

The Qualitative Impact Assessment Protocol

This overview introduces the QUIP - a 'qualitative impact protocol' for assessing the client level social effects of impact investment and development projects. For more information see the website: go.bath.ac.uk/art

The QUIP is a relatively simple and cost-effective way of finding out directly from intended beneficiaries of a development activity what they think are the most significant drivers of change in their lives, livelihoods and wellbeing. There are strong ethical grounds for asking people directly about the effect of actions intended to benefit them, and doing so can contribute usefully to learning, innovation and public accountability. But for responses to be credible it is necessary to address potential response biases. The QUIP does this by ensuring that interviewers and respondents are given no information about the project being evaluated. It also uses simple software to make analysis and reporting timely and auditable. By working alongside routine monitoring of key indicators of change it is also possible to estimate the magnitude as well as the nature and direction of the main causal drivers of change.

The QUIP is the product of a recently completed three year action research project called 'Assessing Rural Transformations' conducted by the University of Bath with UK government funding. The project set out specifically to design and test a credible way to assess the impact of multifaceted development activities in complex contexts where other approaches to impact evaluation, such as randomised control trials, are not appropriate. By relying on self-reported attribution rather than statistical inference to generate evidence of causation it also avoids the need for a control group. Underlying this design is an emphasis on generating evidence that is both credible and cost-effective.

During the 'ART Project' the University of Bath worked with two NGOs, Self Help Africa and Farm Africa, to assess the impact of four of their rural development projects - two in Malawi and two in Ethiopia. A quantitative monitoring tool called the IHM was used alongside the QUIP to measure changes in household level disposable income relative to basic food needs. The four projects all aimed to strengthen household level food security in the context of both rapid commercialisation and climate change. A large number of interconnected, uncertain and hard-to-measure confounding factors (Z) affected the causal links between project activities (X) and impact indicators (Y). The QUIP generated evidence of attribution through respondents' own blinded accounts of links between X and Y alongside Z rather than relying on statistical inference based on variable exposure to X. This was used to generate standard tables showing the frequency of unprompted reference by respondents to different drivers of change, cross-analysed against project theories of change and exposing both obvious gaps where links were expected, and unintended consequences.

Project updates, reports and a guide to using the QUIP, including the full questionnaire, are available at: go.bath.ac.uk/art

We are currently developing plans to take the QUIP into a second phase of development. If you are interested in being part of this next phase, please contact us using the details below.

We are now starting a further stage of developing and testing the QUIP and are interested in talking with other providers and users of innovative impact evaluation methods. If you would like to help us in this research by taking part in a short discussion about the tools you currently use please contact:

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