

Communiqué

Improving Social Development through Impact Evaluation:
An Indian Perspective on Closing the Evaluation Gap

A Consultation held in New Delhi, India, 7 April 2006

Co-hosted by Suman Bery (NCAER) and Rajat Gupta (McKinsey & Co., Inc) and convened by the Center for Global Development (CGD)

How can we expand the knowledge base of “what works” in social development programs?

Since 2004, the Center for Global Development (CGD) has been asking this question of leaders, officials, and researchers from developing countries, bilateral agencies, development banks, NGOs and private foundations, and has found strong demand for increasing the evidence base with rigorous studies in health, poverty reduction, education and other social sectors as a way to guide and improve social policy decisions.

Through this process, including the convening of an expert working group, CGD policy researchers have analyzed the obstacles that constrain the realization of useful studies, their use by policymakers, and the existing range of initiatives aimed at increasing coordination, building evaluation capacity, and conducting studies. Several possible solutions have been formulated and critiqued through consultations with stakeholders.

At the consultation co-hosted with NCAER and Rajat Gupta (McKinsey & Co., Inc.), 7 April in Delhi, participants issued the following statement as an expression of individual views based on professional expertise.¹

We call upon developing country governments, multilateral agencies, bilateral agencies, private foundations, NGOs, and research centers to consider and endorse the following principles and commit time and resources to the formation of an international, collective initiative that will build knowledge and evidence for local action as well as international use through promoting reliable and valid studies on the impact of social programs and policies.

Principles as a guide to action

1. Impact studies are beneficial

Impact studies are essential complements to program monitoring and process evaluation to know if public resources are being used effectively to promote social development.

Reviews have demonstrated that too few impact studies are being conducted with the requisite reliability and validity to provide the evidence base needed by public and private decision-makers and program designers in developing countries. Such impact evaluations are also essential to efforts to improve the effectiveness of international aid and improve accountability of government social spending. Impact studies should be an integral component of the program

¹ Endorsement of this statement by the individuals listed below does not, in any way, represent the official views or positions of their places of employment or institutional affiliations.

from the design stage.

2. Knowledge is a public good

Once impact studies are completed and disseminated, many countries can benefit by using their findings, with adaptations to local contexts. Hence, there is a larger collective demand for impact studies than from any single organization or country. Though they may recognize the value of impact studies, countries and organizations generally do not have incentives to invest sufficiently in the implementation of such studies relative to the global value of the information that would be generated. Thus collective action by multilateral agencies, bilateral agencies, developing country governments, private foundations, NGOs, and research centers is necessary to assure that sufficient investment in impact studies occurs; that findings are widely disseminated and data are made public; and that studies address questions of enduring importance and relevance to policymaking.

3. A collective initiative to promote impact studies is needed

The stakeholders mentioned above should work together to implement an initiative, with the appropriate institutional structure, to promote, finance and stimulate the use of reliable and valid impact studies that:

- address questions of enduring importance;
- provide models of good practice for emulation and for going to scale ;
- provide opportunities for capacity building through collaboration; and
- promote methodological innovation and high evaluation standards.

4. The quality of impact studies is essential

Any collective action to promote and finance impact studies should make the quality of those studies its top priority. This means endorsing and promoting methods that:

- reliably measure the impact that can be attributed to a specific program or policy;
- draw valid inferences from the evidence;
- are appropriate to the particular policy questions that are being asked;
- correspond to operational realities; and
- are appropriate to the social, cultural, economic and political context.

The establishment of methodological standards, peer review processes, and wide dissemination of information about methods and data can be used to ensure quality.

5. Impact evaluations should be promoted if and when they address relevant questions

Simply increasing the number of impact evaluations that use high quality methods should not be the aim of a collective enterprise. Rather, the aim should be to promote good impact evaluations that address questions of major significance, either because of the scale and quality of the program, the opportunity for influencing a public policy decision, or the potential contribution to answer a question of enduring importance (i.e., testing economic or other models of human behavior).

6. Local initiatives to develop capacity for evaluation and use of evidence should be promoted

Any effort to increase the quality and quantity of impact evaluations should provide opportunities for building capacity at the local level through collaboration and the creation or

strengthening of professional networks, at both national and international levels.

7. Any initiative should be designed with the recognition that monitoring and forms of evaluation other than impact evaluation are integral to sound implementation and generation of knowledge about key processes

Although functions such as developing the capacity for good program monitoring may be outside the scope of an international initiative on impact evaluation, the same parties should attend separately to this important concern.

8. The initiative should be complementary, strategic, transparent, inclusive and independent

Organizations and governments are pursuing a wide range of activities to improve the evidence base, including conducting process and institutional evaluations; establishing evaluation standards; maintaining searchable databases; conducting meta-evaluations; coordinating and partnering in research, and introducing or improving impact evaluation work within specific institutions. The programs and studies promoted by this new initiative should *complement* and bring added value to existing activities. The initiative should promote the relevant use of impact evaluations for select programs that are *strategically* important because of their potential scale, impact on important social problems, or potential contribution to knowledge about enduring questions in social development. The initiative should be *transparent* in all its activities – whether in the awarding of grants; setting standards; disseminating studies that meet quality standards regardless of their findings; or publishing financial information. The initiative should be *inclusive*, recognizing developing country partners, both in governments and NGOs, as full partners. Finally, the initiative has to have substantial *independence* from the agencies and organizations that it is involved in evaluating and all information gathered through this process should be available in public domain with free access to all.

Signed

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