



DRG IMPACT EVALUATION RETROSPECTIVE LEARNINGS FROM THREE GENERATIONS OF IES

In response to an influential 2008 National Academies of Science report, the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID's) Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG) Center initiated a pilot program of impact evaluations (IEs). As of this writing, the DRG Center and its learning partners have completed or are close to completing 27 IEs. This retrospective intends to provide a look back at both the accomplishments and the challenges of DRG Center IEs with the goal of deriving lessons learned and providing evidence-based recommendations for future DRG Center evaluations.

LEARNING FROM IMPACT EVALUATIONS

Unlike more traditional performance evaluations (PEs) and monitoring, IEs were able to measure a counterfactual for an intervention and make causal inferences about that activity's impact. In Haiti, an IE demonstrated that a program was working and should be scaled up. In the Caribbean, an IE found that previous conclusions that an intervention was producing dramatic results were incorrect. Furthermore, IEs frequently provided better measures of outcomes and changes in those outcomes over time. In some cases, baseline data or regression analysis produced valuable information that could be useful for implementers. As such, the evaluation team can point to valuable findings that would not have otherwise existed in the absence of an IE. However, many evaluations did not meet stakeholders' expectations. USAID and IP survey respondents were considerably less likely than evaluators and PIs to identify the benefits of IEs. In some cases, null results could not be explained, mixed results did not produce clear