The use of difference in differences as a robust but cost effective approach to NGO evaluation of complex social programmes
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**Background:** In the last 3 years Tearfund UK and its partners have implemented a widespread and complex program (mainly funded by Irish Aid) in Ethiopia and Malawi addressing HIV in rural communities. 8 local NGO partners, working across more than 14 denominations, implemented a range of activities designed to build the capacity of churches to ‘respond more effectively, sustainably and holistically to HIV and AIDS’.

**Methods:** A Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practice survey methodology was developed to generate evidence of those areas where the programme made a contribution to positive change. Baseline and endline surveys generated a total of over 4,900 interviews. The difference-in-differences methodology measured indicators before and after the intervention, and among people exposed to programme activities, and those not. This takes account of selection bias and trends that are independent of the project.

![Graph]

**[Difference-in-differences approach]**

Where a positive and significant change took place between those exposed, but was absent among the control groups, a link with the programme was flagged.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-exposed group (control)</th>
<th>No change (or negative)</th>
<th>Positive change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exposed group (treatment)</td>
<td>No change (or negative)</td>
<td>Link flagged</td>
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**Results:** The method was able to distinguish between improvements in the HIV/AIDS context within a country, and areas where the programme was linked to positive change. The role of the church stands out in changing attitudes and combating stigma. Exposure to programme activities compared favourably with other sources of HIV/AIDS messaging e.g. media. Differences in programmatic
approaches between countries were evident - personal contact played a greater role in Ethiopia, reflecting the use of self-help groups.

Conclusions: The methodology successfully demonstrated specific issues where the programme had contributed to positive change. The process was appropriate to NGO partners who administered the surveys. This impact assessment tool provided a quantitative measure of change that is becoming increasingly important in programme evaluation. In addition to being cost-effective, it provided a useful resource for feeding back to participating communities.

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