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## Early implementation lessons from 3ie-supported impact evaluations of humanitarian assistance

**3ie's Humanitarian Assistance Thematic Window (HATW) aims to produce high-quality evidence to help inform policy and programming in the humanitarian sector. 3ie is supporting impact evaluations and synthesising evidence to understand what is effective and efficient in delivering programmes in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, including what can help to improve recovery and build resilience. We are funding studies that use innovative approaches, are gender responsive and equity focused, and adhere to the ethical standards in evaluation research with vulnerable populations.**

### How are we building the evidence base?

3ie-supported impact evaluations examine important questions related to effectiveness, ethics, gender-responsive equity, targeting, and sustainability and efficiency across various sectors, including nutrition and food security, multi-sectoral humanitarian programming and water, sanitation and hygiene. Currently 3ie is supporting impact evaluations in Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali, Niger, Pakistan, Sudan and Uganda. Besides the impact evaluations under the HATW, 3ie is also supporting high-quality impact evaluations in fragile and conflict-affected contexts on various topics such as community-driven reconstruction, peace-building programmes, cash-based humanitarian interventions, among several others (see page 4 for more information).

Table 1 gives an overview of where the studies are being conducted, the context and the nature of the humanitarian setting, the interventions and the key outcomes being assessed in these ongoing impact evaluations. These impact evaluations will subsequently inform the overall theory of change that is being developed for this HATW.

### Key lessons

- **Early and ongoing engagement is critical to ensure buy-in for the impact evaluation** and to mitigate anticipated risks associated with study implementation in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.
- **Complex humanitarian contexts pose a challenge for the fidelity of the study design and rollout of the programme.** Given the context, researchers should anticipate these risks and try to come up with alternative and rigorous study designs that can account for these challenges.
- **Researchers should use existing administrative and monitoring data and collaborate with other agencies** to complement their data collection efforts, since these are resource-scarce contexts.

This **learning brief** draws from the preliminary challenges and lessons from the ongoing impact evaluations under 3ie's HATW. These include lessons on study design and methodology, study implementation, and engagement during the course of an impact evaluation. It provides a point-in-time reference for researchers and evaluation commissioners to anticipate and mitigate some of the challenges associated with conducting impact evaluations of humanitarian interventions.

**Table 1: 3ie-supported impact evaluations under the Humanitarian Assistance Thematic Window**

Study	Context	Key outcomes	Interventions							
			MAM treatment	MAM prevention	Food assistance for assets	Non-food intervention	General food distribution	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene	Livelihoods	Community mobilisation
WFP programme targeting moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) in humanitarian situations in Chad	Protracted emergency with conflict and food insecurity	Incidence and prevalence of MAM; morbidity	✓	✓			✓			✓
Assessing the impact of conflict and the effects of WFP humanitarian interventions on MAM and other developmental outcomes in Mali	Ongoing conflicts; internal displacement; chronic food insecurity	Child malnutrition; child mortality; food consumption and expenditure; impact of emergency nutrition interventions on women's health	✓	✓			✓			✓
Impact evaluation of WFP malnutrition interventions in Niger	Chronic food insecurity and high levels of malnutrition; climate and agricultural shocks, patriarchal social structure, lack of services which have adverse effects on women	Prevalence of MAM; reduced gender inequalities	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓
WFP's moderate and acute malnutrition treatment and prevention programmes in Sudan	Active conflict; political instability; chronic food insecurity; flooding; exclusion of women and lack of knowledge of feeding practices	Incidence and prevalence of MAM; morbidity; knowledge, attitudes and practices related to pregnancy and dietary diversity among women and children	✓	✓						✓
Impact evaluation of UNICEF's Rapid Response to Population Movement programme in eastern DRC	Chronic conflict and displacement; poverty	Mental health; well-being; morbidity and mortality				✓	✓			
Improving the quality of care for children with acute malnutrition: cluster randomised controlled trial in West Nile region, Uganda	Poor rural health systems; poverty; HIV and AIDS	Child malnutrition; access to care; equity-related outcomes (for e.g. socio-economic quintiles)		✓		✓				
An impact evaluation of ACTED's humanitarian assistance in Pakistan	Recurrent natural disasters; chronic malnutrition	Prevalence of MAM; coping strategies; resilience; impact on discriminated and vulnerable groups including women and girls					✓	✓	✓	✓

## What have we learnt so far?

The following lessons cover issues related to the study design and methodology as well as study implementation and engagement in varying humanitarian contexts in the ongoing impact evaluations.

### Study design and methodology

**After implementation begins, maintaining design fidelity is complicated by the context.** The adverse humanitarian contexts, and the complex and sensitive nature of these programmes make it crucial that the impact evaluations are conducted within tight timelines. This can ensure feasible and timely evidence to inform key activities and programmatic decisions. However, it requires quick reaction time and expertise in understanding and identifying bias, spillovers and the need for maintaining overall rigour in impact evaluations.

The 3ie-supported study in Mali had to come up with an alternative robust study design for a programme targeting MAM due to a security situation in Bamako. The team circumvented this delay by going ahead with their qualitative research and maintained overall rigour.

**Study designs should be responsive to needs to recalculate sample size and power calculations when context changes suddenly.**

The 3ie study in Sudan had to modify their study design from a four-step rollout to a three-step rollout of the programme with an increase in the sample size, due to an unexpected emergency in the field.

**Researchers need to make the best possible use of any administrative and monitoring data that are routinely collected by humanitarian agencies.** Issues around accessibility, ethical constraints, security concerns and the changing nature of baseline populations pose major concerns. Given the complex nature of such evaluations, study teams have to efficiently use the existing data and tap multiple resources, if available.

The study team in Niger are using the data being collected by The World Food Programme country office and will use it to inform the overall analysis of the impact of the programme.



### Implementation and engagement

**The current construct of the humanitarian contexts complicates generating more high-quality evidence about programme effectiveness.** The instability and complex nature of humanitarian contexts and timing as well as the underlying 'cluster system' in the humanitarian sphere raise serious challenges, including the lack of clarity with respect to when interventions will be rolled out on the ground and when funding will be available for them. Sometimes this poses a challenge for the research team, who have to coordinate with multiple actors involved in the programme rollout, particularly around study implementation and engagement efforts.

A study in the DRC is coordinating with several agencies involved in the rollout of a large-scale programme that addresses the needs of recently displaced populations.

**Security challenges in the field often affect the choice of intervention areas, beneficiaries, and even a thorough description of the interventions.** 3ie urges study teams to undertake early and deep engagement at the inception of the study, particularly with the field staff of the implementing partners. This ensures that the evaluation designs are adapted to the actual implementation plans.

**Early and ongoing engagement with key stakeholders can be crucial to study implementation.** Early engagement can help ensure that the implementing agency staff understand the scope and limitations associated with the impact evaluation, particularly when defining the research questions, study design, methods and the ethics associated with the evaluation. All teams undertake a series of preparatory activities, including workshops, while preparing the proposals to ensure that there is strong support for the impact evaluation.

## 3ie-supported studies in fragile and conflict-affected contexts

3ie is also supporting a range of impact evaluation and systematic reviews in fragile and conflict-affected contexts under its various grant windows. More information about these studies are available on our website.

- Assessing the impacts of community-driven development in Sierra Leone
- Social and economic impacts of Tuungane: effects of a community-driven reconstruction programme in eastern DRC
- Impact evaluation of the LivingSideBySide®, peace-building programme in Kyrgyzstan
- Does reconciliation affect conflict and development? Evidence from a field experiment in Sierra Leone
- Impact evaluation of the UNICEF-IKEA project on adolescents' lives in Pakistan
- Impact evaluation of the UNICEF-IKEA project on adolescents' lives in Afghanistan
- Evaluating the impacts of psychosocial support and cash for work on employment and propensity towards violence among Liberian youth
- Cash-based approaches in humanitarian emergencies: a systematic review
- Short-term hygiene interventions in emergency response situations: a systematic review and impact analysis

### 3ie-supported impact evaluations in fragile and conflict-affected contexts

- HATW impact evaluations
- Other 3ie-supported impact evaluations

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Mike Clarke  
Claire Allen  
Frank Archer  
Diana Wong  
Annell Eriksson  
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Scoping Paper 1



International Initiative for Impact Evaluation

**What methods may be used in impact evaluations of humanitarian assistance?**  
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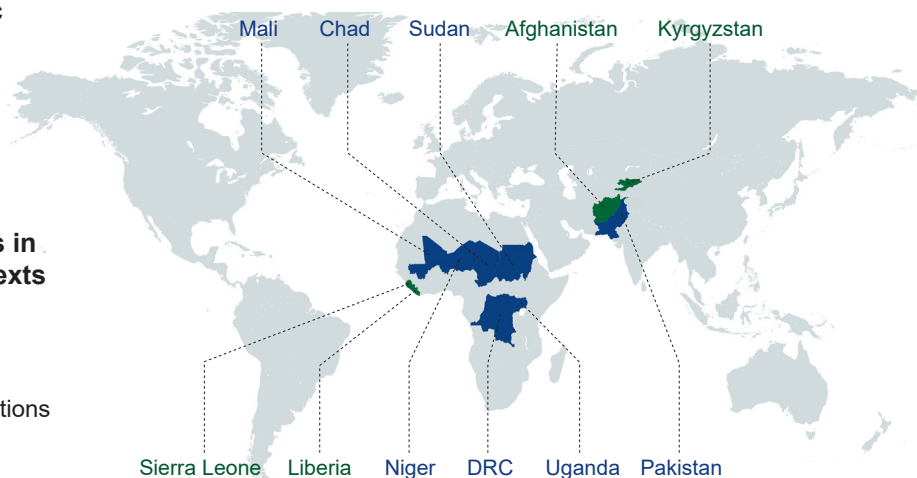
International Initiative for Impact Evaluation

**What evidence is available and what is required in humanitarian assistance?**

This 3ie scoping paper offers an independent analysis of the evidence base of evaluations in the humanitarian sector and identifies key gaps and priorities in need of rigorous evidence.

**What methods may be used in impact evaluations of humanitarian assistance?**

This 3ie working paper examines the extent to which impact evaluation methods can provide evidence to help improve the effectiveness and efficiency in humanitarian action.



3ie is a member-based, international non-governmental organisation committed to promoting evidence-informed development policies and programmes through high-quality and policy-relevant evidence. One of the ways that 3ie realises this commitment is by supporting and quality assuring impact evaluations, replication studies and systematic reviews of development interventions in low- and middle-income countries in high-priority sectors. 3ie is the global leader in funding and producing high-quality evidence on what works, how, why and at what cost in international development. We believe that better evidence will make development more effective and improve poor people's lives.

[www.3ieimpact.org](http://www.3ieimpact.org)

For more information on the impact evaluations included in this brief, please email Tara Kaul at [tkaul@3ieimpact.org](mailto:tkaul@3ieimpact.org). This learning brief is an updated version of what was published in September 2016.

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