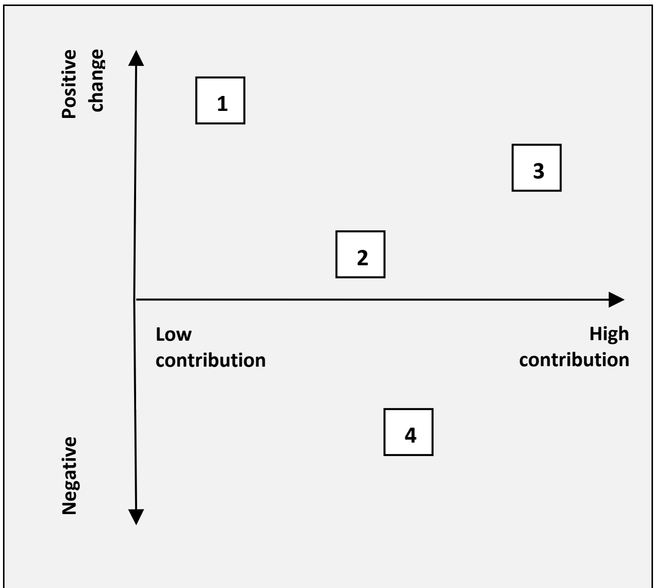
IMPACT GRIDS

An impact grid is a tool that helps stakeholders involved in a development intervention to analyse multiple changes by mapping those changes onto a grid. A typical grid charts the extent of change alongside the degree of contribution of the intervention. Impact grids can be used for many different purposes. They are only normally used after enough time has elapsed for changes to emerge.

An impact grid is a tool that enables different stakeholders involved in a project, programme or organisation to identify and chart changes. The basic idea is that stakeholders identify stories of change – either positive or negative – and place them onto a grid. The grid then provides a visual aid to help analysis. A typical grid allows an organisation to chart the extent of change against the contribution of the organisation, programme or project (see diagram below). This enables some overall analysis of change (impact and outcomes) and provides an indication of how far change can be attributed to the project, programme or organisation concerned.



In this example, story number one represents a very positive change, but with a low contribution from the organisation, programme or project. Story two represents a modest change, but with a higher degree of contribution. Story three represents a positive change with a very high degree of contribution. Story number four represents a negative change, for which the organisation, programme or project was partially responsible.

Impact grids can be developed by internal staff, evaluators, targeted beneficiaries, or any combination of these. An impact grid is usually conducted as a participatory exercise which encourages different stakeholders to discuss stories of change and move then around on the grid. The patterns that emerge can then be examined to support analysis.

Impact grids are only normally used after enough time has elapsed for changes to emerge. They would not usually be done at the start of a project or programme. Impact grids are often conducted at an organisational level to analyse multiple changes to which an organisation has contributed over a period of time. In some circumstances this can include changes spread across multiple countries and sectors, and over many years.

Case study: Syrian NGO

INTRAC conducted an evaluation of a Syrian NGO in 2015. As part of the evaluation, INTRAC asked the NGO to conduct an internal mapping exercise, and to produce stories of change. NGO staff produced the stories and wrote these up into case studies. INTRAC read the case studies and developed an impact grid that was shared remotely with the NGO staff. Once the impact grid had been agreed, INTRAC selected five stories to investigate in more depth as part of the evaluation.

Because it was not possible for foreign staff to enter Syria, the NGO staff themselves investigated the stories, using a range of different participatory techniques. In this instance the impact grid was used to explore the range of changes to which the Syrian NGO had contributed, and to provide the basis for purposeful sampling of cases within the evaluation.

No negative stories were produced as part of the exercise, so the final grid showed a range of positive stories with different levels of significance, organised against the degree of contribution.

The purpose of impact grids

Impact grids can be used for many different purposes.

- They can be used to help analyse complex portfolios of work. They enable stakeholders to look for patterns, and discuss why some changes are seen as more important than others, or why stakeholders differ in their views about an organisation, programme or project's contribution to change. For example, analysis might focus on the proportion of positive to negative stories, or the type of interventions that evoke a high or low contribution rating.
- Impact grids can help communicate complex portfolios of change across different sectors, regions or countries, without the need to aggregate numerical indicators.

They provide a graphic of change that shows 'the big picture'.

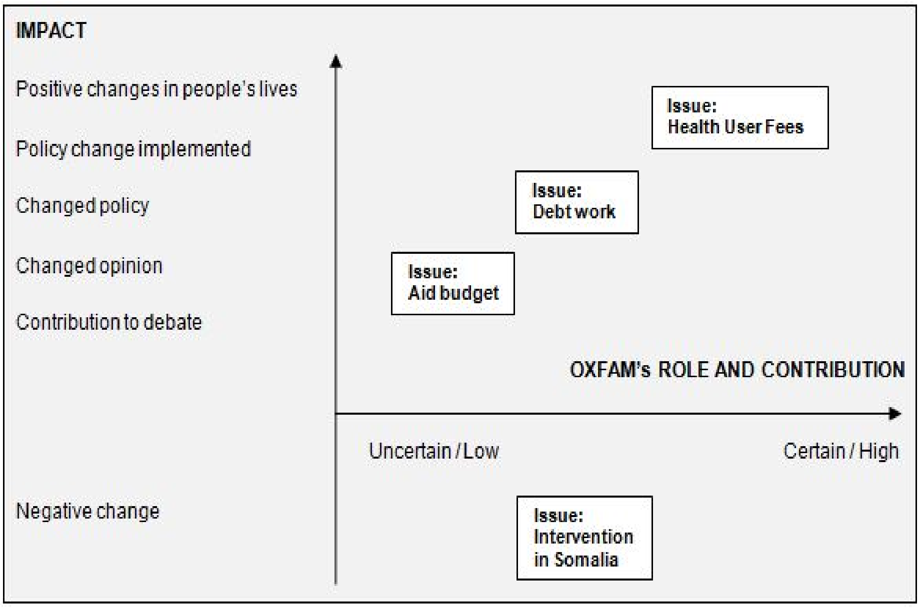
- Impact grids can be used to help identify and select stories that can then be built up into case studies. The case studies can be used for many different purposes, including marketing and public relations, as well as accountability, learning and improving.
- Impact grids can be used to support the selection of cases, based on purposeful sampling. For example, they can be used to help identify best or worst cases to follow up in more detail. Or they can be used to identify typical or extreme cases.

Impact grids can be used in many different circumstances, and there is no set methodology for developing one. They are often developed as part of a meeting or workshop. In some circumstances the impact grid methodology can be used over the life of a project or programme, with the same stakeholders, to track what changes are emerging and when. Some materials described in the reading list below outline step-by-step methodologies for developing an impact grid as a participatory exercise.

Impact grids can also be developed by an evaluation team or core M&E team based on already existing stories of change. However, if conducted in this way the impact grid would not be seen as a participatory exercise.

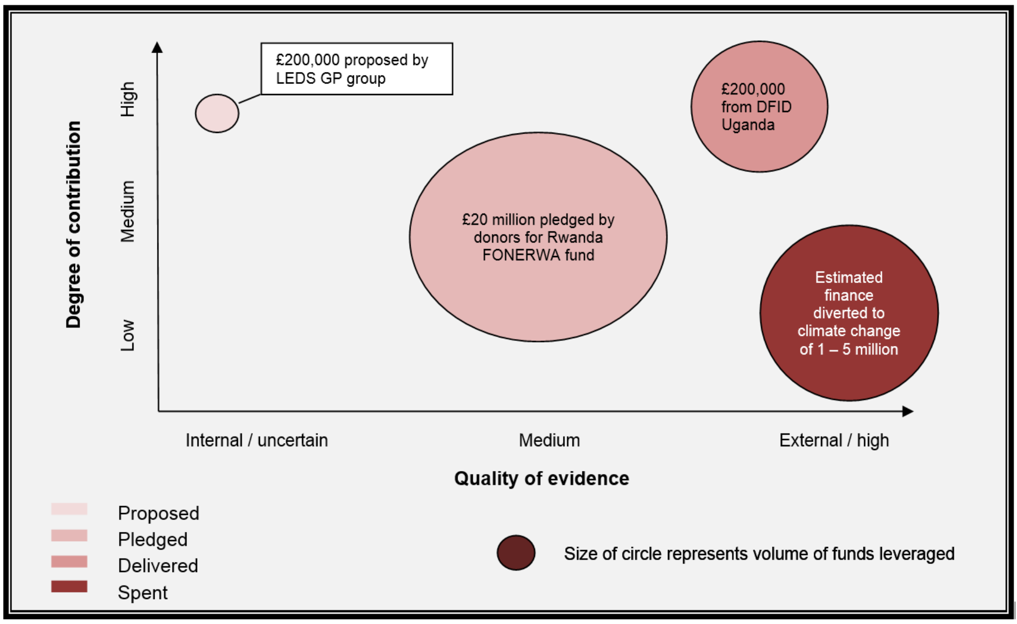
Adaptations

Impact grids do not have to be charted in the same way. Many organisations have used different types of grid to help with analysis processes. Two examples of adapted impact grids are shown below.



An early version of an impact grid was produced by Oxfam GB in the 1990s (see Roche 1997). As part of an exercise to assess multiple advocacy projects, Oxfam charted projects on a grid using a range of different advocacy outcomes on the y-axis and the degree of contribution on the x-axis. The grid is reproduced on the left. It shows that Oxfam believed it had made the most positive intervention through a Health User fees project, where policy changes had been implemented, with real changes in people's lives, and Oxfam had had a large contribution. By contrast, work on aid budgets may have changed opinions, but Oxfam's contribution was either low or uncertain. Oxfam's intervention in Somalia was judged to have had a negative impact overall.

Another example comes from the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN 2015), and focuses on the leverage of finance for climate change and development work. In this example the x-axis shows the quality of evidence and the y-axis shows the degree of contribution. The amount of leverage is represented by the size of the bubble, and the different colours represent different kinds of leverage. This shows how impact grids can be expanded to show many different dimensions of change at the same time.



Further reading and resources

A publication providing a step by step guide to conducting impact grids can be found via the following link.

- *Impact Grid Exercise to Explore Organisational Change.* Produced by Framework Tools for BOND/NIDOS. Available on the internet at http://www.framework.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Impact-Grid-in-template-signed.pdf

References

- CDKN (2015). *Annual Report to International Climate Fund, 2014-2015*.
- Roche, C. (1997) "Assessing the impact of advocacy work" in *Appropriate Technology*, Vol. 24 no 2, Intermediate Technology Development Group, Rugby, England.

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INTRAC is a not-for-profit organisation that builds the skills and knowledge of civil society organisations to be more effective in addressing poverty and inequality. Since 1992 INTRAC has provided specialist support in monitoring and evaluation, working with people to develop their own M&E approaches and tools, based on their needs. We encourage appropriate and practical M&E, based on understanding what works in different contexts.

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