

Registry for International Development Impact Evaluations – Background Document

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1. Background and purpose of RIDIE

The Registry for International Development Impact Evaluations (RIDIE) is an initiative of the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie). The registry and this website were created and developed for 3ie by the RAND Corporation.

RIDIE is a registry of impact evaluations related to development in low and middle income countries. Its objectives are to enhance the transparency and quality of evaluation research and to provide a repository of planned and ongoing (and eventually, completed) impact evaluation studies for researchers, funders, and others.

RIDIE is intended to be a *prospective* registry in which researchers record information about their evaluation designs before conducting the analysis, and ideally, before data are collected on impacts. They post findings upon study completion and can also update information as the study proceeds.

A prospective registry seeks to avoid several widely recognized sources of bias in research or reporting. These include *post hoc* data mining or specification searches, whereby researchers use the results to decide what outcomes to report or specifications to use on the basis of what is statistically significant, ‘interesting’, or in accordance with preconceived ideas. Positive or interesting findings may also be more likely to get published in journals. For these reasons, published findings may present a distorted picture of which interventions work and which do not (and what share of the time they work).

With a prospective registration, evaluation plans (including hypotheses, samples, and main outcomes) are publicly stated out front, committing or at least encouraging researchers to report all the results they initially planned to obtain, the hypothesis tests they had originally proposed, and so on. The process does not prevent or discourage changes in design or focus, but helps to ensure that these changes are transparent. Thus, for example, if the intervention

had no impacts overall but subsequent subgroup analysis revealed impacts on one group of participants (e.g. urban women), the registry will show both sets of results.

The registry can also mitigate the problem of publication bias, since it will include all studies of a given type, including those that were never published in journals--and those that were never even completed. This will help prevent researchers, policymakers, or program funders from concluding that a certain type of program is effective on the basis of one or two favorable published studies, when a larger number of unpublished evaluations actually find no benefits or only weak impacts.

Prospective (and public) registration can also benefit researchers by allowing them to 'lay claim' to innovations in study design, testing of theory based hypotheses, sampling approaches, etc. by making public these aspects of their work well ahead of study completion and eventual journal publication.

The ultimate objective of RIDIE is lead to overall improvements in the quality and integrity of impact evaluation evidence in low and middle income countries, and thus provide a better basis for policy decisions than simply relying on published findings.

2. Comparison with other registries in the social sciences

Several initiatives in addition to RIDIE are underway in the social sciences to create prospective registries, as part of a general movement inspired in part by the earlier implementation of registries in medical science such as clinicalTrial.Gov. The social science registries include the registry of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) in economics recently initiated by the American Economics Association (AEA) and the Experiments in Governance and Politics Network (EGAP) in political science. RIDIE will potentially overlap with these but will also differ in several important ways:

- The other registries will be restricted (at least for now) to randomized control trials. While the benefits of RCTs are very well established, this leaves out many high quality impact evaluations in developing countries that use a range of quasi-experimental approaches (regression discontinuity, propensity score matching, natural experiments, and others).
- RIDIE focuses on low and middle income countries only whereas registries such as AEA and EGAP also include studies in the US and other developed nations. The need for reliable, high quality evidence for policy-making is especially strong in low and middle

income settings. This motivates the focus of RIDIE on these countries, as it does the mission and focus of 3ie itself as a funder of evaluation research for development.

- Reflecting an emphasis on policy impact, RIDIE is restricted to actual program evaluations ; it does not include behavioral laboratory experiments.
- Finally, and reflecting the same emphasis, RIDIE is not geared only or primarily toward scholarly research destined for journal publication. It is intended to also include impact evaluations by non-academics—including consultant organizations as well as developing country analysts—produced for governments or other funders and not necessarily intended for publication.

3. Intended users of RIDIE

The core user groups and how they are expected to use and benefit from RIDIE are as follows:

- Researchers (study authors): Researchers based in universities and research institutes who are conducting impact evaluations and would like to prospectively register their studies. These evaluations may be primarily research oriented or they may be work that is contracted with government or multilateral agencies. Prospective registration of studies will enhance the transparency and credibility of the researchers' work (and may also be encouraged or required by funders and journal editors). It also allows researchers to 'lay claim' to innovations in study design, testing of theory based hypotheses, sampling approaches, etc. by making public these aspects of their work, well ahead of study completion and eventual journal publication.
- Professional evaluators: Researchers based in private consultancy or research organizations who carry out contracted evaluations primarily for government or multilateral agencies. As with the previous group, prospective registration of their studies will enhance the transparency and credibility of the research as well as lay claim to innovations.
- Other researchers: individuals who are interested in knowing about particular ongoing studies, or trying to learn about findings of unpublished or not yet published evaluations, or planning their own evaluations and therefore seeking to learn where gaps in research are with respect to topic and countries or region. Importantly, RIDIE

can tell such researchers what is currently happening or in development in these topics or areas. Published studies would be quite dated for this purpose.

- Evaluation funders: Foundations, governments, and multilateral agencies that fund impact evaluations, and want to monitor the progress and performance of these evaluations, or to learn where gaps in research are with respect to topic and countries or region so as to inform which proposals to fund and to shape calls for proposals. Funders may also decide to make registration a condition of funding, as a means of ensuring quality and credibility of findings.
- Journal editors: For papers submitted for publication that use impact evaluation data, journals may decide to encourage prospective authors to register their studies or give higher priority to those that do; they may want to reference the registration number in published articles; and they may want to provide information from the registry (including initial analysis plans and changes to study design) to referees to assist them in evaluating submissions.
- Students/other: A broad class of users, including for example NGOs and development practitioners, who may not themselves be evaluators but seek to learn about a particular ongoing study, or get a sense of what is happening in their country, region, or thematic area of interest.
- Policy makers: decision makers who similarly seek to learn about a particular ongoing study, or get a sense of what is happening in their country, region, or thematic area of interest; or who want to understand what interventions work well in similar contexts and could be attempted in their own country. Note that while RIDIE can be used this way and will be accessible to anyone, it is not primarily designed as an information tool for the policymakers or the general public.

4. RAND and 3ie Teams

The RIDIE design team at RAND consists of Peter Glick, Sebastian Bauhoff, and Elizabeth Brown. The development (IT) team at RAND consists of Bas Weerman and Christopher Skeels, with additional help on web design from Monica Hertzman and Lee Floyd. The RAND teams worked

closely with Annette Brown of 3ie on the design aspects of RIDIE. In addition, RIDIE has been significantly shaped by input from two expert task forces that have advised on design and development issues.