



Report

Department for International Development

**EVALUATION OF THE HUMANITARIAN
INNOVATION AND EVIDENCE PROGRAMME
(HIEP): FORMATIVE PHASE REPORT**

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Submitted by Itad

Executive summary

Introduction

The Humanitarian Innovation and Evidence Programme (HIEP) intends to have impact on humanitarian actors' capacities to deliver improved response and resilience programmes that are effective at supporting vulnerable people. HIEP is a £48.3 million investment that is working towards three specific outcomes:

- **Outcome 1:** International donors, including DFID, develop funding instruments and frameworks for investment into evidence, innovation and its applications.
- **Outcome 2:** Humanitarian actors change skills, behaviours, relationships, cultures and systems to promote the regular integration of evidence into humanitarian and disaster risk management (DRM) interventions.
- **Outcome 3:** Policy and practice actors invest in social, economic and political innovations that focus on benefits for poor people in humanitarian crises.

This formative stage of the evaluation aims to make an initial assessment of strengths and weaknesses of current HIEP design; to identify progress to date; to make recommendations to facilitate learning; and to provide a foundation for future summative evaluation. It is the first of a series that will be conducted by the Itad evaluation team between now and 2018. It is organised around four key questions agreed in the inception phase:

1. **Relevance:** How well has HIEP identified and responded to evolving priority needs and opportunities for investment in humanitarian evidence and innovation?
2. **Efficiency:** Which management and implementation approaches have enabled HIEP to deliver better value for money (VfM)?
3. **Effectiveness:** Which approaches have been more effective in enabling HIEP to ensure the creation, support and application of high-quality and relevant humanitarian evidence?
4. **Impact:** What contributions has HIEP made to building and sustaining evidence-aware policy and practice by humanitarian organisations?

In line with the evaluability assessment carried out in the inception phase, the focus of the evaluation is on progress and results up to outcome level.

Background to HIEP

The Humanitarian Innovation and Evidence Programme (HIEP) is part of DFID's commitments in response to the Humanitarian Emergency Response Review (HERR) to:

- Make humanitarian research and innovation a core part of DFID's research and evidence work.
- Use innovative techniques and technologies more routinely in humanitarian response.

DFID developed a Humanitarian Innovation and Evidence Strategy (HIES) that outlined an approach to four key problems affecting humanitarian effectiveness that evidence and innovation can address:

- **Problem 1:** Decision-makers have inadequate access to reliable and tailored information about risk, especially as it affects the poorest.

- **Problem 2:** Inadequate synthesis and generation of evidence about which humanitarian interventions work best, and new ways to tackle humanitarian problems.
- **Problem 3:** Insufficient capture and systematic analysis about how to work with national and local institutions to manage disasters, especially in insecure settings.
- **Problem 4:** Inadequate systems and incentives to integrate evidence production and use routinely in humanitarian decisions and actions.

HIEP is the programme that puts the strategy into action. DFID has approved a total budget of £48.3 million for HIEP of which £36.4 million has been allocated to date. HIEP includes projects that seek to generate new evidence or synthesise existing evidence on what works in humanitarian action in key areas, including health in emergencies, disaster risk reduction, scaling up cash-based responses, working in volatile environments and urban resilience. There are also projects focused on support to innovation in the humanitarian sector. Projects are implemented with partners and include a range of approaches and ways of working, including the establishment of specific funds such as the Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF), commissioning self-contained research projects and using evaluation as a means to generate evidence.

HIEP is an innovative programme in DFID being supported and implemented through cooperation across three departments: Research and Evidence Division (RED), Conflict, Humanitarian and Security (CHASE) and Africa Regional Department (ARD). The management of HIEP is a new departure in the management of humanitarian research in DFID. It is the most integrated programme to date in DFID's efforts to pool funding and involve lead advisers and programme management resources from different DFID departments. It is based on the assumption that this structure will produce more high-quality, relevant and used research by including skills from across DFID departments.

Methodology

The formative evaluation took place between January and May 2014. At the heart of the evaluation is a case study approach. The evaluation identified eight of the twenty projects so far allocated funding by HIEP to follow up to 2018. This formative phase was an opportunity to check the feasibility and appropriateness of that selection.

At this stage the evaluation reviewed the current status of case study projects and their strategies, plans and alignment with the overall HIEP theory of change. Most case study data was gathered through document review, interviews and group discussions with HIEP project teams and external stakeholders during January-mid-March 2014. Findings at case study level are based on data available at that point. Additional programme-level data was gathered through document review and interviews with DFID and external stakeholders in April 2014.

A theory of change was developed by the evaluation team with DFID in the inception phase, which is summarised below. This is being tested and refined over the course of the evaluation. In this formative phase, key questions and judgement criteria were developed based on the HIEP theory of change and the four overarching questions around which the evaluation is framed.

HIEP theory of change summary

Through its operations, networking, influencing and funding, *alongside* coherent and convincing evidence products, DFID will attract other humanitarian funders and practitioners to invest in new technologies, evidence-informed operational approaches and systems that the HIEP will produce.

This will influence skills, behaviours, cultures and systems among humanitarian actors to promote the routine integration of evidence into the financing, design and implementation of humanitarian interventions.

In turn, these enabling conditions, capacities and systems will support international agencies, national governments, public sector actors, civil society and private actors in fragile and conflict-affected states and countries vulnerable to disaster risks **to use context-specific applications of evidence and innovations** in their design, financing, planning and delivery of humanitarian policies, programmes and practices to manage risks and deliver rapid, effective responses in emergencies.

This will improve programmes so that lives are saved and communities recover quickly from economic and livelihood losses that arise from humanitarian crises.

Key findings

Relevance

There has been a robust process to identify and develop HIEP projects. HIEP projects respond to key problems identified in the Humanitarian Emergency Response Review and Humanitarian Innovation and Evidence Strategy (HIES). There were systematic and thorough processes to identify specific questions and evidence gaps and to inform the design of projects. These include good use of literature and evidence reviews, triangulating and strengthening initial evidence gap analyses with broad stakeholder engagement, and good use by DFID of proposal and inception phases to strengthen project designs.

The establishment of project advisory groups that combine a range of expertise, both academic and operational, provides a good structure to maintain relevance. The selection of projects is in line with existing DFID strengths and priorities which means there is expertise in house to support projects, as well as strengthening the likely relevance of HIEP outputs to future DFID programming.

Interviews with external stakeholders consistently found strong support for the subject areas that HIEP is addressing. There is some evidence of HIEP's harmonisation with other relevant institutional and sectoral initiatives, but more systematic scanning of the external environment could be beneficial to ensure HIEP relevance and responsiveness to future opportunities for investment and influence. This is particularly important in the midst of an evolving global agenda, with key events up-coming in 2015 and 2016, including the World Humanitarian Summit, the World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction and the development of a post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction.

An issue that was raised across a number of interviews with external stakeholders was the extent to which lack of evidence or lack of access to it is a problem as opposed to other obstacles or resistance to its use. An analysis of HIEP funding allocation to date indicates that well over 75% has been allocated to the synthesis and generation of evidence about what works best in humanitarian operations. Only 11% of funding has so far been allocated to the problem identified by DFID of "inadequate systems and incentives to integrate evidence production and use routinely in humanitarian decisions and actions". In this regard, the new HIEP initiative to strengthen humanitarian evidence systems in East Africa and South Asia could be an important addition to the HIEP portfolio. Moving forward, it will be important both for the evaluation and the management of HIEP to monitor the overall balance in resources and allocation across the four problems HIEP seeks to address.

A second recurrent theme in external stakeholders' assessment of HIEP is the need to engage with national and regional stakeholders. Given the growing importance of country-based actors in humanitarian crises and disaster risk management it will be important that HIEP both is engaged with and guided by priorities identified by stakeholders based in regions anticipated to benefit from the programme.

Efficiency

The evaluation is using the 4E framework (economy, efficiency, effectiveness, equity) to evaluate value for money (VfM) in HIEP. Some aspects of the planned methodology at this stage were not possible due to the

lack of availability of key data, including most project budgets (for commercial reasons) and resourcing costs of HIEP. However, the evaluation was able to identify good evidence that VfM considerations were influential in resource allocation in HIEP. Attention to economy and efficiency has been strong during procurement processes, with some attention also to effectiveness. It is important to note that quality has been a key driver of resource allocation rather than a need to spend money within a particular financial cycle.

HIEP has committed over £36 million to projects to date. It had, as of May 2013, leveraged a further £6.2 million from other donors, largely UK research councils. This represents a leverage ratio of roughly 25%. So, for every £1 of DFID money spent, this has leveraged a further £0.25.

One of the clear challenges facing HIEP is how it can develop a more consistent approach to monitoring VfM both between projects and at programme level. Key areas for consideration include the use of standardised VfM indicators, assigning resource allocations to logframe outputs and outcomes and clearer guidance on how equity should be considered in VfM management across HIEP.

Effectiveness

There are solid plans to produce relevant evidence products. Critical relationships between DFID, project partners and key stakeholders are being established. Relationships are most developed at the international level, with national and regional connections at a much earlier stage of development. The planned outputs provide the building blocks for the programme's potential success. HIEP project teams are developing research uptake plans, which should support evidence being debated, brokered and endorsed by operational actors. These are all key processes to support the effectiveness of HIEP.

The inter-departmental design of HIEP is proving to be an effective structure to bring together expertise and perspectives from across DFID. The virtual team has the potential to increase the impact of HIEP through collective learning and joint activities. HIEP is also building links with other parts of DFID with related skills and interests, e.g. the Innovation Hub. Many of the building blocks for the success of HIEP projects are in place.

However, initial data available at this stage suggest that the budget for communication, which is key to HIEP success, are tight, often at around 10% or less of total budgets. This is countered to a certain extent in some projects by their participatory approaches that engage stakeholders in the design and research process. But activities to support the uptake of evidence and innovation are likely to be needed beyond the planned contracts with partners, which often run just up to 2016. The planned activities of DFID's own personnel are also unclear at this point, though research uptake strategies being developed at the time of the evaluation may have made these more explicit. Furthermore, there is no HIEP programme-level communication budget.

A key to maximising HIEP results is the HIEP Secretariat. The Secretariat has a range of roles, which include supporting and finding ways for cross-department working to be effective, building relationships at strategic level within and outside of DFID, communication of HIEP and its agenda within and outside of DFID, as well as key programme management roles. The current staff achieve impressive results given the current resourcing constraints. Staff capacity of HIEP amounts to just over two full-time equivalent staff which, given the current and future workload, appears to be inadequate.

Furthermore, while some structures are in place to monitor HIEP (e.g. regular Management Committee meetings, annual reviews and partner reporting templates), some key tools required to monitor the effectiveness of HIEP, such as the populated logframe, were not finished at the time of the formative evaluation. This limits the effectiveness of management systems.

Impact

There is a strong alignment between the aims and strategies of individual HIEP projects with the overall programme theory of change that will be necessary to achieve HIEP's planned outcomes, e.g. the project's plan to promote debate about findings, link with key networks and build relationships with potential ambassadors and champions to promote evidence and innovation.

However, HIEP outcomes are extremely ambitious and go beyond the uptake of specific evidence produced by HIEP projects. HIEP intends to achieve change at the humanitarian system level in how humanitarian actors, including donors and operational organisations, support and use evidence and innovation. The programme rests on assumptions that DFID's influence as a respected humanitarian donor, investor and actor can attract others to change policies, investments and operations.

The analysis underlying the programme also describes the need to overcome likely and known barriers, such as organisational resistance to change. Interviewees within and outside of DFID raised questions as to whether the current HIEP approach, strategy and resourcing is adequately addressing change at this level. There is not yet a strategy for how projects and HIEP activities at the programme level will work together to maximise their potential collective impact.

The evaluation found that with adequate resourcing and planning, at least up to 2018, there is potential to achieve some progress in relation to all three outcomes. However, there is a need for clearer articulation of the specific ambitions of HIEP, greater analysis of and planning for the specific contexts in which HIEP aims to bring about change, and for planning and resourcing of activities over and above individual project research uptake activities.

Gender and social inclusion

There is a good focus on gender and social inclusion (GaSI) in DFID documentation. This includes an emphasis on engagement with affected communities, commitment to disaggregated data, and development of a mixed portfolio of targeted research and activities that address specific issues affecting women and girls in humanitarian crises. However, a lack of HIEP guidance to project teams on how to assess and monitor gender and social inclusion has resulted in inconsistent approaches across the programme. Greater guidance and monitoring can strengthen the approach. Also, further review by DFID internally is likely to be necessary to ensure HIEP's ability to meet any new accountability and transparency requirements of the International Development Gender Equality Act (2014).

Overall

The focus of HIEP programme development so far has understandably been on the establishment of the individual HIEP projects along with key partnerships and stakeholder relationships. This is creating a solid foundation for HIEP to be successful. Plans for robust, relevant evidence, support to innovation and key relationships are in place. It is now timely to start developing more detailed programme-level plans. Particularly important is the development and implementation of an influencing strategy for HIEP and also the further development of the virtual team to ensure opportunities are taken, challenges addressed and resources are in place to maximise the potential collective impact of HIEP.

Recommendations

The formative evaluation identified seven key recommendations to support the development of HIEP to maximise its potential success. In addition, specific recommendations for each case study are detailed in the report.

Recommendation 1 – Clarify level of ambition of HIEP to support transformative change in the sector

It is urgent in 2014 for the HIEP Secretariat and Management Committee to clarify the level of HIEP's ambition in relation to transformation and change in the sector (i.e. at the outcome level) so plans, strategies and resourcing can be developed accordingly.

Recommendation 2 – Resourcing HIEP

Before the end of 2014, the Management Committee should review the overall balance of how resources are being allocated to and within HIEP, and make adjustments taking into account decisions made in relation to Recommendation 1 and the level of ambition of HIEP.

Recommendation 3 – Galvanising the collective power of HIEP virtual team

By December 2014, the HIEP Secretariat should develop a plan and identify the resources needed to support the development of the strategic role of the HIEP virtual team.

Recommendation 4 – Monitoring HIEP

By December 2014, the Secretariat and Management Committee should put in place systems to monitor HIEP more effectively, including a populated logframe, establishing systems to track efficiency and economy across HIEP.

Recommendation 5 – Achieving change in humanitarian contexts

By Quarter 1 2015, the HIEP Secretariat should develop a strategy for HIEP engagement with regional and country stakeholders.

Recommendation 6 – HIEP's approach to gender and social inclusion

By Quarter 1 2015, the Secretariat should develop a plan to strengthen HIEP's approach to implementing its commitments to gender and social inclusion.

Recommendation 7 – Learning from HIEP

By the end of Quarter 1 2015, the HIEP Secretariat should develop a strategy to ensure learning from projects is captured and shared across the HIEP virtual team, partners and externally in key subjects (e.g. methodological challenges in integration of gender and social inclusion issues in humanitarian research; ethics in humanitarian research).