WHERE POVERTY EVIDENCE IS MOST NEEDED: AN EVIDENCE GAP MAP SHOWS WHAT WE KNOW

WEBINAR CHAT TRANSCRIPT

APRIL 09, 2015
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presenters</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q&amp;A</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Presenters

Martina Vojtkovva, The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation

Jennifer Stevenson, The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation

Tania Alfonso, USAID/PPL/LER
Hello everyone. I was going to say good morning but it seems like there are people joining from all over the world so good morning, good afternoon, good evening wherever you are. This is actually very impressive and very exciting. This is the first learning lab webinar that we have done, that we at PPL have done in a couple years so those of you who joined a little bit earlier today, this morning could see that we were still sort of working out some of the logistical technical details. And we have I think more participants than we had expected so this is very exciting.

A few kinds of logistical notes before we get started. We’re going to be – actually Martina is going to be presenting and during that time if you have any technical issues with the webinar or you have any questions either for me at USAID or for Martina please put them in the chat box so on the lower right hand corner and we will be monitoring the chat box to see if there are any questions or issues that are coming up. Unfortunately we’ve muted all of you so that the chat box is the only way that you can communicate with us. So and I know that many of you are still introducing each other, introducing yourselves and that’s very exciting. Please, please continue doing so. It’s very nice seeing where you are all coming from.

So let’s get started. So I will introduce Martina very briefly and introduce the idea of the evidence gap map. In 2011 USAID came up with the evaluation policy. And so since then we have worked very diligently at producing evidence. But we haven’t been very good at digesting all the evidence that we’ve produced and so I think this is sort of the next step in our thinking and in our process is what do we do with everything that we have come up with and more importantly that the rest of the world has produced. We don’t want to be the only – we don’t want to assume that we’re the only ones that are producing evidence that’s useful to us. And in parallel 3ie, the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation of which USAID is a member developed this sort of new tool that called the evidence gap map which you’ll find out exactly how visually and logistically what it looks like but it’s a way for us to have a sense of what is out there in terms of evidence and where are we missing – where are there gaps? Where are we missing information?

And hopefully that will – that will increase our ability to really conduct evidence based decision making so incorporate existing evidence into our country’s strategies and also into our project design documents. So it’s something that we’re striving for. This is an initial step and our hope is that in the future we will have other gap maps at our disposal in other sectors. So with that let me introduce Martina. So I have not actually met Martina. We’ve only worked very intensely but only worked virtually.
She is based in 3ie’s London office and but she’s been a sort of pioneer in developing this type of tool both for mapping evidence and also creating systematic reviews which put together all of the – put together all of the impact evaluations around a particular question. And so with that I will let Martina continue to sort of introduce herself and I will start. Again if you have any questions as she is speaking please ask them in the chat box. Thank you. Martina, please get started.

Martina:

Thank you Tania very much for the lovely introduction and for the opportunity to be here and to speak to all of you. I’m so excited that so many people are interested in the evidence gap maps and I hope that you after this presentation you will find them useful in all the lines of work that you come from. So I’ve been working for 3IE for almost five years now. I joined when the London office started in 2010 and I’ve been working mostly on 3IE’s systematic review program and I’ll talk a bit briefly about what systematical reviews are later. And it’s quite a coincidence that in the same year that USAID had that opened in 2011 – I think that’s probably the date to which the evidence gap maps stayed.

The original idea for the evidence gap maps was really just to kind of having a better understanding of what evidence we already have. One of the first things that 3ie started doing when we were set up as an organization is to create databases of impact evaluations and databases of systematic reviews evaluating interventions in low middle income countries. And after a few years into it we realized that they’re getting too far and it’s perhaps not very easy to find exactly what you’re looking for. It’s there to be the perennial problem of looking for a needle in a haystack so the evidence gaps maps started out as an attempt to make a bit of sense of all the evidence we found and put into our databases and then kind of ended up catching on as an interesting idea and being developed as a methodology of its own.

So my presentation today will very briefly describe what evidence gap maps are in general to give you a bit of an idea and then focus most of the presentation on the – an evidence gap map of productive safety net programs which we have done together with USAID and some of the findings from those evidence gap maps. Oh and please feel free to tweet throughout or after the presentation. This hash tag will lead you to other tweets from previous evidence gap map related events which might be also interesting. So just for your information.

And let’s launch right into it. So what are evidence gap maps? We refer to evidence gap maps as thematic collections of evidence covering a particular sector or thematic area. They try and consolidate what we know about what works by mapping out two different types of evidence sources, systematic reviews and impact evaluations and I’ll describe those in an
instance. I’ll just move on. And what we’re trying to do is we’re trying to map this evidence out into a framework of interventions that are typically conducted in that particular field and then map the evidence according to which outcomes they evaluate for these interventions also along a kind of logic model on theory of change. So not just looking at some of the final outcomes but also looking at some of the intermediate outcomes which we assume need to be in place in order for final outcomes to actually manifest.

They identify where we have lots of evidence and where we don’t have lots of evidence and they identify where we have good quality evidence of what works and what doesn’t work. And they also provide links to you from the summaries of every single individual piece of evidence included. So they’re a tool, a bit of a road map to really help guide people through the information overload, hopefully direct you to the studies that will be of most relevance to answer the questions with which you come to that map. Here’s a very brief glimpse and I will walk you through this mores slowly when I look at the evidence gap map of productive safety nets but just to give you an idea you can see in the first column there is a list of interventions in that particular field and in the other columns there’s a list of outcomes from intermediate to final outcomes in a particular field and all of the bubbles in the middle represent evidence.

Now the size of the bubble represents how many studies were found for that particular intersection. So for example for interventions of employment assistance we found there are four impact evaluations looking at employment assistance which evaluate the effect of these programs on asset accumulation and land acquisition. The size of the bubble is therefore the size of the evidence and the color of the bubble reflects a different type of evidence either systematically if these are impact evaluations and for systematical reviews it uses colors to code the quality of these systematic reviews.

So what type of evidence is included? I think this is quite important because the evidence gap maps are not trying to map out all of the available evidence on a particular intervention. It maps out two specific types. One is impact evaluations of these interventions and by that we mean evaluations that use a counter factor analysis to be able to attribute the effect to the intervention. And these were perhaps not very common in international development or in social studies but I think the idea that all of us are familiar with is the idea of using a placebo group when using a drug treatment and that idea that if you are unwell people tend to get better by themselves all the time. So if you want to see what the effect of a drug is you need to know what is the difference between the placebo group which is presumably just recovering by themselves and the effect of in addition giving a drug and you’re really just measuring that difference that the drug has made.
And it's the same idea with analysis in international development. There's many occasions when people tend to, people's outcomes tend to improve just by their ability and their trying rather than the actual programs so they use different designs to try and untangle these. And I'm not going to go into this. That would be a completely different presentation but this is a brief overview of the types of study designs and study methods that are included in our evidence gap maps and they all are trying to get at this question of attribution. The other type of evidence that's included are systematic reviews of intervention effectiveness. Now this is perhaps something that some people might be less familiar with so we define systematic reviews as the -- as reviews that synthesize the best available research evidence on a specific question using transparent criteria to identify all of the existing evidence, to screen and use a prior determined inclusion criteria and to assess the quality of the evidence before a conclusion is made about whether something works or doesn't.

So here are just some basic features of systematic reviews. They're not just a literature review. They do genuinely try and cover all of the existing literature on a particular question looking for both published and unpublished literature and without any language restrictions. They use inclusion criteria which are determined before you start the research so you can then cherry pick which studies are included and which aren't based on the outcomes. They critically appraise all of the included evidence and try to write conclusions based on the best available evidence from the group and they try and use evidence appropriately so different research designs might be useful to answer different research questions.

Systematic reviews generally report absolutely everything which is why they're sometimes quite difficult to get through because they can reach to the hundreds and two hundreds of pages but they're meant to be reproducible and are very reliable because of this feature. And they're meant to be a global public good updated regularly to capture any new evidence that emerges. And with this approach the idea is that systematic reviews try and capture both the overall balance of empirical evidence on a particular intervention or policy, separate high and low quality evidence and help separate what is generalizable from what is context specific.

So these are the two types of evidence included in the evidence gap map which means that the evidence gap map focuses specifically on what we know about intervention effectiveness. So what's the purpose of the evidence gap map? Well I think it's partially depends a bit on the user but our hope is that the evidence gap maps will be used for two purposes. Firstly, to help identify existing evidence and therefore help inform decisions about policies and programming and contribute to this field of evidence based decision making so really it's just a road map to help you
find what you’re looking for so you can quickly inform decision making based on what we already know. And the other purpose is to inform strategic research prioritization. The evidence gap maps don’t just highlight where we have evidence but they also highlight where the evidence is missing and therefore they can identify areas where maybe some of the research resources could be focused rather than reproducing research in areas where we already have some answers.

So that was a very brief introduction and I hope that if you have any questions feel free to ask them in the chat box but hopefully some of them will also get clarified as I go through the presentation of this one evidence gap map on productive safety nets. So last year we were approached by USAID who were interested in conducting an evidence gap map of productive safety nets. And the idea was – and Tania feel free to kind of compliment or I’ll provide more information at the end. The idea was that the evidence gap map would be one of the inputs into process whereby USAID is trying to identify what we already know and where we should spend the research on interventions that can help get people sustainably out of extreme poverty.

And I think I really like one of the graphs from one of the USAID reports that is showing sort of where we are on eradicating extreme poverty. And it shows that we’ve really gone a long way under the millennium development goals. We’ve managed to reduce extreme poverty down from about 40 percent to about 20 percent. But there’s still about a billion people that live in poverty and oftentimes __ is the hardest. And it seems like a great idea to try and look into what we already know to try and inform the next steps in this process and to also try and commission some research on what we don’t know to really help us along. So it was a brilliant collaboration with USAID.

One of the idea of these evidence gap maps is that some of the development of this collaborative between policy makers and practitioners in that field and the researchers that are developing the evidence gap map so that it can be useful. So one area where we very closely collaborated was the development of the framework including the definition of productive safety nets which we used the one USAID uses which is that they are safety net programs that include a livelihood or an income generating component to allow people to escape extreme poverty and that has been quite a guiding principal for the evidence gap map. So we weren’t just interested in social protection if it didn’t allow people to exit publicly sustainably through generating income or some form of livelihoods.

This led to the development of a framework of key interventions which are listed on this slide and key outcome categories. And you can see we’ve grouped them according to sort of bigger thematic areas so there’s some
intervention categories which fit under social protection. Although these would only be included if they had an income generating or livelihoods generating components such as providing some form of training or financial literacy or some sort of grant to start a new business so that they work in combination with the provided cash to generate sustainable livelihoods. Then there were financial services, very well researched, micro credit, micro savings and micro insurance, micro enterprise support services including some forms of business training, support to new emerging enterprises and linkages to markets.

And then some other types of interventions which seemed to fit well with the productive safety net definitions such as land property right interventions, group formation and multi-component interventions which combine multiple of these components into a bigger package of services and product. And in terms of outcomes we’ve tried to organize them more or less along the causal chains so some of the initial outcomes that we felt needed to be in place for these interventions to work well were things like _of the interventions, knowledge and skills development, acquisition of assets, land holding and then some intermediate and final outcomes such as ability to adapt to shocks or risk management strategies, income and consumption outcomes and finally some kind of publicly related outcome such as income poverty living standards, health education, food security, inequality, empowerment and one that oftentimes gets forgotten in studies but is definitely very key for policy, cost effectiveness and cost benefit information.

And what we’ve done with this framework is we had a lot of back and forth at the beginning with USAID trying to determine these categories until we arrived at kind of draft framework which we then used to begin with when we started searching for the studies. But then we end up iterating this framework as we found studies that did not necessarily fit into these categories or as we found outcomes that perhaps we didn’t initially specify but we realized that they were relevant for the theory of change. And we had a few moments when we’ve gone back to USAID and discussed is this an important outcome along the theory of change? Is this important to break this up into smaller sections? And this way some of these outcomes which were originally grouped into just one category were broken up even further to allow the users to kind of tease this information out a bit more.

So we searched through almost 14,000 study titles and we screened through a lot of these. We used very comprehensive search string but the idea behind searching in a systematic way is that we’re really trying to develop a strategy that will enable you to identify all of the relevant studies and you try and make it as specific as possible so you don’t end up screening through too many irrelevant hits. But it’s still ~ it’s a bit of an art and a bit of a science. So inevitably you end up finding that a lot of the studies you
found are not actually relevant to the topic that you’re trying to explore. So even though it looks like there was quite a big drop from the number of titles we screened to the number of included studies, the majority of these so 11,500 studies were excluded because they were genuinely not relevant. So they were not related to productive safety nets. They were not from lower middle income companies and they did not report any of the relevant outcomes.

So in the end we ended up with 248 included impact evaluations and 24 included systematic reviews. Now this is the greatest evidence gap map in terms of size that we have done to date so it was a very interesting project to work on to see so much evidence and try and sort it out into a one page visual display. Now the evidence gap maps are actually an interactive tool and they’re available on 3ie’s website and I will share the link at the end of this presentation. Unfortunately I’m not able to demonstrate it live here because the webinar platform might not cope very well. So instead I’ve provided a few example slides and I’ll just try and walk you through these and then you can go ahead and play around on the software after the presentation.

So this is what the evidence gap map of productive safety nets looks like. So again in the first column are interventions that I mentioned and in the first row are the outcomes that I mentioned and the bubbles represent the evidence. The grey bubbles are impact evaluations and then there’s green bubbles which represent systematic reviews that were judged to be, to have high confidence in their findings so we use a very standardized checklist. We used three different pieces of independently screen each systematic review and rating is about how well the systematic review was conducted and therefore how well we can trust the findings of this review. So it doesn’t necessarily reflect whether the evidence is positive for the intervention or negative for the interventions it just reflects the quality of the research. So green is for high confidence systematic reviews, orange is for medium confidence systematic reviews, red is for low confidence systematic reviews and blue is for ongoing systematic reviews which will be completed sometime in the future.

At the bottom now highlighted in this red box at the bottom of the slide you can see these options. And they’re actually interactive so you can toggle them on or off. That means if you press it it will remove that type of evidence. So here if I pressed grey – if I pressed impact evaluations on the left all of the impact evaluations disappear from the evidence gap map and all you see are just the systematic reviews where they are in the evidence gap map. And you can do this for all of them. The other thing that the evidence gap map provides is if you hover over a bubble it shows you a dropdown list of all the included impact evaluations. It lists them for you. It gives you the number. But there are also hyperlinks which will take you
to a summary of that study on the 3ie impact evaluation database or the 3ie systematic review database.

And on the summary you'll find a very brief summary of the main findings, a brief summary of the methodology, some information about the region and the type of interventions and a link to the full text. Which if we can find an open access study, that will lead you to an open access study. If it's a paper view article then it will take you to a link for that. So one other feature of the evidence gap maps is that it allows you to filter the evidence so it allows you to filter the evidence to look at evidence from a particular region or for a particular country or by a study design although there's only functions for impact evaluations. And we have a new filter which is live as of today which allows you to filter it by population characteristics which we're very excited about. So that's another way to kind of try and play around with the evidence. It allows you to zoom into the gap map by clicking on the intervention or outcome category in the first column and first row. It gives you a brief description about how these were defined and it allows you to export the evidence gap map as a PDF or a few other image formats so you can print up the vision of whatever you're looking at.

So with this brief introduction I'll just launch straight into the findings because I think they are interesting ones. So what did the evidence gap map of productive safety nets find? There is an awful lot of evidence. 248 impact evaluations and 24 systematic reviews is a lot of evidence in this field which is very encouraging but I think the evidence gap map clearly shows that the evidence is not distributed equally. And the majority of it seems to really accumulate around credit and savings interventions and multi-component interventions although a lot of these multi-component interventions are also about microfinance. It's just that the studies didn't very clearly define whether they provided credit and/or savings and/or insurance. Oftentimes studies will just say they value microfinance and as such would then be classified as multi-component.

So there seems to be a focus on these interventions in the evidence. And the gaps seem to be particularly around cash transfers. But remember that these are cash transfers that need to have a productive component and this might be part of a reflection of the fact that there's not as many programs that have these additional components out yet so they wouldn't be evaluated. But also it's not clear how many of the programs that are there – and they are now getting introduced, are being evaluated and can feed into what we know. Insurance is also a field that's under researched among the microfinance field. They'll note that the evidence gap map did not include health insurance just by itself because it did not meet the definition of a productive safety net.
And the evidence gap map did not include agriculture interventions just because there is a separate agriculture evidence gap map and we felt together with USAID that it would just be quite difficult to untangle all of these interventions from the agriculture focused interventions. So some of this might be because most research might focus on agriculture related insurance and social health insurance. And then there's a surprising lack of information on the effect of linkages to market on household level of publicly related outcomes.

In terms of the outcomes most studies provide some measure of how the intervention affected either income consumption or savings and employment and __. So these are very commonly measured probably because they are also some of these easier ones to evaluate. Some of the ones that seem to be less evaluated are – this is adaptive capacity so risk management capabilities. And surprisingly given how many studies actually do measure income in consumption and savings very few of these studies then also measure the effect of these programs on income poverty. Which what definitely came to a shock to me after seeing the evidence because there’s so many studies looking at productive safety nets but so few of them actually go on and measure whether people left poverty. Another area that’s not often reported in terms of outcomes is income inequality.

And finally something that actually is the case across the boards in terms of all factors as we kind of experience at 3ie is that cost and cost effectiveness information is rarely included in impact evaluations and systematic reviews. In addition the evidence gap map highlights maybe some other emerging gaps which are specifically sort of in the areas of financial literacy, enterprise development and land property rights. They’re specifically in these interventions there’s real gaps in terms of adaptive capacity and income poverty but as well for these specific interventions there seems to be very little information about what effect they have on food security. In terms of systematic reviews of the 24 included systematic reviews more than half of them are classified as either high confidence or medium confidence which is actually quite good because in our experience a lot of systematic reviews in international development seem to miss some very crucial aspects like a comprehensive search of the literature or critical appraisal of the included studies.

But there’s only three of them that are genuinely high confidence. So if you only looked at the high, medium confidence systematic reviews you can see that there’s a lot more gaps in the evidence gap map and they all seem to cluster around the micro finance multiple component and group interventions. But there is also good news because if you add the protocols you can see that a lot more fields are being filled in by ongoing research which is very encouraging. In terms of the findings I am going to give you just a few glimpses of these findings. I generally don’t like trying to
summarize a systematic review in a sentence. I do think that it would be useful for people interested to read at least summaries on the 3IE database because they give you a bit more nuance about the findings.

But to give you a bit of a taste one of the systematic reviews found that access to formal banking services in rural areas has the potential to increase wages, investments and has the potential to produce rural poverty. And the review also found that introducing savings products can have a positive effect on the income. A study of micro credit found that there is no consistent evidence of a positive effect on women’s control over household spending which was the measure that we used to evaluate economic empowerment. However the review also found some mediating factors which enable micro credit to have positive effects such as if the woman is younger, if she has fewer children, if the loan is larger in terms of the sum of money received or if the relationship is already more egalitarian to begin with the progress can be greater. And finally a review of land property rights finds among other things that land tenure interventions do improve welfare measured to use in consumption or income by about 16 percent on average although of course there was some variation and I encourage you to go explore the review further.

So one very surprising thing that we encountered was the sheer lack of good reporting about the population characteristics. Just under half of the studies did not report any information that would allow us to assess whether the studied populations were poor. So only about 54 percent of the impact evaluations actually said “Yes, we evaluated the poor or the intervention targeted the poor.” And of these – so only half of these studies – only a quarter actually then analyzed their findings by public status to show whether these outcomes that they found are relevant for the poor or the nonpoor in their sample.

Very interestingly again that, there is a broad variety of definitions used to define the poor and so you can see them here at the top. Other poor just refers to a study saying something like “We’ve evaluated the poor” and that’s all that they say and it’s just not possible to assess how they defined them or what they mean by the poor. There’s only 10 studies that evaluate the effect of the intervention on the poor as defined by living on $1.25 a day purchasing power per person. Similarly there’s only 10 studies that evaluate the effect of these interventions on the poor defined based on some sort of food security measure like caloric content or number of days gone without food. And there’s only I think about 17 or 18 studies that evaluate the effect of interventions based on a national poverty line.

So all in all there’s very few interventions that use the kind of perhaps more commonly understood measures of poverty in an international context to evaluate the interventions. And oftentimes if studies do use some sort of
definition it’s either using participatory wealth ranking which is a more kind of research based way to determine poverty or some of the multi deprivation indexes and these are very varied in the studies. So if you look at the evidence for just people living on $1.25 the evidence gap map would look like this. And so you can see quite a striking difference between the very first slide I showed you. From the 248 studies we’ve gone down to ten and there’s still a lot of gaps to fill in terms of the effect of these interventions on the extreme poor if you use this definition.

So briefly to summarize there is a large volume of evidence on productive safety nets which is a great treasure trove but there are still considerable gaps if we want to use this evidence to help us assess what can help the poor. And there are key gaps in some of the very important outcomes measures reported by these studies such as income poverty, adaptive capacity and cost effectiveness. There’s poor reporting about targeting and their use of definition is very varied making it quite difficult to kind of systematically look at this evidence. And there aren’t quite as many high or medium competence systematic reviews as we would like to help inform decision making. There are some useful findings from the high medium competence systematic reviews but these gaps that exist do generally limit our ability to use this evidence usefully to help assess what can help people escape poverty in a sustainable way.

And I guess my one plea for any researchers in the audience would be please, please improve your reporting about the populations that the interventions targeted, the populations that you evaluated and the definition you used to define poverty in your research. This will not only allow us to target, use the evidence that we have to target the interventions to the people that can benefit from it the most but it will also allow us to synthesize the evidence in systematic reviews more meaningfully to inform policy and programming. So I hope this gave you a brief glimpse of the evidence gap maps and I hope you will be enthused to go through the actual tool and play around with it.

Just a brief summary about what to think about, what we think about evidence gap maps. They’re our tool for accurate knowledge capture and transfer within a particular sector and area and then kind of as a compliment to other sources and one sort of available for informing decision making. So they’re not by all means meant to replace anything or they’re not meant to be the only thing used. They’re just meant to be one more tool which will hopefully make it easier for some of you to use evidence in your work. With hope they’re used with respect to take stock about what evidence exists in international development. There will hopefully be a good first step to facilitating more rapid systematic reviews which will hopefully be able to give more full answers to the questions we’re
asking and we hope there can be public good to help systematically close the evidence gap map. Sorry, the evidence gap that we currently have.

And something that does come up and I just wanted to point it out and preempt some questions, evidence gap maps do not provide answers to policy or practice questions and we do not want you to go away feeling like that’s what we try to sell them as. By no means. They can’t tell you anything by themselves. There is no way to replace a sound amount of judgment and reading through the included studies and thinking about the context in which you want to provide your evidence to direct conclusions. Evidence gap maps don’t synthesize the findings. They don’t tell you much about context themselves. It’s all included in the studies included in the evidence gap map. So they really are just a road map.

Currently as I mentioned at the beginning they are only focused on evidence on effectiveness so they don’t include studies that specifically focus on predictive factors or implementation experiences or some barriers that facilitators or participant views. They do not critically appraise impact evaluations and do not provide index synthesis of findings. So they are no intended to be a cheap and quick alternative to new primary studies or to systematic reviews. They are just a compliment which will hopefully guide decision making about when your research should occur and maybe guide how that research can be improved in terms of reporting or in terms of the measures that are being evaluated.

And my final slide 3ie has several completed and/or systematic reviews in these fields. So our idea is to have an evidence gap map in each thematic area or each thematic sector. So if you’re interested in supporting any of these, if you want to donate some funds and work with us in developing some of these or others do definitely get in touch. We’re hoping they can be useful and we want to respond to the need to create these if you find they can be useful. And that was all for me. Thank you so much. There’s a link to the evidence gap maps which actually currently leads to not just a productive safety evidence gap map but also there’s one on education interventions and one which is ___ interventions. So you can play around with all three. To find out more about 3ie visit our website.

Q&A

Tania:

Let me jump in just for a little bit. While Jennifer and Martina are putting together the questions and figuring out what order to answer them in I want to say I’ve been interacting with Martina for a long time but it’s only now that I’m really understanding the depth of, the amount of work that it takes to put this together. I mean as you saw in one of the slides they read 358 papers. And all of the impact evaluations are linked on the 3ie website
and sort of so you can – from the gap map you can click on one of the bubbles which will then lead you to the impact evaluations that they’re talking about. So just the amount of work that sort of, that is behind each gap map is incredibly, incredibly impressive.

The other comment I want to make is that the success of a gap map depends on the quality of evaluations and systematic reviews that this reports on. So those of you who are researchers in the audiences please improve your reporting as Martina said. This is – and those of us who sort of commissioned evaluations and systematic reviews take note as well. The better the evidence is that underlies the more useful this kind of summary or synthesis product is. And with that I will let Martina answer some questions.

Martina:

Thanks Tania. Yes, I can tell you when I first found out how many studies we had to screen through and how little time we had before our first draft was due I was a bit panicked but we did manage and I’m quite excited that it was such a big evidence gap map, so much more information in it. So these are all brilliant questions. Let me take them from the top. How do avoid double counting some of the evaluations? It is a question we are grappling with still is developing methods. Currently they are double counted in that we didn’t go through the systematic reviews and say “Ok. These systematic reviews are 15 impact evaluations. There’s 50 impact evaluations in the same field. Let’s remove the 15 that are synthesized.”

I think partially the decision to do that is because we feel like ideally we would like users to use the evidence gap maps in different ways depending on the types of evidence they look at. We feel that systematic reviews are more reliable sources to make decision on because they include all of the ideas. They include all of the evidence on a particular intervention so you’re less likely to come to erroneous conclusions about whether an intervention works or doesn’t whereas single studies are context specific, term specific and population specific so it is quite hard to generalize using that evidence about whether that same intervention or similar intervention will work elsewhere for someone else. So the idea is for the systematic review evidence in the evidence gap map to be used for making decisions and informing policies whereas the impact evaluations in there are meant to be used for more for identifying a) where there are no impact evaluations and we should be focusing funding on primary studies and b) where there are enough impact evaluations but no high quality systematic reviews. So we might want to consider commissioning a systematic review of this evidence rather than keep adding primary studies to an already quite wealthy research field.

But it is something to bear in mind when you interpret the evidence. I think that also helps address question number three which was why do we
not classify the confidence in impact evaluations. It is precisely because of this point and because we don’t want the evidence gap maps to replace high quality systematic reviews. Normally in a systematic review you would critically appraise the quality of every improved impact evaluation but you would make sure that the critical appraisal if determined at the beginning before you do the research and the critical appraisal will come back by two people independently using this criteria and that it is discussed so that you try and arrive at a fair judgment and you very clearly, transparently present this critical appraisal of these impact evaluations. Now evidence gap maps are intended as a quick tool to assess where the evidence is rather than a tool to synthesize this evidence which is why we chose not to present the quality of the impact evaluation evidence. Because that would be one step too close to make it like a systematic review but not as comprehensive, with not such a good critical appraisal with not an appropriate way to synthesize the evidence taking into account things like potential publication bias, etcetera.

Why do we only include systematic reviews and impact evaluations but not other evidence such as case studies? I think this is definitely a big evidence debate. What counts as evidence and what is good evidence and can case studies be used to assess impact or not? 3ie I guess would sit somewhere in the middle of this debate in that we’re not proponents of just randomized control files. We do believe that there are other methodologies that can assess impact but we also feel that there are some methodologies where they are not – that we feel that the methods can’t make an attribution. They are more evidence about association. And so in that sense case studies for us would count into that other category where we feel like a case study can’t really reliably tell you whether the effect had an impact and how much of an impact it had but it can give you an association because the program being there and there being positive or negative outcomes.

But as I said it is just one tool and typically systematic reviews that 3ie commissions oftentimes tend to include a broad range of evidence than the list I presented here but then in a systematic review you can do an analysis of whether the findings of certain study designs versus other study designs make a difference. So you can compare the findings of different study designs and see whether the design used to write this question leads you to different conclusions which is what you want to do when you really want to assess whether there might be some potential bias introduced through one or the other use of a design. And because evidence gap maps can do this we just adopted what 3ie considers to be study designs and methods that allow you to make an attribution statement, a causal statement.

And in terms of how we judge the quality of the evidence so I mentioned we only do this for systematic reviews and the critical appraisal checklist is on the 3ie website for everybody to access and review. It really measures two different things, the quality of the reporting in a systematic review so
has the review clearly reported, how they searched to the literature and whether they searched for published and unpublished studies and have they clearly reported inclusion criteria that they used to include or exclude studies. And then have they used methods of analysis appropriately.

So this will include things like if they had studies with a different risk of bias did they analyze them separately to see whether studies with lower risk of bias had different results to studies with high risk of bias or if a meta-analysis was possible. Did they use it or if it wasn’t possible did they not use it? So it’s a long list of kind of criteria and we try to make the judgment as objective as possible.

Jennifer: More questions? For Tania and Martina. Tania, do you want to have a go at some of these first?

Tania: I will try. So I don’t know that—these are questions that are probably a little bit harder to answer. I think the, I’m not sure what the reason is for the lack of focus on poverty status. I would say that the individual researchers that published evaluation reports varied in their reporting, varied in their explanations for what they meant by “poor.” And so and part of this is that every researcher or every academic sort of works independently or we commission evaluation and different firms do it sort of along their own—just along their own practices. There isn’t sort of a single entity that directs how evaluations are done. Although it does have a little bit of that coordinating role and we can do a little bit of that coordinating role sort of within USAID to get USAID commissioned evaluations to sort of work together and have some consistency in their reporting.

But I think part of it is just that there are as many authors as there are papers and each of them will report something differently. So that is something to keep in mind and something to sort of to worry about. Why not focus private sector targeted interventions in general? I think in the chats Erin Dunlap actually answered that question and it’s that it might be that interventions that target the private sector are harder to evaluate using impact evaluations because usually there aren’t as many—it’s harder to randomize. It’s harder to create a counter facts or however you want to define is so in the case of this particular gap map because it focuses on impact evaluations there are just fewer impact evaluations of broad private sector interventions in general.

What are the prospects of using this tool to identify particular areas for meta-evaluations across sectors? I mean so in a sense where there are many evaluations that have been conducted and few systematic reviews I think that’s a place where there should be systematic reviews. So the gap map can help identify where there are—where we should commission systematic
reviews so that’s one example. I don’t know if Martina you want to comment or say others.

Martina: Yeah. I think — I’m just not entirely sure I know what meta-evaluations across sectors are. I mean in our — it might just be an issue of terminologies. In my world there’s systematic reviews or kind of evidence reviews which tend to answer a particular question including primary studies and then there’s also reviews of reviews. But even these typically will be done because there’s multiple systematic reviews, may be done at different times with just slightly different focuses looking more or less on the same broad intervention category or kind of the same area. I haven’t come across a kind of systematic review that would try and pull things across sectors. I think that would be a pretty intense endeavor but maybe if I’m happy to kind of follow up on this question if whoever posed it wants to kind of then get in touch with me directly and give it my thoughts on that.

I think also something to clarify. I think one of the reasons we focus on micro enterprises is because we exclusively focused on individual and household level outcomes. So we didn’t include studies that reported only outcomes that were at certain level, things like profits or number of people employed in the firm or revenue or productivity because we felt that they were just a bit too far removed, just a step removed from knowing whether an increased revenue or an increased profit in a business actually had an effect on household wellbeing. So that’s the study —

Tania: Martina I’m sorry. Martina I’m going to interrupt you. I apologize. So we’re reaching the end of the hour and I realize actually many of our participants have already left. So let’s continue the conversation through many different media. We are recording this and we will follow up with everybody who either registered or attended this event with a link to the recording of this webinar and also links to opportunities to continue the conversation. So we could answer some of these questions in writing in the next few days, in the next week or so. And we’ll probably provide some opportunity for the discussion to continue via comments on the event website, something like that. So stay tuned and thank you all of you who attended. This was great. Thank you very much Martina and Jennifer from London. This was excellent.

Jennifer: Thank you for facilitating this.

[End of Audio]