

## Systematic Reviews in International Development - Call for Proposals

*Deadline: 9 am GMT, Monday, November 29, 2010*

### Background:

Good existing development research is often not fully utilised to influence policy and practice. There is a high demand for consolidated but robust evidence that can be more readily applied to decision making both in developing countries and by donor agencies. Systematic reviews are an important way of ensuring that evidence can better inform policy and practice. The use of systematic reviews to summarise and appraise existing evidence in international development is gathering pace. It is a key component of evidence-based policy making in the areas of medicine, public health, allied health, education, social welfare and crime and justice. [The Australian Agency for International Development \(AusAID\)](#), the [UK's Department for International Development \(DFID\)](#) and [the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation \(3ie\)](#) are announcing a joint call for proposals for systematic reviews to strengthen the international community's capacity for evidence-based policy making.

AusAID is the Australian Government agency responsible for managing Australia's overseas aid program. AusAID's contribution comprises the fourth round of the Australian Development Research Awards. More information on this programme can be found here: <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/research/reviews-2010.cfm>.

The Department for International Development (DFID) leads the UK Government's fight against global poverty. This will be the second round of funding for systematic reviews coordinated by DFID's Research and Evidence Division. More about the program can be found here: <http://www.research4development.info/SystematicReviewFeature.asp>.

3ie seeks to improve the lives of poor people in low- and middle-income countries by providing, and summarizing evidence on what programmes work and for how much, the circumstances under which they work and the mechanisms by which outcomes are achieved. This will be the third call for proposals under 3ie's reviews programme, which can be found here: <http://www.3ieimpact.org/syntheticreviews/>.

The programme focuses on developing and disseminating systematic reviews in international development that will neutrally collect, critically appraise and synthesise international development evidence. AusAID, DFID and 3ie have developed a set of 59 priority systematic review questions and are inviting proposals from suitable candidates to undertake systematic reviews. This is an exciting opportunity to work on highly policy relevant research and be part of a programme that aims to strengthen evidence-informed policy making in international development.

## Approach to systematic reviewing:

AusAID, DFID and 3ie take a broad perspective on systematic reviews which draws on Cochrane and Campbell Collaboration standards of systematic search, data collection and synthesis, and mixed method approaches to synthesising quantitative and qualitative information, including realist reviews. This broad perspective stresses the importance of synthesising evidence to understand how programme outcomes may vary by context and the underlying mechanisms at work. This call is seeking reviews that contextualise outcomes in relation to the theories of change that underpin interventions and the factors that shape implementation.

Systematic reviews use transparent decision making processes for literature search, data collection and synthesis, drawing on appropriate published and unpublished literature to answer the review question.

- Effectiveness reviews synthesise data on programme effectiveness drawing on evidence from high quality impact evaluations, and examine the variation in reported outcomes by context, not only their mean. For more information on high quality impact evaluation, see [3ie's Principles for Impact Evaluation](#) and the following [link](#) for an overview of impact evaluation methods. For an example review, see [Waddington et al. \(2009\)](#).
- Reviews examining drivers of change draw on appropriate evidence, and may be restricted to qualitative evidence. Such reviews might involve, for example, examining the barriers to and facilitators of behavioural change, by collecting relevant evidence on assumptions underlying a theory of change. For example reviews, see [Greenhalgh et al. \(2007\)](#) and [Munro et al. \(2007\)](#).
- Reviews combining effectiveness synthesis with drivers of change analysis include [Harden et al \(2009\)](#) and [King et al. \(2010\)](#).

All reviews are expected to report variations in findings by relevant contextual factors. Reviews should also be situated in the broader context of the underlying programme theory, reporting and synthesising evidence on all assumptions and links in the causal chain, not only outcomes. Reviews are expected to draw on appropriate evidence from developing (low- and middle-income) countries at the time of the intervention, but may draw on evidence from developed countries if relevant. In cases where causal evidence is limited, scoping reviews can provide the user organisation with an overview and critical appraisal of the available evidence, including the extent to which policy conclusions can be drawn. All reviews are expected to use appropriate methods for critical appraisal of literature.

Systematic reviews should be done to recognized standards. Guidelines and resources can be found here:

- [Cochrane Handbook](#) and [Centre for Reviews and Dissemination guidance](#): reviews of effectiveness and meta-analysis, methods to integrate qualitative reviews into quantitative reviews of effectiveness
- [EPPI-Centre methods](#) and [Joanna Briggs Institute review manual](#): mixed methods reviews, with strong focus on qualitative data synthesis
- [Collaboration for Environmental Evidence review guidelines](#): reviews in environment and conservation
- [Meta-Analysis of Economic Research \(MAER\) Network](#): reviews of macro-econometric literature.
- Combining systematic review with realist review: [Van der Knapp et al \(2008\)](#).

The approach to synthesis, including methods for searching the literature, inclusion criteria, criteria for appraising study quality, and proposed synthesis methods, should be defined clearly in a [study protocol](#). Teams are required to consult search librarians or information specialists as part of the process of developing a protocol, and should budget appropriate resources for this. An example protocol is [Denison et al \(2010\)](#).

## Registration and external support

Protocols and reports must be peer reviewed, which will include referees from the organisation that initiated the review question. Teams will be encouraged to register for peer review with a relevant systematic review coordinating body:

- [Cochrane Collaboration](#): public health, disease including HIV/AIDS
- [Campbell Collaboration](#): education, social welfare, crime and justice
- [Institute of Education EPPI-Centre](#): mixed methods reviews in education and health
- [Joanna Briggs Institute](#): mixed methods reviews in health care
- [Collaboration for Environmental Evidence](#): environmental policy and practice
- [Bulletin of Economics and Meta-analysis at MAER Network](#): meta-analysis in macroeconomics.

Awards will be contingent on satisfactory progress through an external quality assurance process. Teams will also be offered access to training and external methodology support.

Registering with most systematic review coordination bodies involves the following steps, with peer review at each:

1. Registration of titles (usually 1 month)
2. Registration of protocols (usually 2 months)
3. Registration of systematic review reports (usually 3 months)

## Outputs:

The study outputs comprise: (1) a protocol for the study, which is subject to peer review; (2) the final report also subject to peer review; (3) two short summaries: one research brief aimed at policy makers, of 1,000 words or less, and one of 150-200 words suitable for a web-page feature; and (4) a list of all included studies in a format suitable to be included in an evidence database. The outputs must be made freely and publicly available. Additionally, we strongly encourage the use of outputs and derived papers for publication in peer review journals.

## Instructions for applicants:

All applications have to be submitted using **3ie's online application system**.

If you have used 3ie's online application system earlier and have a log-in name and password, go to:  
<http://www.praxispts.com/3ieImpact> .

If you are a **first-time user** and wish to register, go to:  
<http://www.praxispts.com/3ieImpact/xaLogin/regLogin.aspx?register=1>

Guidance materials like the list of priority questions, useful links and resources as well as Frequently Asked Questions are available on the 3ie website at <http://www.3ieimpact.org/syntheticreviews/3ie-ausaid-difd.php>.

The proposal should not exceed the word limits on the application form. Please note that all applications have to be submitted online and NOT via email. Applications should be submitted on-line by **9am GMT on Monday, November 29, 2010**.

As an approximate guide, we expect a medium-sized study to cost around **USD 60,000**.

Proposals from researchers based in developing countries, and proposals including such researchers in the study team, are strongly encouraged.

Proposals will be **reviewed** by three reviewers, including one external systematic review specialist and one external subject specialist. The review criteria are below in **Appendix 1**. Successful proposal teams will be notified by **Friday, January 28, 2011**.

Any enquiries regarding this call should be sent to [sr3@3ieimpact.org](mailto:sr3@3ieimpact.org) with "**Systematic reviews call**" in the subject line.

## References:

Denison E, Berg R, Lewin S and Odgaard-Jensen J (2010) A systematic review and explanatory model of the relative success of interventions designed to reduce the prevalence of female genital mutilation/cutting. Study Protocol. 3ie, New Delhi. Full text available at:

[http://www.3ieimpact.org/admin/pdfs\\_synthetic/011%20protocol.pdf](http://www.3ieimpact.org/admin/pdfs_synthetic/011%20protocol.pdf)

Greenhalgh T, Kristjansson E and Robinson V (2007) Realist review to understand the efficacy of school feeding programmes *BMJ* 2007; 335:858. Full text available at: <http://www.bmj.com/content/335/7625/858.full>

Harden A, Brunton G, Fletcher A and Oakley A (2009) Teenage pregnancy and social disadvantage: systematic review integrating controlled trials and qualitative studies, *BMJ* 2009; 339:b4254

International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) Principles for Impact Evaluation, 3ie, New Delhi. Full text available at:

<http://www.3ieimpact.org/strategy/pdfs/principles%20for%20impact%20evaluation.pdf>

King E, Samii C and Snilstveit B (2010) Interventions to Promote Social Cohesion in Sub-Saharan Africa. Final Report. 3ie, New Delhi. Full text available at:

[http://www.3ieimpact.org/admin/pdfs\\_synthetic2/SR002%20Final.pdf](http://www.3ieimpact.org/admin/pdfs_synthetic2/SR002%20Final.pdf)

Munro SA, Lewin SA, Smith HJ, Engel ME, Fretheim A, et al. 2007 Patient Adherence to Tuberculosis Treatment: A Systematic Review of Qualitative Research. *PLoS Med* 4(7): e238. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.0040238. Full text available at:

<http://www.plosmedicine.org/article/info:doi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pmed.0040238>

Van der Knapp L, Leeuw F, Bogaerts S and Nijssen L (2008) Combining Campbell Standards and the Realist Evaluation Approach: The Best of Two Worlds? *American Journal of Evaluation* March 2008 vol. 29 no. 1 48-57. Available from: <http://aje.sagepub.com/content/29/1/48>

Waddington H, Snilstveit B, Fewtrell L and White H (2009) Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Interventions to Combat Childhood Diarrhea in Developing Countries. 3ie, New Delhi. Full text available at:

<http://www.3ieimpact.org/admin/pdfs2/17.pdf>

## Appendix 1

### Criteria for review of proposals to conduct systematic reviews

| Term  | Definition   | Criteria  |
|---|--|---|
| Qualifications of proposed staff (40%)                        | The skills and experience of the proposed team in the relevant research and policy area and in conducting systematic reviews   | The PIs proposed to conduct the study should have the right mix of skills. Points are awarded for team members with relevant experience in the research and policy area, and previous experience in conducting systematic reviews   |
| Quality of technical proposal (40%)                           | The proposal is for a high quality systematic review, which will use appropriate evidence to answer the research question(s) posed, and appropriate methods of search, critical appraisal, data collection and synthesis | Points are awarded for: (1) awareness and application of the procedures required to meet systematic review quality standards; (2) use of appropriate evidence to answer the research question; (3) recognising the importance of developing a review using appropriate techniques of search for published and unpublished literature, critical appraisal of included studies, data collection and synthesis; (4) attention to reporting variation in findings by relevant contextual factors and use of a theory-based approach |
| Relevance, dissemination, budget and timeline (15%)           | The proposed review title, dissemination strategy, budget and timeline should be relevant to the requirements of the users who developed the question  | Points are awarded for: (1) review titles which are consistent with the topic or focus of the Review Question posed; (2) the approach to involve stakeholders, not just those within the proposing organisations; (3) appropriate budget and timeline for delivery (not exceeding 12 months)  |
| Involvement of developing country researchers/evaluators (5%) | The extent to which developing country evaluators/researchers are involved in the proposed study. Developing country researchers are defined as developing country nationals resident in that country                    | Points are awarded for the substantive involvement of developing country researchers/evaluators in the study team. Higher points are awarded the more substantive the involvement of the developing country nationals   |