



## **3ie REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS UNDER THE SOCIAL PROTECTION THEMATIC WINDOW (SPTW)**

### **Call background**

3ie is pleased to announce the launch of its first request for proposals (RFP) under a thematic window.

The first thematic window will focus on social protection. The window is funded by the [UK Department for International Development \(DFID\)](#), with the potential for some additional funding from [3ie](#). The aim is to fill critical gaps in our knowledge about social protection and further our common understanding of what works, why and in what circumstances.

A rigorous and consultative process has been followed to design the RFP. An [Expert Advisory Group \(EAG\)](#) was formed to guide the process. The first task of the group was to arrive at an agreement around the type of programmes that would be considered under the broad umbrella of social protection for the purposes of this call. An **inventory** of completed, ongoing and planned social protection-related programmes and evaluation studies was then compiled among key stakeholders, including the [World Bank](#), the [Inter-American Development Bank](#), [DFID](#) and [3ie](#), using the definitions and criteria defined in the [social protection typology document](#).

Subsequently, and in close consultation with the EAG, a **survey** was developed, which was sent to 240 developing country policy-makers, experts, and evaluators active in the area of social protection, to capture the emerging research priorities and research questions.

The **scoping report** provides options and recommendations for the design of the thematic call based on the analysis of priority questions and the research opportunities and gaps that emerged from the select literature review, mapping and inventory exercise.

The final step in the window design process was a meeting by the EAG on the 21<sup>st</sup> of July, 2011, which discussed the scoping report, and agreed the options for the design of the RFP.

## Call details

This call is being made under 3ie's Social Protection Thematic Window grant programme (SPTW).

(i) *General guidelines and priorities:*

- *Programmatic focus:* the SPTW seeks to gather evidence about risk reduction/coping mechanisms (in particular cash transfer interventions and public works), but may also consider complementary interventions in the area of risk prevention (unemployment benefits, pensions, and insurance) and opportunity promotion initiatives, such as job creation and training. This will enable the call to capture the linkages between the "protection" and "promotion" roles of social protection which fills an important evidence gap in this emerging field.
- *Geographic focus:* the SPTW is focused on generating lessons and evidence relevant to [low-income countries](#) and priority will be given to proposals from low-income contexts. However, the SPTW will also be open to studies of social protection interventions that include work in a [middle-income country](#), as long as the study clearly demonstrates that the lessons from this work are of relevance to [low-income countries](#). Cross-country and cross-regional studies are also of interest, as they can bring relevant comparisons of experiences.
- *Level of maturity of eligible projects:* while priority will be given to evaluations of large-scale, mature, interventions that have a high probability of influencing policy, the SPTW will also consider studies of pilot projects in low income countries. The main condition for including the evaluation of pilot programmes is clear evidence that they have the capacity and intention to scale up and become more permanent programmes, and if there happen to be similar pilots taking place in different regions/countries.
- *Methodological focus:* [3ie](#) supports impact evaluations that adhere to agreed-upon methodological standards for addressing the "attribution challenge" – e.g. establishing cause and effect between programmatic activities and specified outcomes. For further details refer to [3ie's principles for impact evaluation](#). This specific call will place additional emphasis on the importance of integrating cost benefit or cost effectiveness analysis into the financed studies. Researchers are also strongly encouraged to lay out the theory of change and use mixed methods to explore the causal mechanisms between interventions and measured outcomes. For select priority areas as identified in the table of priority areas below, CGE modelling approaches and systematic context analyses are also sought.
- *Quality focus:* 3ie is not only a funding organization but also a quality assurance and advisory organization. To fulfill this latter part of our mission, we contract External Project Advisors (EPA) for each project we fund. The EPAs are selected taking into account evaluation experience, sector expertise and regional knowledge. The primary role of the EPAs is to provide 3ie with external review of the studies we fund. But teams can also use the EPAs to discuss ideas if required. Both the EPAs and the 3ie evaluation office will review your major deliverables. In the case where we finance studies around

similar programmes, questions, or outcomes, we also expect these research teams to participate in joint design workshops to ensure evaluation designs and indicator specifications are specified to achieve optimal joint learning.

- *Partnership and learning:* the SPTW highlights the importance of involvement of the implementing agency and other key international, national and local policy-stakeholders throughout the study in order to ensure the high quality of the study and policy relevance. Early engagement of potential end users is important, and research teams will be encouraged to carry out impact evaluation user-workshops with their policymaker counterparts. Furthermore, the programme strongly encourages developing country researchers/evaluators, as well as partnerships between developed and developing country researchers/evaluators to apply.

(ii) *Description of priority areas:*

This Social Protection Thematic Window will focus on three main areas:

Priority area	Focus	Eligible methodologies
<u>1: Outcomes</u>	The overall impact of social protection programmes, with a focus on poverty reduction and local economic activity. Outcomes of interest will include: income effects (direct and indirect and diversification); employment effects (including migration rates); consumption effects (direct and indirect: level, composition and smoothing); distributional effects (including intra-household) and human capital effects ( <a href="#">please refer to programmatic focus</a> ).	<a href="#">Rigorous impact evaluations</a> , possibly in combination with general or partial equilibrium and simulation models, and complemented by cost benefit / cost effectiveness analysis.
<u>2: Design</u>	Design issues related to social protection programmes, with a focus on complementary programmes, exit and graduation strategies, and targeting mechanisms ( <a href="#">please refer to programmatic focus</a> ).	<a href="#">Rigorous impact evaluations</a> complemented by cost benefit / cost effectiveness analysis.
<u>3: Context</u>	Analysis of the political and institutional conditions that determine the selection of programmatic approach (e.g. conditional versus unconditional cash), results, sustainability, and capacity to adjust to evidence and emerging needs ( <a href="#">refer to programmatic focus above</a> ).	While the methodological approaches in this area will vary, the minimum requirements for eligibility are that the analysis is of a systematic nature, set out in a protocol prior to study launch with clearly defined inclusion/exclusion criteria, and that the analysis will draw on a range of existing programmes and/or evaluation studies.

### *Important Notes:*

1. [3ie](#) hopes to make **7-12 awards** of up to a total value of US\$5 million under this RFP. There is no maximum size for individual grants, although total cost reasonableness and best value will be explicitly assessed<sup>1</sup>. The duration of the funded studies is not expected to exceed 3 years.
2. Priority areas 1 and 2 will be further defined in terms of clusters at the full proposal application stage. By clusters we mean a number of proposals that propose to evaluate a similar type of programme, evaluation question, implementation-related issue and/or type of outcome. The cluster(s) will be determined based on the expressions of interest and will be announced on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November when the full proposal application period opens. We expect to finance a maximum of two clusters but will not make a final decision on this until the EOIs have been fully assessed. It is expected to finance a maximum of 2 studies under priority area 3, but we reserve the right to finance none should the quality and relevance of the submitted proposals not be deemed sufficient.
3. More information on the review criteria for full applications will be made available later on the 3ie website. In case of queries, please refer to the SPTW FAQ on the 3ie website. Any other questions should be sent to [sptw@3ieimpact.org](mailto:sptw@3ieimpact.org).

### **Submissions and review procedure**

All submissions must be made using [3ie's](#) online Grant Management System: <http://praxispts.com/3ieImpact/>. A helpdesk for enquiries about this system will operate after the call opens.

### **The call will open on October 10<sup>th</sup> 2011.**

There is a two stage submission process:

1. Submission of an expression of interest (EOI), for which the **deadline is 11.59 pm GMT November 7, 2011**. Notification of acceptance for submission of full proposal will be made by November 18, 2011.
2. If the EOI is accepted, submission of **full proposal by 11.59 pm GMT January 27, 2012**.

### **Stage I: Expression of Interest (EOI)**

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<sup>1</sup> **Total price reasonableness and best value:** Total price reasonableness is an assessment of whether the total requested budget for the project is an appropriate price for the scale of the work to be undertaken (e.g. the number of surveys, the amount of analysis, etc.) in the country or region where the evaluation will take place. Best value is an assessment of whether the evaluation (taking into account quality, relevance, and impact) for the total requested budget is good value for money compared to other possible evaluations. In making the best value assessment, reviewers can consider other 3ie applications reviewed or outside information they may have on actual or potential impact evaluations and their costs.

- EOIs submitted online are screened for completeness, as well as for fulfilling the following criteria: (i) following a rigorous methodology; (ii) being an evaluation of a development intervention; and (iii) intervention taking place in eligible country(ies), i.e. low- and middle-income according to [World Bank definition](#).
- For priority areas 1 and 2 specifically: once EOIs have passed this first level screening, they will be assessed on whether they belong to a cluster of proposals around the evaluation of similar programs/interventions, similar outcomes, similar evaluation questions, or similar implementation-related issues. Clusters will be given priority in this call to optimize the possibility of contributing to the body of evidence and generating lessons with wider applicability to low-income countries beyond the lessons from an individual programme. This means that proposals that have passed the first level screening may be rejected on account of not belonging to a cluster.
- Any EOI applicant that does not receive an invitation to submit a full proposal has not got through to the second stage.
- EOIs that successfully pass the EOI screening phase will be notified by November 18, 2011 and invited to submit a detailed proposal on line.
- All EOIs that are recommended for rejection are seen by two reviewers (one internal and one external) before being rejected.

## **Stage II: Full proposals**

- Guidance documents and application forms will be available on line for those research teams invited to submit a full proposal. Once received, the proposals submitted online are allocated to 4 reviewers (3 external and 1 internal). External reviewers are drawn from our pool of approved external reviewers (over 100) and social protection experts.
- All reviewers score the proposal according to two sets of criteria:

The first set relates to the technical aspects of the proposal, and includes 4 criteria:

- qualifications of proposed staff (20%)
- involvement of developing country researchers/evaluators (15%)
- quality of technical proposal: internal validity (30%)
- quality of technical proposal: external validity (30%)
- \* The final 5% for the first round of scores will be added based on [3ie membership](#) of either the applicant, the implementing agency, or the funder.

The second set relates to the relevance of the proposal, and includes 3 criteria:

- policy relevance (40%)
- potential policy impact (40%)
- cost (20%)

These criteria are elaborated in the annex, as a guide for reviewers and applicants.

- After full consideration against all the criteria, the reviewers allocate the proposals to one of the following 4 categories; (i) definitely accept; (ii) accept with minor revisions; (iii) fundable after major revisions; or (iv) reject. The allocation to any of the first three categories does not guarantee that the proposal will be financed.
- A first shortlist is based on the average of the technical scores only, to ensure sufficient quality of the funded research. Large differences in scores across reviewers will be further investigated and controlled. The shortlist cutoff point will be set in part as a function of the total number and quality of proposals received.
- Those proposals above the technical shortlist cut-off will then be ranked based on their relevance scores. Based on these latter scores and the assigned grading categories, the proposals are allocated into three categories: (a) all those that have an average score above a certain threshold, or that get at least 2 'definitely accept' grades and no 'reject' grade get allocated to the selection panel directly; (b) those not included in (a) that get an average score above a lower threshold, or that have no more than one 'reject' score get allocated for further internal review; and (c) those not in a and b are rejected.
- Internal reviewers will revisit those allocated to group (b) and reviewer patterns to decide whether to allocate to group (a) and or (c). The final shortlist is then shared with the selection panel.

### **Selection panel and approval**

A panel of social protection experts, evaluators and policy makers will review and rank the short listed proposals. The panel will make a recommendation to the [3ie Board](#) on which awards should be made.

Final approval of awards is made by the [3ie Board of Commissioners](#), and final decisions are expected to be available early March.

**ALL PROPOSALS SHOULD BE SUBMITTED USING 3ie's ONLINE GRANT APPLICATION SYSTEM. APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED IN ANY OTHER WAY WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED**