



NEWFORESIGHT

SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

From Activity to Impact: Building Measurement Systems That Support Decisions

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Southern Africa*

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The decision gap | Activity data tells us what we delivered and not what to do next



We know how many people participated. But did their prospects actually change?”

Outputs matter for governance and accountability. **But organisations still needs to decide what to continue, improve, scale or stop.**



The reporting paradox | We know what programmes delivered but not whether they changed anything



A decision-led system begins with three questions:

1. What decision are we trying to make?
2. What do we need to learn to make it well?
3. What evidence would give us enough confidence to act?

These questions should determine what is measured, from whom, how often and with what level of methodological rigour.



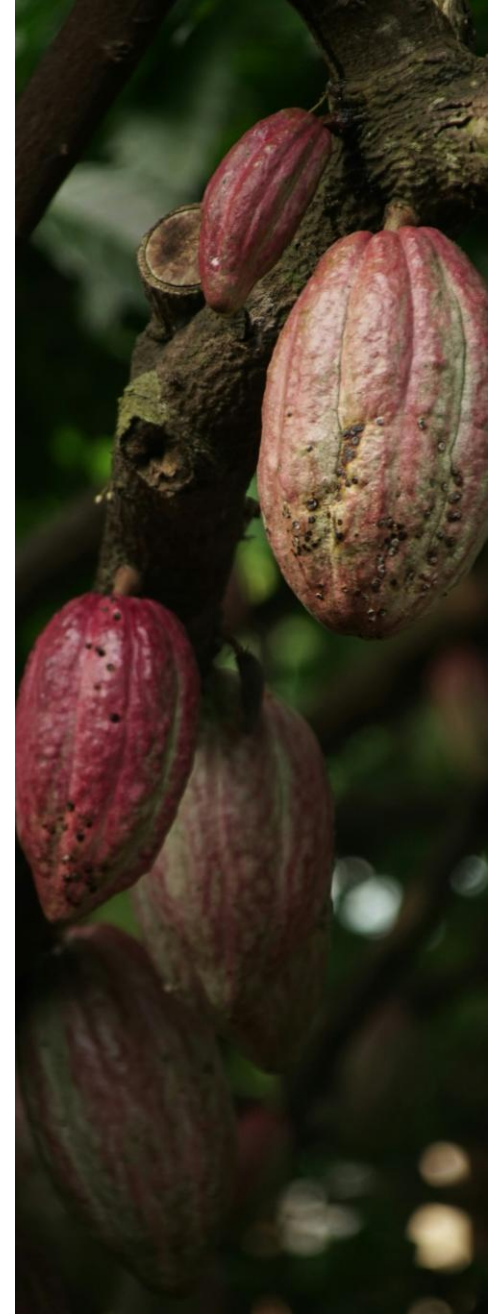
CASE STUDY

Three measurement traps and the choices that turn data into decision evidence

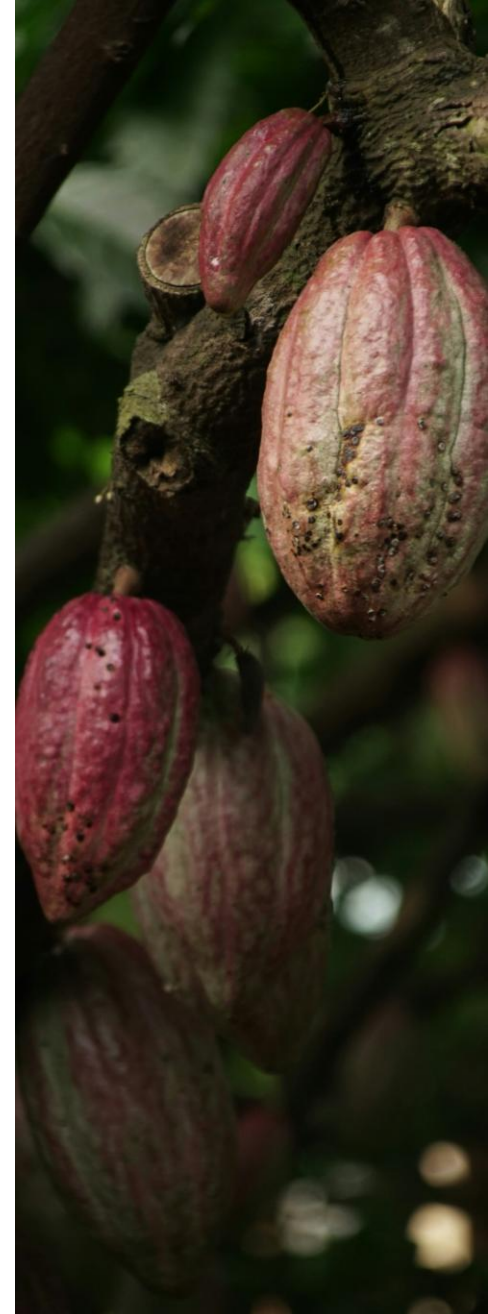
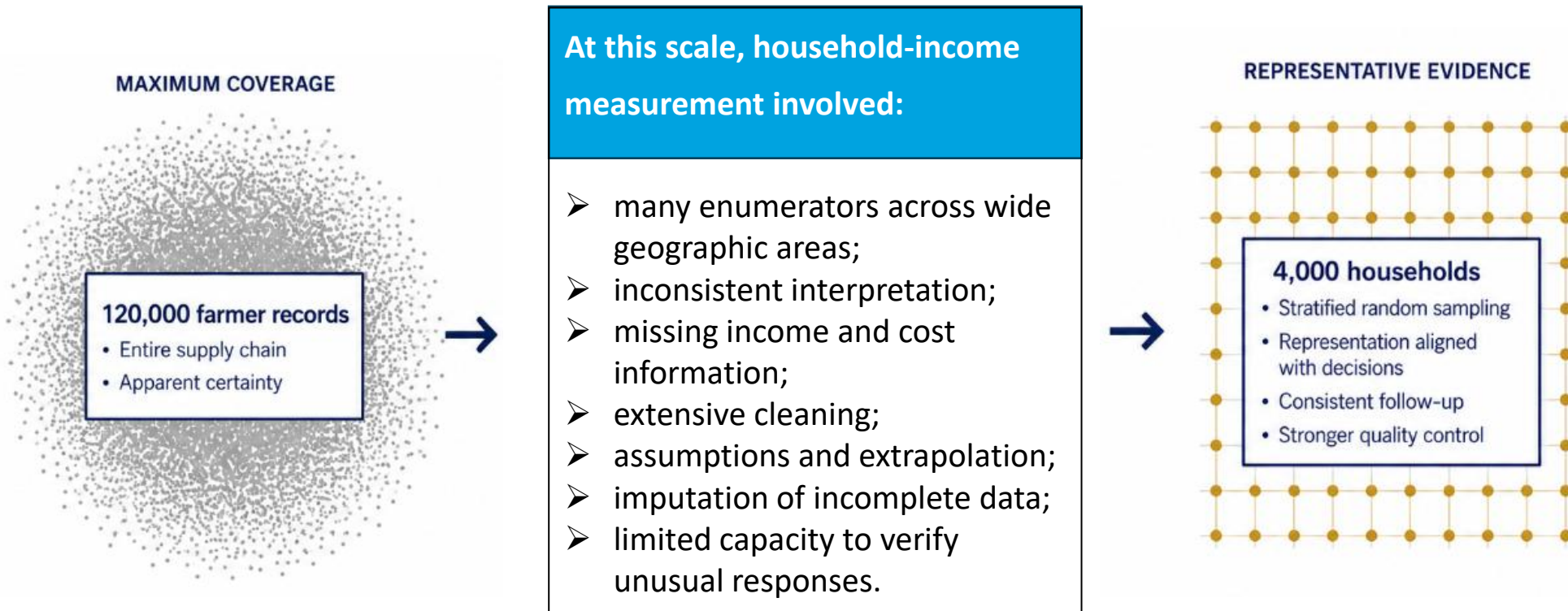


The investment question | Cargill needs to understand whether livelihoods were improving and where to invest next

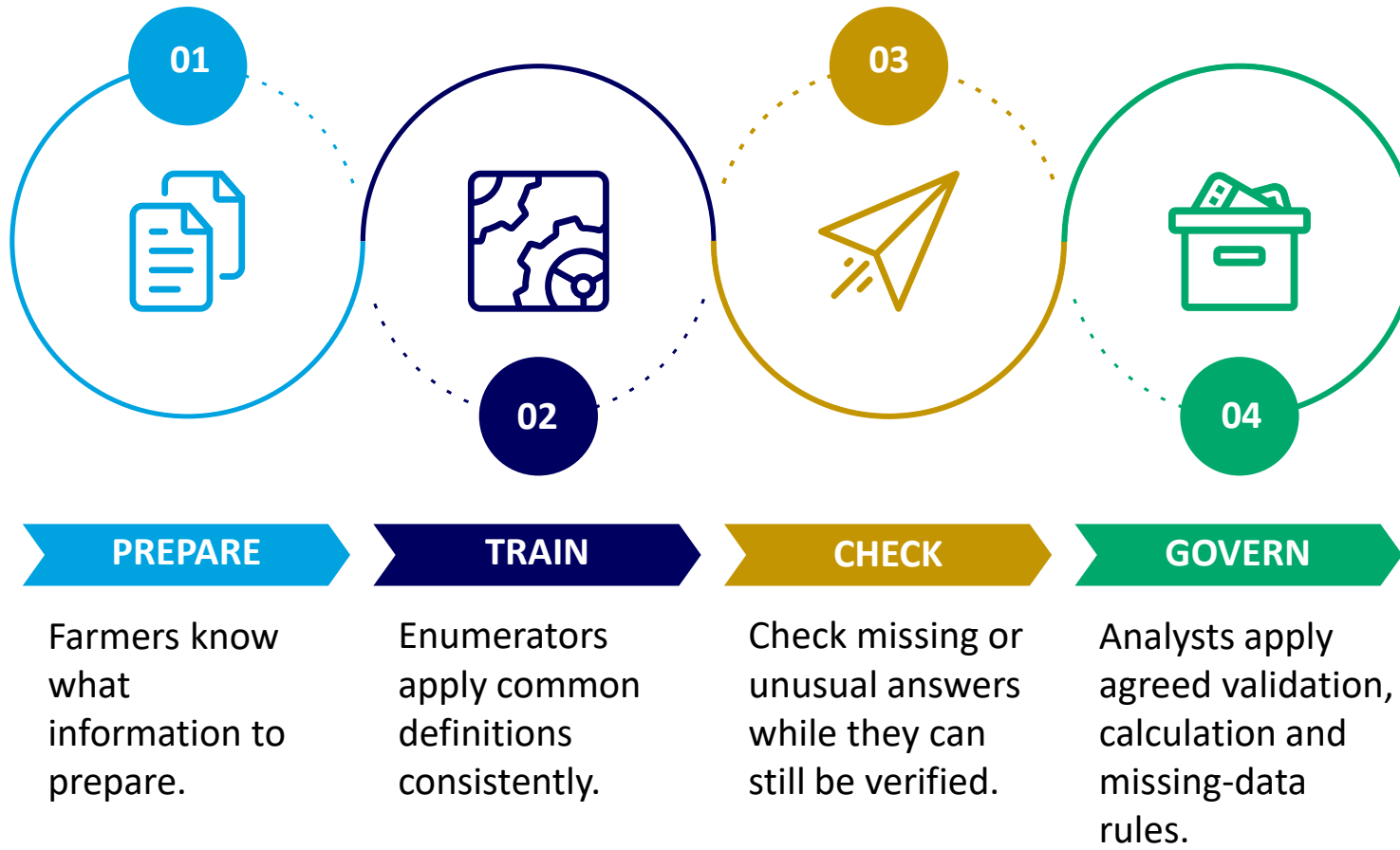
Cocoa-growing households work within a global supply chain but may still struggle to afford a decent basic standard of living.



The illusion of certainty | The first insight was coverage is not the same as credibility



The consistency gap | The second insight is that a questionnaire collects answers, but a measurement system makes those answers trustworthy.



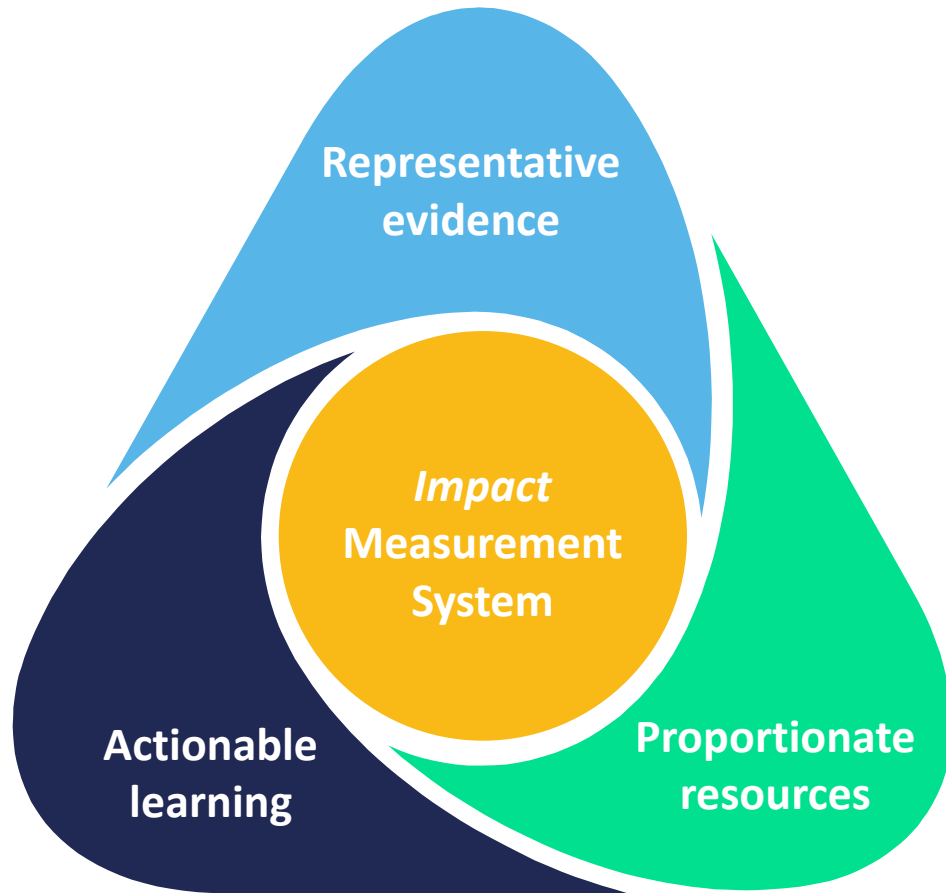
The **same questionnaire** can produce **different results** when enumerators interpret key concepts differently.

Without common definitions, preparation, quality checks and calculation rules, a change in the results may reflect a change in the method and not necessarily a change in farmers' lives.

The attribution gap | The third insight showed that confidence in a decision builds progressively from knowing what was delivered to what changed and its value



The Cargill lesson | Credible evidence is representative, trustworthy and actionable



The case challenged three reassuring assumptions:

- More records create greater certainty.
- The same questionnaire creates consistent measurement.
- Improved outcomes prove programme impact.

Cargill strengthened its measurement system by moving towards:

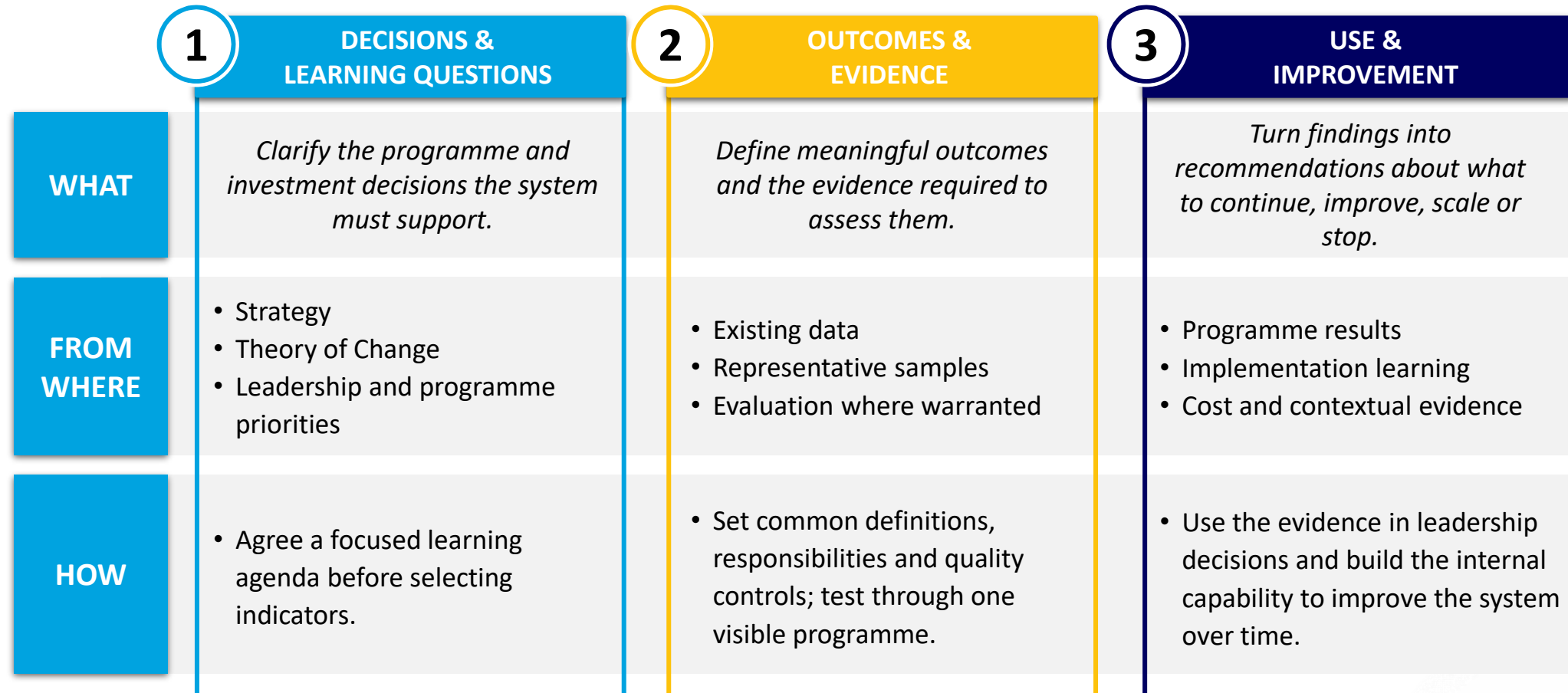
- ✓ Representative evidence it could govern.
- ✓ Quality and consistency beyond the questionnaire.
- ✓ Progressive learning about contribution and value.

All three shifts began with the same question:

What decision must this evidence support?



Begin with the decision | Build the evidence backwards from what the organisation needs to know



Take-home message | Design measurement for the decision and not just the report

We know what programmes delivered but not whether they changed people's lives.

Activity data can show who participated and what support they received. It cannot tell organisations what to continue, improve, expand or stop.

Before adding another indicator, survey or dashboard, ask:

What decision are we trying to make?

What do we need to learn to make the right operational and commercial decisions?

What evidence would give us enough confidence to act?

If the evidence cannot help us decide what to continue, improve or stop, we should reconsider why we are collecting it.

When people give us their time, information and trust, the evidence should travel beyond the report to show what is changing, guide better decisions and direct investment towards interventions that genuinely improve people's lives. The goal is not just more data; it is greater impact.



**If you would like to discuss this further
for your business, please reach out:**

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