

EXPANDING THE REACH OF IMPACT EVALUATION (ERIE)

ERIE is an approach to conducting retrospective long-term impact evaluations of completed USAID interventions. These evaluations will leverage and build on existing program data to either assess if the observed short-term impacts are sustained, or to investigate results which might only be expected to emerge over a long-term horizon. We will use innovative data collection strategies and methods to identify the appropriate counterfactuals, and generate lessons on how to plan for and conduct these long-term impact evaluations which can be incorporated in USAID bureau and mission planning.

THE CHALLENGE

Many development interventions are believed to achieve long-term impacts, but evidence of these impacts is often unavailable. Most program evaluations focus on short-term outcomes because of rigid program cycles, unreliable funding streams for monitoring and evaluation, and changes in programmatic priorities. Without evidence about long-term impacts, development organizations do not have reliable information to make cost-effective decisions, particularly in sectors with theories of change that stretch beyond the typical project cycle. The problem is that we rarely measure the results of a policy or program over long periods of time and large geographic scales.

THE INNOVATION

To demonstrate the power of long-term evaluation, our team will conduct a set of pilot evaluations that assess the impact of a completed aid intervention. These retrospective evaluations might occur either when short-term impacts have been assessed but not tracked over time, or when interventions are only likely to have impacts over longer periods of time. We will also develop toolkits with guidance to help evaluators and USAID offices assess whether a long-term evaluation is feasible for a given program, and to integrate plans for long-term evaluations into future programming. These toolkits will help create low-cost opportunities for long-term impact evaluation by providing recommendations on collecting and compiling certain types of program data in systematic ways from the initial stages of measurement.

THE APPROACH

Two recent developments make long-term evaluation in development programs more feasible now than in the past: First, the recent increase of impact evaluations has created a pool of well-documented, rigorously studied programs to which we can return for long-term follow-up. Second, a rapid improvement in the granularity, coverage, and nature of data— from both aid activities and outcomes—has created new opportunities for rigorous, quasi-experimental evaluations, including retrospective analyses. For example, advances in mobile data streams and administrative “big data” allow us to construct measures of poverty or economic activity using existing data. Geocoding, data extraction tools, and satellite imagery allow us to define what activities took place where, when, and by whom. When merged, these new kinds of program and outcome data create powerful opportunities for evaluation of development interventions that currently lack evidence of long-term impacts.

COMPLETED PILOTS

Malawi: ERIE conducted a retrospective longitudinal impact evaluation of Food for Peace's Wellness and Agriculture for Life Advancement (WALA) activity in Southern Malawi. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, the team examined the long-term impact of WALA on agriculture, nutrition, resilience and sustainability outcomes.

Israel/West Bank: ERIE conducted a retrospective evaluation of the Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation's People to People (P2P) activities. Primarily using a qualitative method with a short online survey, the evaluation explored potential effects of previous P2P projects in terms of perceptions of and continued communication with those on the other side of the conflict, and belief in the potential of peace or co-existence.

Global: ERIE is conducting a long-term evaluation of the Center for Development Research's Partnership for Enhanced Engagement in Research (PEER) and Higher Education Solutions Network (HESN) activities. Using quasi-experimental designs, the team will examine the impact of the two programs on researcher capacity and data-driven policy changes in countries where USAID is working.

Potential future pilots: The ERIE team is exploring potential future pilot studies in Uganda, Bangladesh, and Peru, looking at a range of sectors such as agriculture, nutrition, resilience, market strengthening, environmental change, and sustainability.



Tools: Tools for data collection and analysis will match the design questions, but may include compilation of administrative or programmatic data, mobile data, geocoding, and satellite imagery analysis



Partners: Notre Dame Initiative for Global Development (prime), AidData, Center for Effective Global Action (CEGA), Geo-spatial Impact Evaluation (GIE), Mathematica Policy Research



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