

# Executive Summary

The Department for International Development (DFID) invested £54.6 million into a humanitarian innovation and evidence programme which began in 2013 for initially five years and now runs to 2022.

This report presents evaluation findings on its relevance, effectiveness, impact and value for money.

The Humanitarian Innovation and Evidence Programme (HIEP) was designed to have an impact on humanitarian actors' capacity to deliver improved response and resilience programmes that are effective at supporting vulnerable people. It works towards three specific outcomes:



Credit: Russell Watkins/DFID

## 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.

The **summative** evaluation conducted by Itad, the fourth report in a five-year evaluation of HIEP that started in 2013, aims to provide both an independent assessment of progress and also to produce learning and recommendations on humanitarian evidence and innovation for DFID and the sector.

## Background to HIEP

HIEP is part of DFID's response to the Humanitarian Emergency Response Review (HERR) to make humanitarian research and innovation a core part of DFID's research and evidence work and to use innovative techniques and technologies more routinely in humanitarian response.

It addresses four problems affecting humanitarian action, detailed in DFID's Humanitarian Innovation and Evidence Strategy (HIES), 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 on which humanitarian interventions work best, and new ways to tackle humanitarian problems

### Problem 3

Insufficient capture and systematic analysis of 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 it routinely in humanitarian decisions and actions

## Evaluation key facts



**Over 600**  
documents were  
reviewed



**5**  
years duration



**8**  
case studies  
followed by the  
evaluation team from  
2013 to 2018



**611**  
persons were interviewed



**5** countries  
visited

Pakistan, Jordan, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia

HIEP comprises 30 projects that seek to generate new evidence or synthesise existing evidence on what works in humanitarian action in key areas including health in emergencies, protracted displacement, disaster risk reduction, scaling up cash-based responses, humanitarian assistance in volatile environments and urban risk. Within the HIEP portfolio there are projects focused on support to innovation in the humanitarian sector.

HIEP projects are implemented with partners and through a range of approaches including the development of specific funds such as the Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF) and Research for Health in Humanitarian Crises (R2HC), which between them have made well over 120 grants. HIEP has a particular focus on working through partnerships between operational and academic organisations.

HIEP was set up as an innovative programme in DFID, implemented through cooperation across three departments: Research and Evidence Division (RED), Conflict, Humanitarian and Security (CHASE) and Africa Regional Department (ARD). However, since 2015, RED has been the sole financier of the DFID programme and the principle body responsible for management of HIEP, although with close cooperation across DFID, including through an inter-departmental advisory group.

The HIEP timeframe has been extended from its initial five-year plan and the final project now runs to 2022. The structure overseeing HIEP is now named the Humanitarian Research and Innovation team (HRI team), which is also generating new projects outside of the HIEP framework. Much of the learning from HIEP is relevant to the new phase of work by the HRI team.

**A theory of change (ToC)** was developed by the evaluation team with DFID in the inception phase, which is summarised in Box 1.



Credit: Vicki Francis/DFID

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## Methodology

The evaluation addresses questions of HIEP's relevance, effectiveness, impact and value for money. Findings are based on the data collected across the four stages of the evaluation: inception (2013), formative (2014), first summative (2015) and final (2017).

The evaluation is theory-based with judgement criteria linked to the ToC. The ToC details a process for how HIEP projects travel from production of high-quality outputs to contributing to HIEP outcomes. The theory envisages that DFID has a key role at programme level through its donor, networking and influencing roles in the sector.

At the heart of the evaluation is a case study approach in which the evaluation team followed eight of the HIEP projects from 2013 to 2018. The evaluation included country visits to Uganda, Pakistan and Jordan in this phase, and earlier also to Kenya and Ethiopia, which enabled the inclusion of more country-level stakeholder perspectives. The evaluation considered project quality assurance processes; assessed value for money using the 4E framework (which considers economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity) and conducted a gender and social inclusion (GASI) audit of the programme. We drew on contribution analysis to assess projects and HIEP's contribution to identified results.

We experienced some constraints, notably the lack of a finalised HIEP-influencing strategy detailing more specific anticipated results, access to some data and access to country-level stakeholders, particularly where projects had closed.

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**Overall, the HIEP portfolio focuses well on the first three problems identified by the HIES relating to access to, and production and synthesis of, evidence but has not substantially addressed the fourth problem which relates to lack of incentives and blockages to use of evidence .**

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## Key findings

**HIEP has achieved considerable success in its five years of implementation.** It has established a high profile and level of respect for DFID's role in supporting evidence and innovation. External stakeholders perceive DFID as having distinctive advantages among donors because it has the potential to work across functions in research and operations, and across sectors, to bring together a range of expertise, and is able to balance openness to taking risks, essential in research and innovation, with achieving results.



## Relevance

**HIEP is a highly relevant initiative addressing key issues affecting humanitarian action and people impacted by humanitarian crises.** HIEP's responsive approach, which includes bringing on new projects over its lifetime, has ensured it is focused on key humanitarian issues and evidence needs, both identified in HERR and emerging since – such as the Ebola crisis, Syria response, escalating food insecurity and new sudden-onset disasters. HIEP projects' design has dealt well with the challenges of research in humanitarian contexts, showing that a range of methods are feasible and can produce high-quality evidence. Strong quality assurance processes throughout the projects' durations have been important particularly when new methods are being designed to cope with humanitarian contexts. But some challenges remain, including gaining access to data and the quality of existing data. Overall, the HIEP portfolio focuses well on the first three problems identified by the HIES relating to access to, and production and synthesis of, evidence but has not substantially addressed the fourth problem which relates to lack of incentives and blockages to use of evidence.



## Effectiveness

**HIEP has been highly effective in its production of high-quality evidence and promotion of project findings to relevant humanitarian debates and processes that have reached a wide audience of policymakers, practitioners and researchers at national and international levels.** HIEP, particularly through partner activity, has linked to some key initiatives at national level on cash, nutrition, social protection and healthcare, providing opportunities to influence important programme, policy and strategy development processes. HIEP is also well aligned with DFID humanitarian policy priorities and has engaged with some key issues globally, including those that feature in the Grand Bargain and the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) Agenda for Humanity, such as multi-year funding, localisation and cooperation on innovation.

**HIEP's engagement with other humanitarian actors, as well as policy and practice, has been primarily through partner activities and initiative.** The effectiveness of partners' promotion of their project's evidence and final recommendations has been greatest when

- (a) contact has been sustained throughout a project allowing relationships and credibility to be built; and
- (b) when communication processes were resourced sufficiently to continue for at least 6–12 months after project conclusions and recommendations are drawn and products produced. Other important factors have been resourcing, in terms of time and money, for national and international events and processes; producing a wide range of customised products; and linking individual project findings to a broader body of evidence. Direct briefings for individual agencies tailored to their interest to help consider the practical implications of applying new evidence, while resource intensive, have been an effective strategy in supporting research take-up.

HIEP's partnership model has been particularly effective in bringing together operational and academic stakeholders for the benefit of the programme. Partnerships have enabled access to humanitarian contexts for data collection, ensured operational relevance and provided access to a wider range of networks through which the project findings can be shared.

**Within DFID, the relationship with the humanitarian cadre has been positive with active promotion of research to humanitarian advisers, but more variable across DFID.** However, HIEP's profile was extremely limited at country level in DFID offices. The original vision for HIEP saw DFID playing an active role drawing on its different capabilities as donor, influencer and networker. This has been challenged by a lack of clarity in HIEP around the responsibilities of different parts of DFID, particularly in relation to promoting action based on its findings, and acting in support of the overall HIEP agenda at outcome level. Capacity constraints and the lack of an influencing strategy detailing more specific aims and departmental roles, within and outside of the HRI team and mechanisms, has impeded this. The programme's focus on the production and synthesis of evidence, rather than also addressing the lack of incentives and other obstacles (beyond supply) to the use evidence in the sector, means that HIEP does not fully address the range of problems identified in the HIES.

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## Gender and social inclusion

**HIEP is based on a strong commitment to address gender and inclusion. The portfolio directly addresses issues relevant to women and girls in humanitarian crises.** This includes projects relevant to addressing violence against women and girls, sexual reproductive health, innovations for supporting management of menstrual hygiene during emergencies and disasters, methodologies for identifying vulnerable people affected by urban humanitarian emergencies and for promoting data collection on disability and practical support for people with disabilities. HIEP's flexible approach has aided projects to develop and adapt methods that more effectively reach women, girls and marginalised groups during research. This can be by recruiting and training researchers from targeted communities to reduce the social distance between respondents and researchers; working with women's groups and community-based organisations; remote surveying and the use of a woman's voice on automated surveys to reach isolated vulnerable communities and individuals; and bringing research study participants into discussions about emerging findings (e.g. the inclusion of vulnerable youth and families in Jordan). Some projects have found a focus on power dynamics, social difference and vulnerabilities enhances consideration of gender and inclusion issues. The availability, collection and analysis of disaggregated gender-sensitive and inclusive data remains a persistent challenge, resulting in data gaps that HIEP has only been partially successful in addressing.

**HIEP was slow to translate its strong gender and inclusion principles into systems and mechanisms for management until late in the programme (2016–17).** There is still a need for HIEP and partners to be clearer about what level of socially disaggregated data is expected, and what is meant by integrating a gender and inclusion perspective in research processes.

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Third, HIEP had produced new evidence and innovations which some agencies have applied to their policy and practice, and others have built upon in further research.

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## Impact

HIEP is working towards three outcomes which relate to systemic changes in

- (a) donor funding instruments and frameworks for investment into humanitarian evidence and innovation;
- (b) humanitarian actors' capabilities and relationships to integrate evidence routinely into policy and practice; and
- (c) policy and practice actors' investment into innovation which focuses benefit on poor people in humanitarian crises.

**HIEP has made important contributions to some early and emerging changes in relation to all three planned outcomes.** First, HIEP has developed new multi-donor funds for innovation (HIF) and health research in emergencies (R2HC). Second, HIEP partners have developed methodologies for humanitarian research, built relationships between operational and academic agencies and increased debate on key evidence issues such as quality of data. Third, HIEP had produced new evidence and innovations which some agencies have applied to their policy and practice, and others have built upon in further research. Finally, HIEP has strengthened the evidence and innovation system, notably contributing to the establishment of the Global Alliance for Humanitarian Innovation (GAHI). These are early-stage changes and there are sustainability questions in some areas, but HIEP has made significant contributions proportionate to its original five-year time span. HIEP has made only a limited contribution to building southern capacity to produce and use evidence and innovation. This is a shortfall given humanitarian research needs good local researchers and the key users of HIEP products are local.

## Value for money

HIEP offers good value for money (VfM) in terms of its economy, enabled by its lean management costs, inter-departmental cooperation, partnerships between academic and humanitarian institutions and selection of appropriate partners. Partners' level of activity in HIEP projects has often been over and above contractual agreements to ensure quality of products and their active communication. Management of VfM has improved with the introduction of a VfM framework being applied systematically across HIEP in 2017.

**But there is a trade-off between the lean management costs of HIEP and the programme's overall effectiveness and impact.** There have been some drawbacks including staff turnover and capacity issues in DFID's HIEP team. HIEP would have benefited from more investment into activities to pull together learning and findings across the HIEP portfolio, to link them to broader bodies of evidence, and develop a strategy to guide and encourage activities that promote the use of HIEP findings, both in DFID and externally. These could have drawn on DFID's influencing potential through its role as donor, convenor and influential stakeholder in the sector.

## Theory of change (ToC)

**The HIEP ToC has largely held true and, when applied, shown that projects can contribute to impact. The value of the theory to DFID would have been strengthened by more active engagement with the theory by the HIEP management and governance teams.** Also, with attention to some of the areas identified in the ToC as potential blocks, such as political economy of inter-agency competition and challenges for new actors entering into the humanitarian community. However, if DFID does not plan to take on the full institutional role envisaged in the HIEP ToC of it drawing on its networking, influencing and donor roles, then alternative strategies to achieve change at the system level need to be developed. Even then the ToC provides a good basis to understand the relationship between evidence, innovation and change.



## Factors supporting success of HIEP

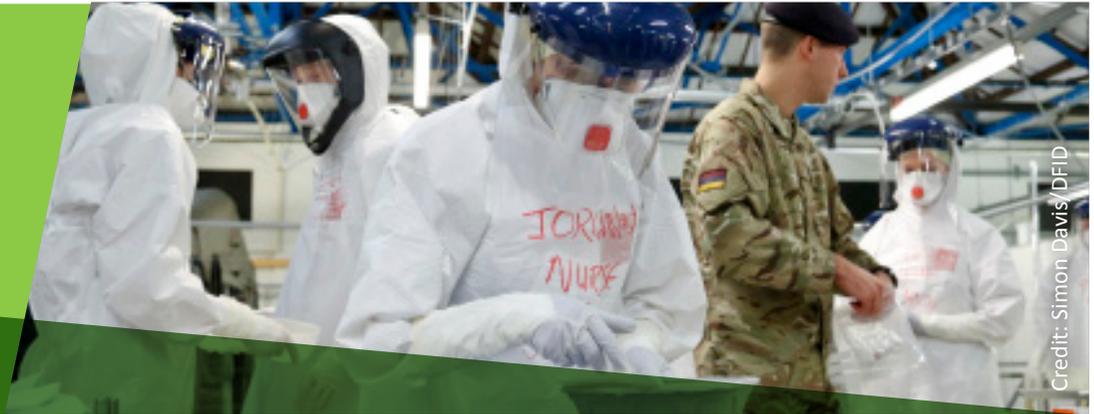
**We observed a number of common features in areas where HIEP has made the most impact.** Evidence so far suggests HIEP is having impact when

- (a) HIEP projects build on and contribute to areas where there is existing momentum towards change in the system, e.g. a consensus on the need for a new approach such as scaling up cash and innovation;
- (b) when HIEP produces a large body of evidence such as the 11 studies on mental health and psychosocial support by R2HC, or links HIEP projects to other existing research and promotes it with decision makers;
- (c) when the implications of new evidence are made explicit for people in their different policy and practice roles and provide support to its application, e.g. through tools, customised briefings and hands-on support; and
- (d) when HIEP makes long-term commitment to themes so projects can build on earlier findings and the theme evolves, e.g. in education in emergencies, scaling up cash.

**However, the level of ambition originally set out for HIEP was beyond the reach of any one agency and requires contributions of others including donors and humanitarian organisations.** DFID is well placed with a respected position as a supporter of evidence and innovation, as well as through its experience to date in HIEP and its strong network of partners to continue to work towards these outcomes. The lessons laid out below for the sector provide an initial agenda for DFID to take forward to build the sector's support for and use of evidence and innovation with peers and allies. Adequate resourcing for DFID roles in support of this agenda in the HRI team and other relevant roles is necessary.

# Lessons

We identified six lessons for taking forward humanitarian evidence and innovation.



Credit: Simon Davis/DFID

- 1** **Humanitarian research needs to be funded alongside operational funding.** Funding for each process tends to be agreed separately, often quickly and for short-term periods in operations, while research needs longer lead time and duration for data collection. This lack of alignment makes it difficult to set up robust data collection systems that also work for operational monitoring, and vice versa. Joint planning benefits both the research and operation. Integration of larger-scale research into operations with separate research teams working alongside the project is an approach that shows potential.
- 2** **The sector needs to increase its focus on understanding and developing strategies to overcome obstacles to the scale-up and application of evidence and innovation.** Much of the sector activity currently focuses on pilot stages of innovation and production of evidence as single case studies. Changes in use of evidence are often limited to the boundaries of organisations involved in these pilot projects. We need to understand better how to overcome these obstacles to support change on a greater scale.
- 3** **Operational agencies can make significant improvements in the quality of evidence through modification of their routine systems for evidence collection, as well as through much greater transparency and sharing of data.** But data transparency remains a challenge due to reasons including data sensitivities and political constraints (e.g. when it reflects badly on government programmes and inter-agency competition).
- 4** **Project designs benefit from broad processes that go beyond evidence-gap mapping and consultation with international expert groups, but also include consultation with a range of local perspectives to define the problem and design the projects.** This helps overcome sectoral siloed thinking and to integrate a user perspective.
- 5** **Effective communication of new evidence and innovation needs to take place throughout the project and be long-term, extending beyond the production and initial promotion and communication around the evidence reports and other products.** It also needs to be customised to specific audiences to draw out the practical implications for their role.
- 6** **Issues of exclusion and marginalisation need to be consistently addressed for robust humanitarian research.**

## Recommendations

### Recommendations to DFID Humanitarian Research and Innovation Team

Recommendation	
	Strengthen DFID's support to the scaling up and application of evidence and innovation, including to increase understanding of better ways to address obstacles and to demonstrate the benefits of applying evidence to the quality of responses.
	Clarify processes and expectations for effective inter-departmental cooperation in DFID throughout the humanitarian evidence and innovation processes. Also, draw on DFID channels, including the evaluation unit and operations, to improve the quality of data and evidence produced in DFID-funded humanitarian evaluations.
	Increase and sustain awareness of, and easy access to HIEP findings and products for all DFID advisers involved in humanitarian action through improved processes and more accessible products and mechanisms.
	Develop processes to ensure a consistent and learning approach to GASI in DFID humanitarian research and innovation.
	Share methodological learning from HIEP in the sector and within DFID, including on (a) humanitarian research challenges and effective methodologies in humanitarian practice; (b) mainstreaming GASI in humanitarian research; and (c) effective communication of humanitarian evidence including at local and national levels.
	Enhance the value of using or drawing on the HIEP ToC for future programmes through clarification of DFID's role, more active management engagement with it, and consideration of key links and obstacles it identifies for evidence use.

Recommendation	
	Increase the timescale and consistency of HIEP/HRI project partners' monitoring of impact to last for at least two years after final conclusions and products are produced.
	Increase support for and learn from HIEP/HRI team communication and stakeholder engagement processes, in particular planning and resourcing influencing work beyond the period of partners' research and outputs production. Increase HIEP/HRI team's level of engagement in steering DFID's influencing work at programme level.
	Strengthen the HRI portfolio by ensuring it balances its emerging more focused approach with maintaining mechanisms to enable flexibility to respond to newly identified needs and opportunities while undertaking focused long-term projects.

### Recommendation to DFID senior management

	Regularly review the resourcing of DFID's humanitarian research and innovation capacity including that of the HRI team to ensure it matches stated ambitions and is sufficient to enable it to steer DFID's potential influencing role in the sector to enhance the humanitarian community's support for and use of evidence and innovation in humanitarian action.
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