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The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)

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Initiative for
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The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie): an introduction

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Abstract

The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) is a new organization devoted to enhancing development effectiveness through supporting the production and use of evidence from rigorous impact studies. This paper outlines the activities of 3ie.

The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) seeks to improve the lives of poor people in low- and middle-income countries by providing, and summarizing, evidence of what works, when, why and for how much. This aim is embodied in 3ie's charitable purpose as stated in its bylaws: 'contribute to the fulfillment of wellbeing by encouraging and funding the research, production and use of evidence from rigorous impact evaluations for policy decisions that improve social and economic development programs in low- and middle-income countries' (3ie, 2008a: 1).

There are two main arms to 3ie's work program: advocacy and grants to strengthen the evidence base for development interventions. A third activity is capacity building.

The advocacy program promotes evidence-based policy making, rigorous impact evaluation and specific policies and programs supported by evidence from impact evaluations. At present advocacy is combined with activities which also fall under the headings of demand generation (creating awareness of the potential of impact evaluations and the role of 3ie), and capacity building. To this end, 3ie has co-organized half and one-day workshops in a number of countries, and participated in events organized by others such as the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC), the Campbell Collaboration, the South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association (SAMEA) and InterAction. The major activity in this regard was the co-organization with the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) and the Network of Networks on Impact Evaluation (NONIE) of the conference 'Perspectives on Impact Evaluation' in Cairo in March 2009.

The rationale for 3ie is to collect a comprehensive body of evidence relating to key 'enduring questions' of development. To this end, 3ie finances the production of synthetic, or systematic, reviews which draw together existing knowledge on specific topics. 3ie's grants for primary studies are concentrated in thematic windows, described below.

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Synthetic reviews (SRs) examine the range of available evidence regarding a particular intervention. The term synthetic review is used to capture the 3ie philosophy of combining the technical aspects of a formal systematic review (a clear protocol, well-documented and replicable procedures, and statistical meta-analysis where appropriate), with a realist synthesis approach (Pawson, 2007) which focuses not just on outcomes but an analysis of the causal chain from inputs to outcomes and impacts, and the role of content in mediating impact. 3ie is partnering with the Campbell Collaboration (C2) in the production of synthetic reviews. All reviews should register with C2, and the protocols and reviews submitted to C2 for review. Table 1 lists the SRs being supported by 3ie at the time of writing. There are eight in total, seven being conducted by independent researchers and one in-house. The protocols and final reports are posted on the 3ie website as they become available. A sample protocol has been published in this issue of the *Journal of Development Effectiveness* (Vaessen et al., 2009), as is the first published review (Waddington and Snitslvelt, 2009).

Table 1 List of synthetic reviews being supported by 3ie of as May 2009

Name of the study	Lead Institution	Lead researcher
Underlying behavioral mechanisms necessary for improved water quality to translate into health gains	Harvard University	Michael Kremer
The impact of daycare programs on child health, nutrition and development in developing countries	National Institute of Public Health, Mexico	Jef LeRoy
Behavior Change Interventions to Prevent HIV among Low-Income Girls and Women Living in Low and Middle Income Countries	Center of Evaluation for Global Action, University of California, Berkeley	Nancy Padian
School enrollment policies and programs in developing nations	WestEd, MA, USA	Anthony Petrosino
Fostering Social Cohesion? A Synthetic Review of Social Cohesion Interventions in Africa	Columbia University, NY	Elisabeth King
Impact of Microfinance	Maastricht University	Frans Leeuw
Community based intervention package for reducing maternal, perinatal and neonatal mortality and morbidities	Aga Khan University, Pakistan	Bhutta
What works in water and sanitation	3ie	Hugh Waddington

Each year 3ie will issue three requests for proposals (RFPs), two of which will be thematic windows and one Open Window, which will accept proposals on any theme. The themes for the thematic windows are being determined through a process of international consultation, with a final decision being made by the 3ie Board. Up to 20 studies will be financed under each RFP, meaning up to 60 new studies each year.

Grants for primary studies may be of three sorts: (1) Short studies (or ‘quick wins’) which use existing, under-utilized data to conduct impact analysis of interventions of relevance to the theme and associated enduring questions. Such studies are expected to be of no more than 18 months duration, and usually less. The budget for each study is expected to be in the range US\$15-60,000. Proposals for implementing similar designs in several countries through networked teams are encouraged. (2) Long studies with an *ex ante* evaluation design, starting with the collection of baseline data and eventual collection of endline data to conduct impact analysis of interventions of relevance to the theme and associated enduring questions. Such studies will usually take place over 3-5 years. Proposals to conduct post-intervention surveys are

welcome. The costs of these studies will depend on the extent of the data collection requirements, but are expected to be in the range US\$ 0.5 – US\$ 1.0 million. (3) Rapid baseline data collection and evaluation design for cases in which no financing is available before an intervention starts. The subsequent end line data collection and analysis should be financed by the intervention budget (though the possibility exists to make a further application to 3ie).

The purpose of 3ie is to finance rigorous impact evaluations, which were defined in the 3ie Founding Document as ‘analyses that measure the net change in outcomes for a particular group of people that can be attributed to a specific program using the best methodology available, feasible and appropriate to the evaluation question that is being investigated and to the specific context’ (3ie, 2008a: 3). The ‘Principles for Impact Evaluation’ elaborate that ‘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’ (2009b: 2). In practice meeting the attribution challenge means that 3ie will largely – in the first instance most likely solely – finance impact studies of programs which are assigned (Ravallion, 2009), which have a large enough number of treatment units (individuals, firms, schools or whatever) to make statistical analysis of sufficient power feasible, and for which a credible control can be identified using either experimental or quasi-experimental means. It is by no means the case that 3ie will only finance randomized control trials (RCTs), as it is fully recognized that there are a range of development interventions for which they may be neither feasible nor ethical. It is further recognized that there are important development interventions which do not meet these criteria, and whose impact need be assessed by other means. However, 3ie was set up to explicitly address an evaluation gap identified as the lack of rigorous studies of interventions which do these meet criteria, so, for the time being at least, 3ie’s attention is restricted in this way.

The ‘Principles’ also stress policy relevance, which it is stated is ‘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?’ (3ie, 2009b: 2). The approach of theory-based impact evaluation is elaborated in White (2009).

At the time of writing 3ie has issued one RFP under the Open Window. Seventy eight proposals were received in response, with a total value of US\$26 million. These proposals were reviewed by a process involving 19 external reviewers. At the end of this process, the Board approved funding for 17 grants, which are listed in Table 2. In addition, one study is being run in-house, which has a capacity building element through learning by doing.

3ie also makes available proposal preparation grants (PPGs) to enable developing country institutions to develop quality proposals by seeking technical support from impact evaluation experts. These experts may be part of the evaluation team in the proposal, but that is not necessarily the case. Activities to be covered by the grant are travel and per diem for evaluation team members to visit to the expert’s institution or vice versa, and a contribution toward expert costs. Five such grants have been made to date. Applications for a PPG may be made at any time, with the expectation that a full proposal will be submitted in response to the next RFP.

3ie is keen to encourage innovation in both impact evaluation approaches and the application of these approaches to new areas. To this end, 3ie will commission conceptual papers. Studies are currently being undertaken on the use of rigorous impact evaluation in the areas of climate change and emergency relief. These papers will be published in the 3ie working paper series, which will cover both conceptual issues related to impact evaluation and findings from specific studies or synthetic reviews. In addition 3ie

manages the *Journal of Development Effectiveness* which publishes conceptual papers on impact evaluation, synthetic reviews, and innovative impact studies.

Finally, 3ie provides on-line databases of both existing impact evaluations and of impact evaluation expertise (these will be launched in early July).

Table 2 Primary studies being supported by 3ie as of June 2009

Name of the study	Lead Institution	Lead researcher	Country of study
Enabling Microenterprise Development in sub-Saharan Africa through the Provision of Financial Services	Innovations for Poverty Action	Pascaline Dupas	Kenya
No margin, No mission? Evaluating the Role of Incentives in the Distribution of Public Goods	Society for Family Health, Zambia	Nava Ashraf	Zambia
Learning and Growing in the Shadow of HIV/AIDS: A Prospective Randomized Evaluation of the Effects of <i>Escolinhas</i> on Young Children in Mozambique	International Save the Children Alliance	Chloe O’Gara	Mozambique
Age at Marriage, Women’s Education, and Mother and Child Outcomes in Bangladesh	Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, MIT	Rachel Glennerster	Bangladesh
Chlorine Dispensers: Scaling for Results	Innovations for Poverty Action	Sidney Povall	Kenya
Estimating the Impact and Cost-Effectiveness of Expanding Secondary Education in Ghana	Innovations for Poverty Action	Esther Duflo	Ghana
The Impact of Day Care on Maternal Labor Supply and Child Development in Mexico	Center for Evaluation Research and Surveys	Jef L Leroy	Mexico
Monitoring and Assessing the Impacts of KickStart’s Low Cost Farm Equipment on Poverty Reduction in Africa	KickStart International	Martin J. Fisher	Kenya, Tanzania
“X out TB”: Monitoring Patient Compliance with Tuberculosis Treatment Regimens	InterActive Research and Development (IRD)	Shama Mohammed	Pakistan
Rigorous assessment of micro-credits in Ecuador	University of Amsterdam	Hessel Oosterbeek	Ecuador
Vocational Education in Kenya – A Randomized Evaluation	Innovation for Poverty Action	Edward Miguel	Kenya
Community Driven Development in Sierra Leone	UC Berkeley, Center of Evaluation for Global Action	Tristan Reed	Sierra Leone
Paying For Performance in China’s Battle Against Anemia	Stanford University	Brian Sharbono	China

Improved CookStoves in the Tumu region of Ghana	UC Berkeley, Center of Evaluation for Global Action	David Levine	Ghana
An Impact Evaluation of the Unconditional Cash Transfer Program: Evidence from the Indonesian Large Scale Social Assistance	The SMERU Research Institute	Sudarno Sumarto	Indonesia
Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Royal Thai Government (RTG)	Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Royal Thai Government (RTG)	Sompit Punyaratabandhu	Thailand
Estimating the Effectiveness of a Food Supplementation Intervention Integrated into an AIDS Care and Treatment Program	The AIDS Support Organization (TASO), Uganda	Robert Ochai	Uganda
The impact of WSS interventions: a multi-country study using DHS data	3ie	Ron Bose	Bangladesh, Cameroon, Egypt, Nepal, Peru, Philippines

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