attitudes, beliefs, or perceptions of key actors on issues regarding the underserved. Behavior Outcome - Observable changes in the actions, decisions, or behaviors of policymakers, the public, or other influential actors toward their responsiveness to needs of underserved populations.

- Social Science Research Network (SSRN)
- Governance Journal
- National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER)
- Cochrane Library
- Freedom house
- International Journal of Electronic Governance
- USAID- Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC)
- Google Scholar
- EPPI knowledge library
- The Campbell library
- Center for Strategic and International Studies
- International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)
- Journal of Governance and Management
- African Development Bank- Evaluation reports
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- Asian Development Bank - Evaluation resources
- The Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials (CENTRAL)
- Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP)

Academic journals:

- Journal of Good Governance and Sustainable Development in Africa
- International Journal of Disclosure and Governance
- Pan African Journal of Governance and Development

The search terms for the various databases were carefully designed using synonyms and related terms for the population, interventions, and outcomes (See [Appendix B, C, D and E](#)). The search did not restrict studies based on study design. Boolean operators AND, and OR were applied to connect search terms appropriately, while truncations and wildcards were used to refine results and capture variations in terminology. Limiters were also applied to filter out studies that fell outside the scope of the EGM. A language

limiter was applied, restricting the search to studies published in English. The restriction to English-language studies was due to time and capacity constraints, as the team did not have the resources to support translation. Additionally, the majority of relevant publications are available in English. The publication years were restricted to 1990 to 2024, as these years are deemed relevant to the emergence and growth of literature on governance, civic engagement, and development interventions.

Furthermore, machine learning techniques implemented through Open Alex within the EPPI Reviewer software were employed to enhance the search process. Open Alex was used to support supplementary searching helping to identify additional potentially relevant studies that may not have been captured through database searches alone.

This integration of machine learning made the evidence gathering process more efficient and effective, ensuring that the EGM reflects a comprehensive collection of relevant literature. Also key authors were contacted for eligible papers through included studies and citation tracking.

## Analysis and Presentation

### Report Structure

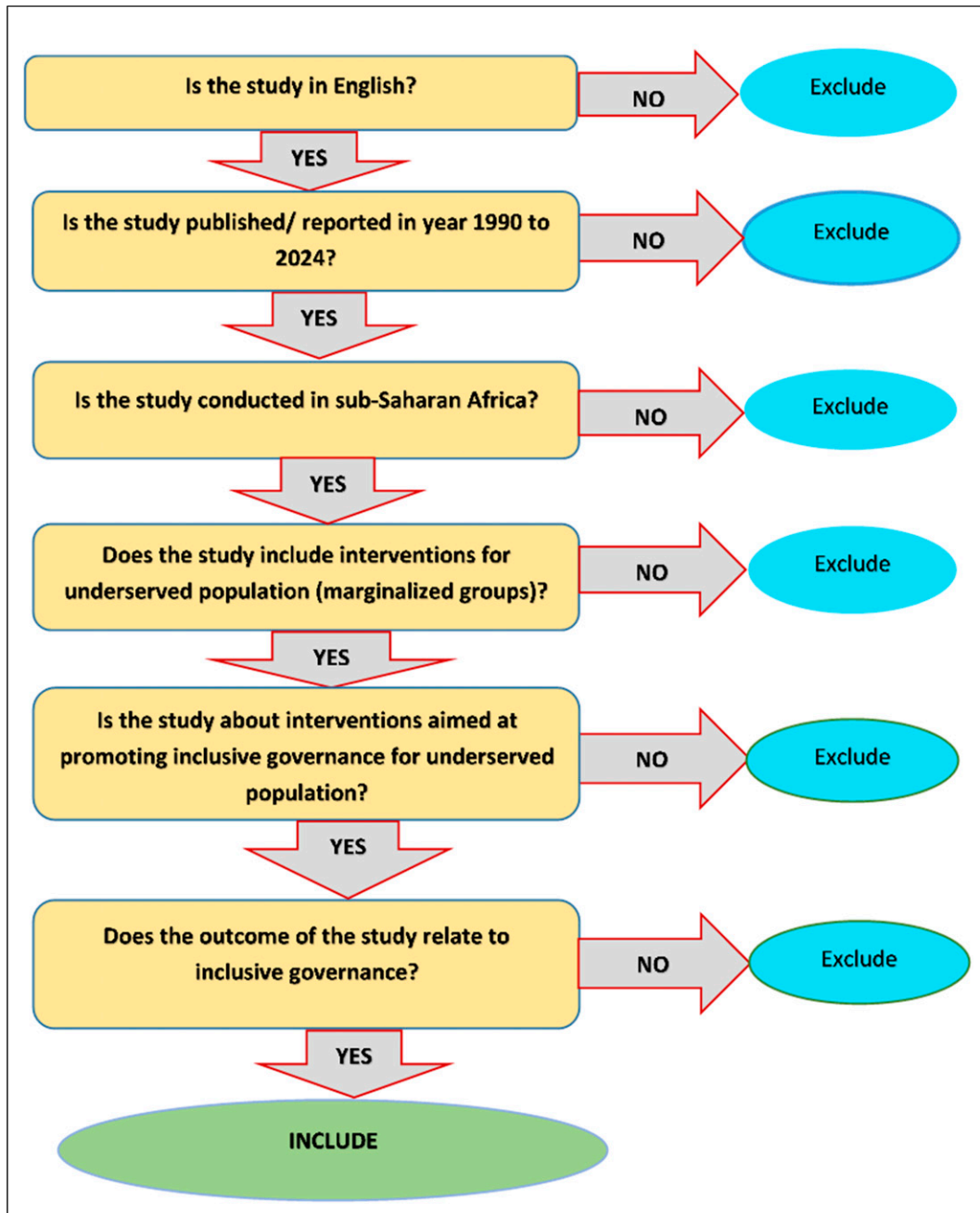
The current report is organized into eight sections: abstract, plain language summary, background, objectives, methods, results, discussion, and conclusion, each with relevant subsections. It includes 13 tables and 12 figures, along with seven appendices (see [Table 3](#)).

### Filters for Presentation

The EGM employs various dimensions as filters, allowing the map users to restrict and display only the studies that meet their criteria. These dimensions include the country and region of study, study design, type of evaluation, year of publication, type of publication, and study status. For a detailed description of these filter variables, refer to [Table 4](#).

**Figure 2**

Screening Tool for Assessing Eligible Studies

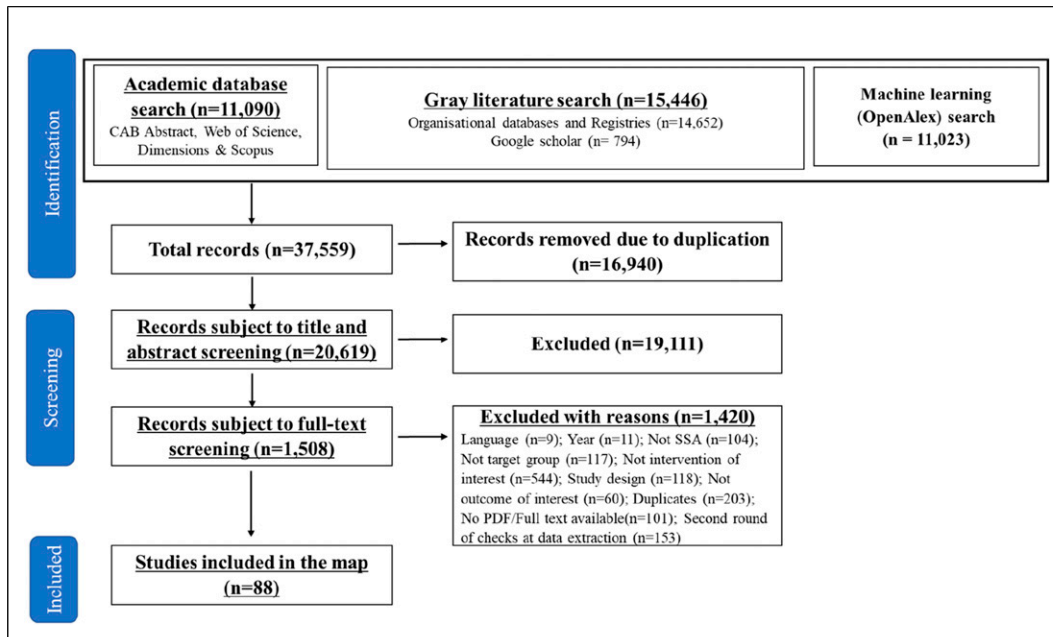


**Dependency**

For this Evidence and Gap Map (EGM), the unit of analysis was a study. Each entry that appears in the EGM matrix represents a single study. Following White et al. (2018), a study was defined as an analysis conducted on a unique sample, even if the sample was over multiple time points. If a single study generated several publications, we included only the most recent openly accessible publication in line with previous EGM practices (Malhotra et al., 2021).

A study was coded multiple times under the relevant categories when it reported on more than one intervention, outcome, population, or study design. This means that although one study could contribute multiple codes, it was still counted as one unique study in the EGM. In situations where a study included several interventions or outcomes but only some met the EGM eligibility criteria, only the eligible components were coded. Primary studies that were eligible were counted only once, even if they appeared in multiple systematic reviews.

**Figure 3**  
PRISMA Flowchart



As in earlier EGMs, coding multiple aspects of a single study means that the total number of codes may exceed the total number of included studies. To help users navigate the strength of the evidence, we classified the density of evidence across the coding categories. Drawing on approaches used in similar EGMs (such as Apunyo et al., 2022), areas with 75 or more studies were considered highly dense or well-researched. Those with between 25 and 75 studies were considered moderately researched, and those with fewer than 25 studies were classified as having limited evidence. This categorization provides a simple indication of where evidence is strong and

where significant gaps remain in the inclusive governance domain.

## Data Collection and Analysis

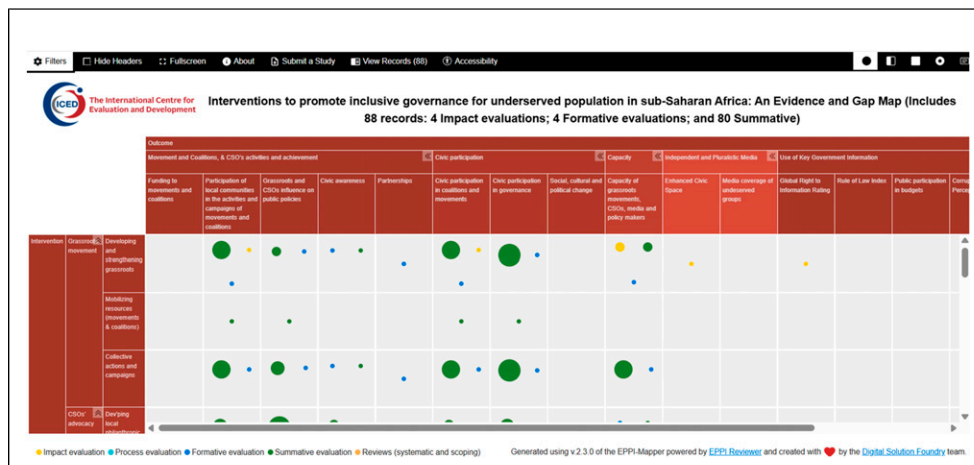
### Screening and Study Selection

All references from the identified papers were uploaded into EPPI Reviewer software and de-duplicated. The screening of eligible papers was conducted in two phases.

First, we screened the titles and abstracts to assess eligibility for the EGM. To expedite this process, we

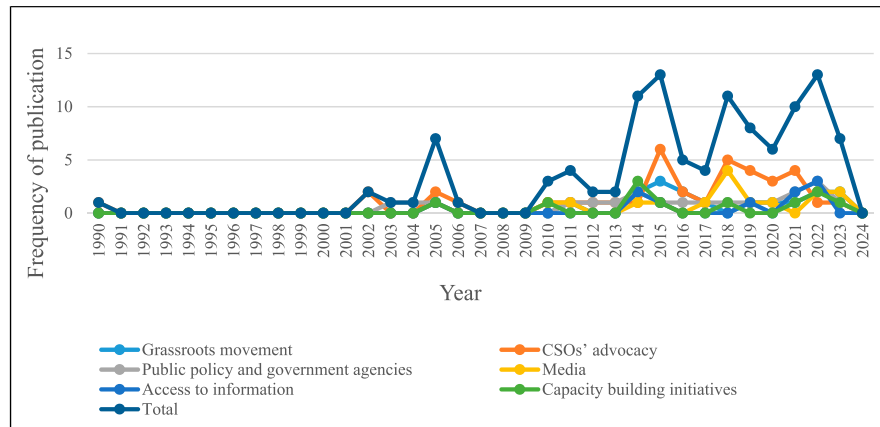
**Figure 4**

A Snapshot of EGM. The EGM Can be Found on <https://products.iced-eval.org/egm-inclusive-governance.html>



**Figure 5**

*Trends of Publications by Interventions From 1990 to 2024*



utilized a machine learning model to prioritize the identified papers based on the established eligibility criteria (see Figure 2). The title and abstract screening involved double screening by reviewers, applying both inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Second, we performed a full-text screening of all papers that passed the title and abstract phase. This phase was conducted independently by two reviewers (double screening). Discrepancies between reviewers were identified through comparison reports generated within EPPI-Reviewer. These discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus within the review team. Where disagreements persisted or eligibility was unclear, a third reviewer was adjudicated to reach a final decision. Finally, the eligible papers identified during the full-text screening were coded using a predefined data extraction form in EPPI-Reviewer, completed by two

independent reviewers (see Appendix G for the coding form). This predefined data extraction included detailed definitions of codes and examples to guide consistent coding. It captured information on interventions, outcomes, types of evaluations, study designs, and sub-Saharan African countries based on the World Bank classification.

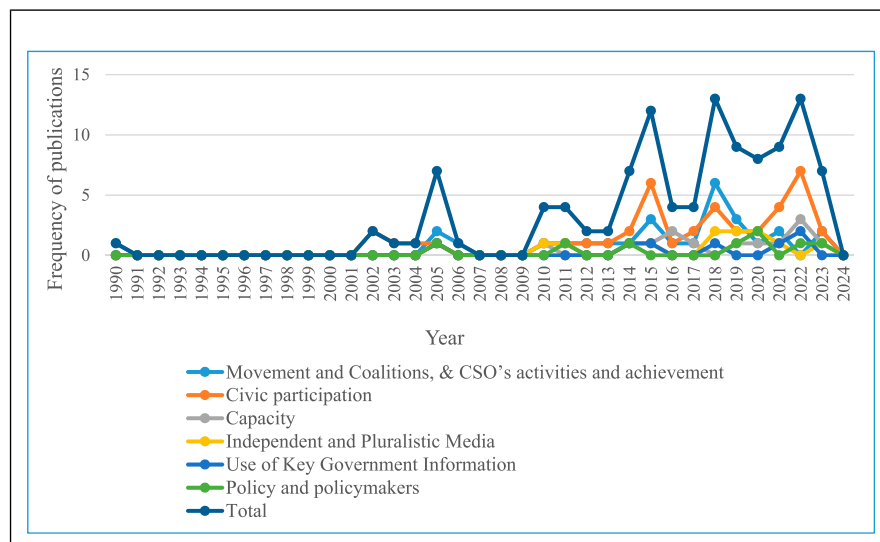
The coded data reports were then compared and reconciled by the reviewers in EPPI-Reviewer.

**Data Extraction and Management**

All eligible reports from the included studies, encompassing various populations, interventions, study designs, and outcomes, were coded using the EPPI-Reviewer software. A data extraction form was utilized to gather information on language, region, country, population, intervention, outcome, study design, and evaluation type for all eligible studies.

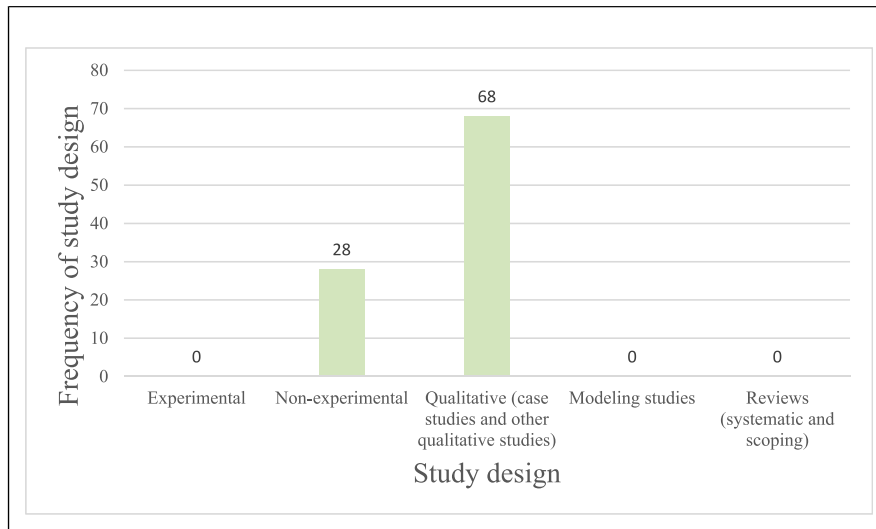
**Figure 6**

*Trends of Publications by Outcomes From 1990 to 2024*



**Figure 7**

Frequency of Types of Study Designs of Included Studies (n = 96)



Two coders were assigned to each study during screening and data extraction to ensure consistency and check for interrater reliability, following the Campbell Collaboration guidelines.

Prior to data analysis, the dataset was cleaned to eliminate errors, duplicates, and missing studies. Duplicates were identified and coded according to a predetermined form (see [Appendix G](#)).

This Evidence Gap Map (EGM) includes both working papers and published studies that meet the eligibility criteria and report on interventions and outcomes relevant to the EGM.

(2017) with independent assessments by pairs of reviewers and resolution of disagreements through discussion, no systematic reviews were identified in our evidence and gap map. In line with guidance for evidence maps ([Snilstveit et al., 2016](#); [White et al., 2020](#)), we did not assess the risk of bias or methodological quality of primary studies.

### Tools for Assessing Risk of Bias/Study Quality of Included Reviews

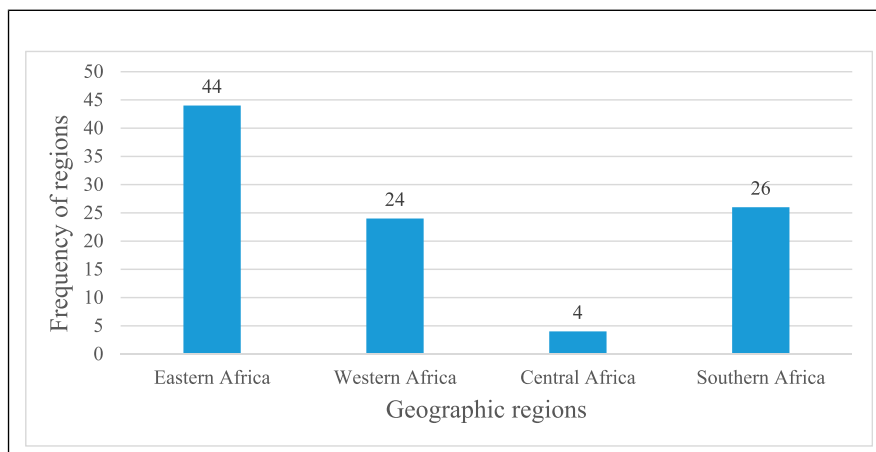
Although we planned to assess the quality of systematic reviews using the AMSTAR 2 tool ([Shea et al.,](#)

### Methods for Mapping

We utilized the EPPI mapping tool to create our evidence gap map (EGM). EPPI-Mapper is a tool from the EPPI-Centre designed specifically for visualizing coded data from EPPI-Reviewer. The two tools are often used

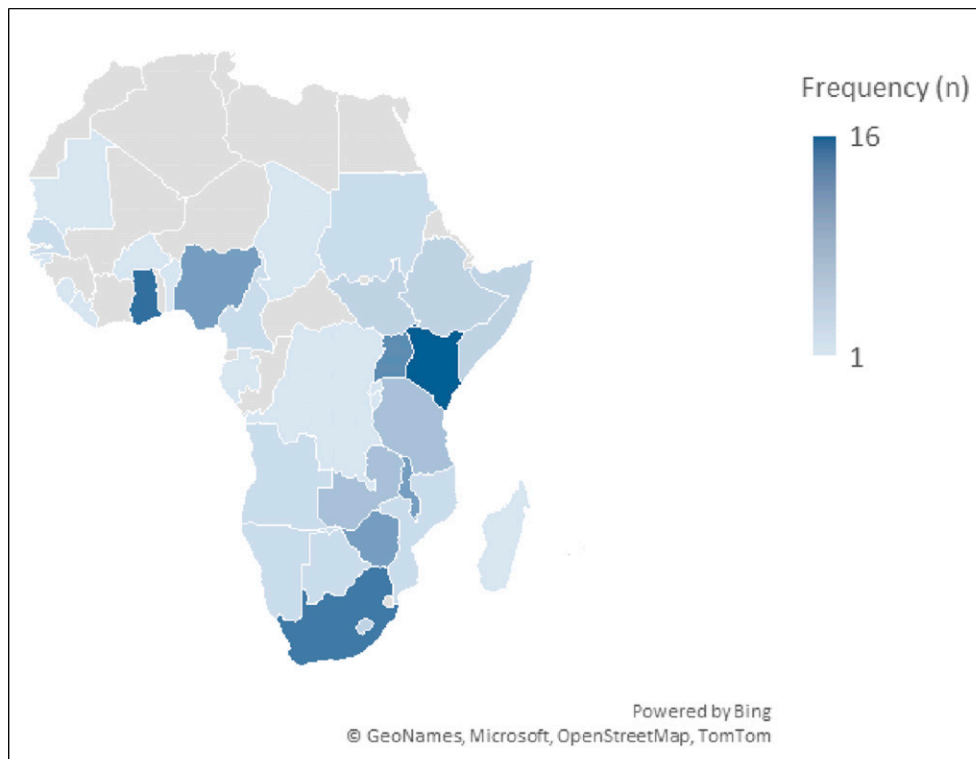
**Figure 8**

Frequency of Geographic Regions of Included Studies (n = 98)



**Figure 9**

*Geographic Heat Map of Included Studies*



together: once studies are coded in EPPI-Reviewer, the data is exported and uploaded into EPPI-Mapper to generate an interactive, web-based EGM. These maps allow stakeholders to identify where high-quality evidence exists, where evidence is limited or missing, and how findings vary across different populations or contexts (EPPI-Centre, 2023).

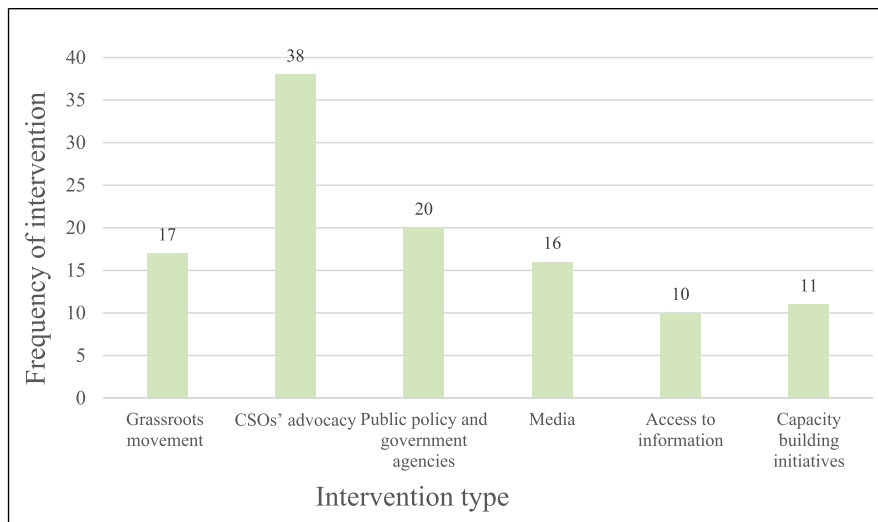
**Results**

**Results of the Search**

A total of 37,559 studies were identified from academic databases, gray literature, and machine learning sources, including OpenAlex in EPPI-Reviewer. The machine

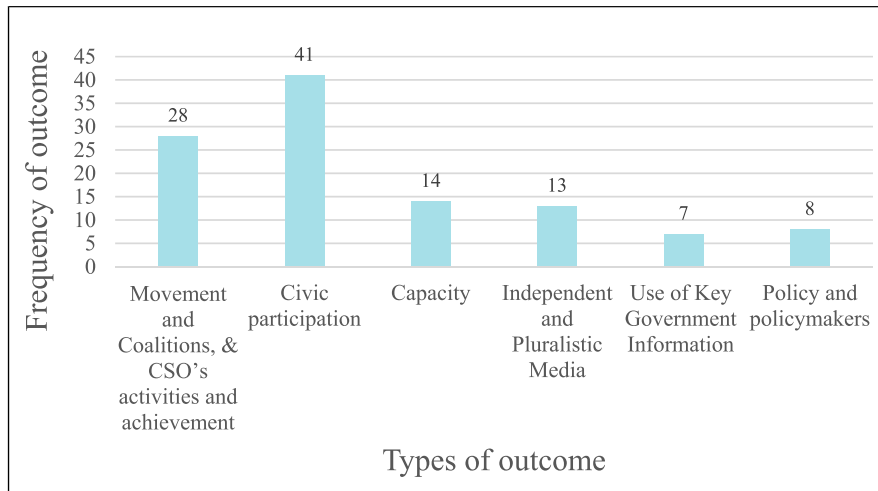
**Figure 10**

*Frequency of Types of Intervention of Included Studies (n = 112)*



**Figure 11**

Frequency of Types of Outcome of Included Studies (n = 111)

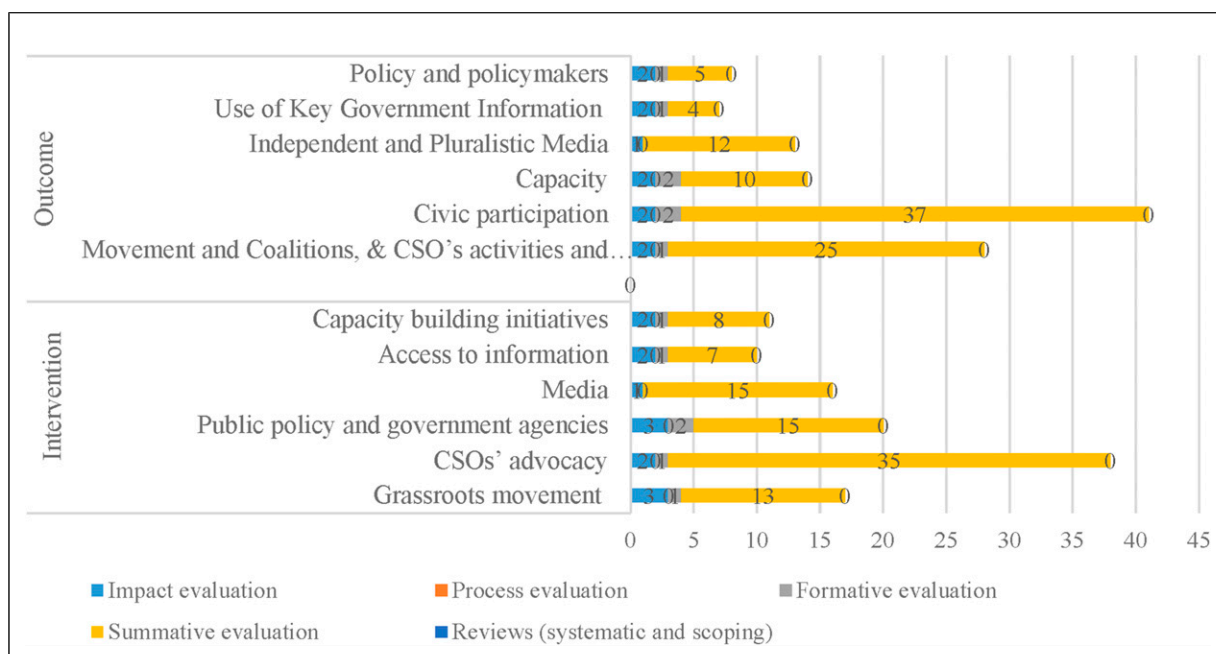


learning source, thus the OpenAlex feature in EPPI-Reviewer, was employed to ensure that all relevant records or studies have not been missed but included from every possible database or source. The OpenAlex really contributed unique records totaling 11,023. OpenAlex is a machine learning system that pulls data from vast open-access sources, including Microsoft Academic Graph (MAG), PubMed, arXiv, DataCite, and institutional repositories. It was launched in January 2022 and is similar to Google Scholar. After removing 16,940 duplicates, 20,619 studies were screened based on their titles and

abstracts, leading to the retention of 1,508 studies for full-text review. Of these, 88 studies met the eligibility criteria and were coded for inclusion in the evidence map (see Figure 3). Figure 3 also shows the screening stages as part of the EGM process. At the title and abstract stage, 20,619 papers were screened out of the total 37,559 records, after duplicates were removed. This stage was done by team members. Reconciliation to address differences was done, after which the included studies were pushed into the next stage, which is the full text stage. At this stage, 1,508 papers were included.

**Figure 12**

Distribution of Studies on Categories of Outcome and Intervention by Types of Evaluation of Included Studies



**Table 3***Structure of Report*


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Abstract
Abbreviations and acronyms
Plain language summary
Background
Objectives
Methods
Figure 1: Conceptual framework.
Table 1: Intervention categories, sub-categories, and definitions.
Table 2: Outcome domain, sub-categories, and examples.
Figure 2: Screening tool for assessing eligible studies.
Table 3: Structure of report.
Table 4: Filter dimensions and descriptions.
Results
Figure 3: PRISMA flowchart.
Table 5: Reasons for exclusion of studies at full text screening.
Table 6: Examples of excluded studies.
Figure 4: A snapshot of the EGM.
Figure 5: Trends of publications by interventions from 1990 to 2024.
Figure 6: Trends of publications by outcomes from 1990 to 2024.
Table 7: Frequency of publications type of included studies in the EGM.
Table 8: Frequency of evaluation types of included studies.
Figure 7: Frequency of types of study designs of included studies.
Figure 8: Frequency of geographic regions of included studies.
Figure 9: Geographic heat map of included studies.
Figure 10: Frequency of types of intervention of included studies.
Table 9: Frequency of categories and sub-categories of interventions of included studies.
Figure 11: Frequency of types of outcome of included studies.
Table 10: Frequency of categories and sub-categories of outcomes of included studies.
Table 11: Aggregate map of intervention by outcome categories of the included studies.
Table 12: Distribution of intervention and outcome categories against types of study designs of included studies.
Table 13: Distribution of evidence on intervention and outcome types against geographical regions.
Figure 12: Distribution of studies on categories of outcome and intervention by types of evaluation of included studies.
Discussion
Potential biases in the mapping process
Authors conclusion
Acknowledgement
References

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However, 1,420 papers were excluded and could not be pushed into the data extraction stage. This is because most of the studies were not according to our PICOS, including language other than English and French, unavailability of PDFs, and other reasons as outlined in the PRISMA chat.

## Excluded Studies

### **Reason for Excluding Studies**

Studies were excluded at the full-text screening for various reasons, as shown in Table 5. Some of the reasons for excluding papers were ineligible country of study ( $n = 104$ ), ineligible study population ( $n = 117$ ), ineligible intervention ( $n = 544$ ), and ineligible outcome ( $n = 60$ ).

### **Potentially Eligible Studies (Characteristics of Some Excluded Studies)**

Table 6 presents the characteristics of studies that were identified as potentially eligible but were not included in the map, along with the various reasons for their exclusion.

## Synthesis of Included Studies

### **Characteristics of the EGM**

The current interactive Evidence Gap Map (EGM) includes 88 studies, consisting of 87 completed studies and 1 ongoing study across sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (see Table 7). This map offers an overview of existing evidence while identifying gaps related to interventions that promote inclusive

**Table 4***Filter Dimensions and Descriptions*

Dimensions of filter	Description
Region	List of study regions based on World Bank categorization: Eastern Africa, Western Africa, Southern Africa, and Central Africa.
Country	The list of countries in the study regions is presented in the EGM. We have a total of 48 countries: 12 from Eastern Africa, 20 from Western Africa, 9 from Southern Africa, and 7 from Central Africa.
Types of evaluation	The types of evaluations used as filters in the EGM include impact evaluations, process evaluations, summative evaluations, formative evaluations, and both systematic and scoping reviews.
Study design	The studies utilized various types of study designs as filters. The Evidence gap Map (EGM) identified four main categories of study designs: experimental, non-experimental (which includes quasi-experimental and regression-based studies), qualitative, and modelling studies, along with reviews (both systematic and scoping reviews).
Year of publication	The EGM specifies the publication date of the paper in a journal, rather than the date it was indexed online. The current EGM includes publication years ranging from 1990 to 2024.
Type of publication	This includes a list of publication outlets for the studies. We considered nine types of publications: peer-reviewed articles, preprints in peer-reviewed journals, reports, conference papers, working papers, discussion papers, dissertations, protocols, and book chapters.
Status of studies	We considered two categories for the publication status of the studies: completed and ongoing.

governance for underserved populations from 1990 to 2024. The results show a significant increase in publications on these interventions starting in 2013 (see [Figure 5](#)). Additionally, there is a gradual rise in publications regarding Civic Participation and Movements and Coalitions from 2013, peaking in 2022 (see [Figure 6](#)). The rise in publication trend after 2013 is a result of governance approach ([Annahar et al., 2023](#)). Globally, the policy agenda shifted from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which started around 2013. Again, in Africa, 2013 marked a period of renewed commitment to increase the participation of women, youth, and the poor in decision-making. [Figures 5 and 6](#) display completed and published studies from 1990 onward, excluding ongoing studies without publication dates. Most studies in the evidence and gap map are peer-reviewed articles (86.4%), followed by academic dissertations at 8% and reports at 3.4% (see [Table 7](#)).

**Type of Evidence**

Most of the studies included in the EGM were summative evaluations ( $n = 80$ ; 90.9%). Only a small number were impact evaluations ( $n = 4$ ) and formative evaluations ( $n = 4$ ) ([Table 8](#)). Regarding study designs, studies were coded under multiple methodological categories. The majority combined qualitative studies ( $n = 67$ ), followed by non-experimental studies ( $n = 27$ ) ([Figure 7](#)). The EGM did not include any modeling or systematic review studies.

**Evidence by Geographic Regions**

The Eastern Africa region ( $n = 44$ ) had the highest concentration of evidence on the relationship between inclusive governance interventions for underserved populations, compared with other geographic regions ([Figure 8](#)). The Western Africa region

( $n = 24$ ) had slightly less evidence than Southern Africa ( $n = 24$ ) regions. The Central Africa region had the least representation ( $n = 4$ ) among the studies included in the EGM ([Figure 8](#)).

Of the 48 countries involved in the EGM, 33 had at least one recorded study. Kenya had the highest number of studies, with 16, followed by Ghana with 14, South Africa with 13, and Uganda with 11. In contrast, Burundi, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Benin each had only one study recorded, making them the least studied populations in this EGM ([Figure 8](#); [Supporting Information S1: Result 1](#)). [Figure 9](#) features a heat map illustrating the geographical distribution of the included studies.

**Intervention Categories**

The EGM involved six intervention categories ([Figure 10](#)). Among the included studies, advocacy by civil society

**Table 5***Reasons for Exclusion of Studies at Full Text Screening*

Studies	Frequency ( $n$ )	Share (%)
Excluded (reasons)		
Language	9	0.63
Year	11	0.77
Country: SSA	104	7.32
Target group	117	8.24
Intervention	544	38.31
Study design	118	8.31
Outcome	60	4.23
Duplicates	203	14.30
Second rounds of checks	153	10.77
No PDF/full text available	101	7.11
Total	1420	100.0

**Table 6***Examples of Excluded Studies*

Author	Title	Excluded on
Aiyar (2015)	Inclusive governance for inclusive development	Country (SSA)
Abdulai (2022)	Freedom of information law and good governance: The curse of corruption in Sierra Leone	Population
Akowe et al. (2023)	The role of deliberate inclusive policy on Women participation in governance in Kogi State	Population
Abakah (2018)	Participation without a voice? Rural women's experiences and participation in local governance activities in the Abura–Asebu–Kwamankese district of Ghana	Intervention
Werner (2019)	From inclusive governance to peace: exploring African governance systems	Outcome

organizations (CSOs) was the most extensively researched category, with 38 studies. The concentration of studies on CSO advocacy implies that the current evidence landscape and research priorities to ascertain the contributions of CSOs towards development (WACSI, 2023). In contrast, access to information received minimal attention (Figure 10). Within the CSO advocacy category, the active participation of women and youth was the most researched sub-category, comprising 22 studies (Table 9). The category of public policy and government agencies showed that inclusive and responsive governance frameworks were studied most frequently, with 15 studies. The liberalization of media spaces was the most examined topic within the Media category, with 11 studies (Table 9). Access to information was the least researched intervention (Figure 10 and Table 9). Notable evidence gaps included a limited number of studies on mobilizing resources for movements and coalitions ( $n = 1$ ) in the Grassroots movement category, gender sensitivity culture in media ( $n = 2$ ) within the Media category, and no studies on capacity-building and direct support for media personnel and journalists in the capacity-building initiatives category (Table 9). This information gap calls for further research into the less studied thematic areas, especially on access to information. This is because the UN highlights a critical role that access to information plays in sustainable development (Aguiler Delgado & Perez-Aleman, 2021).

**Outcome Categories**

The outcomes of interest in the EGM fell into six broad categories: movement and coalitions, civic participation, capacity, independent and pluralistic media, use of key government information, and policy and policymakers (Figure 11). Civic participation ( $n = 41$ ) was the most frequently studied major outcome domain, compared with movement and coalitions, and CSO activities and achievements ( $n = 28$ ), capacity outcomes ( $n = 14$ ). Independent and pluralistic media outcome accounted to ( $n = 13$ ), use of key government information ( $n = 7$ ), and policy and policymakers ( $n = 8$ ).

In terms of evidence by sub-categories outcome domains, participation in governance ( $n = 35$ ) and civic participation in

coalition and movement ( $n = 16$ ) were the most frequently examined within the civic participation major outcome category. Within the movement and coalitions major outcome category, participation of local communities in campaigns ( $n = 19$ ) and influence of grassroots and CSO's on public policies ( $n = 15$ ) were predominant compared with funding to movements ( $n = 2$ ) and partnerships ( $n = 2$ ) which were the least studied.

Similarly, evidence related to media coverage of under-served groups ( $n = 8$ ) appeared less frequently in the independent and pluralistic media major outcome category, whereas global right to information ratings ( $n = 4$ ) were less common, and no evidence was identified for the rule of law index ( $n = 0$ ) under use of key government information category. Also, very limited evidence exists on public participation in budgets ( $n = 1$ ), the corruption perception index ( $n = 2$ ), and the global open data index ( $n = 0$ ).

Evidence on capacity-related major outcomes category focused exclusively on strengthening the capacity of grassroots movements, CSOs, media, and policymakers ( $n = 14$ ). Similarly, all eight studies within the policy and policymakers category examined knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors of policymakers and other key actors.

**Table 7***Frequency of Publications Type of Included Studies in the EGM ( $n = 88$ )*

Publication type	Frequency ( $n$ )	Percentage
Peer review article	76	86.4
Pre-print peer review article	1	1.1
Report	3	3.4
Conference paper	0	0
Working paper	0	0
Discussion paper	1	1.1
Dissertation	7	8.0
Protocol	0	0
Book chapter	0	0
Total	88	100.0

**Table 8***Frequency of Evaluation Types of Included Studies*

Evaluation type	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Impact evaluation	4	4.5
Formative evaluation	4	4.5
Process evaluation	0	0
Summative evaluation	80	90.9
Reviews	0	0
Total	88	100

**Aggregate Map of Evidence: Outcome Versus Intervention Categories**

An aggregate map of evidence shows a broad overview of structured thematic areas with more studies or evidence in the EGM. Table 11 presents the aggregate map of evidence of the intervention versus the outcome categories of the studies included.

The result show that, CSOs advocacy and movements and coalitions & CSOs' activities and achievements outcome; and public policy and government agencies and civic participation outcome were the most studied major

intervention versus outcome categories in this EGM. CSOs' advocacy major intervention category and civic participation major outcome category; grassroots movement major intervention category against civic participation major outcome category; and media major intervention category and independent and pluralistic media major outcome category were thematic areas moderately studied. There is less evidence on interventions that tackle access to information to promote capacity outcome; grassroots movement and independent and pluralistic media outcome; CSOs' advocacy and use of key government information outcome; Capacity building initiatives and independent and pluralistic media outcome; and media and use of key government information outcome.

For CSOs' advocacy as an intervention category, there are studies related to multiple sub-intervention categories. Here, 23 studies related to Movement and Coalitions, and CSO's activities and achievement, 16 on Civic participation, and 5 on Capacity as sub- intervention categories. Grassroots movement category includes interventions aimed at Grassroots and CSOs influence on public policies, and Participation of local communities in the activities and campaigns of movements and coalitions, with 9 studies for Movement and Coalitions, & CSO's activities and achievement, 11 for Civic participation, and 7 for Capacity.

**Table 9***Frequency of Categories and Sub-Categories of Interventions of Included Studies*

Categories and sub-categories of interventions	Frequency (n)
<b>Grassroots movement</b>	17
Developing and strengthening grassroots	11
Mobilizing resources (movements & coalitions)	1
Collective actions and campaigns	11
<b>CSOs' advocacy</b>	38
Developing local philanthropic networks & initiatives	9
Alliance building, advocacy and lobbying	15
Active participation of women and youth	22
<b>Public policy and government agencies</b>	20
Inclusive and responsive governance frameworks	15
Creating awareness (public policies & governance mechanisms)	8
<b>Media</b>	16
Liberalization of media spaces	11
Diversified media programs	8
Elevation of underserved populations voices	9
Gender sensitivity culture in media	2
<b>Access to information</b>	10
Accessibility of local and national information	6
Official information & documents (local languages)	2
Right to information policy	6
<b>Capacity building initiatives</b>	11
Capacity building for grassroots and CSOs	5
Capacity building initiatives (national, public & local agencies)	6
Capacity-building and direct support (media personnel & journalists)	0

**Table 10***Frequency of Categories and Sub-Categories of Outcomes of Included Studies*

Categories and sub-categories of outcomes	Frequency (n)
<b>Movement and Coalitions, &amp; CSO's activities and achievement</b>	28
Funding to movements and coalitions	2
Participation of local communities in the activities and campaigns of movements and coalitions	19
Grassroots and CSOs influence on public policies	15
Civic awareness	6
Partnerships	2
<b>Civic participation</b>	41
Civic participation in coalitions and movements	16
Civic participation in governance	35
Social, cultural and political change	5
<b>Capacity</b>	14
Capacity of grassroots movements, CSOs, media and policy makers	14
<b>Independent and pluralistic media</b>	13
Enhanced Civic Space	11
Media coverage of undeserved groups	8
<b>Use of key government information</b>	7
Global right to information rating	4
Rule of law index	0
Public participation in budgets	1
Corruption perception index	2
Global Open data index	0
<b>Policy and policymakers</b>	8
Knowledge, attitude, or behavior of policymakers, the public, or other key actors	8

### **Distribution of Evidence on Outcome and Intervention Categories by Study Designs of Included Studies**

Most of the studies included in the analysis utilized non-experimental designs to evaluate the inclusive governance interventions on various outcomes. Specifically, there were 81 qualitative studies addressing both outcome and

intervention categories. None of the studies employed experimental designs or randomized control trials. Among those reporting on civic participation outcomes, the majority were summative evaluations ( $n = 37$ ) (Figure 12). Similarly, most studies focused on movements, coalitions, and the activities and achievements of civil society organizations (CSOs) were

**Table 11***Aggregate Map of Intervention by Outcome Categories of the Included Studies*

Intervention	Outcome					
	Movement and coalitions, & CSO's activities and achievement	Civic participation	Capacity	Independent and pluralistic media	Use of key government information	Policy and policymakers
Grassroots movement	9	11	7	1	2	2
CSOs' advocacy	23	16	5	3	1	4
Public policy and government agencies	3	18	3	1	2	3
Media	2	5	2	10	1	2
Access to information	2	2	1	3	6	3
Capacity building initiatives	2	6	8	1	3	2

**Table 12***Distribution of Intervention and Outcome Categories Against Types of Study Designs of Included Studies*

Attributes	Study design				
	Experimental	Non-experimental	Qualitative (case studies and other qualitative studies)	Modeling studies	Reviews (systematic and scoping)
<b>Intervention types</b>					
Grassroots movement	0	9 (21.4)	11 (13.6)	0	0
CSOs' advocacy	0	9 (21.4)	32 (39.5)	0	0
Public policy and government agencies	0	9 (21.4)	12 (14.8)	0	0
Media	0	4 (9.5)	13 (16.0)	0	0
Access to information	0	3 (7.1)	7 (8.6)	0	0
Capacity building initiatives	0	8 (19.0)	6 (7.4)	0	0
Total	0	42 (100)	81 (100)	0	0
<b>Outcomes types</b>					
Movement and Coalitions, & CSO's activities and achievement	0	5 (12.8)	23 (28.4)	0	0
Civic participation	0	18 (46.2)	29 (35.8)	0	0
Capacity	0	7 (17.9)	9 (11.1)	0	0
Independent and pluralistic media	0	4 (10.3)	9 (11.1)	0	0
Use of key government information	0	3 (7.7)	5 (6.2)	0	0
Policy and policymakers	0	2 (5.1)	6 (7.4)	0	0
Total	0	39 (100)	81 (100)	0	0

**Table 13***Distribution of Evidence on Intervention and Outcome Types Against Geographical Regions*

Attributes	Geographical regions			
	Eastern Africa (n, %)	Western Africa (n, %)	Central Africa (n, %)	Southern Africa (n, %)
<b>Intervention</b>				
Grassroots movement	8 (15.1)	8 (20.5)	2 (28.6)	2 (6.3)
CSOs' advocacy	21 (39.6)	12 (30.8)	1 (14.3)	9 (28.1)
Public policy and government agencies	7 (13.2)	5 (12.8)	1 (14.3)	10 (31.3)
Media	7 (13.2)	5 (12.8)	1 (14.3)	3 (9.4)
Access to information	3 (5.7)	5 (12.8)	1 (14.3)	6 (18.8)
Capacity building initiatives	7 (13.2)	4 (10.3)	1 (14.3)	2 (6.3)
Total	53 (100)	39 (100)	7 (100)	32 (100)
<b>Outcome</b>				
Movement and Coalitions, & CSO's activities and achievement	12 (22.6)	11 (29.7)	0 (0)	6 (20.7)
Civic participation	20 (37.7)	11 (29.7)	2 (40)	12 (41.4)
Capacity	7 (13.2)	6 (16.2)	0 (0)	1 (3.4)
Independent and pluralistic media	5 (9.4)	3 (8.1)	1 (20)	4 (13.8)
Use of key government information	4 (7.5)	3 (8.1)	1 (20)	4 (13.8)
Policy and policymakers	5 (9.4)	3 (8.1)	1 (20)	2 (6.9)
Total	53 (100)	37 (100)	5 (100)	29 (100)

also summative evaluations ( $n = 25$ ). Notably, there were no process evaluations or systematic reviews across the different interventions and outcome categories in the included studies (Figure 12).

### **Distribution of Evidence on Intervention and Outcome Categories by Geographical Regions**

Table 13 presents the distribution of intervention and outcome categories by geographic regions among the studies included in the EGM. The Eastern Africa region had the highest number of studies for both interventions ( $n = 53$ ) and outcomes ( $n = 53$ ), while the Central Africa region recorded the fewest studies for interventions ( $n = 7$ ) and outcomes ( $n = 5$ ). In the East Africa region, Uganda was the most studied country regarding CSO advocacy interventions ( $n = 8$ ). This is because, efforts to support CSO advocacy interventions in Uganda gained momentum around the 1990s onwards, as a third pillar of inclusive development (Mugisha et al., 2019). On the other hand, Kenya led in studies on civic participation outcomes ( $n = 8$ ) (see Supporting Information S3: Result 3 and Supporting Information S4: Result 4). Media-related studies were found in Zimbabwe ( $n = 3$ ) and Nigeria ( $n = 2$ ) (see Supporting Information S5: Result 5). Ghana also had the highest number of studies on grassroots movements ( $n = 8$ ), followed by Kenya ( $n = 6$ ) and Malawi ( $n = 5$ ) among the studies included in the EGM (see Supporting Information S5: Result 5). Additionally, studies conducted in Ghana ( $n = 15$ ), Uganda ( $n = 8$ ), and South Africa ( $n = 4$ ) focused on the outcomes of movements, coalitions, and CSO activities and achievements (see Supporting Information S6: Result 6).

## **Discussion**

### **Summary of Main Results**

**Main Findings.** The current Evidence Gap Map (EGM) highlights the existing evidence and gaps regarding the connections between inclusive governance interventions and outcomes on underserved populations in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Over the past two decades, evidence in this area has steadily increased. We identified 88 studies, including one ongoing study, spanning 48 countries across SSA. The Eastern African region contains the largest body of literature on the relationship between interventions and outcomes, surpassing Southern, Western, and Central Africa.

Among the various intervention categories, civil society organization (CSO) advocacy was the most extensively researched, while civic participation emerged as the most studied outcome category. Although 88 studies were included, evidence linking inclusive governance interventions to outcomes remains limited in several respects: there are relatively few rigorous impact evaluations, geographic coverage is uneven across SSA, and direct causal pathways between interventions and outcomes are not consistently examined. Notably, the relationship between CSO advocacy and movements and coalitions, as well as between CSO activities and achievement outcomes, featured the

most substantial clusters of evidence, indicating potential areas for future synthesis. The studies identified in the EGM were predominantly summative evaluations, with no process evaluations or reviews found.

### **Areas of Major Gaps in the Evidence**

The distribution of evidence across sub-Saharan Africa is uneven with certain regions and intervention types receiving substantial attention while others remain underrepresented (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2020). Eastern Africa emerges as the most studied region, driven by the prominence of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, reflecting long-standing civic engagement, diverse civil society actors, and established governance reforms (McGee & Gaventa, 2011). In contrast, Central Africa is markedly underrepresented, highlighting persistent challenges in generating evidence in fragile or conflict-affected settings (Charbit, 2011). Western and Southern Africa show moderate evidence coverage, but several countries including Benin, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Burundi feature only sporadically, revealing gaps in understanding inclusive governance across diverse political contexts (Kock & Gaskins, 2014).

Across intervention categories, civil society organization (CSO) advocacy dominates the evidence base, followed by civic participation and grassroots movements. Media and access-to-information interventions are comparatively sparse, with few studies examining their role in promoting inclusion, transparency, and accountability. Similarly, capacity-building interventions targeting government institutions are limited, reflecting challenges in implementation and evaluation (Charbit, 2011; Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2020).

Outcome evidence is also uneven. Civic participation outcomes are most frequently reported, whereas evidence on policymaker behaviours, information use, and systemic transformations remains limited. Methodologically, the majority of studies are qualitative or non-experimental, constraining causal inference and limiting insights into the effectiveness of interventions (Odei Obeng-Amoako et al., 2023; Saran & White, 2018).

Overall, this EGM highlights key structural gaps: uneven geographic representation, methodological limitations, under-evaluation of access-to-information and media interventions, and limited evidence on state-actor responsiveness. These less studied thematic areas show the gap in evidence among the included studies. Addressing these gaps is critical to generating high-quality, context-specific evidence that can inform inclusive, accountable governance strategies across SSA, particularly for underserved populations such as ethnic minorities, informal settlement dwellers, smallholder farmers, and sexual minorities (Lane et al., 2023; Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2020).

### **Potential Biases in the Mapping Process**

We used a comprehensive search strategy, covering published literature from 1990 up to 2024, with independent title,

abstract, and full-text screening by pairs of reviewers, resolving disagreements through discussion and consensus. Although we had planned to assess the quality of systematic reviews using the AMSTAR 2 tool (Shea et al., 2017), no reviews were identified, and in line with guidance for evidence and gap maps (Snilstveit et al., 2016; White et al., 2020), we did not assess the methodological quality or risk of bias of primary studies.

Potential sources of bias in the mapping process include reliance on English-language databases, exclusion of reference list screening, and the possibility of missing gray literature, unpublished research, or recently completed studies. These factors may have limited the comprehensiveness of the evidence captured.

### **Limitations of the EGM**

This EGM identified 88 studies that focused on the specific interventions and outcomes within the defined scope of our review. While these studies provide valuable insights, it is possible that other research on inclusive governance was not captured, particularly studies that did not measure the outcomes of interest specified in our PICOS framework. Additionally, critical appraisal of the included studies was beyond the scope of this mapping exercise. Again, it was beyond the scope of the interventions to provide a critical appraisal.

### **Stakeholder Engagement Throughout the EGM Process**

Stakeholder engagement remained consistent throughout the EGM process. The authors collaborated closely with the Campbell Collaboration to develop this EGM.

## **Authors' Conclusions**

This Evidence and Gap Map (EGM) consolidates and enhances the visibility of existing evidence on inclusive governance interventions, providing a single, accessible resource for policymakers, researchers, funders, and other stakeholders. The EGM includes studies predominantly from impact and summative evaluations, covering more than two decades and spanning the 48 countries in the sub-Saharan Africa region, with a particular concentration in Kenya, South Africa, Uganda and Ghana.

Our analysis indicates that certain aspects of inclusive governance, such as civic participation, movement and coalitions & CSOs activities and achievement outcomes are relatively well-documented. In contrast, other outcome dimensions, such as the use of key government information, remain under-studied. Regional disparities are also evident, with Eastern Africa receiving the majority of research attention, while Central Africa remains under-represented.

Overall, the EGM highlights both evidence clusters that present opportunities for further synthesis and policy application, as well as significant gaps that require targeted research. This resource provides a foundation for informed decision-making and supports the strategic planning of future

evaluations and interventions to strengthen inclusive governance across the studied regions.

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### **Data Availability Statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

### **Plans for Updating the EGM**

The update process for the Evidence and Gap Map (EGM) will be managed by the core research or review team that developed it. A lead evidence synthesis specialist or systematic review coordinator will be appointed to oversee the updates, ensuring they align with the original framework and coding structure. This role involves conducting regular literature searches, screening and coding new studies, and incorporating them into the existing EGM matrix. To ensure transparency and accuracy, all updates will adhere to the same rigorous

protocol established for the original EGM, which includes double screening and standardized data extraction. EGM updates will take place every 2 years. This schedule facilitates the timely integration of new evidence while maintaining quality control. Each update cycle will conclude with a brief summary report outlining the number of new studies added, any modifications to the coding framework, and significant changes in evidence coverage. This approach ensures that the EGM remains a dynamic tool that accurately reflects the evolving evidence base.

### Differences Between Protocol and Full Report

After submitting the standardized protocol to the Campbell Systematic Review Journal, minor modifications were made to the search strategy, including the removal of the French language requirement.

### Link to Online Interactive EGM

<https://products.iced-eval.org/egm-inclusive-governance.html>.

### Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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## Appendix

### Abbreviations and acronyms

CDD	Center for Democratic Development
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EGM	Evidence and Gap Map
E2A	Evidence to Action
ICED	International Centre for Evaluation and Development
PICOS	Population Intervention Comparison Outcome Study design
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
ToC	Theory of Change
WIEGO	Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing.