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The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) develops evidence on how to effectively transform the lives of the poor in low- and middle-income countries. Established in 2008, we offer comprehensive support and a diversity of approaches to achieve development goals by producing, synthesizing, and promoting the uptake of impact evaluation evidence. We work closely with governments, foundations, NGOs, development institutions, and research organizations to address their decision-making needs. With offices in Washington DC, New Delhi, and London, and a global network of leading researchers, we offer deep expertise across our extensive menu of evaluation services.

## 3ie evidence gap maps

3ie [evidence gap maps](#) (EGMs) are thematic collections of information about impact evaluations and systematic reviews that measure the effects of international development policies and programs. The maps provide a visual display of completed and ongoing systematic reviews and impact evaluations in a sector or sub-sector, structured around a framework of interventions and outcomes. In line with the principles of transparent and reproducible research, this EGM protocol provides all the supporting documentation for the map, including the background information for the theme of the map, and the methods that will be applied to systematically search and screen the evidence base, extract and analyze data, and develop the EGM report.

## About this evidence gap map protocol

This report presents the protocol for an Evidence Gap Map. It outlines a systematic process to identify impact evaluations, qualitative evaluations, and systematic reviews of the effects of private sector engagement interventions on sustainable development in L&MICs. The EGM will be developed by 3ie, funded through a grant agreement from Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. The content of this report is the sole responsibility of the authors and does not represent the opinions of 3ie, GIZ, or its Board of Commissioners. Any errors and omissions are also the sole responsibility of the authors. Please direct any comments or queries to the corresponding author, Tomasz Kozakiewicz, at [tkozakiewicz@3ieimpact.org](mailto:tkozakiewicz@3ieimpact.org).

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# **The effects of private sector engagement (PSE) interventions on inclusive and sustainable development outcomes in low- and middle-income countries: An evidence gap map**

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## **EGM Protocol**

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## Acronyms

3ie	International Initiative for Impact Evaluation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EGM	Evidence Gap Map
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
HIC	High-income country
L&MIC	Low- and middle-income countries
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPP	Public-private partnerships
PSD	Private Sector Development
PSE	Private Sector Engagement
MSMEs	Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training

# 1. Context

## 1.1 The private sector has a growing role in achieving SDG goals

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) stress the need for global partnerships among governments, the private sector, civil society, and international organizations to mobilize resources (UN 2021). In L&MICs, private sector involvement is key to economic growth, sustainable development, and poverty reduction without distorting competition (Pérez-Pineda & Wehrmann 2021). Trade, foreign investment, and remittances now outweigh traditional aid, while fiscal austerity and shifting donor priorities add pressure on international assistance (Abbas 2021; Gillani et al. 2023; Morozkina 2019). This resulted in substantial financial gaps in Official Development Assistance (ODA) for achieving the SDGs (International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) 2024).

Private sector engagement (PSE) involves active private-sector participation in development, including shared decision-making, implementation, costs, and risks. (OECD 2016; DCED 2019; SECO 2019). This can facilitate greater ownership of development programs and policies by governments and private sector actors, while also increasing tax revenues to support the economic sustainability of these initiatives. Ideally, such programs would be financed by governments and private sector actors, and aligned with the economic and development priorities of both types of actors. (European Commission 2014). Such collaboration fosters equal partnerships between public and private actors, aligning efforts toward common development goals (SECO 2021). PSE can also improve cost-effectiveness in development efforts (Grimsey and Lewis 2005), and it holds the potential for supporting recovery, mitigation of climate risks, and social cohesion, including in humanitarian crises, disasters, and conflict-affected settings (UNDP 2023).

## 1.2 What is Private Sector Engagement (PSE)?

For the purpose of this map, in line with the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED 2022), we define PSE as activities that actively involve the private sector as a partner in delivery, investor, or co-financer of development efforts in L&MICs. It can vary in collaboration length (short or long-term), level of formality (informal or formal), and sector focus (health, education, energy, governance, or other). It leverages the assets, networks, creativity, and expertise of the private sector to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes as part of international cooperation (DCED 2022) and partnerships between in-country actors (Whyle and Olivier 2016).

PSE differs from private sector development (PSD), as the latter broadly supports improving the business environment for local businesses in partner countries (Habbel et al. 2021). PSD focuses on strengthening the local private sector through regulatory improvements and market development, especially in supporting small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to be more competitive. PSE can be conceived as a means of implementation for broader private sector development as it engages private actors in strategies such as improving business and investment environments, improving access to finance, enterprise development support/entrepreneurship skills training, and incubator programs, which are typical of private sector development. In the SDGs framework, PSD is a strategic development goal objective in the agenda of governments,

whereas PSE is an approach to achieving multiple development goals, including those related to PSD (DCED 2025).

### 1.3 PSE: Who are the key actors?

Private sector engagement (PSE) involves multiple actors working together. DCED identifies two main PSE strategies (DCED 2019). First, public sector actors to partner with other private sector actors through financial aid, knowledge sharing, capacity-building, and policy dialogue aligned with their business operations. Second, engaging financial actors - such as investors, funds, and development finance institutions - to mobilize or direct private capital toward SDG-aligned projects.

PSE generally involves public sector actors partnering with private sector actors (Di Bella et al. 2013; United Nations Commission on Life-Saving Commodities 2014; Habbel et al., 2021; DCED 2022). Often, additional hybrid sector partners or other development sector partners also join PSE efforts. The various actors who participate in PSE are described in Table 1.

Public sector actors are not limited to governments of ODA partner countries, governmental bodies, development banks, ministries, and bilateral and multilateral agencies active in ODA and policy-making processes. They also include the broader public service delivery sector in the form of education, health, and other national, regional, and local-level social service institutions.

**Table 1: Defining private sector engagement actors**

Type	Actor	Definition	Typical role
Public sector	ODA partner countries	Local and central government, public officials, ministries, public educational institutions, public government hospitals, anticorruption bodies, or human rights commissions	Create enabling environments, foster collaboration, ensure accountability, align private efforts with national development priorities, and providers of services and new interventions
	OECD DAC members or emerging donors	Ministries and their bilateral agencies that provide development or humanitarian aid in the form of ODA.	Offer funding, expertise, and access to local networks, facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships and dialogues, and advocate for responsible business practices.
	Development Finance Institutions	Government-backed financial institutions operating at the multilateral, bilateral, or national level.	Provide direct financing, blended finance, guarantees, advisory, and technical assistance.
	Multilateral organizations	United Nations and other multilateral or regional institutions	Provide funding or leverage private sector finance, implement projects, and support multilateral policy dialogues and standard-setting initiatives

Type	Actor	Definition	Typical role
<b>Private sector</b>	Companies	Profit-seeking organizations with a majority private ownership: financial institutions and intermediaries, multinational companies, micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, co-operatives, and individual entrepreneurs engaged in structured market activities <sup>1</sup>	Provide expertise, resources, and implementation capacity, with MSMEs requiring tailored support and large firms with greater capacity for contributing to activities at scale; incorporate innovations, responsible business, and corporate social responsibility practices
	Chambers of Commerce and business associations	Entities that represent groups of private companies to advocate for shared interests	Engage in policy dialogue, provide guidance, promote investment, improve their service offers, partner in technical education, and support new associations
<b>Hybrid sector</b>	Foundations and private philanthropy	Non-governmental entities, often funded by individuals, families, or corporations	Leverage financial resources and expertise, provide operational flexibility, capacity for innovation, and risk-taking.
	Social enterprises	Organizations that use commercial activities to address SDGs but prioritize public benefit over profit	Bridge the gap between community needs and initiatives by companies to address SDGs
	State-owned enterprises	Businesses created or majority-owned by national, regional, provincial, or local governments.	Provide expertise, financial resources, technical skills, delivery of critical infrastructure (e.g., energy, transport), goods, and services
	Trade and labor unions	Organizations formed by workers	Contribute to policy dialogue, promote negotiations with employers to improve wages and employment terms.
<b>Other development partners</b>	Other civil society organizations	Non-profit, voluntary organizations of citizens operating at local, national, or international levels <sup>2</sup>	Advocate for particular communities or issues, oversee entities, provide expertise, and implement projects
	Knowledge partners	Universities and research institutions	Conduct research, diffuse knowledge, and develop innovations

Source: Adapted from OECD 2016, [OECD 2017](#) and [Kerlin 2024](#). MSMEs refer to Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises.

<sup>1</sup> The definition also mentions farmers who operate in the formal and informal sectors but those are out of scope for this map. For more details refer to sub-section 3.1.

<sup>2</sup> Excluding trade and labor unions that we categorize under hybrid sector actors.



Private actors, on the other hand, encompass profit-seeking organizations such as corporate enterprises, financial institutions, chambers of commerce, and business associations. Hybrid actors are those that display traits of both public and private actors, including social enterprises, state-owned enterprises, and non-governmental organizations such as foundations and private philanthropy. Finally, other development partners, civil society organizations, and knowledge partners may also be involved.

#### **1.4 Expanding PSE: South-South cooperation and within L&MICs**

PSE is not limited to partnerships between high- and L&MICs; it plays an increasing role in South-South cooperation and intra-L&MIC collaboration (Mawdsley 2019). PSE, as part of South-South cooperation, has been a key development in the recent past. These include contributions in multiple sectors such as improving health outcomes, combating climate change, and alleviating hunger (McManus 2023). However, frameworks to measure the effectiveness of this cooperation are limited leading to the establishment of initiatives such as the India-Brazil-South Africa Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation, the Network of Southern Think Tanks and regional accountability frameworks in Latin America and Africa (Besharati 2019) to further efforts to evaluate the impact of such cooperation.

PSE can also exist within L&MIC countries at the national or sub-national level without participation from high-income country (HIC) actors. PSE by L&MIC actors can adopt a public-private partnership (PPP) model to provide a structured approach for private actors to contribute to public service delivery in L&MICs, whether through infrastructure development, service management, or co-location models that integrate private sector expertise within public institutions to enhance efficiency and sustainability (Whyle and Olivier 2016). Other collaboration models may take the form of credit lines that enhance financial access for businesses (Dela Cruz et al. 2023) or risk-sharing initiatives that support enterprise growth within L&MICs (Dilli and Nyman 2015) - each potentially contributing to more efficient, inclusive, and sustainable development outcomes through intra-L&MIC cooperation.

#### **1.5 Objectives of this Evidence Gap Map (EGM)**

- Identify impact evaluations, systematic reviews, and qualitative studies that aim to infer causation, evaluating the effects of private sector engagement interventions on inclusive and sustainable development outcomes in L&MICs
- Characterize the population, settings, design, equity considerations, and implementation factors of the included interventions
- Identify primary evidence gaps and synthesis gaps in the body of evidence on PSE
- Summarize findings from high- and medium-confidence systematic reviews to highlight key findings from evidence syntheses that systematically identify, critically appraise, and analyze effectiveness of PSE interventions.

#### **1.6 Why is this EGM needed**

The rising relevance of PSE for inclusive and sustainable development highlights the need for a comprehensive overview of the literature in this cross-sectoral area. Previous

and ongoing efforts to map PSE evidence for people living in L&MICs have been made, but those have often focused on one intervention or sector. For public-private partnerships, [Whyte and Olivier \(2016\)](#) review existing models for how PPP delivered health services in Southern Africa, and a systematic review protocol by [Ali et al. 2024](#) aims to examine how they affect primary and secondary school access and quality in L&MICs<sup>3</sup>. An ongoing EGM by [Dela Cruz et al. \(2023\)](#) will map the available evidence of the effects of financial access interventions for micro-, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), but does not specify whether a private sector engagement mechanism is involved.

A recently published EGM on PSE ([USAID 2022](#)) provides a comprehensive overview of the literature in the sector. It identifies studies of PSE interventions that were cross-cutting sectors and regions and provides a holistic overview of the kind of interventions that can be included under the ambit of PSE. The definitions of these interventions, however, are specific to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) policy and nomenclature. As noted above, due to the diverse approaches to PSE and the lack of consensus on its definitions and scope, it is important to develop a comprehensive synthesis of PSE evidence that would not only consolidate the relevant literature but also provide uniformity in definitions and scope.

Through this EGM, we aim to provide a definition for PSE interventions within the context of impact on inclusive and sustainable development while also producing a systematic overview of available evidence that evaluates PSE interventions in L&MICs. In developing the EGM and its scope, we aim to distill the mechanisms through which PSE can be engaged in development activities, identify similarities in nomenclature, and establish common definitions based on grey and peer-reviewed literature. Moreover, this EGM intends to broaden the focus of existing syntheses, which mostly covered PPPs and financing of private sector actors, by including evidence on blended and results-based finance, collaborations for capacity development, matchmaking, advisory support, and structured dialogues. We will also explore unintended outcomes of PSE interventions based on [Habbel et al. 2021](#) and those identified inductively from the studies we include.

By systematically identifying and describing the available evidence, this EGM will significantly expand the understanding of the existing evidence on PSE in development cooperation and will facilitate access to evidence on interventions that promote development outcomes in partnership with the private sector and inspire more research in policy areas where evidence is limited.

## **1.7 Scope of the EGM**

While broad definitions of PSE may not specify the types of actors the private sector must engage with (OECD 2016), this map specifically focuses on those that engage partner countries, donors, or multilateral organizations. Engaging public actors in PSE may spur innovation in government agencies (Torfing 2019), align initiatives with national

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<sup>3</sup> Most of the public-private partnership intervention categories set by the systematic review involved partnerships between public entities and civil society or other actors that would not meet our definition of private sector actors (Ali et al., 2024, p. 3).

priorities, and improve coordination and sustainability (Abbott 2011). Moreover, PSE initiatives with public sector involvement differ from other forms of private sector engagement, making them distinct in their objectives and effects. Our goal is to map initiatives by public actors to better understand public-private co-led PSE programs and their effects on inclusive and sustainable development outcomes. Hence, our map focuses on **development activities where at least one public sector actor and at least one private or hybrid sector actor<sup>4</sup> are involved as funders or implementers** of the intervention.

**Activities carried out by the public sector, where private sector engagement is not an explicit objective, such as when ODA partner countries, OECD DAC members, emerging donors, development finance institutions, or multilateral organizations do not collaborate with private or hybrid sector actors, are beyond the scope of this map.**

**Initiatives that are fully public, fully private, or fully run by CSOs and knowledge partners would not be included in the interactive map.** However, we will attempt to identify them and provide a list of such studies in the final report.

#### ***1.7.1 Fully public initiatives***

Public initiatives funded and implemented only by public sector actors are key to building an enabling environment for PSE, but would not fall under its definition. With regards to financing, those could include loans or guarantees provided by development finance institutions to companies without commercial banks serving as intermediaries (Silva, Resende, and Silveira Neto 2009) or bank's efforts to comply with India's priority sector lending policy to direct a minimum share of credit to disadvantaged sectors such as agriculture, transport and small scale industries (Banerjee and Duflo 2014). Regarding capacity development, such initiatives could include vocational training implemented through public institutions, without the involvement of private or hybrid sector actors (Medina and Núñez 2005). Such activities would not be considered PSE and would therefore fall outside the scope of our map.

#### ***1.7.2 Fully private initiatives***

We recognize that private sector engagement interventions could occasionally involve only private and hybrid sector actors, without the involvement of public actors. For example, impact investors, such as foundations or venture capital funds, might invest in startups aiming for both financial, social, and environmental impact (zu Eulenburg et al. 2025), or blended finance may not require the participation of public actors, for example when a financial corporation issues green bonds in capital markets to fund sustainable energy projects without guarantees by a government or multilateral organization, or an impact investment fund that pools funds from private or hybrid sector actors only (Impact Investing Institute 2017). However, such scenarios are rare and fall beyond the scope of

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<sup>4</sup> As defined in Table 1, our rule takes into account the fact that many studies will likely not provide details of the private sector engagement activities beyond who implemented and funded the intervention. Hence, we do not think it is feasible to set up a more sophisticated threshold of representativity that would allow us to capture the degree of involvement of private sector actors.<sup>5</sup> We will also include a seventh type of intervention – the multicomponent intervention. This refers to any interventions combining two or more intervention categories.

this map, making it difficult to compare them with initiatives co-led by partner countries, bilateral organizations, and multilateral organizations. While these ‘private only’ interventions may be of interest, de-prioritizing them does not compromise the relevance of the map's scope, as the lost information is not essential to its scope.

### **1.7.3 Civil society organizations and knowledge partners**

We will also include private sector engagement activities conducted in collaboration with other development partners, such as community-based associations, youth groups, informal media organizations, social movements, academia, and think tanks, provided they include at least one private or hybrid sector actor and one public sector actor.

For instance, we would include evaluations of vocational training programs like those studied by Frohnweiler et al. (2024), which were implemented through a partnership between the German Agency for International Cooperation (a public actor), Samira Empowerment and Humanitarian Projects (a civil society organization), and for-profit companies (private sector actors). However, we exclude programs organized solely by civil society organizations, even if they collaborate closely with hybrid or private sector actors, unless there is explicit involvement of public actors. While in some settings (e.g., with no functioning government institutions), multilateral organizations act as the only public actor, collaborations solely between for-profit and nonprofit actors may occasionally be needed (Oxfam Policy & Practice 2012). However, to achieve high performance, strong public sector capacity is essential for maximizing the value of private sector contributions in collaborative projects (Lazzarini et al. 2020).

## **2. Private Sector Engagement interventions**

We reviewed institutional and academic literature on PSE to identify relevant interventions and organize them into distinct categories. The high-level structure of this taxonomy has been developed based on [zu Eulenburg et al. \(2025\)](#) and Whyle and Olivier (2016), while sub-categories and definitions are adapted from [Habbel et al. \(2021\)](#), [DCED \(2019\)](#), [OECD \(2017\)](#), [DCdVET \(2017\)](#), [Ali et al. \(2024\)](#), and [Dela Cruz et al. \(2023\)](#). In collaboration with advisory group members and the subject matter expert (see Appendix 1 for details on stakeholder engagement). Below, we explain the rationale for each of the six key intervention types (financing of private sector actors; financing with private sector actors; public-private partnerships; capacity development of public, private, and hybrid sector actors; matchmaking and consulting; structured dialogue<sup>5</sup>). We also elaborate on how they aim to advance the SDGs in L&MICs while enhancing private-sector participation in development initiatives.

### **2.1 Financing of private sector actors**

Companies that operate in L&MICs, particularly MSMEs, face challenges in accessing the financial resources needed for growth and engaging in sustainable development activities (Clark, Reed, and Sunderland 2018). Information asymmetry between lenders and borrowers may increase the perceived risk of lending to smaller businesses or companies from certain regions. This problem is particularly acute in L&MICs, where

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<sup>5</sup> We will also include a seventh type of intervention – the multicomponent intervention. This refers to any interventions combining two or more intervention categories.

financial infrastructure and regulatory environments are less developed, making it difficult for MSMEs to secure formal financing (Sun, Li, and Li 2020; L. Zhao et al. 2023). These constraints limit their ability to function effectively and contribute to economic growth and job creation, let alone to address societal and environmental challenges. According to the World Bank (2023), at least 600 million jobs need to be created by the year 2030 to cater to the growing working population in L&MICs. Foreign direct investment, responsible supply chains, and international trade may contribute to economic growth and human development. However, these may be compromised if large multinational companies hesitate to invest in some geographies due to unattractive economic (Saini and Singhania 2018), regulatory (Contractor et al. 2021), and institutional (Paul and Jadhav 2019) factors.

One common approach to helping companies contribute to inclusive and sustainable development is through financing provided to them. This could take the form of attractive loans provided through commercial financial institutions by development banks, central banks, special government funds, or collateral auctions. For example, in the form of lines of credit, which allow businesses to borrow up to a certain amount at a preferential rate (Dye 2020). A common risk-sharing mechanism are credit guarantees, whereby part of the loan risk is absorbed by a third party, often a public institution, in case of loan default or loss (Dilli and Nyman 2015).

Distributing grants, typically in a competitive manner, is another key strategy for private sector funding. Co-financing that does not require repayment is often distributed through donor-led prizes or funds, typically targeted at new business models closely aligned with the SDGs, or partnerships between public and private actors to jointly address key development challenges related to health, nutrition, education, sanitation, access to energy, and livelihoods. (Achamkulangare and Bartsiotas 2017). Also referred to as innovation funds, they facilitate new solutions to old or emerging problems while also striving to ensure that existing commercial capital is not displaced. (Andersson, Noren, and Christoplos 2014).

To complement the two financing strategies above, technical assistance, often offered by development banks alongside financial products, helps businesses improve their operational efficiency and financial management (for more details, refer to sub-section 2.4 for capacity development and 2.5 for consulting). Combining private-sector funding approaches with technical assistance is significant as it addresses the lack of resources, expertise, and high initial capital cost of engaging in sustainable development activities, especially for MSMEs (Álvarez Jaramillo, Zartha Sossa, and Orozco Mendoza 2019).

The overarching goal of financial support, sometimes paired with technical assistance, is to promote sustainable development and reduce poverty by boosting people's income, while also promoting the uptake of better business practices and innovation that enhance long-term growth and high-quality job creation. For example, financial support to MSMEs has been found to increase investments, firm performance, and employment, but the effects on economic development and poverty alleviation are unclear (Kersten et al. 2017). IFC (2021) report finds that better financial access may benefit young, women-owned businesses in particular. Further, financial support to multinational corporations could drive inclusive and sustainable development in L&MICs by incentivizing responsible business practices, corporate social responsibility, and fostering green

technology innovation (Ordóñez-Ponce and Weber 2022).

Financial support for inclusive and sustainable development, however, is often uneven. In middle-income countries, National Development Banks provide counter-cyclical financing, which is vital during economic downturns to maintain investment levels in infrastructure and climate initiatives. (Griffith-Jones 2020). On the other hand, low-income countries often struggle to secure foreign direct investments and loans for SDG initiatives, emphasizing the need for innovative financing solutions (Anantachoke 2018).

## **2.2 Financing with private sector actors**

When public financing is used to attract greater private investment, a key evaluation question is whether public investment truly mobilizes additional capital (financial additionality) or merely displaces private financing (crowding out effect) (Habbel et al., 2021). The goal is for these financial instruments to create a strong demonstration effect (USAID 2021), where successful public-private collaborations validate the model and encourage broader adoption. This effect can promote similar financing mechanisms, motivating the private sector to invest in SDG-aligned initiatives where a \$2.5 trillion financing gap exists, particularly in underserved sectors (e.g., renewable energies) and regions (e.g., Sub-Saharan Africa) (OECD 2021). Financial additionality ensures that public funds are directed toward high-risk sectors where private financing is scarce, preventing competition with commercial lenders (OECD 2021). Meanwhile, development additionality focuses on achieving impactful development outcomes that neither the public nor private sector could accomplish independently. Two key strategies exist for mobilizing private sector engagement in development finance: blended finance and results-based finance.

Blended finance typically combines public concessional ODA with private or public sector resources to mobilize funding for private sector projects at below-market rates (Oxfam, 2017). It integrates multiple financial instruments into distinct products tailored to the actor's risk appetite. The aim is to attract investment in L&MICs, addressing their unique developmental challenges and investment gaps (Bertzky et al. 2020). While blended finance depends on the context of each developmental challenge, it aims to bridge financing gaps, provide technical assistance, and direct capital to underserved sectors (OECD 2019). Effective implementation requires streamlined funding sources and local capacity-building (DEval 2021). Key blended finance instruments include a mix of equity investments, where public or philanthropic organizations reduce investor risk; first-loss capital, where socially driven investors absorb initial losses to attract private capital; structured funds, which pool resources with different risk-return profiles; and syndicated loans, where multiple lenders share risk in financing a single borrower (OECD 2021). One concrete example would be a green bond issued by a financial corporation to fund sustainable energy projects with guarantees provided by a multilateral development finance institution (Hussain 2022).

Results-based finance is a financing mechanism where payments for development activities depend on achieving predefined outcomes. The OECD (2021) outlines two key results-based finance instruments. First, performance-based grants or loans are defined as outcome-based funding without external investors with payments linked to various pre-defined indicators, including SDG-related outcomes such as business expansion, job

creation, and leverage. An example of this is Loans Based on Results by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB, 2025). Second, Development Impact Bonds involve private investors providing upfront capital for an intervention, service providers implementing the intervention, and outcome funders - typically aid agencies or philanthropic organizations - repaying investors with interest if predetermined targets are met (Oroxom, 2018). For both instruments, an independent third party verifies the results before payments are made; for example, a research institution verifies whether girls' education outcomes were achieved, or a financial and risk auditor verifies whether rehabilitation centers for war victims were built and equipped. The flexibility<sup>6</sup> Development Impact Bonds enable innovation in service delivery while ensuring financial accountability and improved development outcomes.

## 2.3 Public-private partnerships

Providing finance for the private sector to solve developmental challenges often involves growing the private sector's core business activities. However, the approach can also take the form of long-term contractual agreements where private entities provide public services or infrastructure while assuming significant financial, technical, and operational risks, i.e., public-private partnerships. This class of interventions differs from the "financing with private sector actors" type in terms of the modalities of the agreement: while "financing with private sector actors" involves a financial collaboration between public and private sector actors and the mobilization of private capital, PPPs instead provide services or infrastructure. According to the World Bank (2024), public-private partnerships (PPPs) are characterized by risk-sharing arrangements that align the interests of both parties, ensuring that private partners are incentivized to deliver high-quality services (World Bank 2024). The theoretical underpinnings of PPPs suggest that they can enhance efficiency by combining the private sector's innovative capacity with the public sector's regulatory oversight.

Previous and ongoing efforts have attempted to systematically identify PPP interventions across various sectors. Whyle and Olivier (2016) found 52 public-private engagement interventions for health financing, delivery, and human resource management in Southern Africa alone. Nineteen of them were public-private partnerships, of which seven included international partners, and four had private firms co-locate within public hospitals, providing complementary services in exchange for compensation and designated advantages for the public entity.

Another prevalent public-private partnership (PPP) involves the private sector assuming responsibility for operating and managing public services, such as healthcare, education, and transportation. At the same time, the government provides funding and oversight. This can take the form of Educational Management Organizations where private operators manage schools while the government finances them and maintains accountability (Ali et al. 2024). Another example is a social franchising model where a public authority coordinates a network of providers through contracts, offering support via branding and bulk drug procurement while enforcing strict regulations on service quality, quantity, and delivery and preventing selective service provision (Whyle and Olivier

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<sup>6</sup> Unlike Social Impact Bonds, which are backed by government entities, Development Impact Bonds rely on non-governmental outcome funders. This provides the latter some flexibility.

2016). Educational studies from Pakistan and Uganda indicate that such partnerships could be cost-effective for governments and enhance educational governance (Barrera-Osorio and Filmer 2016; Crawford 2017; Crawford and Hares 2021). However, an evaluation in Colombia that matched schools on relevant characteristics using the propensity score matching technique found that the effect on student achievement in Colombia was lower than for traditional public schools (Diaz-Rios and Urbano-Canal 2021).

Finally, public-private partnerships have a long-standing history where governmental agencies contract a private entity to construct and operate infrastructure facilities, which are then repaid by public actors under fixed per-capita payments (Alzira model) or per-service fees (Cruz and Marquez 2013). A review by the [ADB \(2020\)](#) highlights that well-structured PPPs can lead to improved infrastructure outcomes, particularly in developing countries where public funding is limited.

[Lee et al. \(2018\)](#) highlight that well-structured PPPs drive macroeconomic growth in developing Asia by enhancing infrastructure, creating jobs, and attracting private investment, making them vital for national development goals. But PPPs also raise significant challenges that can hinder success if not addressed, such as complex negotiations, regulatory gaps, and partner conflicts, which can hinder successful implementation, leading to low quality of infrastructure and a strain on public sector finances (Zhao, Su, and Li 2018). The World Bank (2024) emphasizes the importance of transparent legal frameworks in supporting successful partnerships. A core principle of PPPs is risk-sharing, ensuring responsibilities are allocated based on each party's capacity to manage them efficiently. The [International Monetary Fund \(2021\)](#) and Devine et al. (2021) emphasize that the choice between public and private financing should prioritize efficiency and risk management, promoting sustainable, balanced partnerships that avoid overburdening either sector.

## **2.4 Developing capacity of private, public, and hybrid sector actors**

Drawing on [OECD \(2016\)](#), capacity development can be defined as the set of initiatives aimed at enhancing the capacities of private sector actors to contribute to development outcomes. This can be achieved through training activities and other forms of capacity development programming, mentoring, professional exchanges, and higher education. These initiatives typically bring public, private, and/or hybrid sector actors together to change or modify business operations by improving skills for responsible entrepreneurship and aligning them with market demands ([DCED 2019](#); [Habbel et al. 2021](#); [zu Eulenburg et al. 2025](#)).

However, capacity development is also required in the public sector, and the private sector may play a role in developing it. For example, in the context of non-communicable disease programming, [Marshall et al. \(2023\)](#) find that the private sector builds the capacity of public actors in L&MICs by enhancing research, workforce development, and standardization of best practices. The private sector often provides training for public healthcare providers on medical technologies, treatment protocols, and disease management and introduces new products and processes that enhance public service delivery, improved distribution methods, and digital health systems for data collection and monitoring. To support research capacity, private health actors also provide



supplementary funding, technical expertise, and infrastructure such as laboratories or databases.

Before starting a new PSE activity, it is essential to assess both the existing and intended business operations, as well as market demand. Financing and implementing feasibility studies is an established way to take into account all possible factors that may determine the success of the venture (zu Eulenburg et al. 2025). This is the first sub-category of interventions for this intervention type.

For any economy that aims to promote inclusive and sustainable development and a dynamic business environment, it is vital to align the skills of the workforce with the demands of the private sector. In this perspective, the second intervention sub-category, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), funded and implemented with participation of both public and private actors, represents a valid option for increasing human capital and aligning training programs with labor market needs (Euler 2018). Examples of these interventions are initiatives for designing TVET curricula that meet industry standards and programs facilitating apprenticeships that provide trainees with anticipated market-demanded skills. Other initiatives engage the private sector in providing the know-how and support to improve the quality of training offers and infrastructures, such as teacher training and advising on equipment needs, or establishing certification systems to accredit the training.

To deliver effective training programs, institutions must be equipped with the skills and practical expertise necessary to engage the private sector in inclusive and sustainable development activities. To this end, the third sub-category of interventions aims to strengthen the capacity of financial institutions and other private and hybrid sector actors. Strong financial institutions are key for improving skills and capacity of financial institutions to evaluate investments, assess performances of particular actors (such as social enterprises), and setting up ad hoc trainings and programs (Eskesen, Agrawal, and Desai 2014) including operational efficiency, project planning, or enhancing skills for financial systems essential for development, such as MSME support or women's financial inclusion. Other examples include: training programs by consulting companies for public sector employees on how to engage with private actors, business associations funded by a bilateral organization to help similar organizations respond to member demands in another country or publicly funded mentoring schemes by experienced entrepreneurs for MSMEs to improve management practices, use of technology, prepare for financing and trade negotiations (USAID 2024).

## **2.5 Matchmaking and consulting**

Finding new markets for L&MIC firms is often hindered by information gaps and high fixed costs, which makes it difficult to establish business connections, especially in foreign countries (Carballo et al. 2022). Export promotion agencies in L&MICs aim to reduce these barriers by providing training, market intelligence, and facilitating participation in trade fairs and business missions, sometimes offering financial support (Jordana, Martincus, and Gallo 2010). They may also assist in business matchmaking, facilitating direct business connections between exporters and importers through business-to-business meetings and supplier databases, which aim to mitigate market failures caused by free-riding and information spillovers (Rauch 1996). Similar programs

exist in some HICs and emerging donors who set up import promotion offices or desks to facilitate imports from L&MICs, which could include import guarantees as well (Seringhaus and Rosson 2012).

Matchmaking initiatives increasingly use virtual online platforms, such as the *leverist.de* digital platform, which presents business opportunities in new markets that are geared towards the specific needs of local development cooperation. The German Import Promotion Desk (IPD) expands the access of suppliers from L&MICs to trading partners from Germany (Müller, 2023). Another example is *ConnectAmericas*, which connects SMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean with international trade opportunities, financing, and business networks. Impact evaluations using a difference-in-differences approach compared similar firms before and after the platform's implementation and found that they increase exports in Uruguay and Peru (Martincus and Carballo 2010; Carballo et al. 2020) especially for women-owned firms (Poole and Martincus 2023). Finally, matchmaking can also focus on a single aspect, such as financing. In a study in seven Middle Eastern countries including L&MICs such as Turkey, Egypt, Abdeldayem and Aldulaimi (2021) identify models used by MSMEs to tap into a variety of peer-to-peer financing digital platforms through which they can access financing on more favorable terms or that would not have been possible from traditional banks.

Other mechanisms include initiatives offering advisory input on existing options, their prerequisites and terms and conditions, and providing specialist support to increase the transparency of markets in partner countries for private sector actors and to expand their knowledge of these markets in order to be able to engage there successfully and responsibly (Habbel et al. 2021). This would typically consist of expert-driven, short-term consulting that provides specialized guidance. Examples include help desks providing advisory services on funding, financing, cooperation opportunities, and project development in areas such as climate neutrality, decarbonization, and sustainable supply chains (zu Eulenburg et al. 2025), as well as guidance for large firms on inclusive business practices, support for investment recipients, and technical insights to help smaller companies access financing or expand markets (USAID 2024).

## 2.6 Structured dialogue

Systemic challenges may hinder private sector contributions to development. At the macro level, many sectors face challenges due to misaligned policies, regulatory gaps, and fragmented collaboration between stakeholders, limiting the private sector's ability to contribute effectively to development (OECD 2017). Structured dialogue interventions foster collaboration among private, hybrid, and public sector actors and other stakeholders to generate and share knowledge, shape agendas, and align investments with public policy (OECD 2007). Ranging from informal consultations, workshops, cross-sector roundtables to multi-stakeholder initiatives, they enhance PSE by facilitating exchange, consensus-building, and alignment with regulations, sectoral needs, and SDGs (USAID 2024).

Within this framework, co-creation processes can enable stakeholders to collaboratively assess project viability, identify risks and opportunities, and develop solutions for complex development challenges (OECD 2016; van Ewijk and Ros-Tonen 2021). Through formal partnerships or during informal co-creation workshops with a series of

deliberate discussions and conversations, stakeholders jointly define problems, explore solutions, build consensus, and refine action plans to address development challenges effectively (USAID 2024). These participatory mechanisms ensure that interventions are not just technically and financially feasible but also aligned with the priorities and interests of key sector and policy stakeholders, which may increase their long-term sustainability.

Another mechanism to promote demand-driven approaches developed in collaboration with governments and other national and international stakeholders is multi-stakeholder partnerships. As its name suggests, multistakeholder platforms involve multiple stakeholders, such as public actors, private actors, universities, and civil society actors (Loveridge and Wilson 2017). They often vary in obligation strength, compliance mechanisms, and formality (Beisheim and Simon 2016). Despite these differences, they often share common goals, such as promoting transparency, accountability, and sustainability. While they can be used for knowledge sharing and service provision as well<sup>7</sup>, they often seek to coordinate actors to create, implement, and enforce norms and standards that address public sector failures or specific development goals, or common themes such as environmental performance, human rights, and labor rights (Loveridge and Wilson 2017). For example, the Global Reporting Initiative enhances standardized reporting on economic, social, and environmental performance, the UN Global Compact mainstreams principles on human rights, labor, environment, and anti-corruption, and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative focuses on reducing corruption through transparent revenue reporting (Buckup 2012). A multi-stakeholder partnership can have more than one objective, for example, the Apparel Lesotho Alliance to Fight AIDS united the Lesotho Ministry of Health, USAID, international clothing companies, and the garment industry to provide HIV counselling and medicine (service delivery), improve working conditions (coordination and standard setting), and boost sales through 'fair-trade' marketing (Kenworthy, MacKenzie, and Lee 2016). In such cases, they would be classified under our seventh intervention type, which encompasses multi-component programs integrating at least two elements from the six categories outlined above.

### **3. Inclusion criteria**

We will include studies in the EGM according to the following criteria.

#### **3.1 Population**

We will include studies on interventions reporting outcomes for participants in L&MICs (see Appendix 2), using the World Bank's country income classification, at the start of

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<sup>7</sup> Knowledge sharing and advocacy assumes that sharing information is crucial for deploying solutions on a larger scale (e.g., see [Forsberg and Montagu 2014 for a health-related example](#)). Service providing partnerships on the other hand aims at addressing market failures by supplying infrastructure, goods, or services, or by enabling innovation (e.g., multinational education technology firms partnering with international financial institutions to expand digital learning infrastructure).

the intervention implementation or publication year (if the start date is unclear).<sup>8</sup>

Some studies may assess interventions conducted in multiple countries. These will be included in the EGM if they provide at least one estimate of the intervention's effect on participants in L&MICs. For studies covering both L&MICs and HICs, inclusion requires separate results for each or, for systematic reviews, an average effect where at least 50% of the sample comes from L&MICs.

As specified in Section 1.7 (Scope of the EGM) we will only include interventions that have at least one public and one private or hybrid actor as funders or implementers of the intervention.

We will exclude interventions that target self-help groups, informal or semi-formal producer groups, individual farmers, and harvesters, as an extensive literature exists for these populations, which goes beyond our definition of PSE. However, interventions involving farmer cooperatives and similar member-owned and -controlled business enterprises will be included.

## 3.2 Interventions

As outlined in Section 2, we will include six key types of individual interventions and a seventh type, which will consist of components combining two or more intervention categories (Table 2). Appendix 3 provides additional details on how these intervention types will be further sub-categorized.

**Table 2: Included intervention types**

Intervention type	Description
Financing of private sector actors	ODA or public support to private or hybrid sector actors provided through private financial intermediaries in the form of equity, debt, and guarantees or grants through competitive prizes and challenges.
Financing with private sector actors	Collaborative funding arrangements between ODA or public sector actors and private or hybrid sector actors, to pool resources and share risks for development initiatives to attract more private funding.
Public-private partnerships	A long-term contractual agreement between public and private actors to develop, finance, and/or deliver public infrastructure and services. Both parties share risks and management.
Capacity development of private, hybrid, and public sector actors	Efforts to align workforce skills with private sector needs, strengthen the capacity of firms and business associations for responsible entrepreneurship, and for public actors to engage with the private sector.
Matchmaking and consulting	Organizations, programs, projects, online portals, and apps that foster business connections through networking and advisory services.
Structured dialogue	Consultations and platforms that engage public, private, and hybrid sector actors in co-creation, topic, policy, and sector dialogue.
Multi-component PSE interventions	Interventions that combine at least two components from the first six categories.

<sup>8</sup> We will include studies from countries that briefly held high-income status for just one year before returning to L&MIC status: Venezuela (2014), Argentina (2014, 2017), Mauritius (2019), and Romania (2019).

Our list of intervention types and sub-categories included is based on the expected immediate causal mechanism of the intervention (e.g. ‘financing with’ that pools public and private funding to attract more private funding) as opposed to the intervention’s topic (e.g. financing for medical product development). Intervention strategies within PSE programming that cut across our intervention categories would be captured as a cross-cutting filter with its values compiled based on our literature review and recommendations from Advisory Group experts.

Some studies may have reported results for multiple treatment arms (intervention variants). Those will be included as long as one of them evaluates a PSE intervention. We will also include studies of interventions with multiple components combined, as long as at least one of the components is a PSE intervention. We will distinguish between ‘multi-component PSE interventions’ (Table 2) where more than one PSE intervention is combined and ‘interventions with multiple components’ where the intervention has multiple components, but only one is a PSE intervention.

We will exclude interventions that may interact with private sector engagement activities, but in the literature are often categorized separately. The complete list is provided in Appendix 4.

### **3.3 Comparator**

Impact evaluations assess the effects of an intervention by comparing it to a counterfactual scenario, estimating what would have occurred in the absence of the intervention. We will include impact evaluations with any types of comparison groups derived from randomized assignment or retrospectively constructed comparison groups using quasi-experimental methods. This could include but is not limited to: (a) those receiving no intervention or following a business-as-usual approach, (b) those participating in an alternative form of PSE, or (c) those receiving a different, non-PSE-related intervention.

As noted above, we will not impose restrictions on the type of control group for most intervention categories. However, a key distinction applies to studies evaluating the effects of public-private partnerships (PPPs). We will include impact evaluations of PPPs only if they assess the additional effects of using a PPP mechanism compared to either fully public or fully private delivery. For example, a randomized controlled trial comparing low-cost private schools participating in a PPP program with private schools operating outside the program (Barrera-Osorio et al. 2016).

This means that we will exclude impact evaluations that compare a PPP-based program to a no intervention or business as usual scenario where it is not clear if the delivery is fully public or fully private. This restriction ensures that the map remains focused on studies that can isolate the causal effect of the PSE mechanism itself, rather than other factors.


The above restriction does not apply to qualitative studies or systematic reviews.




### **3.4 Outcomes**

We have developed a comprehensive outcome framework that captures various dimensions of PSE such as job creation, investment, revenues, productivity gains (since productivity might take more time), growth of firms, improved social and labor conditions, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and other sustainable development indicators (OECD 2016). Within our framework, PSE is a strategic approach to achieving development outcomes, which, depending on the outcome type, may align with multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Building on outcomes recognized in seminal literature (OECD 2016, DCED 2019, [Habbel et al. 2021](#), DCED 2022, [zu Eulenburg et al. 2025](#)), we extend the scope to include additional measures such as measures of energy use and extractives, ensuring a holistic perspective of PSE effects. In line with the 2030 SDG agenda of the ‘Leaving No One Behind’ principle, we include equity measures for every outcome group and as filters to allow users to further disentangle the effects on populations systematically excluded from equitable participation in societal activities due to various unfavorable characteristics and circumstances ([3ie, forthcoming](#)). Our six outcome groups of interest are described in Table 3. We provide detailed descriptions of all outcomes, along with examples of measures and indicators, in Appendix 5.

**Table 3: Included outcome groups**

Outcome group	Description	Primary relevant SDGs
<b>Jobs and Income</b>	<p><b>Employment:</b> Measures related to employment, such as labor market outcomes, including employability and job opportunities for marginalized groups and women</p> <p><b>Income:</b> Different measures of income levels, wages, stability in earnings, income sources</p> <p><b>Financial inclusion:</b> Outcomes that measure the level of access to finance, movement to financial digitization, new financial instruments, and financial knowledge</p>	
<b>Market, sector, industrial, and firm growth</b>	<p><b>International trade:</b> Measures related to global trade participation and export performance</p> <p><b>Investment levels:</b> Outcomes related to investments in inventory, property, renewables, or SDG-related initiatives. This includes measures of investment in inputs like property, plant, equipment, or final merchandise for sale, including measures of resources disbursed to SDG-aligned projects and investments in R&amp;D</p> <p><b>Training, knowledge, and technology transfer:</b> Measures related to upskilling, capacity building, and technology dissemination</p> <p><b>Domestic business growth and market development:</b> Expansion in business performance, industry development, and overall market size within a country</p> <p><b>Productivity gains:</b> Indicators related to changes in productivity of firms (labor and TFP, when possible), output efficiencies, changes in production levels, technological developments</p> <p><b>Economic growth:</b> Measures related to economic growth outcomes and consumer demand</p> <p><b>Tax revenue:</b> Measures related to tax revenues for the partner countries</p> <p><b>Digitization:</b> Outcomes related to digitization processes in production and supply chains</p>	
<b>Coordination, costs, reforms, and mobilization</b>	<p><b>Coordination and policy dialogues:</b> Outcomes related to PSE coordination and dialogue between donors, partners, intermediaries, and target groups</p> <p><b>Costs:</b> Different measures of cost effectiveness and total costs</p> <p><b>Network building:</b> Outcomes related to contacts between partner countries and donors and utilization of synergies</p> <p><b>Standards and political reforms:</b> Outcomes measuring reforms, changes in regulatory frameworks, national laws, and guidelines for certification of environmental, social, and governance standards</p> <p><b>Partner ownership:</b> Measures of level of involvement of partner governments or other partners (e.g., private or hybrid sector actors) in PSE activities</p> <p><b>Mobilization:</b> Outcomes related to mobilization of financial resources</p>	

Outcome group	Description	Primary relevant SDGs
	<p><b>Signaling effects:</b> Outcomes related to macroeconomic level spillover effects on other private companies, leading to increased mobilization of private capital, or piloting of new projects or sectors, development, and consolidation of sectors</p> <p><b>Governance outcomes:</b> Measures of improved governance, including government effectiveness, rule of law, and corruption</p>	
<b>Work-labor and social outcomes</b>	<p><b>Improved work-labor outcomes:</b> Measures of decent work in the form of changed labor and industrial relationships, employee benefits including worker health, improved TVET, employee motivation, and retention policies</p> <p><b>Education:</b> Outcomes related to education</p> <p><b>Social factors:</b> Measures covering different aspects of social empowerment, including gender equity and marginalized communities, disability inclusion, reduction in discriminatory practices, and changes in social attitudes, multidimensional poverty</p> <p><b>Food security, health and nutrition:</b> Outcomes related to access, availability and sustainability in food systems and measures of health and wellbeing</p> <p><b>Infrastructure:</b> Measures related to basic infrastructure in sanitation, health, and water</p> <p><b>Digital inclusion:</b> Outcomes related to increasing access to digital pathways and digitization in health, education, basic infrastructure, and food security</p>	
<b>Energy and extractives</b>	<p><b>Energy use and nature of extractives:</b> Measures related to energy delivery, knowledge, negotiation, and bargaining in terms of energy and extractives, index of energy investment and financing in energy and extractive companies, internal investments in energy and extractives</p> <p><b>Participation and inclusion - energy and extractives:</b> Measures that look at inclusion or participation of citizens in either an institution or decision-making body at the community level in PSE programs. This can be, for example, strengthening women's capacities in renewable energy, citizen participation, and/or a feedback mechanism, or a civil society organization</p>	
<b>Environmental change and mitigation</b>	<p><b>Environmental outcomes at work:</b> Outcomes measuring but not limited to compliance with environmentally safe production methods, indoor air pollution</p> <p><b>Environmental change and mitigation measures:</b> Measures related to climate change resilience, mitigation and adaptation, pollution, biodiversity, circular economy, humanitarian crises due to climate change, greenhouse emissions, and contamination</p>	



Following [Habbel et al. \(2021\)](#), we further categorize outcomes by the level of analysis across key actors in the PSE system. A cross-cutting filter will allow users to further disaggregate the studies that measure the effects for: (1) investors and donors<sup>9</sup>, (2) ODA partner countries, (3) intermediaries who are operationalizing the PSE (intermediaries from the private, hybrid, or public sector), and (4) individual target groups (individual, household, and community).

Additionally, we will remain open to inductively incorporating new outcomes not currently in the taxonomy if they emerge from the included studies<sup>10</sup> across all key actors.

### **3.5 Study design**

Our goal is to map the effects of private sector engagement mechanisms on inclusive and sustainable development outcomes. Thus, we will only include quantitative impact evaluations, qualitative studies that used a causal inference approach, and systematic reviews that address an effectiveness question. The study design requirements are based on widely accepted standards for impact evaluations ([Gertler et al., 2016](#)), qualitative evaluations (White and Phillips 2012; Sharma Waddington, Umezawa, and White 2023), and systematic reviews (Waddington et al. 2012).

#### **3.5.1 Impact evaluations**

We will include studies that use experimental and quasi-experimental designs to estimate changes in outcomes resulting from an intervention, accounting for other factors that may influence the outcomes. This includes methodologies such as randomized controlled trials, regression discontinuity designs, instrumental variables, fixed-effect regressions, interrupted time series models, matching or weighting methods, and synthetic control approaches (see Appendix 6 for a complete list). However, we will exclude other quantitative studies, including those that do not seek to identify a causal effect but rely solely on cost-effectiveness/benefit analyses, simulations, forecast models, ex-ante impact assessments, or scenario analyses, as well as those focused on feasibility, acceptability, or willingness-to-pay.

#### **3.5.2 Systematic reviews**

We will include systematic reviews that are explicitly focused on assessing the effectiveness of PSE interventions. In line with 3ie's Development Evidence Portal's screening protocol (3ie 2025b), we will include systematic reviews that explicitly outline: the approach for identifying studies (sources searched and search terms used), the process for selecting eligible studies (screening methods), and the techniques for analyzing included studies (e.g., meta-analysis or narrative synthesis). For systematic reviews that are broader in scope, unless they separately report results for PSE interventions, we will not include them in the interactive map. Instead, we will list them in the final report, and we will screen all studies they reference or those that cite them for potential inclusion in our map.

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<sup>9</sup> Outcomes for populations outside L&MICs such as global or ODA donor country measures at the economy-wide, government, or firm level, will be included if the study also provides separate results for L&MIC populations. However, we will exclude studies that measure outcomes only for high-income countries or a mix of L&MIC and high-income countries as including them would require significantly broadening the inclusion criteria, with limited returns given the effort required.

<sup>10</sup> We will include studies that measure outcomes outside the current framework, provided they include at least one outcome already defined within it.

### **3.5.3 Qualitative evaluations**

Certain interventions, such as national policy changes or capacity-building in a single organization, often involve a small number of units, making it difficult to conduct quantitative impact evaluations (White and Phillips 2012). For these scenarios, "small n" approaches, which rely on qualitative methods, may be more appropriate. To ensure we do not miss relevant studies, a two-phased approach will be adopted (Kozakiewicz et al. 2023). After an initial search and screening, which consists of quantitative study design terms (Appendix 6), intervention sub-categories with fewer than 10 studies or 1% of all included impact evaluations in the map (whichever is greater), will undergo a targeted search for qualitative studies. A complete list of sub-categories searched will be reported in the final report. To determine if qualitative studies use theory-based methodologies capable of plausibly establishing a causal link from intervention activities to outcomes, they will need to meet criteria outlined in Appendix 6.

## **3.6 Other inclusion and exclusion criteria**

**Language:** We will include studies published in any language. The full set of search terms will be applied in English only. Studies in other languages will be screened by team members with intermediate reading skills in the language. For languages that no team member is familiar with, we will rely on translation software.

**Date of publication:** We will include studies published in 2000 or later. Studies on L&MIC populations before this date represent less than 0.5 percent of available evidence in 3ie's Development Evidence Portal. None of these meet the scope of our map. Limiting the scope to post-2000 studies reduces the likelihood of missing relevant research while keeping the project manageable within the available resources.

**Study status and format:** We will include published and unpublished studies, regardless of format, whether they have been completed, or whether they were peer-reviewed. Ongoing studies could be prospective records, trial registrations, or published protocols.

## **4. Search methods and data**

### **4.1 Search methods**

To minimize bias arising from the diverse global social science literature, we will adhere to the methodological standards for Evidence Gap Maps (Snilstveit et al. 2016; 2017; Kugley et al. 2017). English search terms will be applied to multiple academic and grey literature databases. This will be complemented by citation tracking, a public call for papers, and outreach to experts and organizations for additional studies.

#### **4.1.1 Electronic database searches**

To identify studies that fit the scope for our EGM, we have developed a set of search terms and a search strategy in collaboration with an information specialist and existing evidence syntheses (e.g. [Habbel et al., 2021](#)). We will use Boolean operators and keywords aligned with the inclusion criteria to search electronic databases, repositories, and institutional websites (for details, refer to Appendix 7).

To minimize publication bias, we will search sources that cover diverse publication types, including journal articles, working papers, conference proceedings, theses, dissertations,

and institutional reports. Since some databases and websites lack advanced search capabilities or export functions, we will adapt our strategy to each source, using their thesaurus or keyword index if necessary. The information specialist (AK) will assist with troubleshooting and refining the search approach, and we will document the entire search process, and any adjustments made to the strategy.

#### **4.1.2 Citation tracking**

We will carry out backward and forward citation tracking for the studies included in the map (Greenhalgh and Peacock 2005). Backward tracking involves reviewing the reference lists of included studies to identify other potentially eligible studies, while forward tracking focuses on finding studies that have cited the included ones to uncover further relevant research. If fewer than 200 studies are included, we will use the gold standard approach: Web of Science for citation tracking, supplemented by Google Scholar for forward tracking. If the number exceeds this threshold, we will use the Citation Chaser app, which draws from the Lens.org database, combining content from Microsoft Academic Graph, CrossRef, CORE, PubMed, and PubMedCentral (Haddaway, Grainger, and Gray 2022). The limitations of using Citation Chaser will be documented in the final report.

#### **4.1.3 Exploring additional sources**

To reduce the risk of missing relevant studies, we will search through study registries, track citations of existing systematic reviews and evidence gap maps, engage with key researchers and organizations in related fields, and publish an online blog to share our map and invite submissions from authors.

#### **4.1.4 Selection of studies**

After compiling and removing duplicate records from the search of literature, we will conduct a two-stage selection process in which trained reviewers assess studies based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in section 4. In the first stage, reviewers will independently screen study titles and abstracts using a "safety first" approach, seeking a second opinion if unsure about a study's eligibility or reviewing the full text if the title and abstract lack sufficient information. In the second stage, two independent reviewers will double-screen the full text of studies that passed the initial screening. Eligible studies meeting the inclusion criteria will be added to the EGM, with disagreements resolved through discussion with a third core team member or an additional reviewer if needed. To streamline the process, we will use the machine learning capabilities of EPPI-Reviewer 4 (Thomas et al. 2022) and screening insights from other 3ie evidence synthesis projects, as detailed in Appendix 8. To verify that the machine classifier is well calibrated and does not exclude relevant studies, we will check 5% of the studies below the cut-off.

## **4.2 Data**

### **4.2.1 Data extraction and management**

We will collect descriptive and methodological information from each study using a standardized data extraction form, with a provisional template provided in Appendix 9. This form is largely based on the data structure for 3ie's Development Evidence Portal (3ie, 2025b) as most reviewers and consultants are already familiar with its categorizations. Furthermore, this approach will allow for the re-use of data from studies

that already exist in the portal. We will extract the following types of data:

- **Descriptive:** Publication-related information such as authors, publication date, status, and study characteristics (e.g., country, intervention type, outcomes, topic, intervention scope, agencies involved as funders, implementers, and beneficiaries, populations targeted, including those based on equity considerations).
- **Methodological:** Details on study design, analysis methods, unit of observation, and whether authors adopted an equity lens to examine the distributions of effects across groups (e.g., gender, income) or consider inequity-related differences in their theoretical framework, data collection, or analysis procedures.
- **Critical appraisal results:** All included systematic reviews will be critically appraised following the procedures for 3ie's Development Evidence Portal, which draws on [Lewin et al. \(2009\)](#). This appraisal assesses the level of confidence we have in systematic reviews based on how they conducted the search, screening, data extraction, and synthesis activities, the most common areas where bias may be introduced. Each systematic review will be rated as low, medium, or high confidence and visualized in a traffic light convention: with green bubbles representing high confidence reviews, orange – medium confidence, red – low confidence (Snijlsteit et al. 2017). Refer to Appendix 10 for the full appraisal checklist used for this purpose. We will not critically appraise primary research studies, as this is typically beyond the scope of EGMs.

Coders will be trained and must meet reliability standards before graduating. Trained reviewers will extract data, with a second core team member performing quality checks for all studies, focusing on interventions and outcomes. Additionally, 25% of all records will undergo comprehensive checks across all fields to ensure accuracy and consistency. A third core team member will resolve any disagreements. Critical appraisals will be done by an experienced 3ie staff member, with checks done by yet another senior 3ie staff member for a percentage of their appraisals to make sure there is no coder drift.

#### **4.2.2 Multicomponent interventions**

For studies of interventions evaluated as a package of multiple components, the team will adopt a consistent approach to coding appropriate for the encountered literature. We will attempt to create separate categories for the most common combinations (depending on how many such studies we find, this could be at the category or group level) while grouping all remaining multicomponent studies together. We will present the selected approach and its limitations in the final report.

#### **4.2.3 Missing data**

We will contact the study authors to provide missing or incomplete data. As recommended by Mullan et al. (2009), we will document the study authors contacted, the type of information requested, the methods used to gather responses, and the results of these inquiries.

## 5. Analysis

### 5.1 Interactive EGM

We will develop a web-based evidence gap map (EGM) to visually represent the presence or absence of evidence about the effectiveness of PSE interventions. We will display studies that meet our inclusion criteria in the form of bubbles in a grid-like matrix with types of interventions (left-hand side) and outcomes (along the top). Bubbles of different colors represent different types of studies, their publication status, and ratings for the confidence (for systematic reviews only). The size of the bubble reflects the relative number of studies for a particular intervention-outcome combination, with larger bubbles reflecting more evidence.

The map will identify absolute gaps, highlighting areas needing new primary research, as well as synthesis gaps, where there is sufficient primary evidence, but no high/medium confidence or recent systematic review. Designed as a global public resource, the EGM will facilitate access to high-quality research. The final map will be hosted on 3ie's online platform, with filters allowing users to explore evidence by key study and population characteristics, such as PSE topic, SDGs, equity considerations, type of implementing agency, or beneficiary.

### 5.2 Descriptive analysis

A technical report will complement the online map and brief outlining the EGM findings and analyze evidence trends and characteristics, such as distribution of studies by publication year, geographic focus, population targeted, and key intervention and outcome-related variables. Descriptive analyses will cover the following:

1. Interventions
2. Outcomes
3. Publication information (year, publication type)
4. Sector information (World Bank themes, OECD DAC codes, UN SDGs)
5. Geographic information (country, region)
6. Population (actors targeted, study participants)
7. Methodological characteristics (study design, unit of observation)
8. Transparency information (dataset availability, was the protocol registered)
9. Systematic review critical appraisal findings (rating, summary of limitations)
10. Equity (whether addressed by authors, how, and which dimension of vulnerability: e.g., sex, socio-economic status, disability, education level)
11. Agencies involved (program funding, implementation partners)
12. Context (country income level, country fragility, conflict and violence status)

Where appropriate, we will also cross-tabulate information to provide a more nuanced overview of the evidence identified. Refer to Appendix 9 for a complete list of variables and to [\(3ie 2025b\)](#) for how they will be operationalized.

## 6. Review information

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### 6.2 Contributions of authors

- **Framework development:** Framework development was led by Tomasz Kozakiewicz (TK), Andrea Floridi (AF), and Suvarna Pande (SP) with support from Megha Bhattacharyya (MB), Anil Thota (AT), Monisha Lakshminarayan (ML), and Zeba Siddiqui (ZS).
- **Protocol Development:** Protocol development was led by TK and AF with support from SP, MB, AT, ML, Ying Gao (YG) and ZS.
- **Search Strategy:** The search strategy was developed by Alison Annet Kinengyere (AK) and supported by Mark Engelbert (ME) and TK.
- **Screening, data extraction, analysis, and reporting:** Screening, data extraction, and reporting will be led by SP, AF with support from TK, MB, and AT.

### 6.3 Declarations of interest

No conflict of interests to declare.

### 6.4 Sources of support

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### 6.5 Plans for updating the map

To keep the map up-to-date and relevant, we will seek funding to regularly update it as new studies become available. The feasibility, frequency, and comprehensiveness of updates will depend on the amount of funding secured.

**Online Appendix: Supplementary Materials for The effects of Private Sector Engagement (PSE) Interventions on inclusive and sustainable development in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: An Evidence Gap Map Protocol**

<https://3ieimpact.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/Online-appendix-PSE-EGM-protocol-sup-materials.pdf>

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