



# Development Learning Lab

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

**CMI** CHR.  
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UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN

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## About Development Learning Lab

Development Learning Lab (DLL) is a research and learning centre working with development practitioners to improve outcomes of development programmes.

DLL partners with NGOs, multilateral organisations, and governments to provide evidence and do research at all stages of development projects and programmes.

Our contribution is to make research-based knowledge more accessible, fill knowledge gaps about what works and why, and provide a systematic approach to learning from research and experience – within and across organisations.

Development Learning Lab was established in 2021 as a collaboration between the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI), the University of Bergen (UiB), the Norwegian School of Economics (NHH) and its Centre for Applied Research (SNF).

DLL originates from a long-standing collaboration between CMI and two Centres of Excellence at UiB and NHH: the Centre for Experimental Research on Fairness, Inequality and Rationality (FAIR) and the Centre for Intervention Science in Maternal and Child Health (CISMAC). At the UiB, DLL is part of the Global Challenges priority area.

DLL is physically located at CMI in Bergen.



More Learning  
Better Outcomes



# Management and Support

## DLL Management Team



In 2023, the DLL management team consisted of (from left) Ingvild Fossgard Sandøy (UiB), Ottar Mæstad (CMI) Kjetil Bjorvatn (NHH/SNF), and Hilde Selbervik (CMI).

## DLL key support staff



Pernille Jørgensen  
Senior Graphic Designer,  
CMI



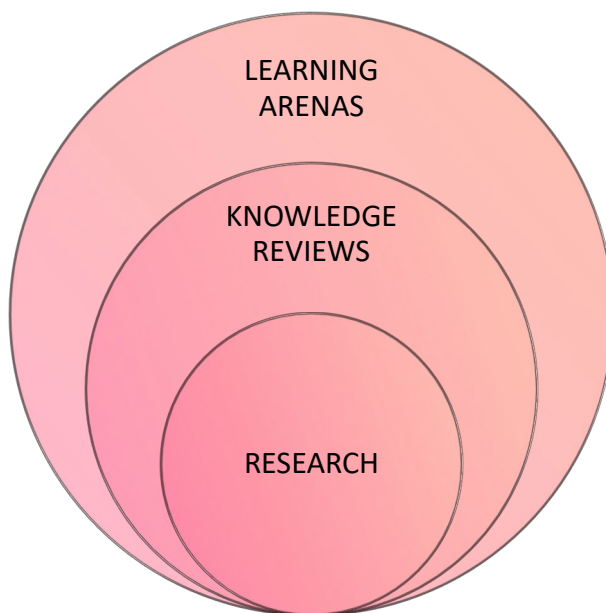
Åse Roti Dahl  
Senior Communication  
Adviser, CMI



Robert Sjursen  
Senior IT adviser,  
CMI



# DLL Activities and Resources



The core activities of DLL are:

## **Research**

Impact evaluation of development interventions to understand what works, why, where, and for whom.

## **Knowledge reviews**

Reviews of existing research to make research findings accessible for practical use.

## **Learning arenas**

Physical and digital venues that bring together researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to share knowledge and experience.



## Highlights 2023

In 2023, DLL has continued to engage with aid organisations to explore opportunities for increased generation and use of research-based knowledge, and for creating venues for enhanced learning. We have seen increased interest from aid organisations in inviting DLL staff to workshops and seminars to share knowledge and explore opportunities.

We are very pleased to have started a new long-term collaboration with NORCAP and the Development Fund to evaluate the impact of interventions to improve climate adaptation in smallholder agriculture in Ethiopia and Malawi. We hope this collaboration will set a good standard for more impact evaluations to come.

A thorough mapping was carried out among staff in civil society organisations of their interest in participating in thematic learning networks. The response was overwhelmingly positive, and we plan to follow up by initiating several new learning networks in 2024.

Towards the end of the year, we launched the new DLL Helpdesk, which will provide knowledge services to organisations that are in the process of developing new aid projects and programmes. This will be an important activity in 2024, and much of our work on new knowledge reviews will concentrate around the demand from organisations using the helpdesk service.

We are very grateful for the promise of economic support from Open Philanthropy. This has been crucial for our ability to continue our work on knowledge brokering and plan for a scale up of activities from 2024.

DLL has established itself as an important mediator between aid organisations and research institutions. A more sustainable funding arrangement needs to come in place for us to further develop this role in years to come.

You will find more about these and other highlights below.







## New research collaboration

In a new five-year project, CMI has partnered with Norcap, the Development Fund, Norce, and NMBU in an effort to help smallholder farmers adjust their agricultural decisions in the face of climate change.

We will assess whether the climate information services have an actual effect on the livelihoods of the smallholder farmers. Does access to such climate information services matter to the farmers' food security? Does the advice they get have any effect on their yield? Does it make them more resilient to environmental shocks like floods or drought?

The research team at CMI will assess the impact of climate information services through a randomized evaluation.



## Economic support from Open Philanthropy

Open Philanthropy has generously agreed to provide economic support for DLL activities.

The collaboration will enable us to

- provide helpdesk services to aid organisations and to establish several thematic learning networks for aid professionals and researchers,
- produce knowledge reviews relevant for the helpdesk service and the learning networks, and
- engage in aid policy debate.

Open Philanthropy is a US based philanthropic funder, with a mission to help others as much as they can with their resources.



# Learning Arenas

## New Helpdesk

DLL launched its new helpdesk which offers tailor-made knowledge services to aid organisations.

The helpdesk assists in assessing existing knowledge and identifying knowledge gaps of relevance to the organisations' theories of change. Rapid knowledge reviews may be conducted as part of this work.

The helpdesk also offers assistance in developing knowledge and learning plans, including the planning of impact evaluations and other knowledge generation activities.

The service is targeted specifically at organisations which are in the process of applying for funding for their programmes and/or are developing new programmes.

Many organisations are working on similar topics. The helpdesk is a mechanism for coordinating the search for research-based knowledge across organisations. The outputs can over time grow into a knowledge hub that serves many organisations.







## Thematic learning networks

A key idea behind the DLL concept is that learning can be enhanced by bringing together practitioners, policymakers, and researchers in a trusting atmosphere to share knowledge and experience.

We distributed a survey to almost 500 aid professionals in Norway to map the demand for such learning networks. The responses show that:

- There is an overwhelming interest in participating in thematic learning networks. 86% of respondents say they will definitively or most likely participate.
- The topics in highest demand are:
  - Learning about research about the effectiveness of interventions.
  - Learning from the experience of peers from other organisations about the reasons for successes and failures of aid projects.

We plan to launch several thematic learning networks in 2024, modelled after the responses received about the preferred format and content.



## Impact evaluation incubators

DLL organised two impact evaluation incubators in 2023 in cooperation with Norad. In total, 77 staff from 15 aid organisations participated.

Aid organisations bring to the incubators a project that they would like to make subject to an impact evaluation. Over three days, 4-6 staff from each organization work intensively with a dedicated researcher to develop their impact evaluation proposals. Key concepts and methods are presented in lectures, but most of the time is spent working on the organisations' impact evaluation cases.

One incubator was targeted at organisations that applied to a Norad call on food security and was organized in collaboration with 3ie. The other was open to proposals in any thematic area.

Both incubators were very favourably evaluated by the participants. A large majority were very satisfied with the content and support they received.



*Participants at the impact evaluation incubator in December 2023.*



## Jobs and Employment seminar series

DLL continued its seminar series on Jobs and Employment in collaboration with the Section on New Partnerships and Private Sector Development in Norad.

The seminar series is a part of the Jobs Network, hosted by CMI and partner institutions in Ethiopia, Nepal, and Tanzania. Key topics include:

- What is the government and donor role in job creation?
- How can a country secure a balanced transition out of agriculture?
- How can access to jobs be secured for the poor and marginalized, and for women?
- How can the productivity of subsistence farmers be improved?
- What are the effects of different skill training programmes?



## Launch of report on impact evaluation in Norwegian aid

DLL facilitated a task force which explored the opportunities and challenges of civil society organisations in doing more impact evaluations of their programmes.

The task force consisted of staff from seven civil society organisations. Their report provides recommendations to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Norad that will help organisations take full advantage of the opportunities to do impact evaluations.

The report was launched in Norad and its recommendations were discussed by a panel consisting of the Director General of Norad as well as leaders from three civil society organisations.

**Impact evaluations in Norwegian development cooperation:**  
Opportunities, challenges,  
and proposed actions

Report to The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Norad  
from Task Force on Evidence-Based Aid



# Ongoing Research

## Agricultural resilience through climate services

**Implementing partners**

Development Fund, NorCap

**Study participants**

3,000-4,000 households

**Type of study**

Randomized evaluation

**Timeline**

2024 - 2027

**DLL fellows involved**

Jon Einar Flåtnes, Carlo Koos, Erik Kolstad

The project will study the impact of a customized climate services program among smallholder farmers in Malawi and Ethiopia.

Climate services refer to weather forecasts and weather-contingent agricultural advice that have the potential to make farmers less vulnerable to climate change.

The research will produce evidence that civil society organizations, policymakers, and funders can use to decide whether and how to scale up climate services projects throughout the region.

We will measure the effects of the program on short-term outcomes like agricultural decisions and yields, but more importantly on long-term outcomes like food security, income, and resilience. We will also work closely with the Development Fund on more frequent monitoring of development indicators.





## Career exploration programme for young women

**Implementing partner**

Local NGO implementing career exploration program

**Study participants**

7,000 students from 45 schools in urban India

**Type of study**

Randomized evaluation

**Timeline**

2022-2026

**DLL fellows involved**

Viola Asri

Deciding about a professional path is difficult for everyone, even more so for girls who lack role models and financial resources. This project assesses the causal impact of a program called “career exploration”, which encourages students to explore different careers and plan their professional futures, on their skill formation and labor force participation. We focus on young women in the final grade of secondary school, given India’s low female labor force participation and rigid gender roles.

The policy question is whether providing career exploration in secondary school can increase the share of students completing a formal skill formation after secondary school and entering the labor force.

We conduct a clustered randomized controlled trial and measure the impacts of the program on students’ plans and what they end up doing in terms of continuing their skill formation as well as their future labor market outcomes. We also measure to which extent mechanisms such as increased information, peer effects, parental or community support, and role models contribute to the effects of the programme.



## Work training for young women

**Implementing partner**

HIP Edutainment

**Study participants**

400 secondary school girls in Tanzania

**Type of study**

Controlled before-after study

**Timeline**

2024

**DLL fellows involved**

Kjetil Bjorvatn, Arne Nasgowitz

In this project, we address the issue of job search and employment using an experimental approach, where we offer young women a *work training* program allowing them to better understand and navigate the labor market. The program will consist of factual information about the job market, as well as inspiring stories from role models who share their experiences and give advice.

The results of our research will be useful for employers and policy makers, who will get a better understanding of how to attract workers, reduce labor turnover, and improve productivity.

A fundamental contribution of our project is that we combine the experiment with lab and field evidence. We follow the participants over time, collecting lab evidence on mindsets and beliefs and field evidence of both job search and early job experiences. In this way, using both the lab and the field, our project allows us to both get a profound understanding of the psychological mechanisms of job search and career choice, as well as evidence on choices outside the lab setting, thus adding external validity to our study.





## Interventions against female genital mutilation and child marriage in Ethiopia

**Implementing partners**

Norwegian Church Aid  
Save the Children, Norway

**Study participants**

3,100 parents, 12,000 children

**Type of study**

Controlled before-after study +  
randomized evaluation

**Timeline**

2020-2025

**DLL fellows involved**

Espen Villanger, Charlotte Ringdal

The project assesses the impacts of an intervention to reduce female genital mutilation and child marriage. The intervention aims to change norms, attitudes and behavior through a range of activities including awareness raising, community mobilization, training, capacity building of institutions, and support at the policy/government level.

The policy question is whether such a comprehensive approach to reducing FGM and child marriage affects parents' intentions to cut their daughters/marry them early, and whether it affects FGM and child marriage incidence.

We measure effects on norms, attitudes, and beliefs about others' attitudes and intentions to cut and marry their daughters. We also measure the effects on the incidence of FGM as well as on the age at marriage. We follow the implementation process and provide regular feedbacks to implementers with qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis during the implementation phase.



## Kizazi Kijacho (“The Next Generation”)

**Implementing partners**

Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation (EGPAF), D-Tree International, EDI Global

**Study participants**

5,700 households

**Type of study**

Randomized evaluation and nationally representative longitudinal cohort study

**Timeline**

2021 - 2026

**DLL fellows involved**

Ingvild Almås, Bet Caeyers, Charlotte Ringdal

This program aims to make a major scientific contribution by establishing and analyzing a large and rich nationally representative longitudinal cohort dataset using state-of-the art methods to measure child development and its multi-dimensional inputs from in-utero until age 3. The program also carries out a large-scale randomized controlled trial (RCT) in the Dodoma region to test the relative cost-effectiveness of a parenting program, an Unconditional Cash Transfer program and a program combining these two.

The main policy objective is to yield actionable evidence for policy makers, donors and practitioners about the design of cost-effective, scalable, sustainable, integrated Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs, from the prenatal period until the child’s 3<sup>rd</sup> year of life – the “first 1,000 days”.

The experimental and longitudinal data that we will collect will be used to assess the relative impact of different ECD intervention packages, to track progress in ECD over time and to construct a comprehensive empirical model suitable for ECD policy analysis of the determinants of parental behaviour and child development.



## Peer counseling to address psychological distress and exposure to violence among the LGBTI population

**Implementing partners**

Blue Diamond Society

**Study participants**

1,000 individuals

**Type of study**

Randomized evaluation

**Timeline**

2023 - 2028

**DLL fellows involved**

Ingvild Sandøy

Sexual minorities in many low- and middle-income countries face discrimination, marginalization, and abuse. They have a higher risk of mental health problems than the majority population, but often have little access to mental health services.

This project will examine the effect of training peer educators from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex (LGBTI) community in Nepal to provide psychological counselling to their peers who suffer from mental distress.

The programme question is whether psychological counselling and safety planning by peers can reduce mental distress and exposure to violence among LGBTI individuals.

We will conduct a randomized controlled trial to test the effectiveness of psychological counselling and safety planning. Participants will be randomly allocated to receive such care or be in a control group, and the effects will be measured after 3 months and after 1 year.



## Water and social cohesion in refugee settings

**Implementing partners**

UNICEF, UNHCR, KfW

**Study participants**

6,000 respondents in  
6 refugee camps

**Type of study**

Randomized evaluation

**Timeline**

2022 - 2026

**DLL fellows involved**

Carlo Koos

Water and sanitation (WASH) are often scarce in refugee settings. WASH projects are implemented across the globe in an attempt to alleviate water-borne diseases, improve health and livelihoods as well as foster sustainable development. WASH projects therefore have marked impacts on local communities' social fabrics and are a plausible driver of social cohesion and peace. Whether and, if so, by what mechanism this link comes about, however, has received all-too little scrutiny in the academic and policy literature.

The policy question is whether water and sanitation interventions can reduce scarcity-related resource competition and contribute to social cohesion within and between refugee and host populations.

This evaluation relies on the design of a six-year cumulative study on the effects of WASH on social cohesion. A key innovation of the project is to bridge quantitative difference-in-differences models with fine-grained qualitative evidence in a Bayesian framework. We measure social trust and prosocial behaviour.



## Investing in safe deliveries

**Implementing partners**

World Vision Zambia

**Study participants**

480 savings groups

**Type of study**

Randomized evaluation

**Timeline**

2022 - 2024

**DLL fellows involved**

Peter Hangoma

Though high-quality health facility delivery can be lifesaving, many women in LMICs fail to access it because of financial barriers.

The project investigates whether community owned informal savings groups can be induced to give maternity grants to women to help them deliver in high-quality health facilities.

We measure effects on facility delivery and amount of maternity grant given to pregnant women, in addition to pregnancy related savings, expenditure on maternal health, perceived quality of facility delivery, and healthcare utilization as secondary outcomes.





## Information campaigns for improved state-society and intergroup relations in fragile states



### **Implementing partners**

KfW

### **Study participants**

10,000 respondents

### **Type of study**

Randomized evaluation

### **Timeline**

2021 - 2023

### **DLL fellows involved**

Carlo Koos, Paul Hofman

Beneficiaries of foreign aid interventions often lack basic information on development projects in their communities. Lack of credible information can increase the risk that misinformation and rumors nurture perceptions of unfair and clientelist aid distribution. This, in turn, can have adverse consequences on inter-group and state-society relations.

This project investigates if targeted aid information campaigns can improve state-society relations and intergroup relations.

Our analyses rely on a randomized controlled trial among 10,000 respondents in 200 villages of Mali and Niger. Members of the treatment group will receive customized information on ongoing aid projects in their community (e.g., type, volume, and formal rules of project selection). In the mid-line, we repeat this information. In addition, half of the treatment group will have the opportunity to provide anonymous feedback on the project to the government and responsible aid agency. In the end line, we estimate the effects of these interventions on people's local political engagement and social trust towards outgroups.

We measure state-society relations, intergroup relations, political efficacy, and distributional fairness.





## Incentives for tax compliance



**Implementing partner** Tanzania Revenue Authority

**Study participants**  
4,900 businesses

**Type of study**  
Controlled before-after study with synthetic control

**Timeline**  
2019 - 2024

**DLL fellows involved**  
Odd-Helge Fjeldstad, Ingrid Hoem Sjursen, Vincent Somville

The project studies whether incentives can be used to improve collection of value added taxes (VAT). VAT receipts are used as tickets in a lottery with monetary prizes. The idea is to motivate customers to ask for receipts and that this will lead to more receipts being issued. Increasing the issuance of VAT receipts will make more information about transactions available to the tax authority. This makes it easier for them to estimate and enforce taxes, and may therefore increase VAT revenues collected.

The policy question is whether positive incentives for customers in the form of a lottery can improve VAT revenue collection and affect business development.

We measure effects of the VAT receipt lottery on issuance of receipts, VAT revenues collected and business development using administrative and survey data.

# Knowledge Reviews



The following knowledge reviews are ongoing:

- Effective interventions for climate adaptation
- Effective interventions to address youth unemployment.
- Effective interventions for women empowerment and investment in children.
- Effective interventions against gender-based violence.
- Evidence for supporting small-scale vs. large scale agriculture.
- The impact of Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) on women's economic empowerment.

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