Lessons from the field: making impact evaluations work on the ground.

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Intervention?

• Total financial inclusion; loan to women and debt-swapping;

• Target: Andhra Pradesh poor and indebted HH through SHG in 33000 villages
Theory of change?

Total financial inclusion project

SHG are formed

Debt swapping intervention implemented

Household pay all debts

Household become more productive and increase income and savings

HH increase consumption expenditure and asset

HH experiences a better livelihood and welfare

Rural poverty elimination

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HH experiences a better livelihood and welfare

Rural poverty elimination
Evaluation design?

- A randomized design
- Effect of debt relief on well-being of rural poor of in India

- Effect of debt relief on well-being of rural poor of in Andhra Pradesh (India)
- Before intervention, beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries are identified
- 4 strata; 10 Mandal; 3 Panchayat; 10 households

- A research assistant will be appointed and stay in the field during the project

A strong proposal that didn’t make it on the ground.
What happened on the ground?
Intervention implementation

Before evaluation baseline

- Debt swapping program was opened to any eligible SHG in any panchayat, across all Mandals

- SHG members were requested by Bankers to be from the same caste

- SHG are eligible for debt swapping after 3 years of activities

- SHG members can apply for debt swapping only one time (with ceiling)

- etc.
ToC and evaluation design?

- The *theory of change* missed Key underlying assumptions;
- Identification and sampling strategy were a fiasco;
- Evaluation *timeline did not match* that of programme implementation;
- Evaluation *timeline far behind schedule*;
- Evaluation *staff not on the ground* as planned.
A matter of Difference in priorities?

- Policy makers
  - Consider political interests
    - Pressure from civil society, opposition;
    - Donors pressure;
    - Future election at stake.

- Researchers
  - Be consistent with design
    - Rigorous identification of treatment and comparison
    - Treatment to remain the same for each group
    - Be consistent with timing

- Implementing agency
  - Get it done at any cost
    - Be rigorous but realistic
    - Change project implementation rules after midterm review
    - Donors are watching
    - Under political pressure

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Lessons learnt: **Before** implementation

- ex-ante design
- Informative research
- Know the intervention and stakeholders
- Participatory approach to develop a theory of change
- Design a pre analysis plan
- Communicate evaluation design to implementing agency
- Agreement on research questions and sampling method
- operational training to M&E staff on evaluation
Lessons learnt: *During* implementation

- Appoint an evaluation field coordinator
- Regular feedback to implementing agency
- Take part into project monitoring meetings and have access to project reports
- Keep an eye on timeline of program activities
- Data collection firms need monitoring
- Data collection firms should work with implementing agency

Remember
Lessons learnt: *After* implementation

- Maintain the momentum with implementing agency to address odd findings
- Consider a report format for policymakers; different from academic audience
- Dissemination of findings should also target practitioners and not only policy makers
THANK YOU