



A tool for improving evidence use in development institutions

The use of evidence is an important way to improve the effectiveness of future international development programs. Institutions can find it difficult to make use of such evidence, however. Pulling the levers of training, resources, incentives, processes, and signals (TRIPS) can help.

Guidance note

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International
Initiative for
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Introduction

It is widely recognized that using evidence – information to help prove or disprove a hypothesis – is crucial for improving the effectiveness of international development programs and policies and therefore to improving lives in low- and middle-income countries.^{1,2}

Our mission at the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) is to make this possible.³ We were founded in 2008 to address the gaps in knowledge highlighted in the Center for Global Development report, *When Will We Ever Learn?*⁴ In the 15 years since, access to relevant, practical, and digestible evidence has improved. For instance, the number of impact evaluations (studies employing causal inference to determine whether a program led to improvement in its target outcome)⁵ has exploded from several hundred to over 13,000 as of March 2024 (these evaluations are searchable in 3ie's Development Evidence Portal).

3ie and similar organizations have developed portals, help desks, and tools to rapidly synthesize and translate existing evidence for implementers and decision-makers. These advances should be celebrated, and 3ie is proud of its role in advancing the field.

However, there is increasing realization in the wider evidence community that effective and timely use of evidence continues to be challenging, despite its increased accessibility.⁶ To address these challenges, the Center for Global Development convened a Working Group on New Evidence Tools for Policy Impact in late 2020, bringing together government policymakers, multilateral organizations, bilateral aid agencies, and NGOs.

One key challenge identified in the group's final report is development institutions' frequent lack of organizational incentives, consistent signals, and role modeling from leadership on the importance of learning and evidence use. The authors noted, "Professional success is still too often measured by project approval and disbursements, as opposed to learning

from, acting on, and sharing of evidence... Even when evidence generation is prioritized, decision-makers may overlook the methods that are most appropriate and relevant to answering specific policy questions."⁷ Goldman and Pabari added, "Evidence use needs to be planned for and woven into the institutional culture."⁸

Several institutional evaluations have assessed how international development organizations such as the World Bank,⁹ the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation,¹⁰ the German development cooperation system,¹¹ and the African Development Bank¹² use and learn from evidence, and what the main drivers and barriers are in this process.¹³

While each institution is very different, with unique experiences regarding their in-house ability to use evidence, the key findings are strikingly similar, and comparable to those of the famous World Bank Wapenhans report 30 years ago:¹⁴ namely, an **approval culture can leave little room for learning**. Some common high-level findings included:

- There were **inadequate institutional incentives** and **insufficient and/or inconsistent signals and role modeling from organizational leadership** on the importance of learning and evidence use.
- **Success was measured by project approvals and disbursements of funds**, rather than results on the ground (which may materialize after those heavily involved in the projects have moved on).
- Quality review and approval meetings often did not add value. There was a mindset of **ticking the boxes**, or compliance with requirements.
- Time and resources for monitoring and evaluation training and learning from evidence were **not prioritized**.

The evaluations also indicated that when a **holistic evidence culture** is not established and promoted, single measures or requirements can become box-ticking exercises.

Guidance objective

The objective of this guidance note is to describe the TRIPS framework, and to provide examples of actionable measures and recommendations for institutions seeking to improve their culture of evidence use.

The overarching framework offers several ways that together provide an easy-to-use roadmap aiming to help organizations adopt measures that help them strengthen their processes to promote evidence-informed decision-making.

The TRIPS framework

The levers available to institutions seeking to improve their culture of evidence use include the following:

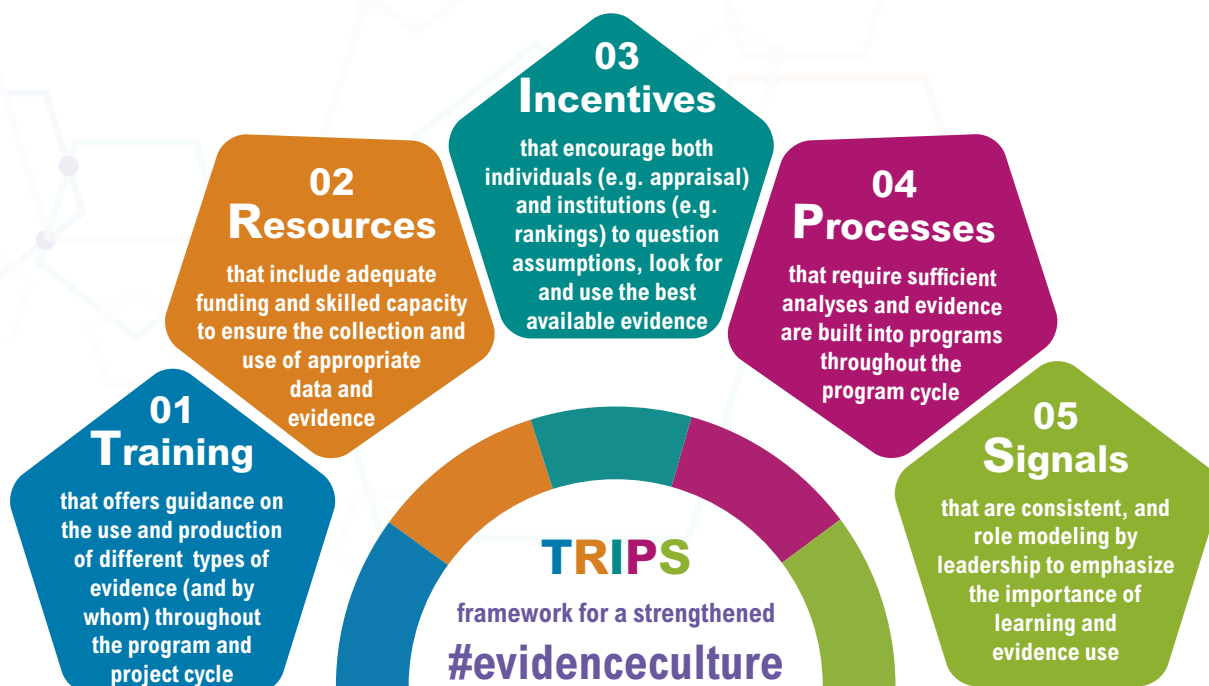
- 1. Training:** Skill building that offers guidance on the use and production of different types of evidence throughout the program and project cycle, as well as how to assign responsibility for these functions and how to match the right type of evidence with the question at hand
- 2. Resources:** Adequate funding, time, and skilled capacity availability from internal and external sources to ensure the collection and use of appropriate data and evidence
- 3. Incentives:** Staff incentives (e.g., promotional criteria, annual performance

assessments) or institutional incentives (e.g., public rating systems)

- 4. Processes:** Institutional processes or requirements to use existing evidence and create new evidence (e.g., quality at entry requirements for approving new programs management and board review of evidence use in proposals)
- 5. Signals:** Expectations set by leadership and consistently reinforced for prioritizing evidence use

These levers are not mutually exclusive. Training requires resources and can be focused on evidence use to complete required processes. Signals from leadership and resources can also function as incentives for staff. Processes can be a way to put signals from leadership into practice.

Figure 1: A visual representation of 3ie's TRIPS framework



Source: In March 2022, 3ie's Marie Gaarder introduced the TRIPS framework to guide conversations around strengthening the evidence culture in international development organizations

The TRIPS framework

A number of organizations have been introducing promising measures. Table 1 includes examples:

Table 1: Improving evidence culture in development organizations

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <p>Training</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ USAID has a dedicated “learning lab” to provide resources to staff on generating and using evidence.¹⁵ ■ The Inter-American Development Bank holds a “knowledge week” to disseminate evidence and learning. ■ The Millenium Challenge Corporation has created a menu of research methods to help staff match questions and methods.¹⁶ ■ The World Health Organization has created a repository of evidence-informed decision-making tools.¹⁷ |
| <p>Resources</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation have recently communicated in the national budget that evaluations can be funded as part of aid portfolios. ■ The World Bank’s Development Impact (DIME) department generates relevant data and research for development policy, with ample skilled experts, training resources, and funding. |
| <p>Incentives</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office includes evaluation skills and use of evaluations as key criteria for annual evaluation and promotion decisions. ■ The World Bank has established a professional monitoring and evaluation career stream. ■ US government agencies such as USAID and the Millenium Challenge Corporation are ranked in the Results for America on the use of evidence.¹⁸ |
| <p>Processes</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation requires all portfolios to present the opportunity costs of proposed approaches. ■ The UK requires that all government departments set out their budget requests on an outcome basis—stating the evidence base and the planned evaluations. ■ The Millenium Challenge Corporation undertakes rigorous constraints-to-growth and root-cause analyses in partnership with every country it selects as eligible for investment. These analyses guide the selection of sector and project, and build evidence into project design.¹⁹ ■ The Inter-American Development Bank uses a Development Effectiveness Framework assessment with ratings. Programs with an insufficient score are not cleared for presentation to the board for approval.²⁰ ■ Consulting 3ie’s evidence portal is a required first step in ex-ante assessments of expected impact at the Latin American Development Bank’s Department of Impact Measurement. |
| <p>Signals</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The USAID administrator has given speeches championing the use of evidence.²¹ ■ The Inter-American Development Bank president has called for a holistic focus on development effectiveness.²² ■ The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation’s director general regularly touts “<i>fakta har makta</i>,” or “evidence rules” as a core part of the agency’s philosophy.²³ ■ The USAID policy framework commits to “grounding responses in evidence.”²⁴ |

How to use the TRIPS framework

The TRIPS framework offers institutions an organizing structure as a way to reflect on how to improve the development effectiveness of their work.

Institutions can use the TRIPS framework to:

- Take stock of the status quo;
- Identify opportunities to remove obstacles to better use of evidence;
- Identify opportunities for assessments of measures to improve evidence culture; and
- Identify examples of what has worked to improve organizational evidence culture

and share information about successes and challenges. By doing so, this guidance can create a community of practice.

Through the Global Evidence Commitment, 3ie is working with other institutions to make better use of evidence in their decision-making. As organizations experiment with using the TRIPS levers, we hope to identify opportunities to test which approaches are most effective at improving evidence use and to share that knowledge broadly. We welcome feedback on the TRIPS framework and opportunities to evaluate approaches.

Endnotes

¹ <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/development-instinct-development-evidence-insights-us-development-policy>

² <https://www.usaid.gov/policy/documents/mar-23-2023-usaids-policy-framework#:~:text=The%20Policy%20Framework%20establishes%20three,invest%20in%20USAID's%20enduring%20effectiveness>

³ 3ie firmly believes that the key to good research is matching research questions and research methods. While we focus on impact evaluations as our name implies, impact evaluations are not the appropriate method to answer all questions. See our methods menu for more information: 3ieimpact.org/pir-methods

⁴ As the report explained, “The missing puzzle piece in learning about what kinds of social interventions can succeed is impact evaluations, studies that document whether particular programs are actually responsible for improvements in social outcomes relative to what would have happened without them. An ‘evaluation gap’ has emerged because governments, official donors, and other funders do not demand or produce enough impact evaluations and because those that are conducted are often methodologically flawed.”

⁵ Since impact evaluations control for other factors that might affect the target outcome beyond the effects of the project or program itself, they allow for “causal inference,” or the ability to confidently conclude that the project or program was responsible for a change in outcome.

⁶ “Given the potential real-world benefits, why have decision makers within governments, aid agencies, multilateral organizations, and NGOs not yet fully harnessed the value of evidence—including from impact evaluations—for better public policies?” Kaufman, Julia, Amanda Glassman, Ruth Levine, and Janeen Madan Keller. 2022. *Breakthrough to Policy Use: Reinventing Impact Evaluation for Global Development*. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development, viii.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁸ Goldman and Pabari 2020, 224.

⁹ <https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/evaluations/learning-and-results>

¹⁰ <https://www.norad.no/en/toolspublications/publications/2014/can-we-demonstrate-the-difference-that-norwegian-aid-makes-/>

¹¹ <https://www.deval.org/en/publications/rigorous-impact-evaluation-evidence-generation-and-take-up-in-german-development-cooperation>

¹² <https://idev.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/Evaluation%20of%20the%20AfDB%E2%80%99s%20self-evaluation%20systems%20and%20processes%2005-10-2020%20-%20Eng%20-%20Web.pdf>

¹³ Gaarder, Marie. (2024). *A ‘balloon-squeezing’ approach to the theory of change*. In A. Koleros, M, Adrien, & T. Tyrrell (Eds.), *Theories of Change in Reality: Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions* (pp. 160-169). Routledge.

¹⁴ <https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/blog/world-bank-and-legacy-wapenhans-report>

¹⁵ <https://usaidelearninglab.org/>

¹⁶ <https://www.3ieimpact.org/pir-methods>

¹⁷ <https://evidence-impact.org/>

¹⁸ <https://2022.results4america.org/>

¹⁹ <https://www.mcc.gov/resources/doc/land-sector-cost-benefit-guidance#:~:text=MCC%20is%20required%20by%20its,projects%20supported%20through%20country%20compacts.>

²⁰ <https://www.iadb.org/en/who-we-are/measuring-results/development-effectiveness-framework>

²¹ <https://www.cgdev.org/event/championing-evidence-use-policy-impact-us-foreign-aid-and-beyond>

²² <https://www.iadb.org/en/news/governors-embrace-vision-priorities-and-plans-idb-group>

²³ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1387110348960762&ref=sharing>

²⁴ <https://www.usaid.gov/policy/policy-framework>

About this note

This note was authored by Marie Gaarder, Daniel Handel and Thomas Kelly as part of 3ie's Commitment to Evidence Initiative, which includes the Global Evidence Commitment (GEC). The note expands on a concept developed by Dr Gaarder in March 2022 and is meant to guide discussions at institutions committed to

improving the use of evidence. The authors of this note are solely responsible for the content.

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About the Global Evidence Commitment

In October 2023, 3ie launched the Global Evidence Commitment (GEC)—an opportunity for leading institutions to commit to improving evidence culture and use in their organizations. As of March 2024, the following organizations have signed a joint statement agreeing to the consistent use of appropriate evidence throughout the programming and project

cycle: Inter-American Development Bank, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), UK's Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and Germany's KfW Development Bank. For more information about the GEC, please visit our website or write to us at globalevidencecommitment@3ieimpact.org.



The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) develops evidence on how to effectively transform the lives of the poor in low- and middle-income countries. Established in 2008, we offer comprehensive support and a diversity of approaches to achieve development goals by producing, synthesizing and promoting the uptake of impact evaluation evidence. We work closely with governments, foundations, NGOs, development institutions and research organizations to address their decision-making needs. With offices in Washington DC, New Delhi and London and a global network of leading researchers, we offer deep expertise across our extensive menu of evaluation services.

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