

Strengthening rule of law and justice programming at USAID

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Highlights

Evidence impact

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) cited the 3ie EGM in its Rule of Law Policy as the Agency's first-of-its-kind initiative to inform its rule of law and justice program design and decisions. Additionally, the intervention and outcomes framework of the EGM informed the design of a USAID-funded \$38-million indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity (IDIQ) project on the prevention of violence and irregular migration in Honduras.

Factors that contributed to impact

The Center for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance was a strong advocate of the EGM. It prioritized the active engagement of key users throughout the EGM development process. Further, it took proactive measures to raise awareness about the EGM within the Center through events, newsletters, and emails. These efforts demonstrated its commitment to the successful uptake and use of the EGM.

Evidence gap map details

Title: [Rule of Law Evidence Gap Map](#)

Authors: Ada Sonnenfeld, Tomasz Kozakiewicz, Lina Khan, Jennifer Doherty, Katherine Garcia, John Eyers, Rami Zalfou, and Douglas Glandon



Context

An estimated 5.1 billion people worldwide lack access to effective justice, leaving nearly 60 percent of justice problems unresolved. In addition, a staggering 253 million individuals endure extreme injustice, encompassing slavery, statelessness, and heightened levels of insecurity.

Having a clear understanding of the evidence related to the rule of law (ROL) can assist in making informed decisions for policy implementation and research. Rigorous evidence, or the lack of it, can help identify opportunities for evidence synthesis and address questions of policy effectiveness. While some mapping initiatives exist for rule of law programs, significant gaps still need to be filled.

The promotion of ROL has been a priority for USAID and its development mission. USAID's efforts to advance ROL began with a focus on enhancing the capabilities of justice institutions. More recently, the scope has expanded from enhancing the capabilities of justice institutions to encompass the design and implementation of flexible, evidence-based, and data-driven ROL programming.

In line with this direction, the USAID's Center for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (DRG Center) commissioned 3ie to develop an EGM to inform its decision-making on ROL reforms.

The ROL EGM provides a snapshot of more than 700 studies on the effectiveness of ROL interventions worldwide. The map contains 118 systematic reviews and 654 impact evaluations. It covers a comprehensive set of interventions that have been implemented across multiple geographies and plots the evidence base for their effects on outcomes of ROL and justice.

Evidence

The authors found that the evidence base for ROL and justice in high-income countries (HICs) is significantly larger than in low- and middle-income countries (L&MICs), which constituted only 20 percent of the mapped studies. It recommended that more high-quality impact evaluations in L&MICs can help shed light on effective ROL interventions and their contextual applicability.

Most of the included studies concentrated on interventions aimed at reducing or preventing crime. However, there were noticeable gaps in rigorous evidence for ROL and justice programs targeting youth in L&MICs, as well as programs focusing on women and girls. In addition to the need for more research in L&MIC contexts, researchers may consider qualitative and mixed-methods approaches for interventions that are more challenging to experimentally evaluate. A broader set of strategies in ROL and justice research could improve collective understanding of what works and why.

High-confidence systematic reviews, based on evidence from HICs, suggested that promising approaches to crime prevention or reduction may involve selected police-led interventions and less punitive measures for individuals at risk of engaging in criminal activities. However, further investigation is necessary to ascertain the extent to which similar positive outcomes can be replicated in L&MICs.

Evidence impacts

USAID Rule of Law policy draws on 3ie's evidence and gap analysis

USAID's Rule of Law Policy lays out its strategic vision and objectives for the ROL and justice system reforms. It embraces an adaptive programming approach, where ROL initiatives are evidence-driven, adaptable to the context, and accountable for results within that specific context. Underscoring USAID's commitment to evidence-based programming, the Policy references 3ie's ROL EGM as a pioneering initiative to advance the knowledge agenda for ROL reforms and inform its program design and implementation decisions. Andrew Solomon, a Senior Advisor at USAID, describes the ROL EGM as an investment that has yielded tangible benefits; the EGM helped launch the new ROL framework that was firmly grounded in evidence.

Matthew Baker, a Senior Learning Advisor at the DRG Center, mentions that the ROL interventions and outcome categories speak to the Agency's higher level of priorities and can be useful for Mission staff, learning teams, implementing partners, and researchers to access and use evidence—which supports USAID's broader goal of becoming more evidence informed. Baker added: "We managed to structure the EGM around the policy, and that has the potential to help people to use and apply the evidence. The briefs provide a platform for people to interact with the evidence, a mental model to sort through the evidence in meaningful categories."

Informing USAID's IDIQ project in Honduras

In reference to Sembrando Esperanza (SE), USAID's \$38-million IDIQ project on violence prevention and irregular migration in Honduras, an ROL and civic engagement specialist with USAID mentioned that the ROL EGM and its intervention and outcome categories were extensively consulted during the project design phase.

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