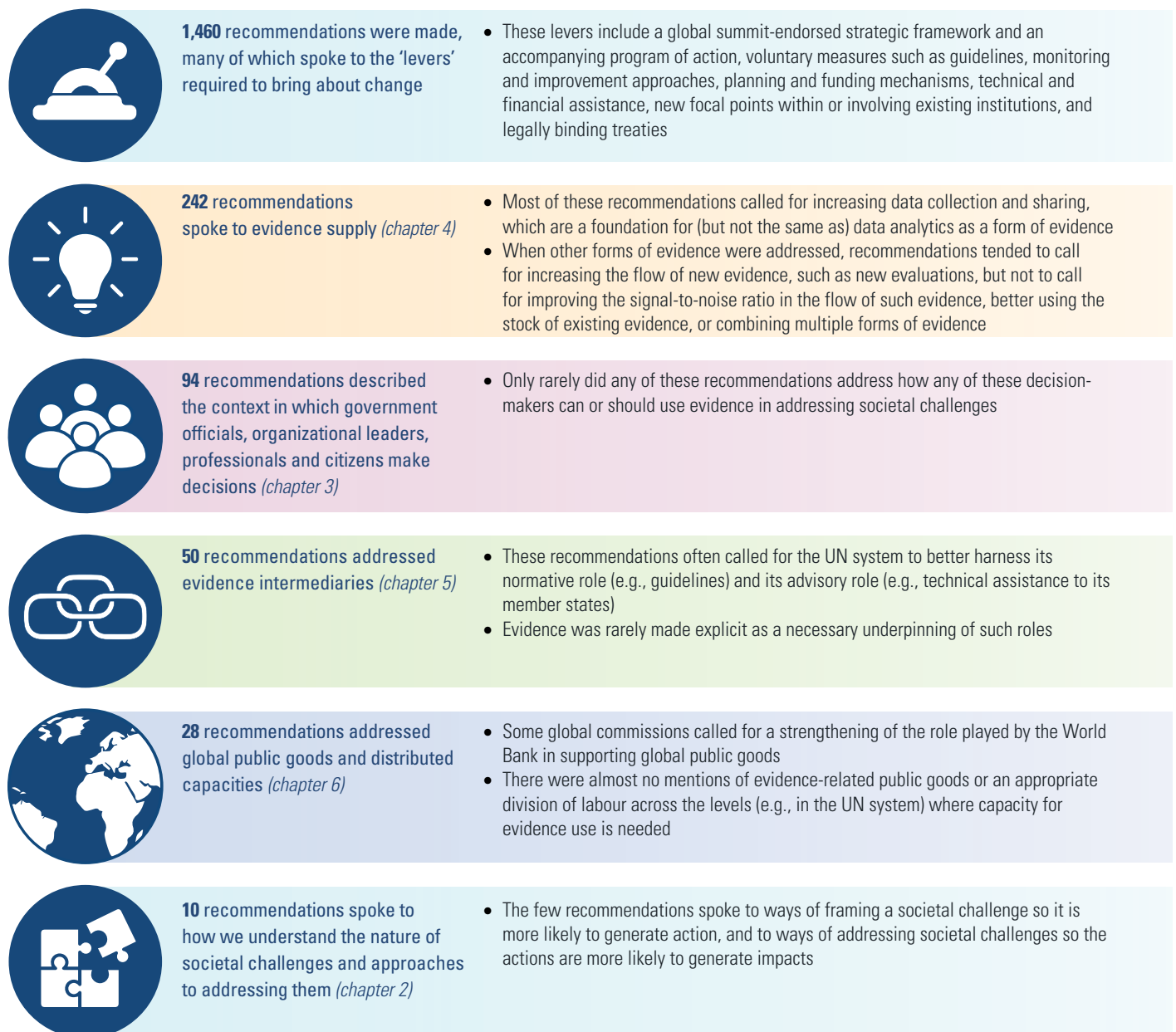


7.1 Insights from an analysis of global-commission recommendations

A thematic analysis of recommendations from 48 global commissions reporting since 1 January 2016 helped to:

- understand the gap between where we are and where we need to be in using evidence to address societal challenges, at least from the point of view of the high-profile members of global commissions
- improve the framing of the Evidence Commission's recommendations and identify new ideas that would help to bridge this gap
- identify the Evidence Commission's recommendations that align with recommendations from other global commissions.

Here we summarize key findings in an infographic, and then we elaborate on them in the text below it and in [section 7.3](#).



Between January 2016 and September 2021, 48 global commissions issued 70 reports (one of which was an interim report) and made 1,460 recommendations, for an average of 30 recommendations per commission and 21 recommendations per report. The full list of reports is provided in **appendix 8.1**.

The global-commission recommendations that aligned with the focus of the Evidence Commission report most commonly addressed evidence supply (i.e., 242 recommendations spoke to chapter 4). Most of these recommendations called for increasing data collection and sharing, which are a foundation for data analytics as a form of evidence, but they:

- gave little attention to the problem of parsimony in what's collected, the quality of the data and data analytics, and timeliness in sharing
- appeared to assume that robust data analytics will be undertaken and then presented in ways that can inform decision-making and support accountability, including by being attentive to equity considerations
- didn't clarify the types of questions that data analytics can best answer or the forms of evidence that can answer the other types of questions needed to make decisions.

When other forms of evidence were addressed, recommendations tended to call for increasing the flow of new evidence, such as new evaluations, and not to call for improving the signal-to-noise ratio in the flow of such evidence, better using the stock of existing evidence, or combining multiple forms of evidence. Some global commissions called for evaluations, including five that explicitly called for evaluating what works and a few that called for evaluating impacts across multiple domains (e.g., health, economic and environmental impacts) and time horizons. Few global commissions called for behavioural/implementation research, despite sometimes calling for campaigns and other strategies to change behaviours that would benefit from such research. Even fewer global commissions called for other forms of evidence, such as modeling, qualitative insights, evidence syntheses and guidelines, to address the societal challenges they focused on.

The second-most common grouping of global-commission recommendations described the context in which government officials, organizational leaders, professionals and citizens make decisions (94 recommendations spoke to chapter 3). Only rarely did any of these recommendations address how any of these decision-makers can or should use evidence in addressing societal challenges.

The greatest share of these 94 recommendations called for government policymakers to use specific policy instruments or specific structures and processes to address a societal challenge. A smaller share called for organizational leaders – especially business leaders – to use specific approaches to address a societal challenge, professionals to address societal challenges independently of their role in governments and organizations, and citizens to play a more active role in addressing societal challenges.

The third most-common grouping of global-commission recommendations addressed evidence intermediaries (50 recommendations spoke to chapter 5). These recommendations often called for the UN system to better harness its normative role (e.g., guidelines) and its advisory role (e.g., technical assistance to its member states), and for the UN system and other 'intermediaries' to use specific types of strategies to support government policymakers and other decision-makers to address societal challenges. Evidence was rarely made explicit as a necessary underpinning of such roles and strategies.

Global public goods and distributed capacities were even less frequently the focus of global-commission recommendations (28 recommendations spoke to chapter 6). Some global commissions called for strengthening the role played by the World Bank in supporting global public goods and for support for global public goods like the internet. However, there were almost no mentions of evidence-related public goods or an appropriate division of labour across the levels where capacity for evidence use is needed (e.g., what the UN system, its regional offices and its country offices can each best do).

Improving how we understand the nature of societal challenges and approaches to addressing them was least frequently the focus of global-commission recommendations (10 recommendations spoke to chapter 2). The few recommendations spoke to ways of framing a societal challenge so it is more likely to generate action, and to ways of addressing societal challenges so the actions are more likely to generate impacts. They also spoke to foresight and innovations being domains that can complement evidence in addressing societal challenges.

The more detailed findings from our thematic analysis of global-commission recommendations are presented in the annex at the end of this chapter (**section 7.3**). The findings start with the levers required to bring about change – a range of measures and mechanisms that could be considered in drafting recommendations such as the Evidence Commission's. Only some of these levers have been the subject of evidence syntheses about their effectiveness. The remaining findings are organized by the focus of each chapter in this report.

Some additional observations from our analysis of the global-commission reports include:

- one report used language that could be easily adapted (as we have done in our recommendations) as a next step needed to support evidence use: the UN Secretary-General should set out clear expectations for all parts of the UN system on evidence use, require relevant UN agencies and entities to outline institutional plans for how they will build internal capacities and step up their engagement on evidence use, and work to enhance member states' access to predictable technical support that is both evidence-based and that strengthens national evidence-support systems (High-level panel on internal displacement)
- another report used language that could be easily adapted (as we have done) as a caution in supporting evidence use: funders should align their support with country strategies for their evidence-support system, and avoid funding a multitude of small-scale or vertical initiatives (Lancet Commission on high-quality health systems in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) era)
- one report used evidence to mean judicial evidence, not research evidence (High-level panel of legal experts on media freedom)
- one report addressed equity by emphasizing the importance of taking crosscutting (intersectional) relationships and hierarchies into account (High-level panel of experts on food security and nutrition)
- one report called for drawing on Indigenous and local knowledge in developing community-based strategies (High-level panel on international financial accountability, transparency and integrity for achieving the 2030 agenda)
- one report specific to COVID-19 was a missed opportunity to call for embedding the many forms of evidence, as well as evidence-support systems, in all aspects of the proposed new global architecture for pandemic preparedness and response (Independent panel for pandemic preparedness and response)
- many reports included recommendations that invoke colours associated with their area of focus (e.g., green bonds for the environment, blue funds for water, and red list for threatened species) or to signal desired actions (e.g., stop doing things on a red list)
- some reports used formats for their recommendations that were helpful in drafting the Evidence Commission recommendations (High-level panel on internal displacement; Lancet Commission on high-quality health systems in the SDG era).