Assessing the impact of humanitarian relief assistance: a challenge and an opportunity

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What is an impact evaluation?

The holy grail statement:

An xxxx programme caused a 7% (xx%) increase (amount of change and direction of change) in the income (some measure) of the included population.

We need comparison groups to know what would have happened in the absence of the programme.

Photo: Rong Shoujun / Xinhua Press / Corbis (for the pile of junk)
So in fact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td><img src="before_project.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="after_project.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
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<td></td>
<td><img src="before_comparison.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="after_comparison.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
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More than one observation required per group to avoid bias.
In humanitarian assistance

- There is a big gap between the requirement and availability of funds.
  - In 2011, shortage of funds amounted to $3.4 billion

Critical that we know if programmes are working, how much, why and under what circumstances.
How can impact evaluations help?

- Magnitude of change? *How large was the impact? For how long?*
- Implementation science: What *amount* of assistance & with *what frequency* is it best delivered?
- Best delivery option e.g. cash or kind?
How can impact evaluations help?

- *What* difference did my agency make? Why?
- Could it have been done in a *more cost-effective* manner?
- Was there a larger impact on some groups than others?
LESSON 1: IMPACT EVALUATIONS CAN HELPFULLY SUPPLEMENT OTHER EVALUATION EFFORTS IN HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE
Impact evaluations can be difficult!

- Need for speed
- Imperfect and absent data
- Multiplicity of actors
- High co-variability
- Ethics

Photo from Progress Report ‘Hunger Under The Cloudless Skies’
LESSON 2: IMPACT EVALUATIONS REQUIRE CAPACITY AND EFFORT BUT HELP REMOVE BIASES IN MEASUREMENT
3. Taking stock

- Only 39 impact evaluations
  - 29 HAD a theory of change.

- But
  - 23 did not have any balance tests
  - 29 did not have any power analysis (to show confidence in results)
  - Only 5 discuss ethical concerns.
RESULT 3: THERE ARE FEW HIGH QUALITY EVALUATIONS OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE. THERE IS HIGH NEED.

LESSON 3: THERE ARE FEW HIGH QUALITY EVALUATIONS OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE. BUT THERE IS HIGH NEED.
Hypothetical Case Study
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment type</th>
<th>Agency on the ground</th>
<th>Sample size (hhs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General food distribution</td>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>5% min. detectable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUSF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General food distribution + RUSF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethics: Factorial design – no one is excluded from food distribution.

Data: Not very large data collection effort.

Time: In Chad, it took 18 months.
Lesson 4

Impact evaluations are possible in humanitarian assistance.

– They do not make aid recipients worse off.
– They can help in better planning.
– They do not require long periods of time or large datasets.

Photo: Claire Pismont (for the second, landfill looking picture)
Thank you.

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