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Towards Closing the Evaluation Gap: Lessons from Three Recent Impact Evaluations in Latin America and the Caribbean

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Objectives

- **Identify barriers that prevent rigorous impact evaluations in Latin America and the Caribbean**
- **Outline key practices for future impact evaluations in the region**

Designs for Impact Evaluations

- Rigor is high validity, accuracy, and reliability of impacts
- Randomized control trial
- Regression discontinuity
- Matched comparison
- Non-matched comparison
- Simple pre-post

Most rigorous



Least rigorous

The Evaluation Gap

- **Limited demand and supply of rigorous impact evaluations**
- **Gradual increase in demand**
 - Millennium Challenge Corporation
 - World Bank and regional development banks
 - National governments
- **Limited increase in supply**
 - PROGRESA-Oportunidades in Mexico and Bolsa Família in Brazil
 - Vocational education in Colombia
 - Pre-school education in Chile

MCC Compact (El Salvador)

- ***Education Intervention:***
 - Improvement of secondary schools, a post-secondary center, and scholarships targeted to poor youths and adults in the Northern Zone
- ***Productive Development Intervention:***
 - Technical and material assistance, loans, and guarantees targeted to micro and small producers in the Northern Zone
- **Financing: Conditional grant from MCC**
- ***Implementation: FOMILENIO***
- ***Evaluation mandate: Rigorous designs, according to feasibility***

PATH (Jamaica)

- ***Intervention:*** Cash transfers to participant households (conditional transfers for children; unconditional transfers for adults)
- ***Target population:*** Poor children, adults, and elderly throughout the nation
- ***Financing:*** Loan from the World Bank
- ***Implementation:*** Ministry of Labor and Social Security
- ***Evaluation mandate:*** Support for a rigorous design

Hábitat Program (Mexico)

- ***Intervention:*** Funds allocated to municipalities to support urban, social and community development
- ***Target population:*** Marginalized families in cities or metropolitan areas
- ***Financing:*** Interamerican Development Bank
- ***Implementation:*** Secretaría de Desarrollo Social
- ***Evaluation mandate:*** Not defined

Barriers Are Multidimensional

1. Lack of support for rigorous designs

- Skepticism about practicality of random assignment
- Implementation incentives misaligned with evaluation

2. Ambitious and unrealistic schedules for designing and implementing programs

- Evaluation started after the program was launched
- Urgency to get the program started without accounting for the evaluation design

Barriers Are Multidimensional

3. Little or no early planning nor interest to build on lessons learned

- Unplanned pilots
- Potential interference with evaluation

4. Data limitations

- Availability of only secondary data
- Infeasibility of collecting independent primary data

Key Practices Are Evolving

- 1. Maintaining early communication with key decision makers**
 - Identify key stakeholders
 - Propose range of feasible designs
 - Identify barriers and propose alternatives
 - Set stage for future coordination
- 2. Confirming that the evaluation will answer key questions**
 - Inform implementers how and when the evaluation will answer the questions

Key Practices Are Evolving

- 3. Choosing designs that fit implementation plans with minimal modifications**
 - PATH evaluation
- 4. Limiting discussion of the design's technical aspects to a group of experts**
- 5. Ensuring that all parties understand the evaluation's legal framework**
 - MCC Compact evaluation

Rigor vs. Feasibility of the Final Design

For evaluators there is tension between:

- the rigor of the design
- the financial, logistical and political limitations of implementing the design
 - » PATH evaluation
 - » Hábitat evaluation
 - » MCC Compact evaluation

Skills Required for Leading a Successful Evaluation

- In-depth understanding of each evaluation's context
- Detailed knowledge of evaluation methodology
- Excellent communication and negotiation skills
- A lot of flexibility

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