

3ie strategy 2021-2023

Improving lives
sustainably in low- and
middle-income
countries through
evidence-informed
decision-making



International
Initiative for
Impact Evaluation



This strategy was developed through a consultative process involving our board of commissioners, members, staff and other key stakeholders.

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Introduction

The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) is a leader in supporting the production, synthesis and uptake of high-quality development evidence. Established in 2008, we adopt cutting-edge empirical methods to address the development needs of our partners in government, NGOs, philanthropic organizations and other partners working in low- and middle-income countries (L&MICs). Our reach is global, with more than 40 research staff in our New Delhi, London, and Washington, DC, offices, in addition to extensive regional expertise through our worldwide member network and other partners.

Our new 2021–2023 strategy responds to the rapid pace of change and the considerable challenges of today and tomorrow. These challenges include not only the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic but also the many other factors that will transform the planet in the coming decades; socially, economically and politically.

3ie was founded with the conviction that high-quality evidence can improve lives. We remain committed to that goal and will continue striving to be an effective voice for the production and use of relevant, rigorous evidence. We will push the boundaries of standard practice to make evidence available when it is needed, and to do so at a reasonable cost. We aim to be a partner for institutions and countries working to promote evidence-informed decision-making. By delivering excellence in both project-funded work and the production of global public goods, we aim to remain at the forefront of evidence-informed policy and practice.

Our Vision

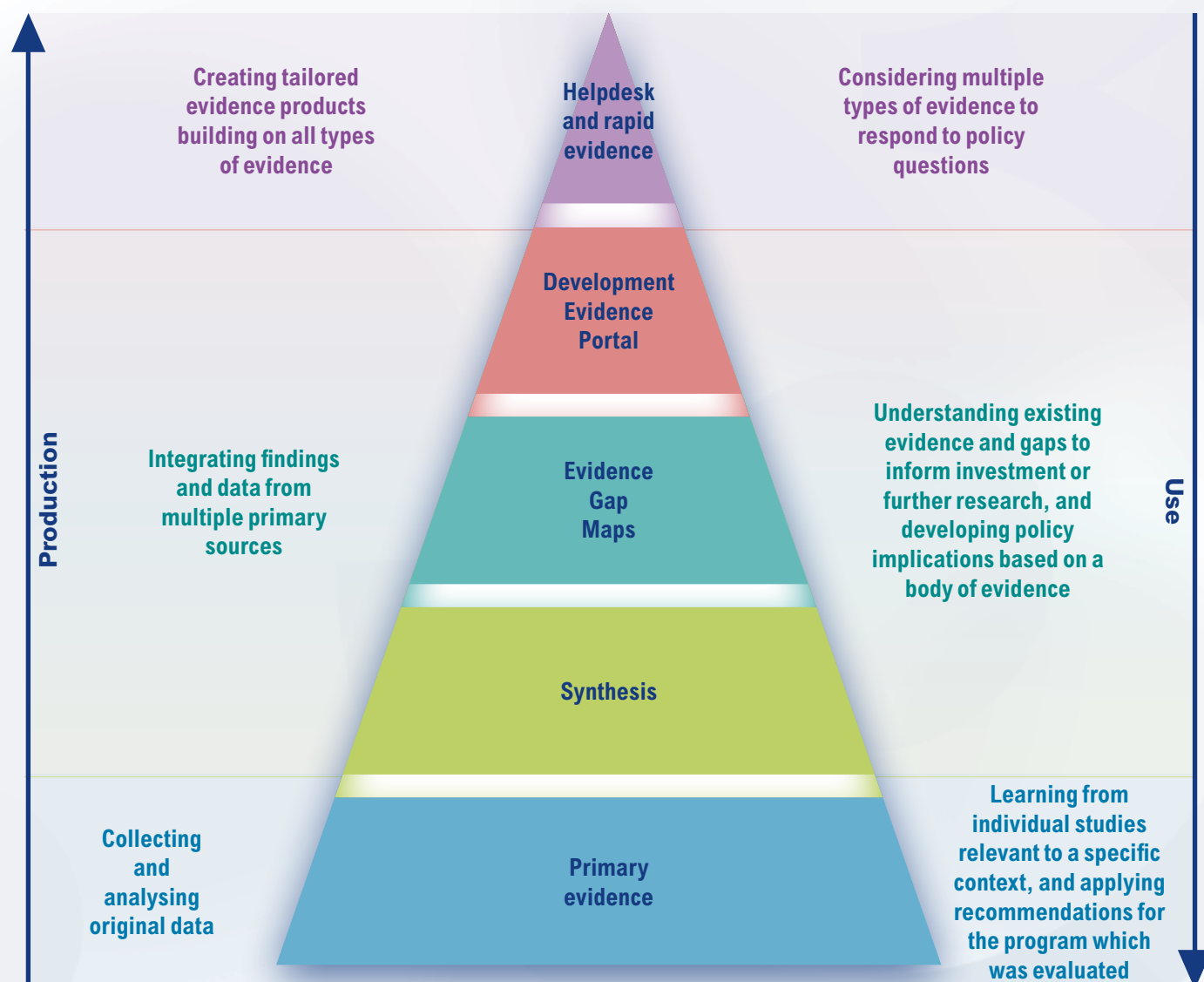
Improving lives sustainably in low- and middle-income countries through evidence-informed decision-making.

Our Mission

3ie promotes evidence-informed equitable, inclusive and sustainable development. We support the generation and effective use of high-quality evidence of what works, for whom, how, why and at what cost to inform decision-making and improve the lives of people living in poverty in low- and middle-income countries. We facilitate evidence and its use by L&MIC governments, development institutions and funders.



Evidence Architecture



3ie has been instrumental in creating an international evidence architecture that has expanded the scope both of the evidence that is produced and how it is utilized. This evidence architecture is the foundation on which we build our relationships with governments, policymakers, development institutions, donors and researchers. We appreciate that evidence needs and journeys vary. Engaging stakeholders where they are, and where their needs are most acute, can lead to a fruitful journey involving several layers of the evidence architecture.

3ie has been instrumental in pushing development evidence beyond bare bones impact evaluations and systematic reviews. We have shown the value in producing theory-based, mixed-method impact evaluations, systematic reviews, evidence gap maps, formative evaluations and cost analyses. To drive stakeholder engagement and evidence uptake, we have pioneered the application of contribution tracing to the measurement of evidence use. And our newly improved Development Evidence Portal meets the varied needs of government policymakers, non-governmental organisation officials, development donors and researchers.

Impact evaluations and other primary evidence make up the base of the evidence architecture. All the higher levels of the architecture depend on the availability of high quality primary evidence, including credible, bias-free, methodologically-rigorous impact evaluations.

Evidence syntheses make up the next level of the architecture, drawing together primary evidence to identify robust, reliable findings on development programs which have been implemented in multiple contexts.

Evidence gap maps build on both primary evidence and syntheses to show which questions the existing evidence base can answer and where more research is needed. These gap maps serve as a roadmap both for policymakers seeking answers to a particular policy question and for researchers seeking to maximize the impact of their work.

The Development Evidence Portal offers a straightforward way to access all of the impact evaluations, systematic reviews and evidence gap maps that make up the lower levels of the evidence architecture. Completely redesigned in 2020, it represents a one-of-a-kind collection of development evidence, accessible to everyone in the world.

At the peak of the evidence architecture, helpdesk and rapid evidence services offer tailored evidence for busy policymakers and development leaders. Our experience with policymaker engagement has shown the importance of this last step to bridge the gap between solid evidence and policy decisions.



3ie strategy 2021-2023

Guided by our mission and vision, three strategic objectives will shape our work through 2023.

Strategic objective 1

Support the generation and use of policy-relevant evaluation evidence

- Evidence should be aligned to regional and global needs, based on the demands of policymakers and the gaps in the evidence base.
- We will oversee evidence programs on topics such as climate change, governance, peace-building in fragile contexts, migration, youth employment, women's economic empowerment and issues related to COVID-19.
- We will continue to build the 3ie Development Evidence Portal, in addition to producing evidence gap maps and systematic reviews to inform both evidence-informed decision-making and research agendas.
- We will increase the capacity of research organizations and policymakers in L&MICs to undertake and use policy-relevant evaluations and synthesis.

Strategic objective 2

Build strategic partnerships and collaborations to drive evidence-informed development

- We will build strategic local partnerships in different regions to better understand evidence-policy linkages, identify opportunities to influence policy decisions, strengthen the capacity to produce evidence, encourage evidence use, and facilitate evidence translation and brokerage.
- At the international level, we will build strategic partnerships to influence and support international actors in using available evidence and creating new evidence.

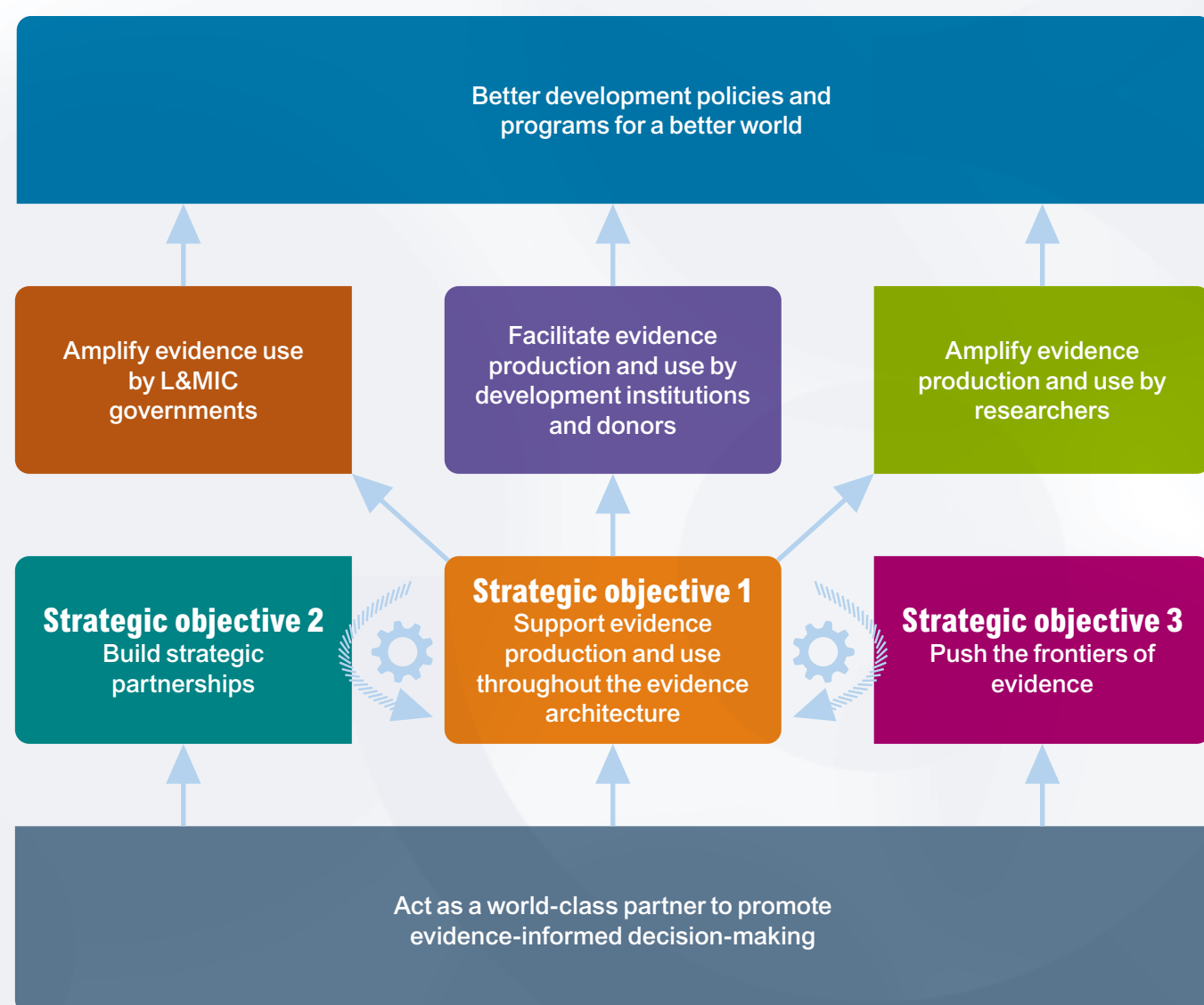
Strategic objective 3

Push the frontiers of evidence, for sustainable and equitable social progress

- We will push the frontiers of evaluation methodology, including the domains of cost-effectiveness analysis, evidence synthesis, ethical review, transparency, reproducibility and open data.
- In the area of evidence engagement, we will pilot innovations on evidence brokerage and the promotion of evidence use, with rigorous evaluations to better understand what works to help close the gap between evidence and policy.
- We will work to reduce the carbon footprint of evaluation and research.
- We will update and innovate with our evidence platform by developing a system for continuous evidence surveillance and an evidence app.



Theory of Change



Our three strategic objectives work together to produce better development outcomes and achieve our vision of improving lives through evidence-informed decision-making. Our second and third strategic objectives – building partnerships and leading evidence innovation – will support our primary objective: the generation and use of policy-relevant evidence. We will put our evidence architecture at the service of stakeholders at the front line of evidence production and use in order to amplify the impact of key evidence champions.

Emphasizing innovation, we will explore ways of making evidence-generation tools more responsive to the needs of policymakers, development institutions and funders. These advances will yield more policy-relevant evaluations and rapid methods for obtaining reliable results. Our recent push for integrating cost analyses into impact evaluations and our work on streamlining the production of systematic reviews are examples of this type of innovation.

By collaborating and partnering with governments, local research organizations and international institutions, we will amplify the evaluation findings that have the potential to improve lives. A new undertaking on women's economic empowerment (see next page) to inform the policy decisions of the Ministry of Rural Development in India, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is an example of the type of government collaboration our strategy prioritizes.



Our work

3ie has supported research in more than 50 countries on topics spanning the full range of development sectors, including education, health, economic growth, environmental protection and governance. Our evaluation and synthesis work has been broadly cited, leading to more than 160 documented instances of evidence uptake, and we share knowledge widely via our outreach and capacity-building work. The programs below represent just a few examples of our work.

Women's empowerment in India

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has funded 3ie to undertake an evidence and implementation program on women's economic empowerment through collective enterprises and institutional linkages in India. This program is a leading-edge effort to integrate evaluation with implementation, through which we will be learning what is needed to create sustainable growth in women-led collective enterprises. We have been working with the National Rural Livelihoods Mission, a special unit under India's rural development ministry responsible for a flagship poverty alleviation program. The learnings from this 3ie research have been used to advocate for the next steps of the program, and the main findings have been shared in the Upper House of the Indian Parliament.

Development Evidence Portal

In 2020 we completed an overhaul of our Development Evidence Portal, one of our key mission-driven projects to contribute to the global evidence architecture, thanks to support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The portal makes nearly 4,000 impact evaluations and more than 700 systematic reviews related to international development available to anyone in the world. With advanced search features designed for the development community, the portal represents an important part of our work to ensure that development evidence is available to those who can use it.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation

3ie and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) are working together to ensure that its investment choices are guided by the best evidence available. The MCC places a strong emphasis on high-quality, evidence-driven decision-making throughout its process of program design and implementation. It has commissioned 3ie as an evidence partner to support and strengthen multiple aspects of its analytical work, including its cost benefit analyses and project evaluability assessments. 3ie meets the MCC's needs in several ways. We produce evidence synthesis products on topics such as the effectiveness of large-scale water infrastructure interventions and stimulating demand for grid electricity. We also provide "just in time" technical support, and we review its evaluability approach, processes and tools.

WACIE Helpdesk

3ie's West Africa Capacity-building and Impact Evaluation (WACIE) program is launching the WACIE Helpdesk, partnering with both IDinsight and the Government of Benin. The Helpdesk provides rapid evidence synthesis and translation to help policymakers in West Africa answer targeted policy questions and design effective and cost-efficient development programs. Based at the WACIE secretariat in Benin, the Helpdesk also connects interested policymakers to additional resources, such as remote, telephone-based data collection or rapid-cycle program evaluations. The Helpdesk supports the production of new evidence; builds local evaluation capacity in West Africa; and encourages the use of existing evidence via brokerage, translation and rapid response services.



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Success factors

As a mission-driven organization that promotes evidence-informed equitable, inclusive and sustainable development, our measures of success reflect our vision and mission. We support the generation and effective use of high-quality evidence to inform decision-making and improve the lives of people living in poverty in L&MICs.

Our impact metric is evidence use and impact resulting from 3ie supporting and generating impact evaluations, systematic reviews and other evidence products. Our approach to measuring and verifying evidence use leads the industry. Since we started tracking evidence use in 2015, we have identified seven types of evidence use. We also verify causal contribution pathways for evidence use. In 2018, we adopted contribution tracing because it can be standardized and is a more robust, rigorous approach than other methodologies. We document each case of evidence use and we add it to our evidence impact database, which will be accessible through our website in early 2021.

In addition to our impact metric, we use a combination of operational and financial key performance indicators to track our progress. 3ie is committed to using evidence to drive our own performance as an industry leader in evidence generation and use.

Stakeholder satisfaction is a primary operational performance indicator. Ensuring we collect regular input from our stakeholders on our performance is essential for 3ie to continue to be recognized as a leader in the field. Stakeholder satisfaction is a primary element of our project management philosophy and execution.

Our pivot to build financial sustainability through project-based work is central to our 2021–2023 strategy. We track a number of financial metrics at the project level and at the organizational-level to demonstrate excellence in project management and effectiveness in building the portfolio of projects that will support 3ie's continued success and help us sustain our continued supply of and innovation in global public evidence goods.

All of these factors are important, but alone they will not enable us to achieve our goals if no one knows about the projects, evidence and use cases that are generated. Our communications efforts are critical to our continued success. We track the use of our website through social media and other usage metrics. In this time of limited travel and personal interaction, we are pioneering online events to convene, inform and collaborate, adapting our strategy to focus on the approaches that yield the greatest impact.



Values

We are committed to ensuring that 3ie maintains a respectful and ethical culture that enables us to be effective in helping our donors and partner institutions to learn and grow. Our values are central to who we are as an organization.

Respect



- We respect human rights and treat everyone with dignity and fairness.
- We follow and advocate ethical and safe research practices that take context into account.
- We respect our stakeholders' time and value clear and responsive communication.

Innovation



- We are a learning organization.
- We strive to be creative, adaptive, flexible and solutions-based in addressing complex development problems.
- We balance time-tested approaches with innovation.

Quality



- We promote the use of relevant and rigorous research methods.
- We believe in and promote high standards, be it in research, in fostering quality open data, or in engagement and communication.
- We strive to strengthen the capacity of L&MICs partners to achieve excellence.

Inclusion



- We see strength in diversity and value the knowledge that comes from people's diverse experiences.
- We believe in and promote gender equity and have zero tolerance for any form of discrimination.
- We believe research is a public good that should be accessible to as many people as possible.

Co-creation



- We believe the best solutions come from co-creation. We seek and strengthen partnerships to address complex development problems.
- We advocate for transparent and stakeholder-responsive practice in the evidence community.
- We promote context-relevant and engagement-driven research.



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