



Principles for Impact Evaluation

Introduction

1. The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) has been created to enhance development effectiveness through the promotion of evidence-based policy-making. 3ie will finance high-quality impact evaluations to inform better program and policy design in low and middle-income. Financing for the studies will be through a number of grant windows, including a thematic window responding to a set of enduring questions selected by 3ie members, and an ‘open window’ for proposals on any theme.
2. 3ie embraces a range of evaluation methods and approaches to address the “evaluation gap” – e.g. the lack of evidence to inform the decisions of developing country policy-makers in the design and implementation of large-scale social and economic development programs.
3. 3ie’s work is guided by a commitment to five core principles:
 - 3.1 Rigorous analysis
 - 3.2 Independence and objectivity
 - 3.3 Flexibility in methodological approach, using qualitative and quantitative methods where appropriate
 - 3.4 Policy-relevance in selection of research topic and study design, and
 - 3.5 Developing country representation and involvement

Definitions

1. High-quality impact evaluations measure the net change in outcomes amongst a particular group, or groups, of people that can be attributed to a specific program using the best methodology available, feasible and appropriate to the evaluation question(s) being investigated and to the specific context.
2. Policy-relevant impact evaluations offer clear policy messages based on a deep understanding of context and implementation.
3. Social and economic development programs have, as their primary purpose, to improve a population’s quality of life, whether they are financed by public agencies, NGOs, or

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private institutions; for example programs aimed at improving health, education, employment, access to credit, infrastructure, and reducing income-poverty.

Standards

1. 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. In particular, evaluation designs must be capable of addressing: a) confounding factors; b) selection bias; c) spillover effects; d) contamination of control groups; and e) impact heterogeneity by intervention, beneficiary type and context.
2. 3ie’s primary emphasis will be on impact evaluations that are both high-quality and policy-relevant, the latter being ensured through a thorough consultation process that is “demand-driven” and engages stakeholders in identifying key policy challenges and issues to inform decision-making.
3. Policy relevance is also facilitated through the adoption of a design that analyzes the intervention across the causal chain (from inputs to impacts), sometimes referred to as theory-based evaluation. 3ie will support studies which seek to explain the channels through which the intervention has an impact, including structural modeling. Thus, 3ie supports studies that answer the question ‘what works?’ as well as ‘how?’ and ‘under what circumstances?’
4. 3ie recognizes the importance of using both qualitative and quantitative data in conducting high-quality impact evaluations. Qualitative data on context are particularly important understanding whether and how the program may be replicated in other settings.
5. High-quality impact studies will typically address challenges relating to scaling up and sustainability, in addition to measuring specific outcomes. Thus, a discussion of cost effectiveness and/or a full cost-benefit analysis will be required.
6. 3ie encourages conceptual innovation. It is particularly keen to support studies which utilize innovative methodologies, or apply quality impact evaluation to areas or questions which have not been the subject of previous study using these approaches..
7. Finally, 3ie adheres to strict ethical standards in data collection and expects grantees to follow *do no harm* principles in all contexts. Investigators will be required to obtain ethical clearance with the appropriate institutions in conducting their studies.

Ensuring policy relevance

1. Engagement of key stakeholders from an early stage greatly facilitate policy influence. The primary audience for 3ie studies is developing country policy makers and program managers. Pre-study briefings or launch workshops should be used to engage stakeholders at an early stage of the planning process, and throughout the study period.
2. Unfavorable as well as favorable study findings must be reported in a timely manner to all key stakeholder groups.