3ie's evidence use and impact measurement approach

Our evidence use and impact typology

3ie has identified seven types of evidence use and impact, based on what we have found in the monitoring data from 3ie-supported impact evaluations and syntheses. The data we monitor includes learning and progress reports, stakeholder engagement and communication plan progress reports and updates from grantees on the use of the 3ie-supported evidence. We regularly check that our typology comprehensively covers the changes we are seeing. We update our definitions for each type as we learn from our experiences of verifying a reported evidence use instance. Due to the nature of evidence-informed decision-making and action, 3ie looks for verifiable contributions that our evidence makes, not attribution. We present the seven types of evidence use and impact alphabetically, as we do not value any type of change over another:

- **Change policies or programmes**: Decision makers use findings from an evaluation or systematic review to alter their programming. Examples include changes in targeting, cash transfer amounts, training modules or other factors that inhibit the policy or programme's ability to achieve its intended impacts.
- **Close a programme**: Evaluation or review findings inform decisions to stop implementation or planned scale-up of a programme or its components.
- **Improve the culture of evidence use**: Decision makers demonstrate positive attitudinal changes towards evidence use or towards information the research team provides. Examples include strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems, increasing understanding of evidence and openness to using it, integrating these systems more firmly into programming or commissioning another evaluation or review.
- **Inform discussions of policies and programmes**: Subsequent phases of the evaluated programme or policy draw from the findings of the evaluation or review, or the study team participates in informing the design of a next phase.
- **Inform global guidelines and policy discussions**: Global policy discussions, documents or actions refer to findings from an evaluation or review. Examples include governments, multilateral donors, or others mentioning findings in policy documents or debates.
- **Inform the design of other programmes**: Findings from an evaluation or review inform the design of one or more programmes different from the one which was evaluated.
- **Scale up a programme**: Programmes found to be effective in an evaluation or review are scaled up.

How we measure and verify evidence use and impact claims

3ie works with research teams to promote evidence use and impact. We have been monitoring evidence use in 3ie-supported impact evaluations since 2015. Our main limitation is that we only have resources to monitor evidence uptake and use during the research cycle. Ideally, we would verify evidence use claims as they emerge, but often use and impact takes place long after the research period has ended.

Our goal is to cost-effectively verify causal contribution pathways for an evidence use claim - irrespective of when it is found - objectively and with confidence. In 2018, we adopted contribution tracing because it can be standardised and is more robust and rigorous than our previous approaches. This method applies Bayesian updating to traditional process tracing (Befani and Stedman-Bryce 2016; Ton et al. 2019) to reduce subjectivity and increase confidence and consistency in making evidence use claims.

Contribution tracing requires more rigour in making an evidence use claim and then proving causal contribution links to a study's findings. It also provides a quantitative expression of confidence in the claim. The requirement that trained evidence use specialists peer review each claim helps limit subjectivity.

In this process, we rely on grantee or researcher reporting, regular online calls, semi-structured interviews and follow-up emails with key actors to gather supporting documentation and details about what happened. These actors include the researchers, implementing agency representatives and others who may know whether and how the evidence contributed to change. We may also visit the study site to interview key actors in depth, though this is rare.

We take the following steps in using contribution tracing to verify our evidence use claims:
1. In the absence of evidence uptake and use reported to us by the research teams, we review documentation to identify potential evidence use instances.
2. We first construct a statement about the reported (or potential) evidence use, which we call the evidence use claim.
3. We identify the mechanisms that form the contribution pathway, using the information available for the grant or research project.[1] We list essential information or items of proof we would need to support the posited contribution pathways, avoiding any information that is not useful to support the links between the 3ie-supported study and its findings and the identified use.
4. We assign two sets of probabilities for every item that supports a claim of 3ie-supported evidence being used. One reflects the extent to which each item supports the claim (sensitivity). The other reflects the extent to which that item could appear, despite other reasons for the change (the uniqueness of the supporting information). The objective is to control the Type I error rate or the chance that we falsely claim contribution where there is none.

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[1] 3ie requires all 3ie-supported researchers to design, implement and report on a stakeholder engagement and evidence uptake and use plan. Research teams regularly report progress on the plan. For some grants, the file includes transcripts from online calls with the study team and interviews from on-site monitoring visits.

5. We then use Bayes' theorem to arrive at an objective measure of our confidence in the claim about how 3ie-supported evidence contributed.
6. To ensure our verification process is efficient and cost-effective, we collect supporting information through online searchers, semi-structured interviews and follow-up emails for three months. If we cannot verify the listed essential items of proof with confidence, we set the claim aside and do not publish it.
7. Based on available supporting information, we prepare a claim summary and update the confidence level. We present it to a jury of colleagues who know the study and have training in contribution tracing.
8. We finalise the claim summary and publish it on our evidence impact summaries portal on the 3ie website.

References

Befani, B, and Stedman-Bryce, G, 2016. Process Tracing and Bayesian Updating for impact evaluation. *Evaluation*, 23(1), pp. 42–60. https://doi.org/10.1177/1356389016654584

Ton, G, Mayne, J, Delahais, T, Morell, J, Befani, B, Apgar, M and O'Flynn, P, 2019. *Contribution analysis and estimating the size of effects: can we reconcile the possible with the impossible?* CDI Practice Paper 20, Brighton: IDS. Available at: <https://www.ids.ac.uk/publications/contribution-analysis-and-estimating-the-size-of-effects-can-we-reconcile-the-possible-with-the-impossible/> [Accessed 19 June 2019]

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