



Development
Learning
Lab

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

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).

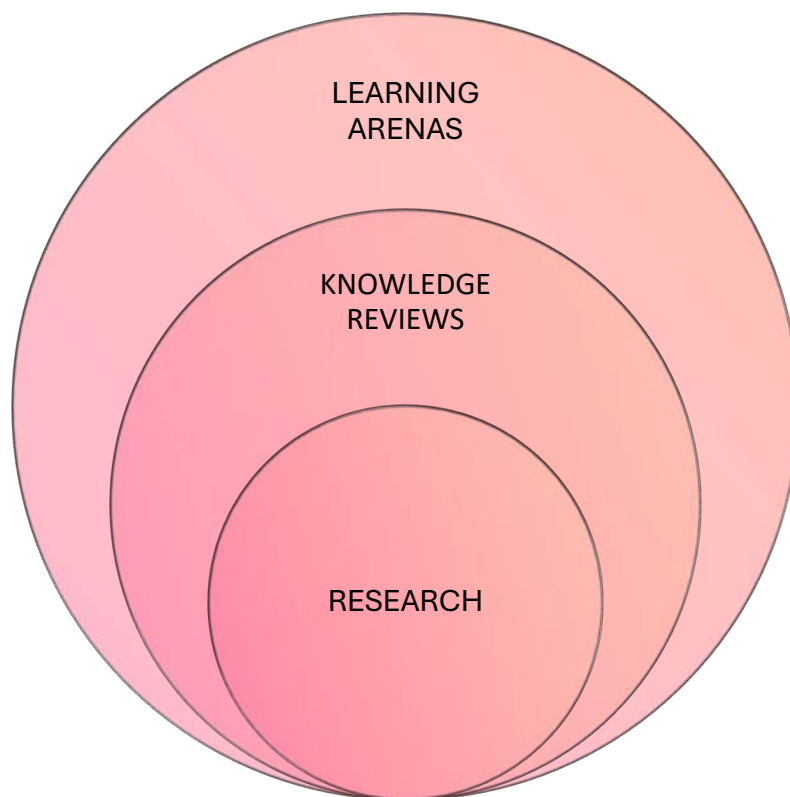
DLL originates from a long-standing collaboration between CMI and two Centres of Excellence at UiB and NHH: the Centre for Experimental Research on Fairness, Inequality and Rationality (FAIR) and the Centre for Intervention Science in Maternal and Child Health (CISMAC). At the UiB, DLL is part of the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

DLL is physically located at CMI in Bergen.



More Learning
Better Outcomes

Core Activities



Research

Impact evaluations and other real time evaluations 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

Learning networks and other events that bring together researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to share knowledge and experience.

Aid policy work

DLL also engage in aid policy work that aligns with our purpose and ambition.

Highlights 2025

Knowledge Centre for Development Cooperation. It has been DLL's ambition to establish a permanent knowledge centre that can bridge the gap between research and practice in development cooperation. This year, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to fund a Knowledge Centre for Development Cooperation, referring to the services DLL has delivered over the past few years. We see this as a testament to the value and relevance of DLL's work, and we stand ready to take on this role if we are selected in the ongoing international tender process.

Learning arenas. DLL facilitated a variety of learning arenas to strengthen the use of research-based knowledge in development cooperation. Some of these arenas have a thematic focus, while others concentrate on methods or on the structures and processes that support knowledge-based decision-making:

- **Thematic learning networks** that provide a continuous space for practitioners and researchers to share knowledge and experience. Three learning networks are ongoing: Women's Economic Empowerment, Climate Adaptation, and the Jobs Network.
- **Helpdesk.** The DLL Helpdesk provides knowledge services to civil society organisations that are in the process of developing new programmes. This year, we assisted four organisations.
- **Methods training.** DLL developed a new 3-day intensive training in impact assessment for programmes where it is not possible to do quantitative impact evaluations.
- **Making a Knowledge Plan.** DLL organised workshops with civil society organisations to develop a structured approach to making knowledge investments in development programmes. This resulted in a guide for how to make knowledge plans that was subsequently adopted by Norad as a reference for future grant applicants.
- **Knowledge management in the humanitarian sector.** In collaboration with the International Rescue Committee, DLL ran a series of workshops with Norad and its humanitarian partners on how more systematic generation and use of knowledge can improve the effectiveness of humanitarian aid.

Research. DLL currently runs nine research projects in collaboration with NGOs or government to assess the effects of development interventions. This year, we initiated a new research project on how to mobilise community financing to assist pregnant mothers to obtain quality delivery services.

Learning Arenas

Women's Economic Empowerment Network

Women's economic empowerment plays a pivotal role in fostering development and addressing gender inequality.

In DLL's learning network on Women's Economic Empowerment, we ask how aid organisations can support women in their access to income earning opportunities, productive assets, and resources.

The aim is to enable the design and implementation programmes that effectively strengthen the economic position of women.

Members of the learning network will:

- become familiar with recent research on women's economic empowerment,
- learn from the experiences of other organisations on how to successfully implement programmes in a variety of contexts,
- be part of a community that shares knowledge and resources that can make women's economic empowerment programmes more effective.

The network meets physically for four half-day seminars each year and currently has more than 50 members from more than 20 organisations. In 2025, the network meetings covered the Graduation Approach as an anti-poverty and training program, the role of technology, women's participation in agricultural value chains, and cash transfers.



Climate Adaptation Network

Effective adaptation to climate change will be an essential part of development work over the coming decades.

In DLL's learning network on Climate Adaptation, we ask how aid organisations can design and implement effective and evidence-based climate adaptation programs that can improve resilience and food security, particularly in smallholder agriculture.

The climate adaptation learning network cultivates a community that brings together researchers and practitioners and facilitate collaborative exchange of knowledge and resources.

Members of the learning network will:

- become familiar with recent research on climate adaptation,
- learn from the experiences of other organizations on how to successfully implement climate adaptation programmes in a variety of contexts,
- be part of a community that shares knowledge and resources that can make climate adaptation programmes more effective and evidence based.

The network meets in person for up to four half-day seminars each year and currently has more than 50 members from over 25 organisations. In 2025, the network met twice and covered topics related to definitions and measurement, as well as climate and conflict.



Jobs Network

DLL continued its seminar series on Jobs and Employment in collaboration with the Department for Climate, Nature and the Private Sector in Norad.

This included a seminar on decent work and one on early childhood care and employment of mothers in Norad.

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

The network has an annual workshop in partner countries, which this year was held in Kathmandu on the topic of job creation and competence building with a particular focus on Nepal. There will be an end workshop in Bergen focusing on the 2027 World Development Report on job creation in May 2026.



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?

Helpdesk

The DLL Helpdesk provided knowledge services to four organisations – Development Fund, Rainforest Foundation, Red Cross, and Rafto Foundation. Helpdesk services were typically used by organisations that are in the process of developing new programmes or are applying for new funding.

Helpdesk services may include:

- Knowledge reviews of direct relevance to the organisations' programmes.
- Evidence-to-Action workshops where researchers meet with practitioners to discuss the implications of research-based knowledge for programming.
- Assistance in developing knowledge-based theories of change.
- Support in the development of knowledge plans.

As many organisations are working on similar topics, the helpdesk is a mechanism for coordinating the search for research-based knowledge across organisations. This saves time and resources.

Our knowledge reviews will be regularly updated and will over time be developed into a knowledge hub that is a public good for aid organisations.



Methods training: Impact assessment workshop

DLL organised an impact assessment workshop in cooperation with Norad.

The purpose of this workshop was to strengthen development organisations' ability to make credible claims about impact when it is not possible to use randomized evaluations or other quasi-experimental methods. The methodological focus was on contribution analysis and process tracing.

The interest in the workshop was overwhelming. More than 30 staff from six NGOs participated, and many had to be put on the waiting list for the next workshop.

Over three days, NGO staff worked intensively with a dedicated researcher to develop their impact assessment cases. Key concepts and methods were presented in lectures, but most of the time was spent working on the organisations' own cases.

In addition to DLL's own researchers, the incubator benefited from contributions from Geil Ton (Institute for Development Studies) and Drew Koleros (Mathematica).



Participants at the impact assessment workshop in December 2025. Digital participants are unfortunately missing.

Making a Knowledge Plan

DLL collaborates with the MERLiN network (Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning in Norway) on a series of workshops to share ideas about how to enhance learning, including how knowledge management systems may need to adapt to promote learning.

In 2025, we finalised a workshop series on **how to develop good knowledge plans**. Knowledge plans describe what knowledge will be generated and made available, for what purpose, and how this will be done. Knowledge plans are currently requested by Norad as part of grant applications. However, there is little guidance on what to include in knowledge plans and how to go about developing such plans.

The workshops resulted in the guide [Making a Knowledge Plan](#), which has been adopted by Norad as a reference for future applicants.

More than 40 representatives from 26 organisations participated in these workshops and provided inputs to the guide.



Knowledge Management in the Humanitarian Sector

In 2025, DLL deepened its contribution to strengthening knowledge management in the humanitarian sector through a major consultancy for Norad alongside the Airbel Impact Lab at the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

The work addressed a core challenge facing humanitarian decision-makers: how to systematically generate, synthesize, and use evidence on impact and cost in a sector operating under severe resource constraints.

Through extensive consultations with Norwegian NGOs, UN agencies, and peer donors, as well as six co-design workshops, IRC/DLL helped map current practices, surface systemic barriers, and identify where strategic improvements could deliver the greatest value.

The consultancy concluded with a set of actionable recommendations for Norad, including leadership signals, targeted funding for evidence generation and use, and the development of public goods such as synthesis platforms, a helpdesk, and cost-analysis tools.



Knowledge Reviews

DLL offers three types of knowledge reviews to cater to different audiences and needs:

Knowledge Briefs. Concise, 3-4-pages documents are designed for practitioners, offering actionable insights and practical guidance.

Evidence Reviews: Designed for practitioners who need more detailed information than what is provided in Knowledge Briefs. These reviews can be *rapid literature reviews*, *umbrella reviews* (review of systematic reviews), or a combination of these.

Systematic Reviews: These comprehensive analyses are written in a more academic style, providing detailed evaluations of the effectiveness of development interventions and exploring the nature and causes of development challenges.

The knowledge reviews are living documents that we aim to update regularly to incorporate the latest research and insights.

Reviews published in 2025:

- The impact of production diversification on livelihood outcomes among smallholder farmers
- Smallholders and food security in poor countries
- Digital financial services and women's economic empowerment in low- and middle-income countries.

Reviews in pipeline:

- Shrinking civic space: Drivers, consequences and responses.
- What works in environmental advocacy?
- The impacts of graduation programmes.

Knowledge reviews are available at the [DLL webpage](#).

Aid policy work

Financing for development: Recycling of Special Drawing Rights

At a time when development aid is decreasing, there is a need to explore new opportunities for financing development.

One option that received significant attention during the Finance for Development Conference in Sevilla in 2025 is the possibility for wealthy countries to strengthen the lending capacity of development banks by investing part of their Special Drawing Rights in these institutions. This measure is a high priority for developing countries, and in the final declaration all countries that are in a position to do so are encouraged to contribute.

DLL has initiated a workstream on this issue to clarify what this opportunity would entail for Norway and to assess the reasons behind the Norwegian government's negative stance toward the proposal so far.

A report on the issue will be published in 2026.

Ongoing Research

Agricultural resilience through climate services



Photo: flickr.com CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 DEED

Implementing partners

Development Fund, NorCap

Study participants

3,000-4,000 households

Type of study

Randomised evaluation

Timeline

2024 – 2027

DLL fellows involved

Jon Einar Flåtnes, Carlo Koos, Erik Kolstad

The project studies the impact of a customised 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 organisations, policymakers, and funders can use to decide whether and how to scale up climate services projects throughout the region.

We 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 also work closely with the Development Fund on more frequent monitoring of development indicators.

Community financing for safe deliveries



Implementing partners

World Vision Zambia, Ministry of Health Zambia

Study participants

1,600 pregnant women from 320 villages.

Type of study

Randomised evaluation

Timeline

2026-2029

DLL fellows involved

Peter Hangoma, Ottar Mæstad

This project tests whether community-based financing can sustainably improve pregnant women's access to quality maternal and newborn health services in rural Zambia. Savings groups are encouraged to provide small maternity grants to women and performance incentives to community health workers, reducing financial, informational, and behavioural barriers to timely care.

The study also compares pure community financing with a matching-grant model to assess whether jointly funded approaches lead to greater impact and scalability.

Key policy questions concern how community-driven and blended financing mechanisms can support essential maternal health interventions in settings with limited government resources.

The project measures effects on timely antenatal care, facility delivery at higher-quality facilities, postnatal care, and adverse birth outcomes, and collects qualitative data to understand community norms and implementation challenges.

Ongoing monitoring and process evaluation provide regular feedback to implementers to ensure the intervention remains feasible, accepted, and positioned for long-term sustainability.

Anticipatory action and early warning against climate risks



Implementing partners

Malagasy Red Cross, Madagascar

Study participants

3,600 households, 200 villages.

Type of study

Randomised evaluation

Timeline

2024-2028

DLL fellows involved

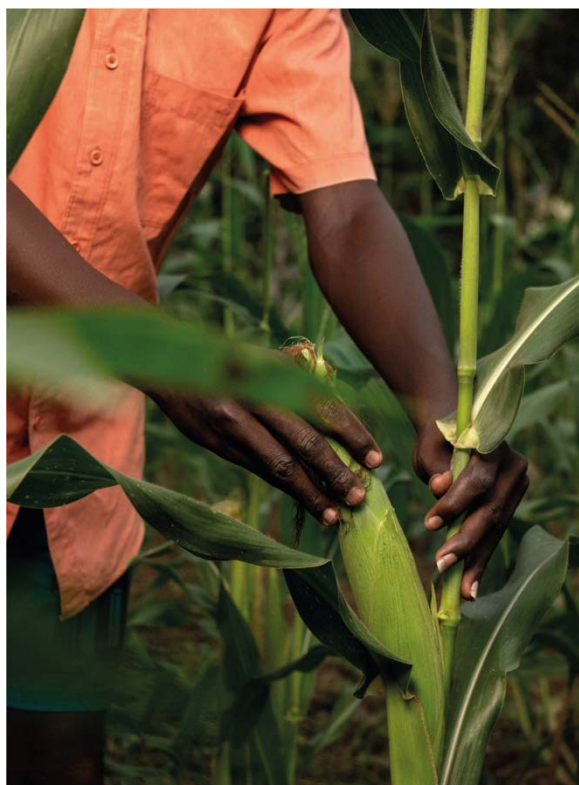
Jon Einar Flåtnes, Carlo Koos

Anticipatory Climate Adaptation for Communities in Africa (ACACIA) is an EU-funded interdisciplinary project for bolstering the resilience of vulnerable households in Sub-Saharan Africa to climate risks. The project includes an impact evaluation that assesses whether strengthening community-level Early Warning Systems and anticipatory action improves disaster preparedness and response in cyclone-prone communities in Madagascar.

The policy objective is to generate rigorous evidence to inform humanitarian agencies and government actors on whether investing in community-based Early Warning Systems and anticipatory action leads to meaningful improvements in preparedness, response, and resilience, and how such systems can be designed and scaled most effectively.

We measure impacts on knowledge and use of warning systems, preparedness behaviors, response actions during shocks, trust in forecasts, and selected welfare and resilience outcomes. We also measure the degree of trust in Early Warning Systems.

Supporting business growth in a context of extreme poverty



Implementing partners

Hauge Microfinance

Study participants

3,000 enterprises

Type of study

Randomised evaluation

Timeline

2024 – 2029

DLL fellows involved

Vincent Somville, Alexander Bjerck
Hagen

This project assesses the impact of a direct financial grant to established small and medium-size enterprises in Burundi. The grant will enable greater investments in business growth.

The study also investigates the optimal size of the grants needed to make a meaningful impact on businesses and livelihoods. Will allocating larger grants to fewer businesses be more effective than providing smaller grants to a larger number of recipients?

The key policy question how unconditional cash transfers of varying sizes influence business growth and poverty alleviation.

We measure the effects of cash transfers on business development outcomes such as investment levels, job creation, revenue growth, and business survival. We also collect qualitative data to better understand business behaviours, preferences, and constraints that might shape the effectiveness of the transfers.

Throughout the implementation process, we provide regular feedback to implementers to ensure the intervention is delivered effectively and remains aligned with the needs of the target population.

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

Randomised 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 labour force participation. We focus on young women in the final grade of secondary school, given India’s low female labour 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 labour force.

We conduct a clustered randomised 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 labour 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.

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 +
randomised 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 behaviour through a range of activities including awareness raising, community mobilisation, 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 feedback 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

Randomised evaluation and nationally representative longitudinal cohort study

Timeline

2021 – 2026

DLL fellows involved

Ingvild Almås, Bet Caeyers, Charlotte Ringdal

This programme aims to make a major scientific contribution by establishing and analysing 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 programme also carries out a large-scale randomised controlled trial (RCT) in the Dodoma region to test the relative cost-effectiveness of a parenting programme, an Unconditional Cash Transfer programme and a programme 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 3rd 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 counselling 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

Randomised evaluation

Timeline

2023 – 2028

DLL fellows involved

Ingvild Sandøy

Sexual minorities in many low- and middle-income countries face discrimination, marginalisation, 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 examines 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 are conducting a randomised controlled trial to test the effectiveness of psychological counselling and safety planning. Participants are randomly allocated to receive such care or be in a control group, and the effects are 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

Randomised 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.

Management and Support

Management Team and Coordinators



Ottar Mæstad
Director,
Research Professor, CMI



Charlotte Ringdal
Co-Director,
Knowledge Review Coordinator,
Senior Researcher, CMI



Ingvild Fossgard Sandøy
Co-Director,
Professor, UIB



Vincent Somville
Co-Director,
Professor, NHH



Viola Asri
Learning Arena Coordinator,
Senior Researcher, CMI



Jon Einar Flåtnes
Research Coordinator,
Senior Researcher, CMI

Key Support



Pernille Jørgensen
Graphic Designer, CMI



Åse Roti Dahl
Senior Comms. Adviser, CMI



Josh Franklin-Mann
Communications Adviser, CMI



Olga Radionenko
Project Controller, CMI

Reach us at

contact@devlearnlab.no

+47 481 89 504

Visit us at

Jekteviksbakken 31
5006 Bergen, Norway

Postal address

CMI-DLL
P.O.Box 6033
N-5892 Bergen, Norway



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