BROADENING THE RANGE OF DESIGNS AND METHODS FOR IMPACT EVALUATIONS

Description

Tweet

Report of a study commissioned by the Department for International Development. Working Paper 38, April 2012. Available as pdf

(Copy of email) â??All

I would like to draw your attention to this important and interesting report by Elliot Stern and colleagues, commissioned by Evaluation Department and Research Division through DFIDâ??s policy research fund.

One of the main challenges we face in raising standards on evaluation in DFID is choosing the best methods and designs for impact evaluation and helping people to think through the practical choices involved. The central dilemma here is how to move towards more rigorous and scientific methods that are actually feasible and workable for the types of programme DFID and our partners fund. As the paper explains, we need approaches that stand up to academic scrutiny, encompass rigour and replicability and which offer a wide and flexible range of suitable methods in different contexts and a clear basis for selecting the best methods to fit the evaluation questions. One well-publicised and influential route advocated by economists in the US and elsewhere is to shift towards more experimental evaluation designs with a stronger focus on quantitative data. This approach has a major advantage of demonstrating and measuring impact in ways that are replicable and stand up to rigorous academic scrutiny. This has to be key for us in DFID as well. However, for many of our programmes it is not easily implemented and this paper helps us to look towards other approaches that will also pass the test of rigour.

This is clearly a difficult challenge, both theoretically and practically and we were lucky to get an exceptionally strong team of eminent experts in evaluation to review the context, theory and practice in this important area. In my view, what the paper from Elliot Stern and his colleagues provides that is valuable and new includes among other things:

a) An authoritative and balanced summary of the challenges and issues faced by evaluators in choosing methods for impact evaluation, making the case for understanding contributory causes, in which development interventions are seen as part of a package of factors that need to be analysed through impact evaluation.

b) A conceptual and practical framework for comparing different methods and designs that does not avoid the tough issues we confront with the actual types of programmes we fund in practice, as opposed to those which happen to be suitable for randomised control trials as favoured by researchers.

c) Guidance on which methods work best in which situations â?? for example, when experimental methods are the gold standard and when they are not â?? starting from the premise that the nature of the programme and the nature of the evaluation questions should drive the choice of methods and not

the other way around.

We hope you will find the paper useful and that it will help to move forward a debate which has been central in evaluation of international development. Within DFID, we will draw on the findings in finalising our evaluation policy and in providing practical guidance to our evaluation specialists and advisers.

DFID would be interested to hear from those who would like to comment or think they will be able to use and build on this report. Please send any comments to Lina Payne (l-Payne@dfid.gov.uk). Comments will also be welcomed by Professor Elliot Stern (e.stern@lancaster.ac.uk) and his team who are continuing a programme of work in this area.

Regards

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Category

1. Uncategorized

Tags

1. impact evaluations

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