



# EVALUATING IMPACT

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## Turning Promises to Evidence

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So you want to do an Impact Evaluation...

# **Operational Issues – Lessons learnt**

# Road map for this session...

- Lets recap... four key elements for an IE
- Some of the usual concerns and how we can handle them
- Practical considerations when implementing IEs
- Final remarks

**Bottom line: We can do it!**

# Lets recap... four key elements for an IE

- Clear understanding of the intervention
- Well defined outcomes (impacts)
- Credible identification strategy (definition of the counterfactuals) -> methodology
- Credible data

**What have we learnt on how to  
measure results? (Have we?)**

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# Some of the usual “excuses”: Ethical Concerns

- We can not run “experiments” on development issues
  - We don’t know everything
  - Experimenting is part of the way to learn what is working (and what is not)
- We cannot leave people aside for the sake of the IE
  - We can not intervene with everybody anyway.... We have to make choices  
[Example: Rural water in Paraguay... “only” 200 communities will be intervened (out of 5K communities that need water!)]
  - The evaluation may be a fair assignation

## Lessons Learned:

- Work with counterparts at the beginning on identifying and addressing their concerns
- Be clear and explain everything
- Offer the evaluation as a solution rather than an extra layer for complications

# Some of the usual “excuses”: Political Concerns

- There is no interest in showing (potential) bad news
  - It is worse to DO something bad and to hide it
  - Experimenting is part of the learning process of identifying what is working (and what isn't)
  - The evaluations may be designed as a tool to find “areas of improvement”
  - The evaluation can be designed to pilot different options [Example: Nicaragua]
- Long durations of the evaluations do not reconcile with political timelines
  - Evaluations can be designed to show results based on time constraints; but there are limitations
  - A good design can go beyond a political cycle [Example: Progresa in Mexico]

## Lessons Learned:

- Understand the political concerns in order to design accordingly
- Work in phases
- Show results soon (even with some limitations in the analysis) as it keeps politicians interested and engaged with the IE.

# Some of the usual “excuses”: Technical Concerns

- We already “know” what works... there is no need for evaluation
  - Arrogance... but basic questions are not answered yet...  
[Example: Water and health outcomes... there are just few evaluations that attempt to establish the causal relation between them]
- The project is already complicated and we don’t want to add more complexity
  - Same than before... it may be complicated, but if we are not evaluating we are not learning
  - Complex programs can be decompressed into simpler activities
  - Not all the activities have to be evaluated
- The concept of the project is already agreed upon and this is what the government wants
  - In most of the cases, the so called “agreements” are just basic features in the project’s concept  
[example: Rural Water project in Paraguay]
  - The design may be worked out in such a way that these agreements are maintained
- The evaluations are too expensive, we cannot afford it
  - Different designs have different costs... and teams can apply for trust funds!

## Lessons Learned:

- Projects in the preparation stage are better candidates than those under implementation
- Be pragmatic

# Some of the usual “excuses”: “INTERNAL” Concerns

All the above... and

- Task team leaders (and managers!) are not recognized for doing good evaluations
  - Evaluations do not have good marketing... we have to turn this in the other way around and sell it as a learning and communication tool
  - Good evaluations (even those with bad results) should be recognized and rewarded since ALL of them generate knowledge...we indeed are a knowledge bank
- The impact evaluation is in academic interest not a practical one
  - No! IEs are based on policy questions, so the goal is to influence policy decisions
  - Good evaluations bring us business
- An IE is too “dangerous” because the team may be penalized for bad results
  - IE evaluates interventions , not teams... again, teams with good IEs have to be recognized even with adverse results... since they are generating knowledge

## Lessons Learn:

- Our organizations have to have a corporate decision about IEs...
- Task team leaders, managers, and projects with good evaluations should be recognized (and rewarded!)

# **Some Practical Considerations...**

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# Practical considerations (1)

- Impact evaluation is not for every intervention
  - Be selective
  - Be opportunistic
- The “gold standard” is plausible causality, not a single impact evaluation method
  - Recognize constraints
  - Be flexible, be creative
- Start early, work IE into the design of the program
- Think hard about benefits (what impacts to measure)
  - Link to project objectives
  - Careful choice of indicators
  - Understand time frame for outcomes to materialize
  - Identify logical axes of disaggregation (e.g. income groups, gender) and plan sample accordingly

# Practical considerations (2)

- Monitor implementation of program – policy does not always equate to reality (know what you are evaluating). The same holds true for data collection
  - The task for implementing IE does not end with a sound design...
- Mix methods – qualitative and quantitative
  - Qualitative data provides information on the actual mechanism that caused the impacts
  - It may also provide intuition, new questions, and anecdotal stories that will enhance the final evaluation
- Watch for contamination of the treated and comparison groups
  - To the extent possible, bulletproof the control and treated groups
  - Stay on top of the implementation so we adjust the unforeseen events with sound solutions as quickly as possible

# Practical considerations (3)

- It is important to work on Monitoring and Evaluation
  - This may link the IE with the ongoing efforts for monitoring the project
  - This generates more ownership of the IE by the project team
- It may be worth considering the implementation of Information Systems: targeting, program implementation, and evaluation
- Discuss your design with other IE colleagues
  - We learn from each other and you may get new ideas
  - This helps with later dissemination
- Work together with local partners
  - This may build local capacity for future evaluations
  - Validates the design and results
  - Having people in the ground helps to preserve the design
  - They tend to stand for change in governments

# **Final Remarks (Finally!)**

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# Final remarks

- We can do more of what we are doing! But we can do less of what we would like to do!
- Projects under preparation are better candidates for good IEs
- Be selective... go for good, relevant, and answerable policy questions
- Be opportunistic... (some) good evaluations come from unexpected venues
- Be pragmatic... we live in a real world
- Understand and tackle (to the extend possible) all the concerns
- Show results ASAP... this keeps politicians (and our managers) interested
- Engage with all the stakeholders and explain why, what, and how
- Look for partnerships with local institutions

# Thanks!

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Oct 11, 2011



# Q & A