



International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)

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3ie Impact Evaluation Practice: a guide for grantees

This document should be read in conjunction with the 3ie *Principles for Impact Evaluation*

Definitions

1. Rigorous impact evaluation studies are analyses that measure the net change in outcomes amongst a particular group, or groups, of people that can be attributed to a specific program using the best methodology available, feasible and appropriate to the evaluation question that is being investigated and to the specific context.
2. Social and economic development programs are interventions whose primary purpose is to improve a population's quality of life, whether they are financed by public agencies, NGOs, or private institutions; for example programs aimed at improving health, education, employment, access to credit, infrastructure, and reducing income-poverty.

Conceptual approaches to measuring impact

3. Rigorous impact evaluations are evaluations are those which tackle the attribution problem. The main challenges to be addressed in attribution are: (1) allowing for confounding factors, (2) selection bias arising from the endogeneity of program placement, (3) spillover effects, (4) contamination of the control and (5) impact heterogeneity.
4. No one approach is promoted by 3ie, though 3ie hopes to contribute to the development of learning about appropriate impact evaluation methods, and so help establish a consensus around these issues.
5. Impact evaluation designs most commonly utilize a control group to allow for confounding factors. This control must be selected in such a way as to minimize the chances of spillover effects and contamination, though data collection should check for the presence of such problems. Identification of the control must also remove possible selection bias, for which either experimental or quasi-experimental approaches which can be used. Finally, study design must allow for impact heterogeneity by intervention, beneficiary-type and context.
6. Proposals made to 3ie must explicitly address the possible endogeneity of program placement and the approach which will be employed to address it. Final reports should include chapters or sections on program placement and targeting, which should lay the basis for a presentation of the identification strategy.
7. Quality impact evaluations require mixed methods; that is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative methods have been outlined above.

There are a range of qualitative methods which can be utilized. At the very minimum they require core team members to spend time in the field observing program implementation, and interviewing program staff at central and field levels. Open-ended participatory fieldwork can be of help in framing the evaluation questions and in design of survey instruments. Qualitative data collection alongside the quantitative survey, and setting aside funds for participatory action research, can help interpretation of patterns in the quantitative data. In longer-term studies it is possible to embed qualitative fieldworkers in the study community, possibly as funded anthropology PhD students.

Evaluation framework

8. 3ie-financed studies are expected to not just answer the question “what works?”, but also “why?” and “under what circumstances?”. This requirement has implications for evaluation design. First, the quantitative analysis should allow for impact heterogeneity by intervention design, beneficiary type and other contextual factors. Second, the study should not be restricted to the impact end of the causal chain. Studies should clearly lay out how it is that the intervention (inputs) is expected to affect final outcomes, and test each link (assumption) from inputs to outcomes (sometimes referred to as the program theory). The evaluation design should incorporate analysis of the causal chain from inputs to impacts. Hence the study needs to engage in process evaluation questions in order to analyze causes of success or failure. Structural modeling is one approach to an analysis of the causal chain, but should be complemented by a mix of methods. Finally, there needs to be explicit discussion of the project context to inform discussions of replicability.
9. The impact studies should address policy-relevant questions which are not strictly related to impact. Principle amongst these are issues of replicability (and scaling up), and sustainability. Addressing these issues will require, amongst other things, a discussion of cost effectiveness or a full cost-benefit analysis.

Pioneering new approaches

10. 3ie encourages conceptual innovation. It is particularly keen to support studies which utilize innovative methodologies, or apply quality impact evaluation to areas or questions which have not been the subject of previous study using these approaches. Under this heading, 3ie encourages further work pursuing rigorous mixed methods designs, using rigorous qualitative methods along with appropriate quantitative methods.

Ensuring policy relevance

11. 3ie’s goal is to influence policy to enhance development effectiveness. Policy influence is achieved through a number of mechanisms. Grantees are expected to fully utilize these mechanisms to maximize the impact of their studies.

Stakeholder engagement

12. Engagement of key stakeholders from an early stage greatly facilitates policy influence. The primary audience for 3ie studies is policy makers, and preference will be given to proposals responding to a clear demand from policy makers. Grantees are expected to ensure full cooperation from implementing bodies, and awareness of the study from those with a policy interest in the study’s findings. Pre-study briefings or a launch workshop should be used to collect insights and evaluation questions from these stakeholders.

13. Key stakeholders should be kept abreast of study findings as they emerge and given the chance to provide feedback. Grantees should not suppress unfavorable findings, but should give recognition to explanations provided by the implementing agency and other stakeholders.
14. Policy makers should be involved in discussions on the presentation of policy-findings from the study.

Evaluation design

15. As laid out above, the evaluation design should not just address the question of “what works?”, but also “why?” and “under what circumstances?”.

Communicating results: dissemination strategy

16. All proposals are required to include a dissemination strategy for communicating their results. The strategy should be adapted to the study context, but the following paragraphs list typical elements.
17. Prior to and during the study the grantee is expected to create awareness of the study. This can be done through:
 - A launch workshop, or pre-study briefings with key stakeholders.
 - Larger studies may create their own websites
 - Participation in workshops or other events associated with the intervention.
 - Where appropriate, notes on preliminary findings from baseline and midterm surveys.
18. On completion of the study the grantee must provide:
 - A final report, which lays out the study approach, findings and policy implications.
 - A policy-brief, accessible to the lay reader, focused on findings and policy implications.
 - A ‘technical briefing’ of up to 1,000 words, outlining the approach and main findings; these briefings will be posted on 3ie’s website, distributed to its mailing list in *3ie news*, and published in the *Journal of Development Effectiveness*.
 - Stage a study completion workshop which involves key stakeholders.
 - For studies financed through 3ie’s thematic window, the grantee will be required to participate in a thematic workshop. The grantee should arrange media coverage of the workshop.
19. In addition, the grantee is encouraged to identify innovative means of communicating findings, which could include:

- Enhanced media coverage, e.g. magazine articles
- Documentary-style video presentations
- Podcasts to be available from the 3ie site

Building partnerships and capacity

20. 3ie is committed to supporting studies driven by the policy interests of agencies based in developing countries, with a preference for study teams led by research institutions and other agencies based in developing countries. However, 3ie also recognizes the considerable skills in conducting quality impact evaluations in institutions located in developed countries. 3ie therefore encourages collaborative partnerships between developing and developed country institutions. Particular encouragement is given to South-South collaborative partnerships.
21. The above does not preclude proposals from teams based entirely within developing countries, either through South-South partnerships, or from single institutions in a developing country.
22. Where a partnership is appropriate, 3ie does not prescribe any specific partnership model, which will depend on the relative strengths of the partner institutions. However, there are some typical elements which might commonly be expected to be observed in partnerships under 3ie-supported studies. First, the grantee will normally be the developing country institution, who is the lead institution and budget holder for the study. Second, most of the work, including data analysis and report writing, will be conducted in the developing country institution, with core team members from both developed and developing country institutions. Third, whilst 3ie is not directly engaged in support for capacity building, capacity building elements can be included under collaborative partnerships. In addition to on-the-job training from learning-by-doing, such capacity building can range from ad hoc training courses to allocating funds for a PhD scholarship at the developed country institution (or of course a developing country partner institution) where the thesis uses data generated by the project. As proposed above, the proposal might also include PhDs for qualitative data collection and analysis, which may be located at either developed or developing country institutions.

Obligations of grant holders

23. Aside from contractual reporting requirements to 3ie, grant holders have the following obligations:
 - All 3ie proposals and evaluation designs are subject to expert peer review. The grantee is required to respond in writing to comments received by peer reviewers, indicating how these comments have been taken into account.
 - Assist 3ie in packaging the study findings and policy implications for policy makers.
 - Place data collected using 3ie finance, together with adequate documentation (survey instruments, code sheet and description of the construction of aggregate and composite

variables) in the public domain within six months of the end of the study date. This can be done by submission to 3ie to place on 3ie's website, or any other publicly available site (to which a link will be provided from the 3ie site)

- Seek to publish at least one paper in an international peer-reviewed journal. Consideration should be given to 3ie's journal, the *Journal of Development Effectiveness (JDEff)*, but this is not a requirement. *JDEff* will, anyhow, publish the 1,000 word 'technical briefing' referred to above.
- Be available for policy-related follow-up including, but not necessarily restricted to, policy briefings and participation in thematic workshops.

Ethical standards

Study management

24. When planning and reporting evaluations, evaluators should include relevant perspectives and interests of the full range of stakeholders.
25. In general, 3ie will not finance studies where there may be a perceived conflict of interest. Any apparent conflict of interest which arises once the study has begun should be declared to 3ie immediately.
26. The evaluator's allocation and expenditure of resources should reflect sound accountability procedures and otherwise be prudent and ethically responsible, so that expenditures are accounted for and appropriate.
27. Reporting procedures should guard against distortion caused by personal feelings and biases of any party to the evaluation, so that evaluation reports fairly reflect the evaluation findings.

Fieldwork

28. Fieldwork behavior:
 - All required permissions should be obtained from the appropriate authorities before any fieldwork is undertaken.
 - The purpose of the fieldwork should be explained to community leaders on entry into the community.
 - Care must be taken to not raise expectations as a result of the study.
 - All respondents are to be treated with respect.
 - All members of team financed by 3ie are expected to behave appropriately during fieldwork with respect for local cultural norms.

29. Team leaders should exercise due caution in conducting fieldwork in hazardous conditions. Any decision to suspend, postpone or terminate fieldwork should, where possible, be discussed with 3ie prior to implementation of that decision.