

Impact Assessment Methods

Comparison of Evaluation Methods for Livelihoods of Vulnerable Children Programs



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Why Assess Impact?

- Capture long-term effects of program activities and offer credible proof of the effectiveness of the project
- Little evidence yet on the impact of economic strengthening programs on youth
- We'll discuss two basic types of impact assessment

Basics of Impact Assessment

- Fundamental question: how would youth have fared without the intervention?
- Two basic types of IA:
 - Experimental
 - Quasi-experimental



Experimental Design

- Key feature is randomized assignment into groups receiving the program (treatment) and those that do not (control)
- Benefits:
 - relatively straight-forward analysis
 - best method to ensure intervention is only difference between groups → strongest demonstration of causal link

Experimental Design (2)

- Potential complications or drawbacks:
 - Limited uptake of program by treatment group
 - Control group members participating in activity or receiving spill-over information
 - Larger sample size due to clustering
- Other potential drawbacks
 - Ethical considerations: withholding ‘treatment’
 - Reduced implementer control over program activities

Experimental Design (3)

- Some methods for bypassing these drawbacks
 - Randomize at the community or village level
 - Seen as fairer than randomization of individuals
 - Less chance of households in the program sharing information with those in the comparison group
 - Compare various types of activities rather than just with and without
 - Each program faces logistical and budgetary constraints
 - Randomize to allocate scarce program resources
 - Randomize phase in as program expands

Quasi-Experimental Design

- Uses statistical techniques, rather than randomized assignment, to create similar groups with and without program
- Benefits:
 - Fewer constraints on implementer activities
 - Fewer perceived ethical concerns
 - Able to analyze more complex interventions

Quasi-Experimental Design (2)

- Potential complications or drawbacks:
 - Requires more complicated analysis and results more difficult to interpret by non-evaluators
 - Weaker method to ensure that groups share no differences aside from program → more prone to biased results

Selecting Appropriate Design

- For many youth programs, logistical and ethical concerns dominate
 - losing full control of the project areas and flexibility in services provided
 - “denying benefits” to vulnerable youth
- Therefore, quasi-experimental is usually chosen
- In certain settings and with implementer buy-in, experimental designs can be used for a stronger degree of evidence

Additional Considerations

- Qualitative methods are crucial to support IAs:
 - Preliminary focus group discussions and desk research to design research
 - Process evaluation to understand ‘why’ the results occurred as they did
- Survey planning, sampling design, and implementation are under-appreciated components

Example: Mushrooms

- NGO interested in improving nutrition and education for children (including youth)
- Work with female caretakers with HIV or other vulnerability factors
- Goal: improve HH income and child well-being by fostering low labor intensity productive activity: mushroom farming
- Method: provide training, input facilitation, and linkages to buyers in capital city

Causal Model

- Outputs: caregivers trained, input chains established, linkages to buyers created
- Outcomes: shift to low-intensity, high-value production, increased time for child care and education, increase in household income, reduce involvement of youth in subsistence farming
- Impact: improved nutrition (food variety, meal frequency) and education (school attendance) for youth

Assessment Design

- Suppose NGO intends to go into 20 villages with this program
- 40 villages in total are suitable based on similar HIV and other vulnerability factors
- Experimental design:
 - select 20 out of the 40 randomly
 - select sample of households in 20 program and 20 non-program villages
 - compare outcomes at the end of the project

Assessment Design (2)

- Potential concerns with experimental design:
 - Implementer may want project villages close together
 - Reduced flexibility to drop unsuccessful villages or expand rapidly to control areas if successful
 - 20 villages are being “denied treatment”

Assessment Design (3)

- Quasi-experimental design:
 - NGO selects 20 villages
 - Use households in matched villages for the comparison group
 - Compare outcomes across groups and time to measure impact

Assessment Design (4)

- Potential Concerns with Quasi-experimental design:
 - NGO may place program in 20 villages according to some criteria (e.g., most vulnerable): needs to be controlled for in the analysis
 - Matching of villages across relevant factors may be difficult

Conclusions

- An impact assessment, properly conducted, can help isolate the effect of livelihood programs on youth
- Two common types of impact assessments have their advantages and drawbacks
- Implementers and evaluators should work together to choose which option is best depending on the specific situation