



EXPLORING ALIGNMENT BETWEEN THE QUALITATIVE IMPACT PROTOCOL AND THE PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL VALUE



Bath Social &
Development
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**CAUSAL
MAP**
MAKING CONNECTIONS

SOCIAL VALUE 

Exploring alignment between the Qualitative Impact Protocol and the Principles of Social Value

Introduction

This paper explores how the Qualitative Impact Protocol (QuIP) sits within the Principles of Social Value - the SVI Framework. QuIP is an approach to social impact assessment initially developed for the international development sector but now being adapted for a broad range of contexts. QuIP is focused purely on maximising insight through the analysis of detailed qualitative data in evaluation, and was specifically designed to tackle the 'attribution problem' - adding more credibility to claims made about contribution to change by directly addressing the issues of selection and confirmation bias.

Social Return on Investment (SROI) is a methodology which aims to apply the Principles of Social Value in order to quantify extra-financial value.

The application of QuIP in practice differs in many ways from SROI, but there are also many areas of close alignment which offer the opportunity to combine relevant aspects of both for different types of projects and activities. This paper first considers the QuIP in relation to the overarching Social Value Principles, and then compares the SROI methodological steps with the QuIP steps, to offer more clarity on a practical approach to combining the methodologies.

Section A provides a short overview of each approach. Section B looks in more detail at QuIP in relation to each of the Principles of Social Value, and Section C summarises the key similarities and differences between SROI and QuIP and how aspects of QuIP could be incorporated into SROI studies. It has been written in collaboration between the Social Value UK team and Bath Social & Development Research.

Note: Please note that this document is not intended to be a guide to either of the methodologies covered, but instead identify areas of convergence and divergence.

Section A: An overview of the two approaches.

What is the SVI Framework?

The SVI Framework refers to the Principles of Social Value and the stages of completing a social impact or SROI analysis. For more information and guidance on applying this Framework read the SVI Standards for Social Value Principles and the Guide to SROI.

The Principles of Social Value provide the basic building blocks for anyone who wants to understand how their decisions causally link to social value, for example, in order to increase equality, improve wellbeing and increase environmental sustainability. They are generally accepted social accounting principles and are important for accountability and maximising social value.

The Principles have been drawn from established best practices in sustainability reporting, cost benefit analysis, financial accounting, and evaluation practice. The Principles of Social Value are a framework to follow in order to create a complete account of social value. By complete, we mean that it contains all material outcomes for all stakeholders who are affected by or affect an activity. This 'complete' account is necessary if an organisation wants to make decisions that maximise the value created by its activities; by maximise we mean reduce any negative outcomes and increase the positive outcomes to create the most value using available resources.

The Principles of Social Value:

1. **Involve stakeholders** – Inform what gets measured and how this is measured and valued in an account of social value by involving stakeholders.
2. **Understand what changes** – Articulate how change is created and evaluate this through evidence gathered, recognising positive and negative changes as well as those that are intended and unintended.
3. **Value the things that matter** – Making decisions about allocating resources between different options needs to recognise the values of stakeholders. Value refers to the relative importance of different outcomes. It is informed by stakeholders' preferences.
4. **Only include what is material** – Determine what information and evidence must be included in the accounts to give a true and fair picture, such that stakeholders can draw reasonable conclusions about impact.
5. **Do not over-claim** – Only claim the value that activities are responsible for creating.
6. **Be transparent** – Demonstrate the basis on which the analysis may be considered accurate and honest and show that it will be reported to and discussed with stakeholders.
7. **Verify the result** – Ensure appropriate independent assurance.

Read the "[Seven Principles of Social Value](#)" document for more information.

What are the accompanying tools?

For studies using the SVI principles (e.g. a Social Return on Investment study), a pre-formatted Excel spreadsheet (Impact Map) is available here. More complex functionality can be gained by using software products, a number of which have undergone SVI Software Accreditation. A directory of available products is [available here](#).

What is the QuIP?

The Qualitative Impact Protocol (QuIP) is an approach designed to collect information about what intended beneficiaries of social interventions perceive to have changed, and the reasons for those changes. QuIP is not designed to determine the extent of change experienced, but rather to whom or what change can be attributed to - focusing on causal mechanisms of change.

Detailed qualitative data is collected through both individual interviews and focus groups, focused on encouraging discussion about what changes have been experienced by intended beneficiaries and what they think are the reasons for these changes. This is a 'goal-free' approach to evaluation, so most interviews are carried out with a degree of 'blindfolding' - that is to say the project being assessed is usually not known by the researchers and participants, and is not referred to at all in the questionnaire schedule. This is to mitigate confirmation bias as far as possible, and ensure that reasons cited for changes to behaviours and outcomes are not limited to the interventions, but encompass a broad range of contextual information. Questionnaires are designed to reflect the intervention's theory of change - focusing on the areas of people's lives where change is expected. This enables analysis which can test the theory of change, looking for expected and unexpected causal mechanisms.

The data is coded using a specific approach to qualitative thematic coding. This process is mainly 'inductive', identifying recurring themes in the data rather than starting with a preconceived set of codes, and is based purely on what is reported by participants. Inductive coding involves identifying and highlighting statements with sufficient causal information to connect a 'driver of change' and a related 'outcome'. Additional deductive coding can be used to add more structure to these factor labels, for example adding an 'attribution' flag which indicates whether the causal claim appears to reference the project's theory of change.

This depends on the analyst having access to a theory of change being tested and using the research questions underlying the study to add a 'deductive' interpretative element to the coding. For example, factor labels can include flags which tell you if:

- A driver of change is explicitly attributed to project activities
- A driver of change is implicitly consistent with the project's theory of change
- Changes are perceived to be either positive or negative

This helps to analyse the stories of change in the context of the project, allowing the user to drill deeper into stories which fall into different categories, and to see where different pathways of change may be experienced by different types of respondents.

What are the accompanying tools?

Bath SDR has been instrumental in the development of bespoke software to code causal connections, Causal Map. This is an online application which builds on an established field of data analysis, causal mapping, and is designed specifically to code and visualise claims of causal influence within narrative data, rather than isolated concepts as is usually the case in qualitative data analysis. This is of particular interest to those who are interested in understanding the claims people make about what influenced change, whether from primary interview data or from other sources for meta-evaluations.

The main outputs of causal mapping are visual, making it easier to communicate top-level syntheses or even detailed analyses and case-by-case comparisons. It also provides some innovative ways to generate metrics, such as comparing the 'robustness' of alternative causal pathways.

For more on QulP please see www.bathsdr.org where you can find a wealth of **resources**, including an **accessible guide** which is also available in different languages. For more on causal mapping in general see **this bibliography** and see **Causal Map** for more about the software.

The screenshot shows the Causal Map app interface. On the left, there is a text input field with a paragraph of text describing a respondent's agricultural practices and the impact of social cash transfer. On the right, a causal map diagram illustrates the flow of influence between various factors. The diagram starts with '(IEA) Social Cash Transfer (OrgX) [E]' which leads to '(BF) Increased livestock numbers', '(BF) Agricultural training and advice [E]', and '(BF) Unable to compete with Mozambique farmers'. These factors then lead to '(BF) Stopped growing beans' and '(BF) New agricultural conservation techniques'. These factors then lead to '(BF) Increase crop diversity', which finally leads to '(IEA) Increased income' and '(HN) Increased food security'.

Screenshot from the app Causal Map

Section B: QuIP and The Principles of Social Value

This section takes a detailed look at how QuIP aligns with The Principles of Social Value, looking at each principle individually.

Principle One: Stakeholder Involvement

Inform what gets measured and how this is measured and valued in an account of social value by involving stakeholders.

The SVI Framework requires all stakeholders to be part of the process of assessing:

- what outcomes are relevant and therefore should be accounted for
- how much change in each outcome has occurred
- what is the relative importance (value) of the different changes in outcomes
- what contribution the activity makes to the changes

This Principle is one that cuts through all the other Principles and requires that groups of people that often have little or no power are to be included in conversations about social value.

The **QuIP** is similarly focused on giving stakeholders a voice in evaluation but does so using a very different approach. Stakeholders are not actively involved in defining outcomes for evaluation in a structured manner, rather the goal-free approach is designed to identify changes within pre-defined "domains" which are experienced by stakeholders. This is a 'Most Significant Change' approach to data collection which puts the responsibility for judging what is significant with the stakeholders themselves. Their testimonies are also used as the sole source for establishing causal links between an intervention and the outcomes. The only structure applied is the pre-selection of very broad 'domains', areas of people's lives where change is expected. This is usually informed by a pre-existing project theory of change, which may or may not have been developed with stakeholder involvement.

One key difference is that the sample selection for QuIP studies does not allow stakeholders to identify other relevant stakeholders who should be consulted in the process. The approach to sampling is deliberately purposive, and blindfolding means that participants are unable to suggest other respondents, other than for focus groups where participants are self-selecting within the community. The more restricted approach to stakeholder involvement is an acknowledged trade-off in the QuIP, resulting from the 'blindfolded' approach to data collection which prioritises mitigation of confirmation bias over identification of unintended stakeholders for a project or activity. However, the QuIP does encourage follow-up sense-making workshops with all stakeholders to discuss the results of the initial interviews and suggest next steps.

Principle Two: Understand What Changes

Articulate how change is created and evaluate this through evidence gathered, recognising positive and negative changes as well as those that are intended and unintended.

This SVI Principle relates to two stages in the process for accounting for value;

1. "Mapping Outcomes" which is about defining what the relevant outcomes are that people experience (as a result of the activity being analysed).
2. "Evidencing Outcomes" is about quantifying how much of each outcome is occurring.



In the first step of 'defining what the relevant outcomes are' the SVI Framework encourages stakeholders to be involved (through qualitative methods) in defining all the outcomes experienced or expected to be experienced. This feedback should be analysed qualitatively in a way that includes identifying causal links in a 'chain of outcomes' or 'Theory of Change'. The analyst will need to decide which outcome in the chain is the most important one for the organisation to measure in order to manage its impact. This means identifying the most sustainable and important one within that chain (read more about this [here](#)).

The QULP is similarly focused on establishing the causal links in stories of change but does not attempt to quantify the amount of change which has occurred. Participants are encouraged to discuss the full range of changes they have experienced within a specific time period and articulate what they think are the drivers of these changes. The project activities as referenced as little as possible to encourage participants to discuss the full range of changes experienced, rather than only those they believe relate to the project activities. The extent to which change can be attributed to the intervention is assessed by an analyst during the coding process.

The trade-off for maintaining this broad context is the risk of not being able to probe further on project-relevant responses to gather more relevant detail in those areas.

Principle Three: Value the Things That Matter

Making decisions about allocating resources between different options needs to recognise the values of stakeholders. Value refers to the relative importance of different outcomes. It is informed by stakeholders' preferences.

This principle is about establishing the relative importance of the changes in outcomes. It is necessary to produce an account of value that can be used to inform decisions about how to optimise social value. It also relates to part of Stage 3 which is called "evidencing outcomes and giving them a value".

QULP coding does not weight outcomes based on relative importance since participants are not asked to rank changes in terms of importance to them - this isn't possible due to the way that questions are asked if 'blindfolding' is being used.

However, spontaneous (unprompted) repetition of stories does give the analyst information upon which to base a judgement about what main stories are considered to be more significant than others. Purposive sampling, done well, will usually lead to similar stories of change being repeated by multiple individual respondents. Counting the frequency of these links is one way of judging the relative significance of them within a group of respondents, but additional nuances also come from the narrative analysis of the content of detailed stories gathered in the interviews. The Causal Map web application offers analysts the opportunity to flag links with additional information, for example how certain they are about the validity of the claim, or if a respondent has explicitly given information about the relative importance of a claim, but care needs to be taken with this to ensure that there is sufficient information to do this well.

Additional metrics available can help to dig deeper into patterns and outliers, using algorithms to help with queries the naked eye would struggle with in complex maps. One of these is the Robustness of Argument. For example, many people may have evidenced different versions of various causal pathways from factor X to outcome Z, whilst there are also claims that factor Y influenced Z - can we just count and compare the evidence? This is harder than it seems; most causal maps include many such pathways and comparing them would mean literally counting the number of different possible paths or alternative routes to Z, and it isn't easy to agree on how to do that. It would also mean grappling with questions such as how to take into account the number of different stakeholders who mention parts of a path. Robustness of Argument is designed to solve this problem, based on an algorithm called 'maximum flow / minimum cut'. It calculates the relative strength or robustness of each claim entered, e.g. between X & Z and Y & Z, to help the analyst make comparisons between different sets of influence pathways.

Principle Four: Only Include What Is Material

Determine what information and evidence must be included in the accounts to give a true and fair picture, such that stakeholders can draw reasonable conclusions about impact.

The SVI Framework encourages analysts to consider all outcomes that occur as a result of an organisation's activities. The materiality principle ensures that only the outcomes that are significant and relevant to activities and stakeholders are then selected to include in reporting. In practice there are two screens/tests for materiality;

1. Outcomes are assessed on their relevance (at the mapping stage)
2. Outcomes are assessed on their significance (after stages of evidencing outcomes, valuing and assessing impact)

Outcomes, when being identified and considered for reporting need to pass a judgement by the analyst as to whether the outcome is relevant to the activity being analysed. If it is relevant then it will be tested for significance meaning additional data will be collected on:

- Quantity
- Value
- Causation
- Duration

This quantitative data should be considered together to determine whether the outcome is significant. Only outcomes that are relevant and significant are to be included in the final account of value.

To some extent the QulP researcher and the commissioner pre-determine the materially relevant outcome domains based on an assessment of the project activities and its intended beneficiaries. However, these domains are broad and still allow wide scope for unexpected outcomes to materialise in interviews. Similar to the SVI Framework, we advise that the relevance of the drivers and outcomes is then explicitly assessed via attribution coding, which ranks citations according to how closely they resemble the expected theory of change or mention the intervention.

This does not mean that reporting should exclude drivers or outcomes which are not explicitly relevant to the project's theory of change, but analysis will focus on the extent to which 'incidental' drivers of change may either enable or inhibit a theory of change.

As outlined in the previous section, the significance of outcomes is assessed by a combination of analysis of attribution coding and frequency counts, helping to inform which outcomes are relevant and significant to draw reasonable conclusions about impact.

Principle Five: Do Not Over-Claim

Only claim the value that activities are responsible for creating.

This principle is part of the SVI Framework to ensure that an account of social impact (or value) only includes the additional value that the activity is creating. Applying the principle requires the analyst to ask, 'would these changes in outcomes have happened without our activities?' and 'who else has contributed to these changes?'.

QuIP was designed specifically to address this very question, using double blindfolding and goal-free interviews to elicit self-reported attribution without the need for a control group. Changes and the reasons for change are reported unprompted by respondents - whether project-related or not.

Principle Six: Be Transparent

Demonstrate the basis on which the analysis may be considered accurate and honest, and show that it will be reported to and discussed with stakeholders.

This principle is about reporting openly and honestly about the processes that have taken place to produce reports and accounting for the quantity or contribution. It also relates to being transparent about the professional judgements that have been made and citing any other data sources used.

The principle of transparency is also core to the way that QuIP data is analysed and presented. Any visualisations or tables produced in Causal Map link immediately back to the source data, and dashboards containing the source data, coding, and visual representations are shared with stakeholders to ensure that they have full visibility.

Principle Seven: Verify the Result

Ensure appropriate independent assurance.

The SVI Framework is an accountability framework and therefore verification of the results is very important. Verification should be provided by the stakeholders who have provided data and contributed to the account. The SVI Framework also encourages independent assurance of social value accounts where appropriate.

Independent assurance is not a requirement of QuIP studies, but discussions between both internal and external stakeholders following data collection and analysis are a means to provide verification by encouraging interrogation of the data. Researchers keep audio recordings of interviews and focus group discussions with the consent of stakeholders to allow verification of findings at a later date; if a need for further verification is identified, internal and external auditing or peer review can be conducted. The protocol strongly advises that findings are shared with respondents at sensemaking workshops to help close the feedback loop, allowing commissioners to dig further into findings without blindfolding and ensuring that all stakeholders are part of the next steps in the evaluation.

Summary

There are, unsurprisingly, strong areas of alignment between the SVI Principles and QuIP in almost all principles of social value. Both have a strong commitment to placing the voice of intended beneficiaries front and centre of any evaluation and maintaining a transparent and auditable approach to analysing and presenting that evidence. QuIP's focus on the goal-free, blindfolded approach means trade-offs in some areas which are key to the SVI principles, such as relative significance of outcomes, but more emphasis on attribution to the project being assessed.

QuIP is an approach designed to validate and test a theory of change, with a particular focus on minimising the biases that can be involved in data collection. Whilst it does not involve stakeholders to the same extent that the SVI principles does at each stage, the underlying principles of QuIP are aligned with the SVI Framework in that they are both focused on giving stakeholders a more prominent voice in impact evaluations and on increasing accountability to stakeholders.

There are sufficient areas of alignment between the two approaches that we believe that it is possible to draw on some of the specific ideas suggested in the QuIP approach as part of a study that follows the SVI principles (for example an SROI report) both in data collection and analysis. In terms of data collection, the goal-free approach to structuring interviews and focus groups can yield interesting change data and can be used even in the absence of 'blindfolding'. This is one way of ensuring a strong commitment to Principle 2, Understand What Changes - 'recognising positive and negative changes as well as those that are intended and unintended', and Principle 5 'only claim the value that activities are responsible for creating'. Keeping the questions about change open-ended and making sure that you don't frame questions around a specific intervention ensures that you pick up a much broader range of evidence about possible drivers of change - reducing the likelihood that you will only hear what people think you want to hear. However, this may need to be paired with other opportunities to probe for more detail about a specific intervention if that is required; in QuIP this would be done after analysis of the initial evidence at sensemaking workshops which unpick the findings and allow stakeholders to add more detail, or explain why expected causal pathways didn't come up, for example.

The second main opportunity to merge approaches is to use a form of causal mapping with data that you have; looking for causal connections in qualitative evidence from stakeholders and assessing what these mean when compared to a theory of change. This narrative evidence could take the form of transcripts from individual interviews, focus groups or other documentary evidence collated as part of the evaluation. All that is required is sufficient information within the data to be able to map links between drivers of change and associated outcomes.

The QuIP approach to qualitative data analysis is relatively straightforward, making it accessible to those without too much experience of Qualitative Data Analysis. The fact that narrative data is coded 'inductively' means that the analyst is only ever coding native causal claims; you only code what is reported in the text - without any subjective interpretation or assumption. The resulting causal maps are, therefore, a simple representation of the reported experiences of stakeholders - whether that is based on past lived events, or plans for the future.

SVI Principle

QuIP Comparisons

- **Involve stakeholders –**
Inform what gets measured and how this is measured and valued in an account of social value by involving stakeholders.
 - **Understand what changes –**
Articulate how change is created and evaluate this through evidence gathered, recognising positive and negative changes as well as those that are intended and unintended.
- QuIP does not involve stakeholders in the design of a QuIP study, relying instead on a very broad interpretation of the expected outcomes from the theory of change. This is a necessary step for the mitigation of confirmation bias and to ensure that stories of change are unprompted.
 - QuIP collects stories of change as its point of evidence, recommending that this is combined with other sources of evidence, such as quantitative monitoring data to help triangulate evidence. The goal-free approach ensures that intended as well as unintended positive and negative changes are all captured.

SVI Principle

QuiP Comparisons

- **Value the things that matter** – Making decisions about allocating resources between different options needs to recognise the values of stakeholders. Value refers to the relative importance of different outcomes. It is informed by stakeholders' preferences.
 - **Only include what is material** – Determine what information and evidence must be included in the accounts to give a true and fair picture, such that stakeholders can draw reasonable conclusions about impact.
 - **Do not over-claim** – Only claim the value that activities are responsible for creating.
- The relative value of drivers and outcomes is not determined in the first instance by respondents but is determined at the point of analysis of detailed narrative data. This can be triangulated with key stakeholders and respondents at a later point in sense-making workshops
 - The **relevance** of evidence is explicitly assessed by deductive attribution coding. The significance of outcomes is assessed by frequency counts of links between factors. Combining the two is used to draw conclusions on impact.
 - Self-reported attribution via double blindfolding ensures that all changes deemed relevant and significant by stakeholders are captured - whether project-related or not.

SVI Principle

QuiP Comparisons

- **Be transparent** – Demonstrate the basis on which the analysis may be considered accurate and honest, and show that it will be reported to and discussed with stakeholders.
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- **Verify the result** – Ensure appropriate independent assurance.
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- Transparent coding and analysis is a key priority in QuiP - manifested in the development of an interactive dashboard to engage stakeholders with detailed results and fully auditable coding.
 - Independent audit is not a key part of QuiP, but the transparent coding process helps to ensure that both internal and external stakeholders can verify results. Sense-making triangulation workshops with respondents are encouraged to help close the feedback loop.
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