3ie Replication Programme
Programme Description
February 9, 2012

Background

The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) seeks to improve the lives of poor people in low- and middle-income countries by providing and summarizing evidence about which development interventions work, when, why, and for how much. In addition to providing and summarizing such evidence, 3ie seeks to improve the quality and reliability of evidence that is produced and used for development policy making. To this end, 3ie is establishing the Replication Programme for impact evaluations of development policies and programmes.

The scientific method has always emphasized the importance of replication, and very few researchers will deny the benefits—both direct and indirect—of replication to the search for knowledge through data analysis. The benefits to individual researchers from conducting replications have been limited, however, except in those few cases where the replication gains a high profile by uncovering major faults in a highly influential or widely cited study. Few journals have a policy that encourages the submission of replications.

3ie’s replication programme is designed to increase the conduct of internal replication studies, specifically of impact evaluations of development programmes. In order to mitigate the incentive to replicate studies only to expose mistakes, the 3ie replication programme provides incentives for replication by funding researchers to undertake replications and publishing the completed replications through the 3ie website and working paper series.

By internal replication, we mean the re-analysis of the original data and, in some cases, the validation of the data analysis by using different data sources for the same population. The 3ie programme does not include external replication—replications of interventions in different settings to assess the external validity of an impact evaluation of a particular intervention. Please see 3ie’s Practical Guidelines to Replication of Impact Evaluations for additional information.

Objectives

The primary objective of the replication programme is to improve the quality of evidence available for development policy making and programme design. For impact evaluations that have valid and robust findings, the replication programme will lend additional credibility to these findings for use in policy making. For impact evaluations that have invalid or non-robust findings, the replication programme will help to encourage further analysis before the evidence influences policy. More specifically, the replication programme seeks to:
Verify the findings, and examine the robustness of findings, in selected influential, innovative, or counterintuitive impact evaluations of development interventions;

- Improve the incentives of researchers to conduct careful and responsible data analysis.

Additional advantages of the programme include:

- Increase the incentives of researchers to maintain clear databases, codebooks, transformation files, and statistical analysis files;
- Encourage further analysis of existing datasets;
- Provide research consulting opportunities for researchers interested in impact evaluation of development programmes.

Programme features

This document outlines the features of the programme for published studies replication.

Candidate studies list

The backbone of the published studies replication programme is the candidate studies list. At any given time, this list includes 10 to 20 published impact evaluations that are yet to be replicated. Published can mean an academic journal article, a book or book chapter, or a formal agency report. It does not include working papers.

Candidate studies must be impact evaluations of social and economic development programmes in low- or middle-income countries. According to the 3ie Principles for Impact Evaluation, high-quality impact evaluations measure the net change in outcomes amongst a particular group, or groups, of people that can be attributed to a specific programme using the best methodology available, feasible and appropriate to the evaluation question(s) being investigated and to the specific context. Social and economic development programmes have, as their primary purpose, to improve a population’s quality of life, whether they are financed by public agencies, NGOs, or private institutions; for example programmes aimed at improving health, education, employment, access to credit, infrastructure, and reducing income-poverty.

The candidate studies list is developed by the 3ie Impact Evaluation Services office with the assistance of the Replication Programme Advisory Group (RPAG). The RPAG is comprised of four distinguished researchers who serve for terms of two years. The RPAG makes suggestions for the list and approves the final selections. Anyone may submit suggestions for the candidate studies list.

The selection criteria for the candidate studies list include:

- Innovative methodology or estimation techniques;
• Significant impact on policy or clear and important policy implications;
• Novel or counterintuitive results, or results that contradict previous findings in the literature;
• New or under-explored datasets.

Studies may be selected based on one or more of these criteria. Selection for the candidate studies list is not based on and should not consider the current availability of the data.

The candidate studies list is published on the replication programme page of the 3ie website. As studies are selected for replication, they are moved to the replications list. The replications list includes all studies selected for replication along with the status, updated regularly, of the replication. The status section will include notation for when replications cannot be conducted due to the unavailability of the data or computer codes.

All final replication reports, along with the original authors’ response to the report if submitted to 3ie, are published on the 3ie website.

Soliciting replications

3ie is launching the replication programme with an open call for applications to conduct replications. As a result of this competition, 3ie anticipates awarding 5 to 10 independent consulting contracts for replications. Each application must select a study from the candidate studies list. Applicants may submit up to three applications but may only receive one contract. It is the intent of the programme to award the consulting agreement to the researcher who is devoting the most time to the replication, so individual researchers may be involved in more than one ongoing replication, but can only be the contract holder, and thus ultimately accountable, for one at a time.

The application must include the following components:
• CV of the applicant;
• Statement explaining the applicant’s choice of the study and the main replication questions. This statement should include a discussion of the contribution of the study to the literature and the study’s influence or potential influence on policy;
• Proposed replication plan. This plan should identify the proposed level of replication (pure, statistical, or scientific) and what avenues of inquiry the applicant plans to pursue (alternative measures or indexes, methods of data construction, estimation methodologies, functional form specification, hypotheses, theories of change, etc.);
• Work plan (not exceeding six months after data and code acquisition);
• Proposed budget, not exceeding $15,000, in the 3ie budget template and conforming to the 3ie direct cost policies.
Applications will be scored according to the following criteria and weights by at least two internal and one external reviewer.

- Qualifications of applicant (40%)
- Relevance of study and proposed replication questions (20%)
- Proposed replication plan (30%)
- Work plan (10%)

Contracts will be awarded on a best value basis, so that final selection may take into account relative costs across applications. Only one application will receive a contract for any given candidate study.¹

The mechanisms for solicitation after the first open call will be announced at a later date.

**Contract terms**

The contract template can be found [here](#). The contracts are independent consulting contracts with individuals. In cases where the principal investigator desires to pay others involved in the study, he/she may include those costs as expenses in the budget and then provides the receipts for these expenses as part of the time and expense reports. These expenses must comply with 3ie direct cost policies. No indirect costs or fringe rates are permitted under these contracts.

A key element of the contract is the data acquisition period. For replications of studies for which the data and necessary log files are not already publicly available, the contract includes a three-month data acquisition deadline. The deadlines for the draft replication report and the final replication report are then calculated from the date that the data and necessary files are acquired.

If the consultant is not able to obtain the data and necessary files by the three-month deadline, the replication is aborted. The consultants can be reimbursed for up to 8 hours of recorded time spent trying to obtain the data. The consultant is eligible to submit an application to replicate another study from the candidate studies list, and 3ie awards contracts in these cases assuming the application receives a minimum acceptable score.

In some cases, the data acquisition period is also used for discussions between 3ie reviewers and the consultant with the objective of improving the replication plan.

The contract also includes a two-month period between the submission of the draft replication report and the final replication report. 3ie provides comments to the consultant by the end of the first of these two months.

¹ A second replication, i.e. replication of the replication, may be funded by 3ie if the original study along with the first replication are included on the candidate studies list after the first replication is published on the 3ie website.
3ie makes payments based on review and approval of deliverables according to fixed percentages of the ceiling price of the contract. Consultants are required to submit timesheets and expense reports with each tranche. The final payment is made based on a reconciliation of the time and expense reports with the original budget and constitutes the lesser of the actual costs and the ceiling price of the contract.

The three tranche payments are:

- 20% when the data and codes are obtained from the original authors and 3ie’s comments on the proposal are addressed;
- 40% after the acceptance of the draft replication report;
- 40% after the acceptance of the final report.