

# Centre of Excellence for Development Impact and Learning



Photo: Valentina Barca

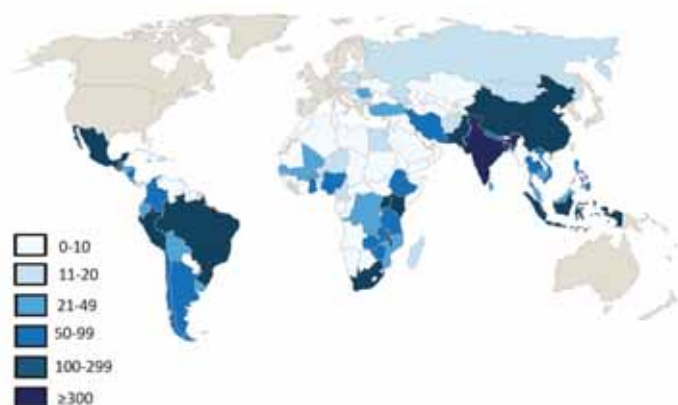
**The Centre of Excellence for Development Impact and Learning (CEDIL) supports innovation in impact evaluations and evidence synthesis in international development.**

## CEDIL's objectives

The field of impact evaluation has grown rapidly over the last two decades. It has generated extensive evidence on whether development interventions work, but there are still substantial gaps in this evidence base. It is these areas that the Centre, financed by the UK Government's Department for International Development, aims to address:

- **Thematic and geographic evidence gaps:** Most evaluation evidence is concentrated in fields such as health, education, and social protection, and in a relatively small number of countries, primarily middle-income (see Figure 1). The Centre will begin to fill this evidence gap by funding more research in under-evaluated sectors, and in low income, fragile, and conflict-affected states, where development assistance is often concentrated (see Figure 2).
- **Methods gaps for primary studies:** Established methods for conducting impact evaluations cannot answer all evaluation questions. Methods that are generally accepted as sufficiently rigorous often cannot be employed in certain contexts, such as rapid emergencies and evolving interventions, or with certain types of initiatives, such as large-scale infrastructure or peacebuilding initiatives. This explains some of the thematic gaps. The Centre supports research to develop new methods which broaden the range of development initiatives that can be rigorously evaluated.
- **Evidence synthesis gaps:** Single studies rarely provide sufficient evidence to inform decision making in other contexts, so combining findings from various studies through synthesis methods is essential. However, the time and resources required to undertake systematic reviews may not always be practical, and existing synthesis methods are limited in the range of evidence they

Figure 1: Geographic distribution of impact evaluations



Source: Sabet and Brown (2018)

Figure 2: Map of UK development assistance



Source: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/where-we-work>

can use and the types of policy questions they can address. The Centre's research will strengthen methods for evidence synthesis to broaden their scope and enhance their usefulness.

- Evidence translation gaps:** The generation and synthesis of evidence is only useful if it leads to positive, practical change. Despite an increasing emphasis on research uptake and impact, there is still limited evidence on the effectiveness of different approaches to stakeholder engagement and influence. The Centre will build an evidence base on how to conduct and present research in such a way that is accessible and useful to a variety of stakeholders.

New research is needed to identify, validate, and promote new methods and approaches that address these challenges.

## CEDIL's innovative approach

To address these gaps, the Centre has commissioned a £10 million research portfolio that will work in three thematic areas:

- Evaluating complex interventions:** Complex, multi-component development interventions are difficult to evaluate using existing approaches, which often either isolate and evaluate single components or measure the overall effect of the



programme as a whole. The Centre seeks to strengthen methods to evaluate complex interventions and improve theoretical understanding of causal chains which explain how and why combinations of activities work. To achieve this, it will support prospective and retrospective evaluations, and projects that assess existing evidence on how systems and processes interact to generate outcomes.

**2. Generalising evidence through middle-range theory:** A key challenge in evaluation is to determine whether evidence from one context can be used to develop interventions in another. While systematic reviews and other forms of evidence synthesis can draw together results from multiple evaluations, it may not be clear whether findings can be transferred to a different context. To address this, the Centre will develop and test middle-range theories which explain how a programme works in a plurality of contexts and how findings can be adapted to them. This will provide clearer guidance to policymakers on how interventions should be designed and adapted in different contexts.

**3. Enhancing the use and usefulness of evaluation findings:** Even though the goal of evaluation is to inform policy and practice, how this happens is relatively under-researched. There is a need for a more rigorous conceptual framework around how evaluations are used, particularly in development contexts characterised by weak institutions and limited resources. The Centre aims to rigorously assess research uptake efforts and has identified three promising areas of research: stakeholder engagement, making sense of evidence, and developing and testing communication methods. The Centre will also develop guidelines for policymakers on how to use evidence from multiple sources.

The Centre will fund large-scale primary evaluations, secondary data analysis, evidence synthesis and exploratory projects to design and test new approaches. It will also undertake evidence synthesis and outreach activities to maximise learning from its research and ensure uptake.

Read CEDIL's full agenda setting paper at: [cedilprogramme.org/working-papers/](http://cedilprogramme.org/working-papers/)



## CEDIL's team

The Centre's work is led by a directorate with research and programme management arms. Intellectual leadership, strategic direction, and technical guidance for the Centre is provided by a consortium of five organisations:

- The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation
- The Campbell Collaboration
- The Centre for Evaluation at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine
- The Centre for the Evaluation of Development Policies at the Institute of Fiscal Studies
- The EPPI-Centre at University College London.

This work is coordinated by a core team of four individuals based within the London International Development Centre and draws on the expertise of an 18-member Intellectual Leadership Team.

Management of the directorate and the funded research projects is delivered by Oxford Policy Management (OPM). OPM also leads on research uptake and communications activities for the Centre.

The Centre is further supported by an advisory board that draws on academia, evaluation practitioners, policymakers, and the third sector. The Centre is funded by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID).

It was established in 2017 and is set to run until 2023. Given the scale and complexity of the challenges it seeks to address, the Centre aims to secure additional funding to become self-sustaining and to continue its work in this area.



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