

Methodological and conceptual challenges of evaluating the impact of development interventions

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Methodological and Conceptual Challenges of Evaluating the Impact of Development Interventions

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Maastricht, 16 september 2010

1. The distinction between three sets of challenges in impact evaluation (delimitation, attribution versus explanation, and design and implementation of impact evaluations in practice) constitutes a useful framework for discussions on methodological designs (*this thesis*).
2. Randomized experiments can generate valuable evidence on the effectiveness of development interventions. Yet, stakeholders should be very careful in considering mainstreaming of randomized experiments in development interventions (*this thesis*).
3. A randomized experiment is designed to reduce bias in impact evaluation. However, at a different level its current popularity has generated a bias in impact evaluation debates and practices, drawing attention away from other important issues (*this thesis*).
4. A credible mixed method evaluation design should reflect the premise that some combinations of methods are more suitable to address particular issues in impact evaluation than others (*this thesis*).
5. At increasing levels of aggregation, attribution analysis becomes more complicated, not so much due to increased heterogeneity on the dependent variable side (e.g. the characteristics of target groups), but mainly due to heterogeneity on the independent variable side (i.e. the characteristics of the intervention).
6. The emergence of ever more toolkits, methods and guidelines for impact evaluation in the developing world seems to suggest that impact evaluation is largely about methodology. However, in reality impact evaluation is first and foremost about the three p's: people, politics and the policy-making process.
7. Although most donor organizations recognize the need to invest more in the assessment of results, they usually lack a coherent strategy regarding the planning and use of such analyses.
8. In many impact evaluations, most notably those evaluations based on existing data, substantial parts of the research process are beyond the control of the researchers analyzing the data. Surprisingly, all too often this restriction appears to have little effect on the researchers' zeal to infinitely fine-tune those aspects that *are* under their control, which is a clear symptom of being out of touch with the overall validity picture.
9. In Belgium the balance between public and private capital is quite different from the Netherlands. This can be illustrated by the fact *y* cvⁿ in the Netherlands the average car is more modest than in Belgium, whereas the average road is of a better quality.
10. A government, besides an institutional structure, is also a body of people, often notably ungoverned.