Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab Executive Training: Evaluating Social Programs
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What is Impact Evaluation And When Should You Do It?

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Overview

- Why impact evaluation?

- Objective of evaluation

- A model of change to evaluate

- Different types of evaluation

- Evaluation and cost benefit analysis

- When to do an impact evaluation

- Putting it all together: developing an evaluation strategy

- Learning from impact evaluations

Why impact evaluation

- J-PAL, this course focus on impact evaluation: why?

- Surprisingly little hard evidence on what work

- Decisions often based more on emotion than evidence

- Can do more with given budget with better evidence

- If people knew money was going on programs that worked, help increase pot for anti poverty programs

Aid optimists

"I have identified the specific investments that are needed [to end poverty]; found ways to plan and implement them; [and] shown that they can be affordable."

Jeffrey Sachs, End of Poverty

Aid pessimists

"After $2.3 trillion over 5 decades, why are the desperate needs of the world's poor still so tragically unmet?

Isn't it finally time for an end to the impunity of foreign aid?"

Bill Easterly
The White Man's Burden

Objective of evaluation

- Accountability
  - Did we do what we said we were going to do?
  - Did we have a positive impact on people's lives?

- Lesson learning
  - Particular programs do or do not work
  - What is the most effective route to achieve a certain outcome?
  - Similarities in strategies that are successful, for example, in changing behavior, even across fields?

- Reduced poverty through more effective programs

What makes a good evaluation?

- Answers an important question

- Answers it in an unbiased and definitive way

- To do that you need a model/theory of change
  - Who is the target?
  - What are their needs?
  - What is the program seeking to change?
  - What is the precise program or part of program being evaluated?

Example of model: provision of textbooks

Needs	Logical Framework				Long-term Goal
	Input	Output	Outcome	Impact	
Poor children in Busia district Kenya with low learning, low incomes, few books, can't take books home, hard to learn.	NGO purchases books.	Books delivered to and used by schools.	Children use books and are able to study better.	Higher test scores	Higher Income
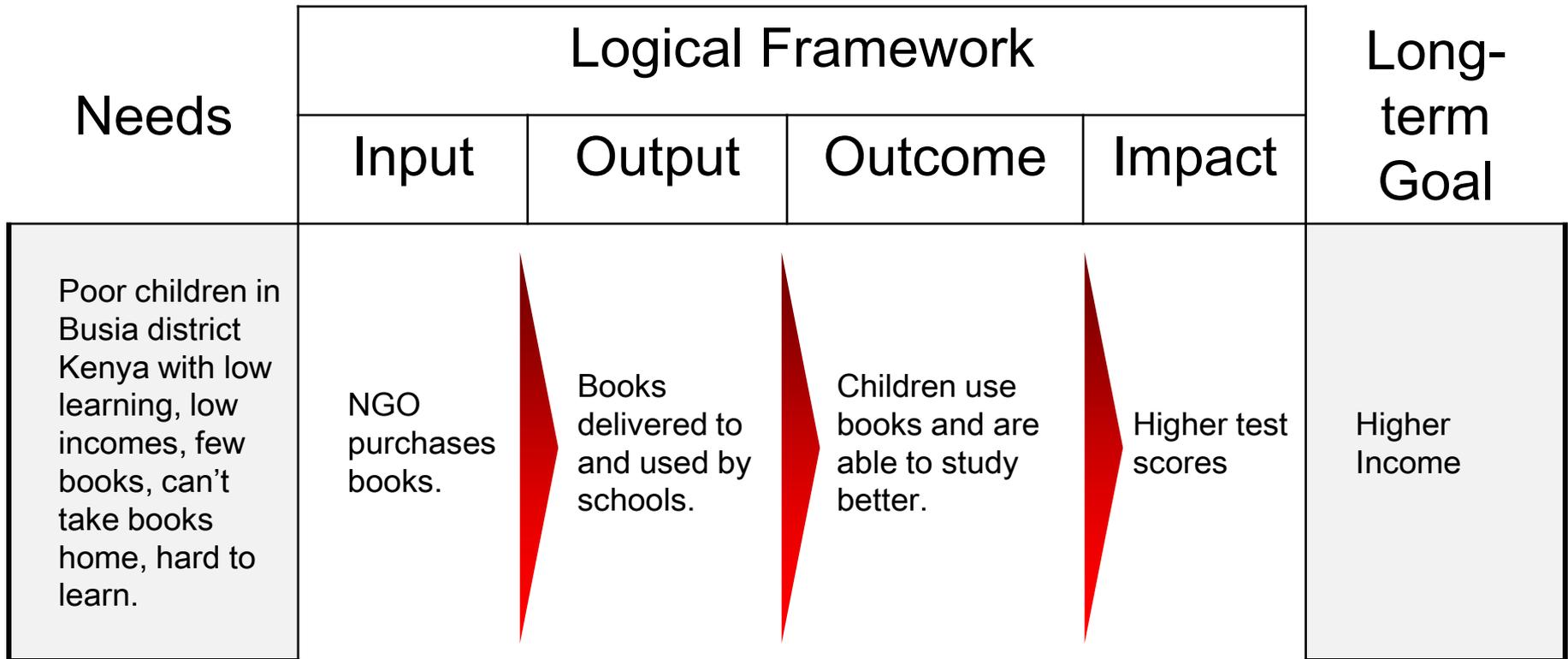
Different types of evaluation

- Needs assessment

- Process evaluation

- Impact evaluation

- Review

- Cost-benefit analysis

Needs assessment

- Who is the targeted population?
    - All children? Those with the lowest scores?

- What's the nature of the problem being solved?
    - How will textbooks solve it?

- How does the service fit the environment?
    - Do teachers feel comfortable using them?
    - How does this fit the curriculum?

Needs Assessment Should Provide

- Clear sense of target population
  - Students who are not responding to other inputs
  - Students who are falling behind

- Clear sense of need program will fill
  - What are teachers lacking?
  - How to deliver? How much? What are potential barriers?

- Clear articulation of program benefits
  - Is a wrong being righted? Is a right being expanded?

- Clear sense of alternatives
  - Is this the most effective, efficient, cost-effective method of meeting teacher/student needs?

Process evaluation

- Are the services being delivered?
    - Money is being spent
    - Textbooks are reaching the classroom, being used

- Can same service be delivered at lower cost?
    - Substituting expensive inputs with cheaper ones

- Are the services reaching the right population?
    - Are the books reaching students? Which students?

- Are the clients satisfied with service?
    - Teachers', students' response to teaching method

Impact evaluation

- The program happened, how did it change lives?

- What does ToC say we might expect to change?
  - Intermediate indicators
  - Final outcomes

- Primary: did textbooks cause children to learn more

- Also distributional questions
  - Who learned more

How impact differs from process?

- When we answer a process question, we need to describe what happened.
  - This can be done from reading documents, interviewing people, admin records, etc.

- When we answer an impact question, we need to compare what happened to what would have happened without the program
  - There are various ways to get at this, but all of them have in common that they need to re-create what did not happen.

Linking back to objectives for evaluation

- Accountability
    - Did we do what we said we were going to do?
        - Process evaluation determines whether books delivered and used
    - Did we have a positive impact on people's lives?
        - Impact evaluation of link between books and test scores

- Lesson learning
    - Particular programs do or do not work
    - Impact evaluations of similar programs in different situations
    - What is the most effective route to achieve a certain outcome?
    - Cost benefit analysis comparing several programs
    - Similarities in strategies that are successful, for example, in changing behavior, even across fields?
   - Linking results back to theory

- Reduced poverty through more effective programs
    - Future decisions based on lessons learned

- Solid reliable impact evaluations are the building blocks for more general lesson learning

Evaluation and cost-benefit analysis

- Needs assessment gives you the metric for defining the cost/benefit ratio

- Process evaluation gives you the costs of all the inputs

- Impact evaluation gives you the quantified benefits

- Identifying alternatives allows for comparative cost benefit
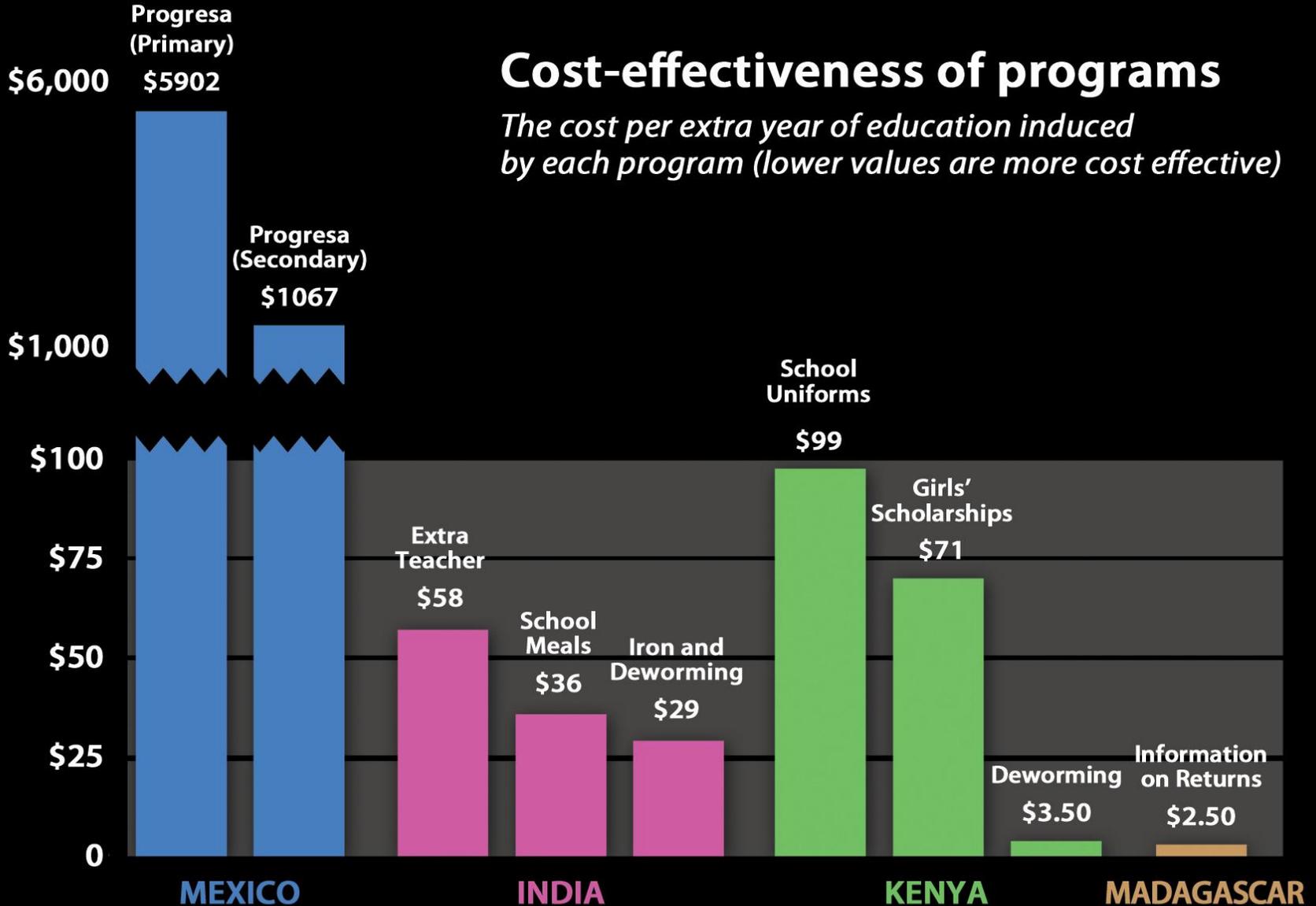
When to do an impact study?

- When there is an important question you want/need to know the answer to
  - Common program with not much evidence
  - Uncertainty about which alternative strategy to use
  - Key question that underlies a lot of different programs
  - About to roll out a big new program, important design questions

- Timing--not too early and not too late:
  - Test once basic kinks have been taken out
  - Before rolled out on a major scale

- Program is representative not gold plated

- Time, expertise, and money to do it right

- Develop an evaluation plan to prioritize

Developing an evaluation strategy

- Determine key questions for your organization.

- How many can you answer
  - from existing rigorous impact evaluations?
  - from improved process evaluation?

- Select top priority questions for impact evaluation.

- Establish plan for answering them
  - taking advantage of roll out of new programs
  - set up experimental sites

- With key questions answered from impact evaluations, process evaluation can give your overall impact.

- A few high quality impact studies are worth more than many poor quality ones.

- If you ask the right question, more likely to use it.

Learning from impact evaluations

- Learning from a single study:
  - Did the program work in this context?
  - Should we expand it to a similar populations?

- Learning from an accumulation of studies
  - Did the same program work in a range of different contexts (e.g. deworming in India and Kenya)
  - Did some variation of the same program work differently (e.g. conditional vs. unconditional cash transfer)?
  - Did the same mechanism seem to be present in different areas (e.g. impact of user fees in education, health, etc.)

- We learn more if place each evaluation inside a general learning strategy, helps us be explicit about
  - questions we want to answer
  - hypotheses we want to test