



Challenges to Impact Evaluation: Solutions for IFAD

Paul Winters and Alessandra Garbero

Strategic Planning and Impact Assessment Division

International Fund for Agricultural Development

Background

- IFAD9
 - Commitment to enhance IFAD results management system through an “**enhanced thrust on impact evaluation**”
- Results Measurement Framework 2013-2015
 - Outreach: **90 m** people received IFAD projects
 - Impact: **80 m** people moved out of poverty (2010-2015)
- Objective of the impact evaluation agenda
 - Measurement of poverty dynamics by 2015 through **rigorous** impact evaluations
- Overall logic
 - Triangulation across methods & data sources

IFAD9 : Official studies

1) Ex-ante designed evaluations (experimental)

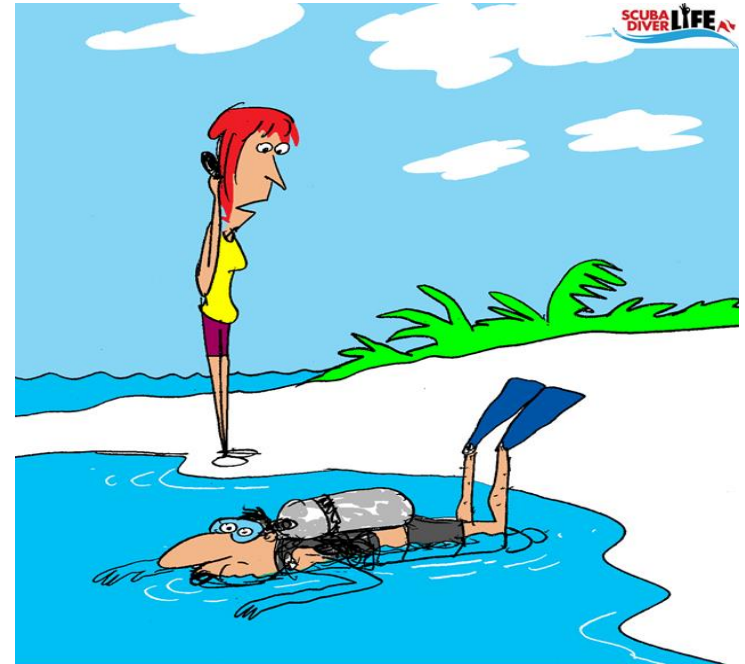
- **Six** project evaluations using randomized control trials (RCTs)
- Designed ex-ante at project inception
- Data collection at baseline/mid-term and completion
- Medium to longer- term → results 2018-2020

2) Ex-post evaluations (non-experimental -“Deep Dives”)

- **24** project evaluations **& 1** multiple projects evaluation (China)
- Evaluation designs and data collection done at completion
- Potential problem with measurement and identification (lack of baseline, recall bias, unreliable results)
- Short-term → results by 2015

IFAD9 : Additional studies

- **14 in-house impact assessments with observational data (Shallow Dives)**
- 5 qualitative studies part of 25 ex-post evaluations
- Content analysis on ~50 Project completion reports
- Systematic review: Impact of similar interventions
- Meta-analysis of the impact of agricultural research on poverty
- Methodological work



“He’ll have to call you back. He’s in the middle of a shallow dive.”

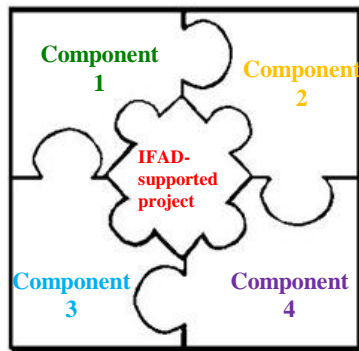
Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs)

- **Selection criteria: Purposive** (6 out of 30 new projects)
- **Research questions:**
 - Innovative ways to package **information** to foster adoption
 - **Type of contractual arrangement** to increase smallholders' market power, food security, marketed surplus and net returns
 - **Cost effective mechanisms** to incentivize smallholders
 - Cost effective **Integrated Soil Fertility Management**
- **Status: RCT currently in design phase**



RCTs: Challenges

Balance between researchers interest and project specific relevance



IFAD projects and innovation potential: complex interventions (choice of subcomponent)

Evaluation design vs. project readiness



Commitment of the project staff to implementation strategy and continuous dialogue
Government buy-in

RCTs – potential solutions

Project selection: Requires collaboration and identification of research and thematic areas of common interest

Striking a balance: Bring in interested stakeholders earlier in the process

Design complexity: Choose most relevant and strategic sub-component

Evaluation design vs. project readiness: Timing is everything

Implementation strategy: Generate incentives and embed RCT in the implementation strategy

Dialogue: Continued interaction between implementers and researchers

Government buy-in: Mutually agreed upon by all parties at onset

Ex post non-experimental evaluations

- **Selection**

- 127 projects with data sets in July 2013
- Randomization (stratified) and purposive sampling of projects

- **Methodology**

- Mixed methods designs focusing on **accountability** (poverty impact) and **learning** (intended & unintended impacts)
- Indicators: Poverty proxies, food security, resilience, gender empowerment
- Questionnaires: Core modules (impact dimensions) and project-specific modules (intermediate outcomes)
- Process guidelines and TORs

Ex post evaluations: Challenges

- Projects not designed for evaluations
 - No comparison group
 - No baseline data
 - No clear beneficiary lists, etc.
- Potential biases difficult to address ex post
 - Self selection bias
 - Program selection bias
- Issues of timing of evaluation and project timing
- Concern over contamination and spillover effects
- Other issues noted with RCTs

Additional studies

- In-house impact assessments – “Shallow dives”
 - Secondary data such as DHS, LSMS, Censuses, MICS
 - Challenges and second-best solutions
 - 1) Lack of money metric poverty indicators → asset based
 - 2) Lack of true panel data for measuring poverty dynamics → Synthetic panels
 - 3) Lack of comparison groups → geographical identification of treatment and comparison areas through project documentation plus matching

Additional studies (cont')

- Qualitative Studies – Content Analysis
 - Examination of reports from 50 projects
 - Claims on income gains common but not poverty reduction or increased resilience
- Systematic reviews and meta-analysis
 - Examination and analysis of existing related studies/data
 - On-going
- Methodological work
 - Inventory/ranking of Project Datasets, analytical framework, upgraded Impact Assessment Guidelines, measurement and modelling of resilience, poverty dynamics with synthetic panels
 - High frequency data collection, remote sensing, nationally consistent scenarios on the impact of different policies, etc.

Conclusions

- **IFAD9 IE agenda as a transition towards:**

- Better corporate measurement of “development effectiveness”
- Enhanced evaluability standards of IFAD-supported projects
- Development of methods and survey instruments
- Upgrading the M&E system → “impact evaluation” ready!
- Appropriate data infrastructure for in-house analyses and rigorous impact evaluations

- **Enhancing institutional capacity**

- Analytical capacity established in-house: “Impact Assessment Cluster” within SPA
- Capacity building: technical support and improved dialogue with in-house and field-based operations

Early recommendations for IFAD10

- 1. Embed impact evaluation design in project design**
 - Development effectiveness at entry
 - Experiments where possible
 - Non-experimental approaches if necessary
- 2. Careful ex-ante selection of projects to be evaluated**
 - Enhanced external validity
- 3. Mixed methods**
 - Qualitative, quantitative, cost analysis, process evaluation...
- 4. Systematic reviews and meta-analysis**
 - Use of existing evidence to inform project design
- 5. Institutional strengthening in impact evaluation**
 - Training of operational staff in evaluation practice
- 6. Identifying clearer financing mechanisms**
 - Finance embedded in projects