



“WHEN WILL WE EVER LEARN?” CLOSING THE EVALUATION GAP ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESULTS ♦ SEPTEMBER 2005 – JANUARY 2006

Like many organizations, the Center for Global Development has looked for information about the most effective ways to promote social development in low- and middle-income countries. Yet, too often we find that, as a consequence of poor data collection or incomplete analyses, basic knowledge about what kinds of social development programs work is simply lacking.

Our [Evaluation Gap consultation draft](#) documents these limitations, and argues that the most serious gap in evaluation work today is the lack of good *impact evaluations*. While many different kinds of evaluations are needed to document the inputs and outputs of social development programs and to improve operational and managerial performance, impact evaluations are necessary to identify and measure the impact of a social development program.

In a survey that was disseminated between September 2005 and January 2006 via online and e-mail communications, we asked a number of questions about experiences using and conducting impact evaluations in order to test some of our hypotheses about the problem and to solicit reactions to our ideas and recommendations.





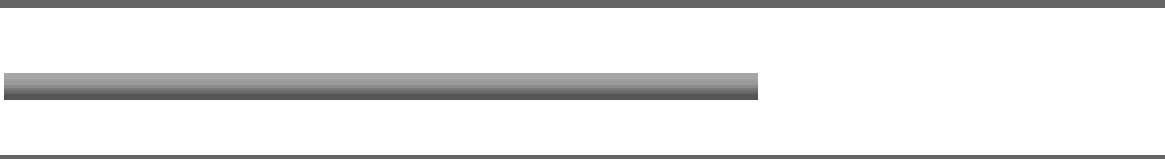
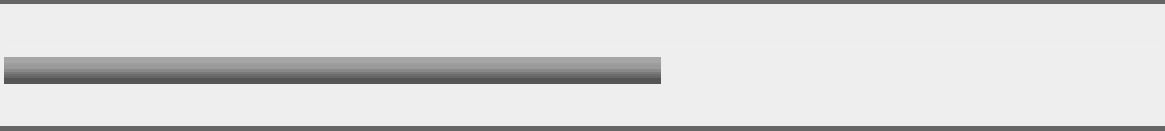
Results from the survey’s 61 respondents have been summarized in the below analysis. Respondents work in research institutes, NGOs, international agencies, and governments. Most reside in North America, Japan and Western Europe, though a few respondents participated from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. The majority of respondents do work in Africa, though all other regions were well-represented.

This snapshot of perceptions and experiences does not suggest methodologically rigorous conclusions, but it does offer useful input into the issues being addressed by the [Evaluation Gap Working Group](#). Input from the survey as well as all other feedback from our consultations will be considered as the report is revised into final form. The Working Group will aim to issue a consensus document by May 2006.

For questions about the survey, feel free to contact Jessica Gottlieb at the Center for Global Development, jgottlieb@cgdev.org.

Knowledge of Existing Impact Evaluations

Respondents were familiar with a wide range of social development programs with impact evaluations:

Conditional cash transfer programs	
Reducing class size or student-teacher ratios	
Job training programs	
Micro-credit programs	
School-based mass treatment of children for intestinal parasites	
Effects of agricultural extension on productivity and income	

Selected social development programs with impact evaluations added by respondents:

- Integrated Management of Childhood Illness
- Disaster relief
- Privatization programs
- Private sector development
- Demographic laboratories in the Gambia and Bangladesh for various public health interventions
- Rural road rehabilitation programs
- Basic education programs
- Provision of education inputs; use of mother tongue for teaching in early years of primary school
- Performance-based or output-based aid for health services
- Food aid programs; food for work programs
- Community nutrition programs
- Community-school grants for school improvement projects
- Community-based family planning services
- Social funds
- International child labor programs

Selected high-quality impact evaluations recommended by respondents:

- IMCI Joint Donor Evaluation of Rwandan Refugee Crisis (2005)
- US Self-Employment Program (experimental design)

- Evaluations of Conditional Cash Transfer programs in Latin America
- Stifel and Alderman's evaluation of a feeding program in Peru (2003)
- Nutrition programs in Argentina
- Morris SS, Flores R, Olinto P, Medina JM. Monetary incentives in primary health care and effects on utilization and coverage of preventive health care interventions in rural Honduras: cluster-randomized trial. Lancet, 2004, Vol.364, No.9450, pp.2030-7.
- Esther Duflo's randomized evaluations
- Microfinance: USAID/AIMS Impact Assessment in Mali (MkKelly/Lippold)
- AusAID's Health Services Support Program in Papua New Guinea
- Cognitive and biomedical impact measurements on children receiving deworming medication
- OED evaluation of BINP nutrition project in Bangladesh

Knowledge of Existing Resources on Social Development Policy

Of the current initiatives dedicated to improving social development, some respondents were relatively familiar with Development Gateway and Measure DHS. However, most were relatively unfamiliar with:

- Development Assistance Committee Evaluation Network
- Development Impact Evaluation Initiative or DIME
- ID-21 (Institute for Development Studies)
- Campbell Collaboration
- Cochrane Collaboration
- Health Metrics Network

Respondents indicated additional initiatives that aim to improve learning about social development policy:

- UN Research Institute for Social Development's (UNRISD) program on Social Policy in a Development Context: <http://www.unrisd.org/unrisd/website/projects.nsf/0/9DBC873B99D850E180256B4F005D6460?OpenDocument>
- Development Ethics: www.development-ethics.org
- Eldis: <http://www.eldis.org/>
- UN Development Program (UNDP): <http://www.undp.org/>
- Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP): <http://www.alnap.org/>
- The Poverty Action Lab at MIT: www.povertyactionlab.com
- Center for International Development (CID): <http://www.cid.harvard.edu/>
- Institute of Development Studies University of Sussex: <http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/>
- Groupe Initiatives: <http://www.groupe-initiatives.org/uk/default.htm>
- Development in Practice (Oxfam group): <http://www.developmentinpractice.org/>
- CIDA's Capacity Development Extranet: <http://web.acdi-cida.gc.ca/cd>
- Enterprise Development Impact Assessment Information Service: <http://www.enterprise-impact.org.uk/index.shtml>
- Microfinance Gateway Impact Assessment Centre: <http://www.microfinancegateway.org/section/resourcecenters/impactassessment/>
- Imp-Act @ IDS: <http://www.ids.ac.uk/impact/index.html>

- USAID Poverty Assessment Tools: http://www.povertytools.org/Project_Documents/project.htm
- Institute for Fiscal Studies at University College London: <http://www.ifs.org.uk/index.php>
- USAID’s Initiative to Revitalize Evaluations: <http://www.dec.org/partners/evalweb/>

Respondents reportedly accessed a variety of different sources for information about social policy:

United Nations websites and publications		
OECD websites and publications		
World Bank websites and publications		
Bilateral donor agency websites and publications		
NGO websites and publications		
University and Research Institute websites and publications		
General web search engines		
Specialized database search sites (e.g. for journals)		

Respondents suggested the following other sources of information:

- Developing country governments
- National evaluation associations in developing countries
- USAID’s Evaluation Database: <http://www.dec.org/>
- Eurodad: www.eurodad.org
- World Bank’s Live Database in Africa: <http://www4.worldbank.org/afr/stats/ldb.cfm>
- World Bank’s Living Standards Measurement Study: <http://www.worldbank.org/lsms/>
- MandE News: <http://www.mande.co.uk/>
- Overseas Development Institute: <http://www.odi.org.uk/>
- InterAction’s Evaluation and Program Effectiveness Working Group: <http://www.interaction.org/evaluation/>

Enduring questions to be answered by impact evaluations

Respondents converged around the following major enduring questions that challenge social policy in developing countries:

- Who is responsible for implementing social policy, and who is most effective?
 - Role of government vs. civil society

- Public vs. private enterprise roles in social change and social policy
- What are the appropriate roles of international aid institutions
- Impact of local religious organizations on improvements in health, education, and poverty
- How does promoting local ownership over the development process improve:
 - mitigating the unexpected consequences of social development efforts?
 - consideration of historical context within a country when creating new social policy?
 - harmonizing aid supply with demand?
- Are the poorest of the poor targeted in development programs?
- How to improve the sustainability of development programs?
- What works in development?
 - Poverty alleviation efforts vs. social development programs
 - Safety net/social security approach of European donors vs. funding realities and capacities of host governments
 - Are successes replicable?
- Concerns about local governments:
 - What is the impact of decentralization?
 - How to eliminate corruption in the political process?
- Sector-specific concerns:
 - How to improve the quality of social services (education, health, etc)?
 - How to effectively deliver health services?
 - How to define the right problem in education?

Suggested literature reviews on enduring questions:

- “Who Counts Reality? Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation: A Literature Review”
<http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/bookshop/wp/Wp70.pdf>
- “Learning in Development Cooperation” http://www.egdi.gov.se/pdf/20002pdf/2000_2.pdf
- Oxfam’s Program Impact Report: <http://www.eldis.org/cf/rdr/rdr.cfm?doc=DOC20049>
- Judith Tendler’s “Good Government in the Tropics”
<http://government.cce.cornell.edu/doc/summary.asp?id=tendler1997>

Missed opportunities for impact evaluation

The following are a few anecdotes among many from respondents answering whether they know of missed opportunities to implement impact evaluations that may have yielded beneficial knowledge:

“Sustainability of immunization programs following polio eradication in Latin America I have a protocol, have applied for funds to do such a study but cannot locate funding. Donors are either amnesic or funding is too tight.”

“Bangladesh, the impact of government policy and NGO's, notably BRAC, on the notable increases in enrollment, and the erasure of urban/rural as well as inequality. Uganda and Malawi, on how removing school fees impacted enrollment, retention and school learning. I think the opportunities were lost because most of the benefits of learning the impacts would accrue to other countries.”

“In nearly all of our work in conflict and post-conflict countries, we have used "urgency" to justify not devoting resources to collecting the necessary information to do an impact analysis, leaving us to start over in the next conflict situation, with only anecdotal ideas of what works.”

“I know of impact evaluations that took place, but were then filed away and the learning was never embedded, which can be worse. This is often because the results of the impact evaluations threaten the interests of powerful people and sections of the community.”

Suggestions for avoiding missed opportunities in the future include:

- Specific instructions from the granting authority that an impact evaluation needed to be proposed and implemented as part of the grant award. Clients are reluctant to spend borrowed funds on evaluations. They feel that the money should be used for program implementation. Moreover, the results of the impact evaluation benefit other countries and, therefore, the cost of evaluations should be spread out among many beneficiaries.
- Improving evaluation expertise of program designers
- Communicate demand for use of impact knowledge by developing countries
- More funds earmarked for international health impact evaluations
- Change the organizational/bureaucratic/career incentives in favor of doing more and more rigorous impact evaluations.
- Seeing impact evaluations not as a cost but as a high return investment for development.
- Political commitment to counteract entrenched interests
- More conscious, up-front planning of the impact evaluation
- Learning from success in other countries
- It should be the policy of donor organizations that appropriate mechanisms be included in projects by implementing partners and that resources be made available for rigorous, independent impact analysis. Development agencies are constantly reinventing the wheel because we rarely know exactly what works and doesn't work and much more importantly, why.
- If donors started to actually pay for performance and not for project expenses, project metrics would be part of every day activities.
- Creating a platform where evaluators might safely post the results of evaluations, i.e. others could use the information, but the evaluator would not be penalized for negative results

Solutions to improving impact evaluations

Respondents indicated that the following actions are important to improving impact evaluations:

- Increased pressure on governments and agencies to measure results
- Training for evaluators
- Increased exchange of existing information
- Timely funds

Respondents added a number of other ways to promote more and better impact evaluations:

- Less ideologically driven agendas
- Consistency with what results mean
- Appropriate career incentives for doing impact evaluations
- More effective aid as in OECD Paris Declaration, starting with government ownership + alignment, harmonization and management for results
- Continuity of the study teams
- Greater desire of governments to get evidence on impact
- Creating incentives within projects and programs to engage impact evaluation

- Better understanding of what motivates people to plan based on evidence, or what motivates them to use "alternative" sources of information
- A "feedback culture"
- Not just to measure results but analyze and publicize them.
- The involvement of development project participants in the impact evaluation, particularly in defining the indicators of success
- 'Safe' & transparent platforms for posting information
- Time afforded to carry impact evaluations.

Most respondents thought the following actions were very important to improving learning about social development (in order of importance):

1. Encouraging developing countries to conduct evaluations
2. Coordinating research among agencies
3. Creating a new fund for impact evaluation

Participants proposed alternative ways to do this:

- Changing career incentives in major development institutions to favor impact evaluations
- Making sure that multilateral development banks provide evaluations as a free good in loans
- Disseminating information and sharing research among stakeholders; and promoting feedback
- Increasing pressure on governments and agencies to measure results and be more honest, transparent and accountable
- Increasing media coverage of development issues
- Encouraging timelines that are amenable to impact evaluations

Critiques of the CGD proposal for improving impact evaluation

The majority of respondents did not like the word "Club" to describe a collective independent evaluation organization. Some of the reasons are as follows:

- Implies exclusivity ; Denotes elitism ; Too informal

Respondents preferred:

1. Network
2. Initiative
3. Center
4. Group
5. Program
6. Facility

Other recommendations include:

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| • Consortium | • Alliance |
| • Conference | • Union |
| • Working Group | • Organization |
| • Partnership | • Hub |