

Suggested Outline for Reports of Impact Assessments should provide the following: Context, Objective, Methods, Setting, Participants, Projects/Interventions, Main Outcome Measure(s), Results, Cost-Effectiveness, and Conclusions/Lessons. The following outline is based on JAMA Instructions for Authors, (JAMA, January 4, 2006—Vol 295, No. 1 <http://jama.ama-assn.org/content/295/1/103.full.pdf+html>; see Structured Abstracts on pp 108-109) with significant portions copied verbatim and my subjective interpretations, subtractions and additions for development analysis. . A typical assessment report of this type may run 3000-5000 words, and can refer to a more detailed working paper or other detailed publication

Context: The document should begin with a paragraph or two explaining the development (or other) importance of the study question.

Objective: State the precise objective(s) or study question addressed in the report (eg, “To test the development hypothesis that . . . ”; To quantify effects of ... on poverty reduction/child nutritional status). If more than one objective is addressed, the main objective(s) should be indicated and only key secondary objectives stated. If an a priori hypothesis was tested, it should be stated.

Methods: Describe the basic methods used in the study, e.g. quasi-experimental case-comparison study, regression analysis of differences-in-differences, etc. State the years of the study and the duration of follow-up. State the basic method of attribution of outcome changes to the project/intervention. Describe any data cleaning (e.g. removal of outliers). Describe any statistical techniques used to improve matching, control for external influences, or otherwise used prior to determination of impact. ‘Dosages’ should be quantified, e.g. multi-crop intervention strategies v. mono-crop interventions, on-farm extension visits v. attendance at a farmer-day demonstration, etc. Limitations of the method should be described.

Setting: Describe the study setting to assist readers to determine the applicability of the report to other circumstances, for example, broad-based smallholders, subsistence farmers, introduction of a cash crop into subsistence farming, introduction of a second staple into a subsistence farming area, connecting smallholder growers of [crop] to markets/value chains, etc.

Participants: State the important eligibility criteria and key socio/economic/demographic features of participants. The numbers of participants and how they were selected should be provided, including the number of otherwise eligible individuals who were approached but refused. If matching is used for comparison groups, characteristics that are matched should be specified. In intervention studies, the number of participants withdrawing (e.g. dis-adopting the technology) should be given along with the reason for withdrawing. In follow-up studies, the proportion of treatment participants who adopted the initial intervention at the time of the intervention must be indicated, along with measures of later withdrawal/dis-adoption. For selection procedures, these terms should be used, if appropriate: random sample (where random refers to a formal, randomized selection in which all eligible individuals have a fixed and usually equal chance of selection); population-based sample; referred sample; consecutive sample; phased roll-out; volunteer sample; convenience sample.

Projects/Intervention(s): The essential features of the project interventions should be described, including their method (e.g. public-private partnership, distribution via existing (created) producer groups, etc.) and duration of administration (e.g. from 2005 to 2009 free seedlings were distributed through five NGOs).

Main Outcome Measure(s): Indicate the primary study outcome measure(s)/indicator(s) (e.g. household income, poverty status, child nutritional status) as planned before data collection began. If the manuscript does not report the main planned outcomes of a study, this fact should be stated and the reason indicated. If a development hypothesis is being tested, state clearly if the development hypothesis being tested was formulated during or after project design and prior to or after data collection.

Results: The main outcomes of the study should be provided and quantified, including confidence intervals (for example, 95%) or P values. For comparative studies, the differences between groups should be expressed with P values. When risk changes or effect sizes are given, absolute values should be indicated (e.g. marginal probability of emerging from poverty from a PROBIT regression; associated impact factors). Approaches such as number of participants needed to achieve a unit of benefit (e.g. one percentage point reduction in treatment group poverty rate) are encouraged when appropriate; reporting of relative differences alone is not normally sufficient (e.g. difference-in-difference or other approaches should be used instead of before-after comparisons).

Cost Effectiveness. Cost effectiveness should be reported if it is measured accurately. Cost effectiveness can be reported as the project/intervention cost divided by the quantified number of people achieving the primary outcome, e.g. dollars/person emerging from poverty. Costs should include all project/intervention costs including multi-donor contributions and participant costs relevant to the project/intervention under examination; external cost may be included if relevant and accurately measured. Significant expected external costs that cannot be measured accurately should be delineated qualitatively. Quantification of the number of people achieving the primary outcome may be determined by census of the treatment population (relative to the comparison) or by random sampling or other sampling methods. If sampling methods are used, care should be taken with respect to dosages. E.g. it is inappropriate to sample the 20,000 smallholders who are known to have adopted the specified innovation and then generalize to the 250,000 smallholders who attended a farmer demonstration day but for whom there is no adoption information.

Conclusions/Lessons: Provide only conclusions of the study directly supported by the results, along with implications for development practice, avoiding speculation and overgeneralization. Lessons relevant for development practice including impact assessment practice should be reported when supported by the results. Indicate whether additional study is required before the information should be used in development practice or for evidence-based investment via Feed the Future or other development mechanisms. If justified, indicate whether the project/intervention is adaptable for scale-up (replication or enlargement; be specific as to circumstances). Give equal emphasis to positive and negative findings of equal scientific merit.