

Barriers to Evidence Informed Decision making
Towards Globally Informed, Locally Grounded Policymaking

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What are the barriers to Evidence Informed policy / decisions?

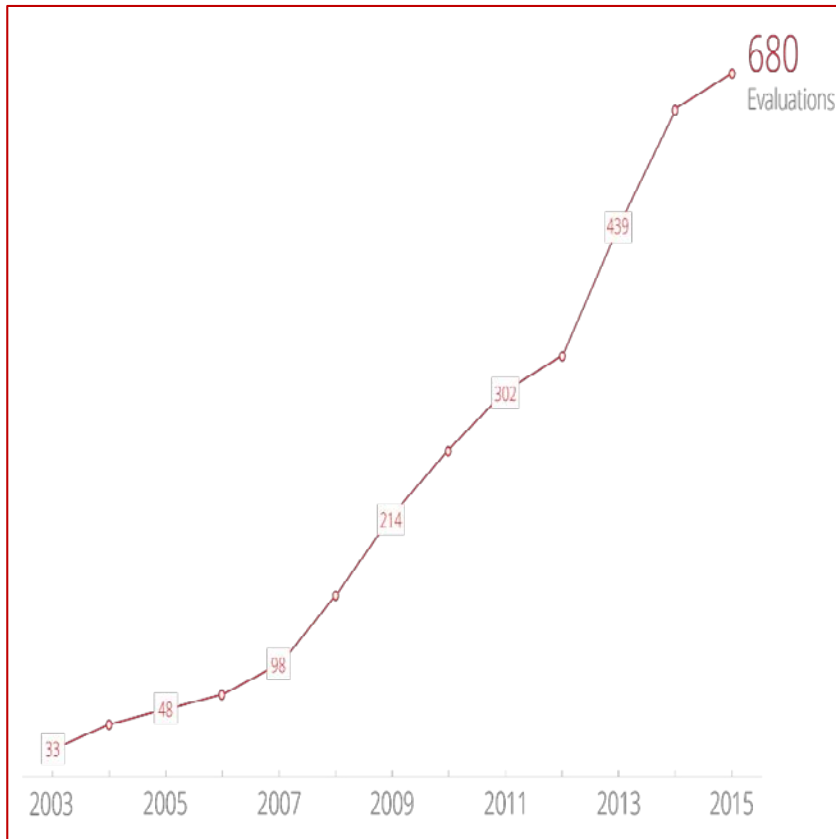
1. Lack of Demand

- Political expediency
- Time pressure
- Technical constraints
- Administrative limitations
- Ideology
- Instincts
- Inertia
- Ignorance
- Initiative (or lack of)

2. Lack of Supply

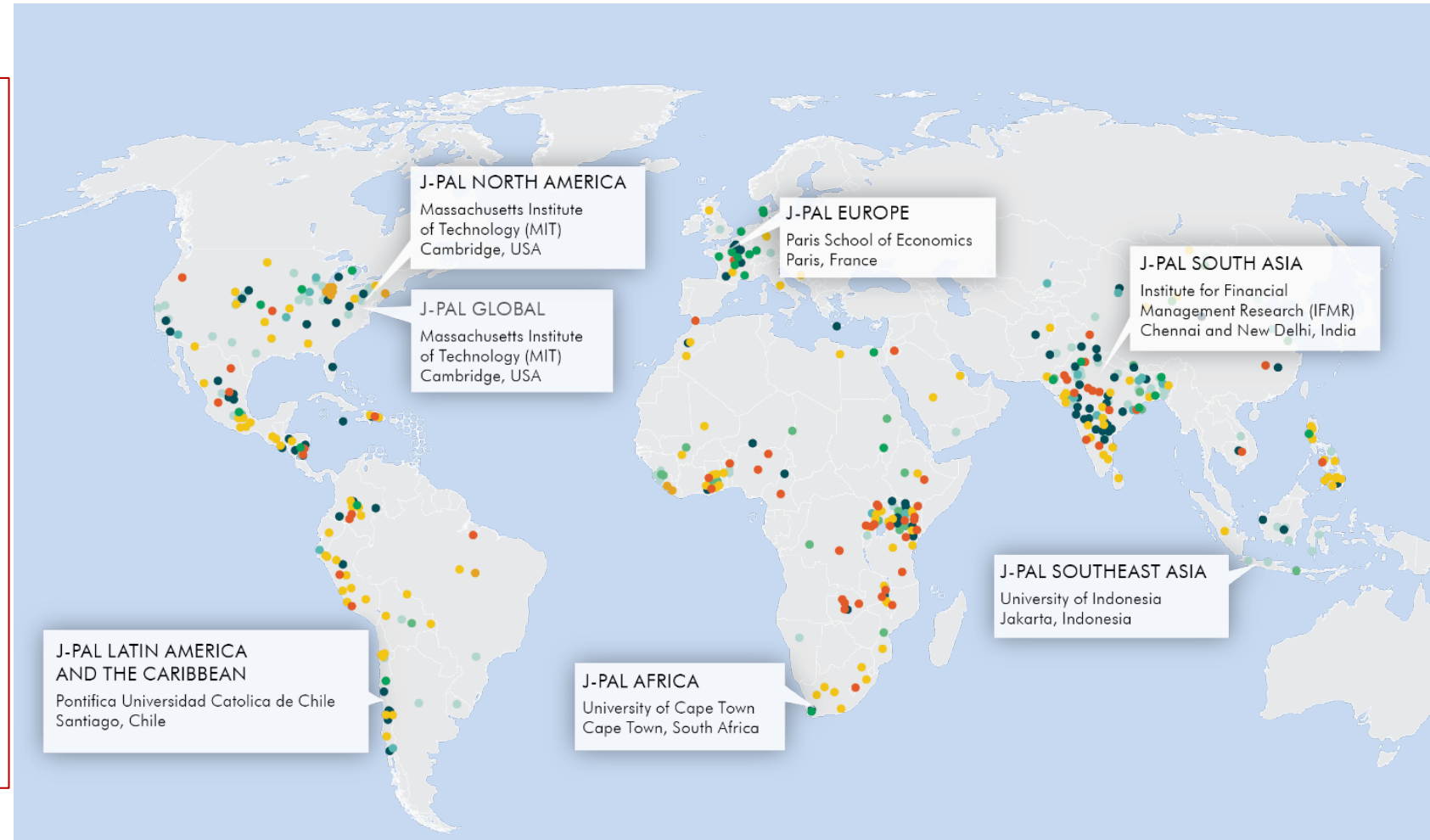
- No evidence
- Evidence *not rigorous*
- Rigorous evidence *too technical* to understand
- Rigorous evidence in an understandable format is *not accessible*
- **Accessible, understandable, rigorous evidence, but *not from my context***

Dramatic increase in the number of rigorous impact evaluations in developing countries in last two decades (and in JPAL/IPA offices)

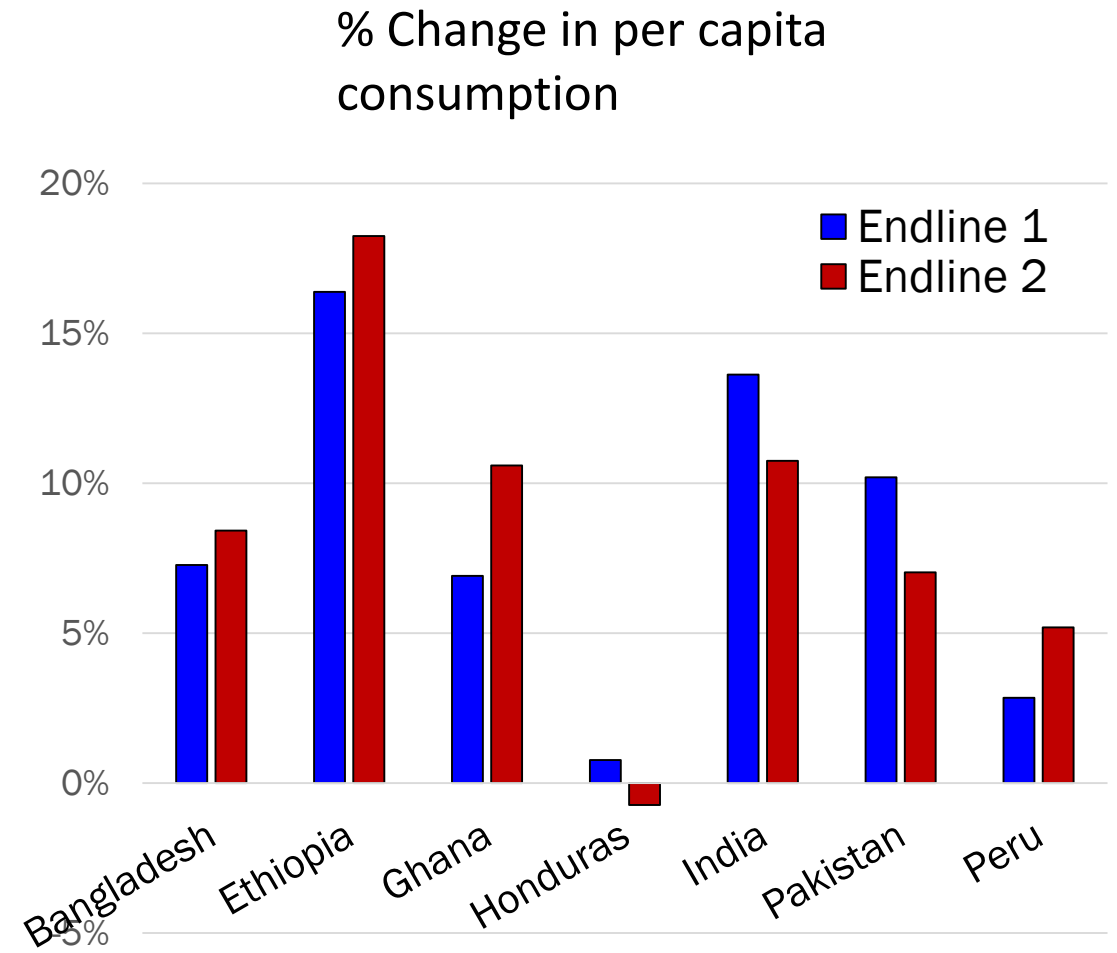


Legend

- | | | | |
|---------------|------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| ● Agriculture | ● Education | ● Finance & Microfinance | ● Labor Markets |
| ● Crime | ● Environment & Energy | ● Health | ● Political Economy & Governance |



Many of these studies have been replicated in different contexts as well
– e.g. CCTs and Targeting the Ultra Poor (TUP) Program...



... or Seven Evaluations on Microcredit

TABLE 2 SUMMARY OF MICROCREDIT'S IMPACT ON VARIOUS OUTCOMES

Outcome	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ethiopia	India	Mexico	Mongolia	Morocco	Philippines
Business ownership	↑	—	—	—	↑	—	—
Business revenue	—	—	—	↑	—	↑	—
Business inventory/assets	↑	<i>no data</i>	↑	<i>no data</i>	↑	↑	—
Business investment/costs	—	—	↑	↑	<i>no data</i>	↑	↓
Business profit	—	—	—	—	—	↑	—
Household income	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Household spending/consumption	—	↓	—	↓	↑	—	—
Social well-being	—	—	—	↑	—	—	↓

J-PAL and many others create Policy Publications that summarize evidence. Searchable online databases and regional staff make access easy

BULLETIN

POLICY BULLETIN [SEPTEMBER 2015]

ABDUL LATIF JAMEEL
Poverty Action Lab
TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO ACTION



BUILDING STABLE LIVELIHOODS FOR THE ULTRA-POOR

A multifaceted livelihood program that provided ultra-poor households with a productive asset, training, regular coaching, access to savings, and consumption support led to large and lasting impacts on their standard of living across a diverse set of contexts and implementing partners.



DANIEL JANARDAN

Key Results of the Graduation Approach:

A holistic livelihood program targeted at the ultra-poor helped them shift into more stable self-employment that increased their standard of living both two years after the productive asset transfer, and three years after the asset transfer—a year or more after all program activities ended.

The Graduation approach caused broad and lasting economic impacts. Pooled data from six sites show Graduation households' consumption increased 5.8 percent relative to the comparison group two years after the asset transfer. Graduation households' consumption increased 7.3 percent in Bangladesh, 16.4 percent in Ethiopia, 6.9 percent in Ghana, 13.6 percent in India, and 10.2 percent in Pakistan relative to the comparison group, though there was no impact on consumption in Honduras or Peru. Households experienced similar improvements in food security, asset holdings, and savings. Most positive impacts on participating households were consistent three years after the asset transfer—one year after all program activities ended.

The improvements in well-being were mostly the result of increases in self-employment income. Injecting a combination of productive assets and relevant skills training led to an increase in basic entrepreneurial activities, primarily concentrated on livestock and activities like petty trade.

Graduation led to some improvements in psychosocial well-being. Happiness, stress, women's empowerment, and some measures of physical health and political engagement improved for participants at some sites. The effects on women's empowerment and physical health were no longer statistically significant one year after all program activities ended.

These effects were consistent across multiple contexts and implementing partners. The program's positive results on economic well-being, which range from very economically significant to moderately so, are not driven by any one country.

ABDUL LATIF JAMEEL
Poverty Action Lab

TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO ACTION

English | Español | Français

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FEATURED EVALUATIONS

Graduating the Ultra-Poor in India



Recent support for livelihoods programs has spurred interest in evaluating whether comprehensive "big push" interventions may allow for a sustainable transition to self-employment and a higher standard of living. To test this theory, in six countries researchers evaluated a multi-faceted approach aimed at improving long term income of the ultra-poor. They found that the approach had long-lasting economic and self-employment impacts and that the long-run benefits, measured in terms of household expenditures, outweighed their up-front costs. This evaluation summarizes

the India site, which had similar effects as the other successful sites.

Researchers: [Abhijit Banerjee](#), [Esther Duflo](#), [Jeremy Shapiro](#)

[School Choice in Andhra Pradesh, India](#)

But still unlikely that evidence policymakers seek would have been replicated in many contexts

- In fact unlikely to be even one rigorous evaluation of precisely the program policy makers want to introduce in exactly same location
- How should we respond?
 - Wait to act until there is more evidence?
 - Always do new rigorous evaluations before introducing in new context?
 - Only use less rigorous, but local evidence?
 - Only use from other countries if at least X replications or if replicated in a similar enough context?
 - *Or can we consider a framework that allows us to use results from even one rigorous study from another context?*

Not reasonable to wait to use evidence only if generated in that very narrow context

- We should do more replications of RCTs of similar programs in different contexts but there are limits
- Rigorous impact evaluations are hard to do well and we underutilize their potential if we only learn about the precise program and context they evaluate
- Do Policy makers ever have 100% certainty?
 - Basu (2014): *tomorrow is a new context*
 - Do we think that rigorous evidence from another context, carefully interpreted is **likely** to be worse than no global evidence?
 - Do we know enough that there is a reasonable chance this will work?

We need a more structured way of thinking about using evidence –
a move towards a theory-based approach to evidence

- Evidence from a single RCT is only one part of the puzzle
- Understanding local needs, and informal and formal institutions allows us to assess if we can apply that evidence to this context or need new RCT
- We use this RCT to adjust our “priors” which are based on theory, descriptive work and other empirical evidence – not an RCT vs. descriptive debate
- Putting evidence into a theoretical overview allows more efficient use of different forms of evidence than “black box”
 - allows us to be more precise about what a “similar context” is
- Number of RCTs is less important – even one study is invaluable if the results complement our descriptive work, theory and other empirical evidence

Case Study: Rigorous Evidence on Increasing Immunization Rates in India

The Context

Very low rates of full immunization among children in rural India

The Intervention

- An NGO-based program to increase immunization rates in rural India
- Addressing *supply*: regular monthly immunization camps with nurse
- Addressing *demand*: 1 kg lentil for every vaccination, set of plates on completing full immunization schedule



[Banerjee et al. 2010](#)

Incentives for Immunization had a large impact and were cost effective

FIGURE 2: PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN AGED 1-3 YEARS FULLY IMMUNIZED BY TREATMENT STATUS

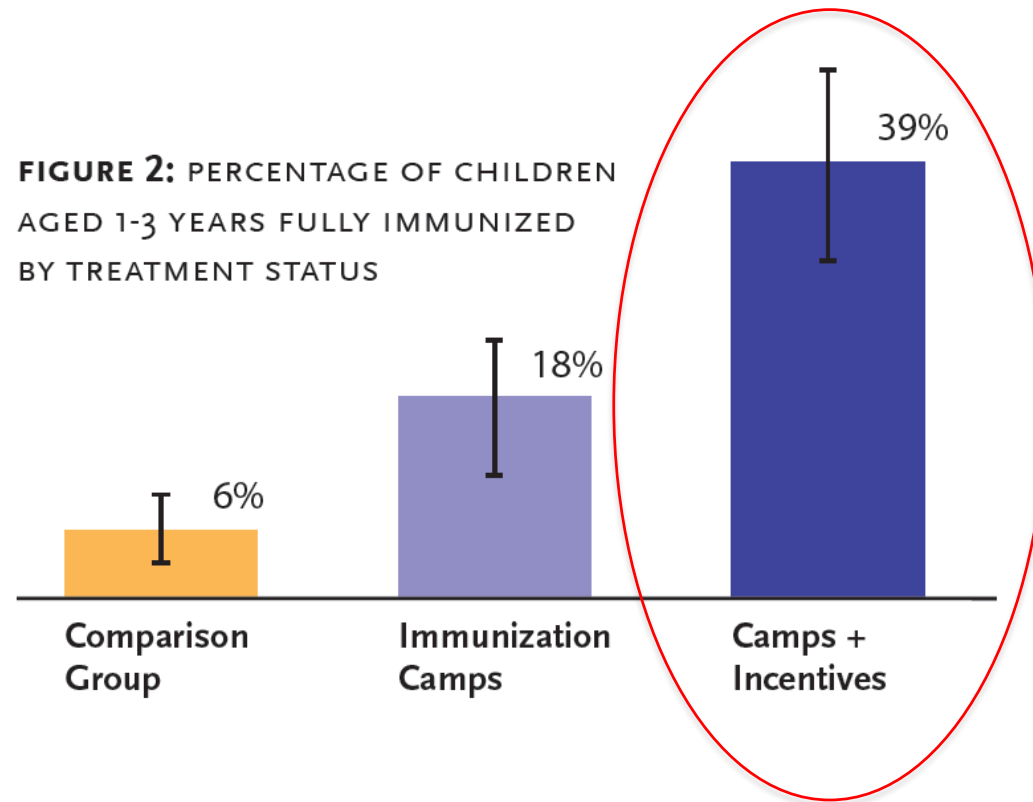
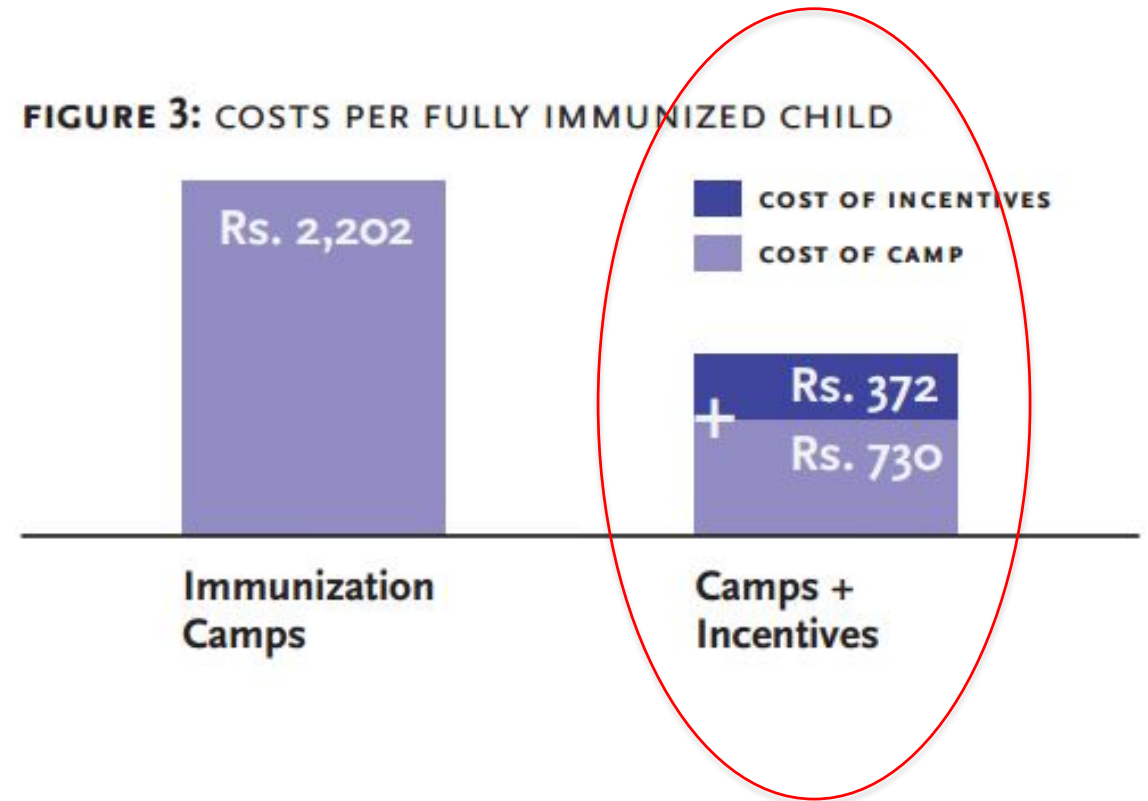
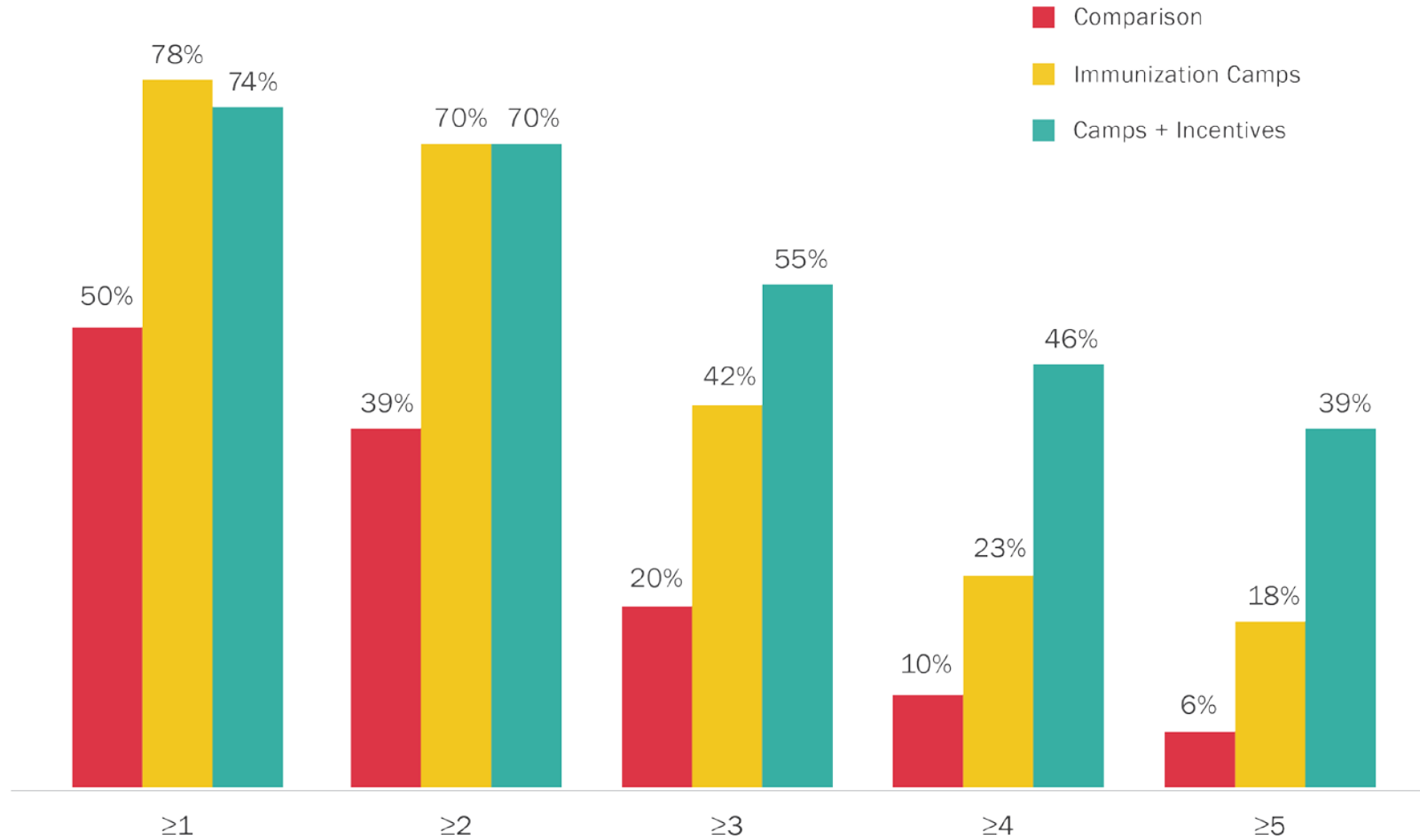


FIGURE 3: COSTS PER FULLY IMMUNIZED CHILD



A good RCT not only measures impact but helps Decode the Black Box:

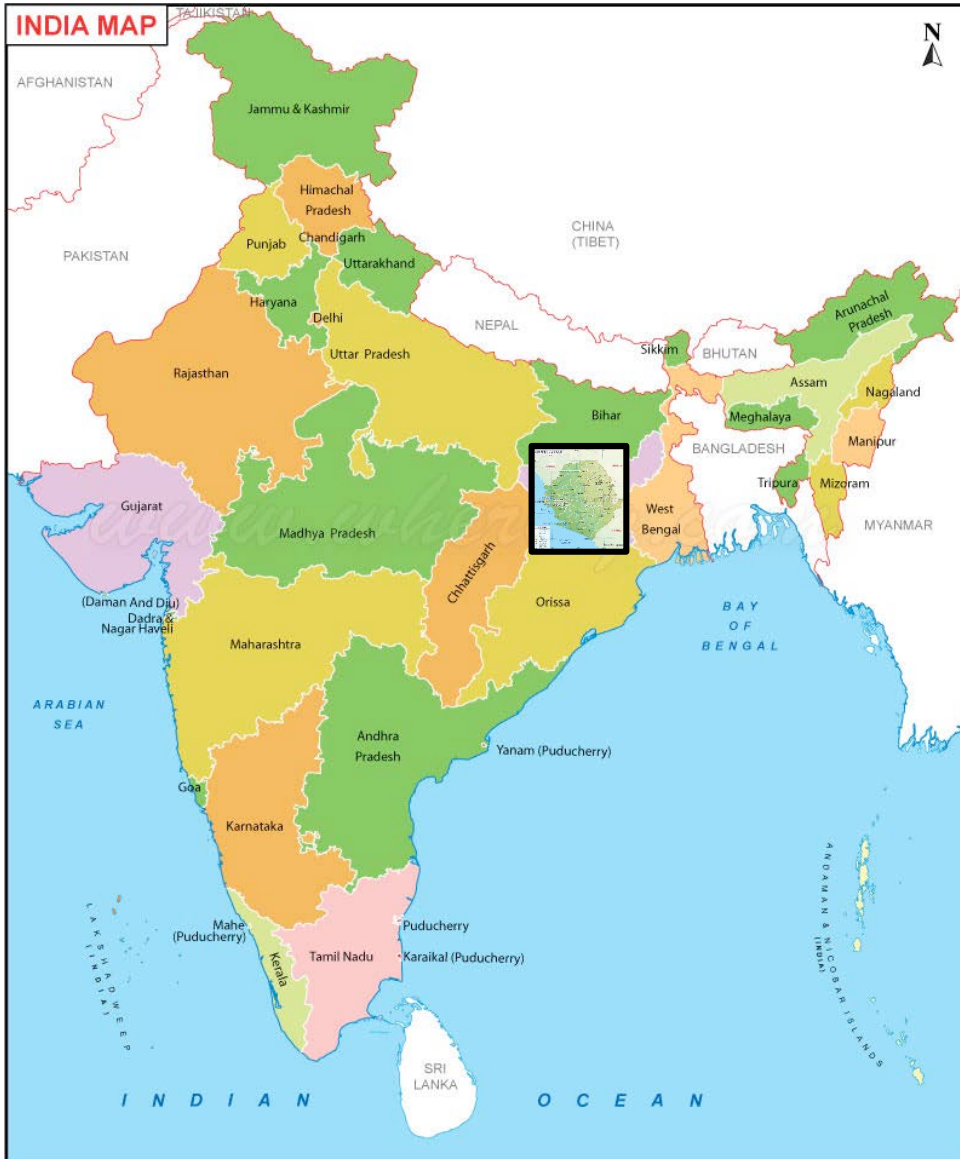
Impact of supply does not persist, but does of demand



Number of Immunizations Received by Children Ages 1 to 3

[Banerjee et al. 2010](#)

One Evaluation, Two Contexts



Characteristic	India	Sierra Leone
Population (Millions)	1,250	6.1
GDP (USD Billions)	1,800	4.1
GDP (USD per capita)	1,498	679
Health Expenditure (% of GDP)	4.0 %	12 %
Health Expenditure (USD per capita)	61	96
Under-5 infant mortality rate per 1000 live births	38	87

The “black box” approach to evidence

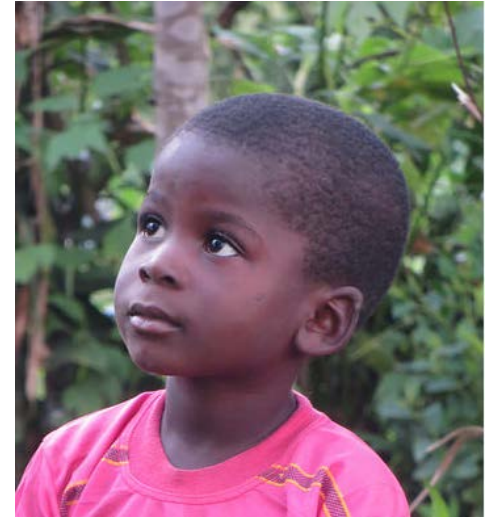
Policy Context:

Very low rates of full child immunization in Sierra Leone.

Should the government consider non-cash incentives?

The Evidence

- How many times has this approach been rigorously tested?
- Once
- In South Asia, not Africa.
- By an NGO, not a government.
- Most policymakers would not take seriously this evidence in isolation.



Applying Theory of Change helps assess relevance of evidence *(implicit in RCTs, even if not explicit part of paper)*

Basic local conditions



Behavioral



Process

Impact



Let us break down this Theory of Change >>>

Step-1: Basic Local Conditions

What are some contextual factors to consider?

- Similarity of problem:
 - Immunization rates
- Similarity of stakeholders:
 - Implementing organization willingness and capacity
 - Service providers (attendance)
 - Parents (awareness about benefits of immunization, attitudes towards immunization and response to incentives)
- Similarity of infrastructure:
 - Health facilities
 - Roads to transport incentives and vaccines



Step 1: Local Evidence on Basic Conditions

Where would you recommend incentives? Where do parents want to vaccinate?



Immunization
Rates by
Antigen

Vaccination	Country 1	Country 2
DPT1	84%	47%
DPT3	74%	41%
Measles	67%	41%
Fully Immunized	49%	38%

Step 1: Local Evidence on Basic Conditions



Descriptive evidence

- 84% of children receive DPT1
- 54% of households within 1 hour walk of clinic
- 44% Health worker absenteeism

Institutional knowledge

- Unlike India, clinics often have multiple workers, and are only closed 12% of time
- Immunizations on specific days when absenteeism is lower

Step 2: Evidence on Behavioral Linkages in Theory of Change

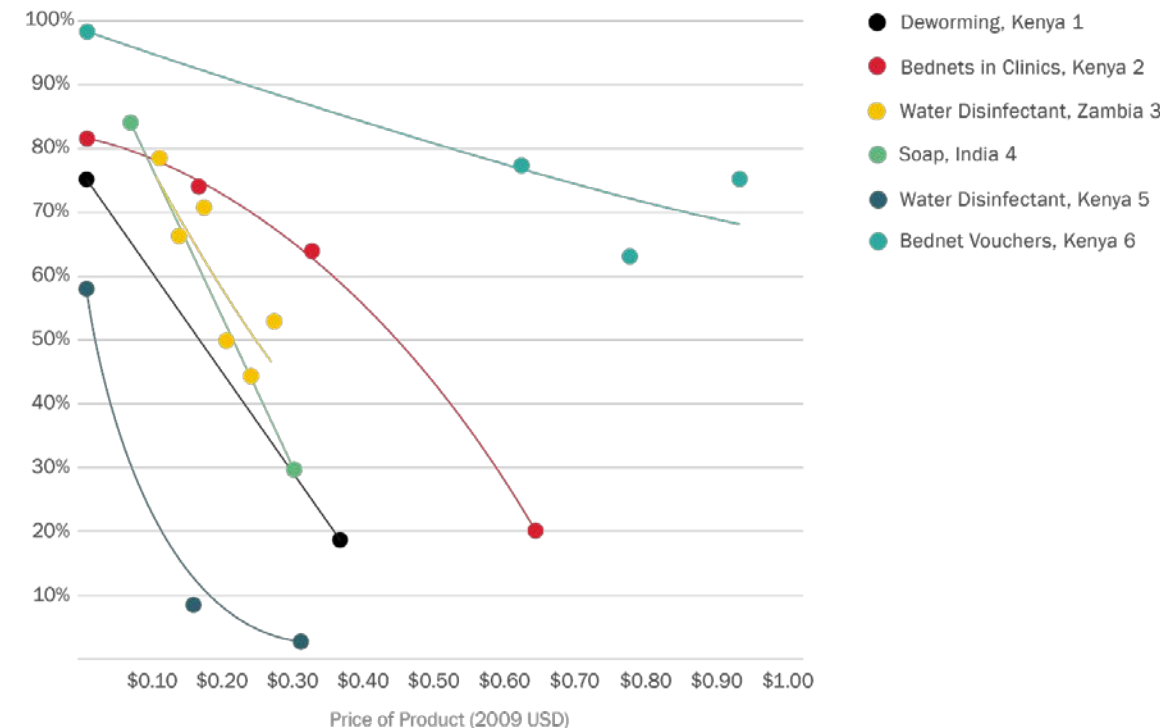
Parents Procrastinate and find it hard to stick to behavior they believe is good for their children

Small incentives offset bias

Completed Schedule Salient

Evidence that People Procrastinate / Present Bias

- Small changes in price for preventive health products sharply reduces take-up (9+ RCTs)
- People are willing to pay to tie their own hands with commitment savings products: difficult to explain unless people know they are present biased



Step 2: Evidence on Behavioral Linkages in Theory of Change

Parents Procrastinate and find it hard to stick to behavior they believe is good for their children

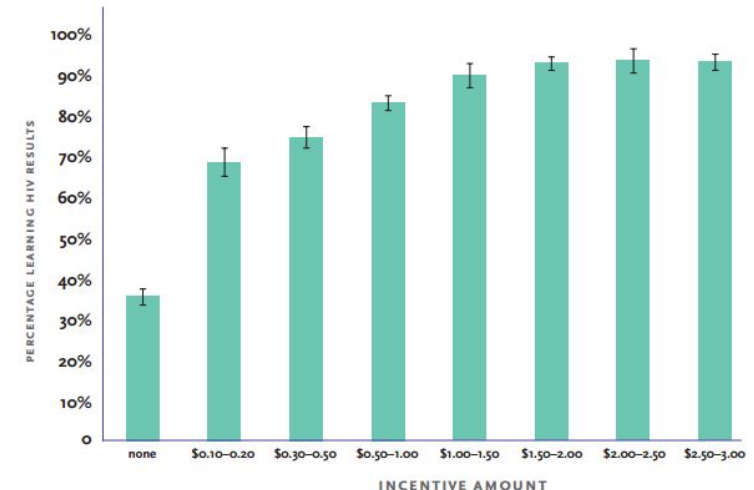
Small incentives offset bias

Completed Schedule Salient

Evidence that Incentives Offset Bias

- 30+ RCTs on cash transfers and smaller CCT same impact as bigger CCT (Malawi)
- Offering small financial incentives more than doubled the rate of obtaining HIV test results (Malawi) and increased age of marriage (Bangladesh)
- Weaker evidence on the importance of salience

FIGURE 1: EFFECT OF THE INCENTIVE AMOUNT ON THE PERCENTAGE RETURNING FOR HIV RESULTS



Step 3: Evidence on Process Links in Theory of Change



Logistics evidence is less generalizable:

- There are fewer rigorous impact evaluations on implementation effectiveness
- Process issues may vary significantly by program (e.g. health infrastructure may be different from education), country (strength of bureaucracy or leakages) or implementer (NGO vs. government delivery of incentive)
- Not just a challenge from learning from RCTs, good implementation is a constant struggle in development (*"Nandan as the head plumber"*)

Step 3: Evidence on Process Links in Theory of Change



Solution:

- This is why we need monitoring for every program: We may be confident a program will work if it is delivered, but we need to make sure it is delivered appropriately
- Conduct a logistics pilot. The theory of change will help identify what to monitor
- Other advantages:
 - Test newer innovations in delivery like incentive vouchers, cash and mobile money
 - Test cost effectiveness

Towards Globally Informed, Locally Grounded Policymaking

Sierra Leone, Pakistan, Haryana state...

Local descriptive evidence suggest basic conditions hold



Strong RCT evidence of behavioral conditions



Must monitor Process

If all else holds, expect to achieve impact



The Limits of Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis in understanding the underlying theory

The medical model increaseing in Social Sciences

- Helps understand research available
- Can help avoid selective inclusion of studies
- But do not account for local descriptive data
- In attempting to eliminate bias from judgment, we lose role of theory
- By averaging results across studies, meta-analyses often fail to pick up underlying behavior and broader lessons

Examples: Studies on learning that included teaching children at their ability level classified these studies under teacher training, technology, class size, materials, pedagogy; OR studies on incentives that average coefficients from studies on incentivizing age of marriage and collecting HIV tests.

Economic Literature Reviews

- Evaluate literature in less controlled way, interpreting theory and local context
-

Conclusion

Policymaking draws on different kinds of evidence, but not all evidence is equal

- Hopefully course helps distinguish if evidence is rigorous and sufficient, while recognizing that policymakers often need to act even when evidence is thin
- Design research for generalizability - Theory based RCTs can be very useful for policy because ask generalizable questions
- Implementation is hard: leverage existing evidence because knowing a program will have impact if implemented well is a good place to start vs. often zero evidence base

When to continue evaluating despite existing evidence?

- When evidence from multiple studies is contradictory
- When stakes are very high – add evaluation to pilot
- When newer innovations added and being tested
- Logistics pilots and monitoring important part of scaling up, even if no new RCT

J-PAL works with implementing partners and funders to generate and review global evidence and scale-up locally appropriate solutions

J-PAL Global

- Provides general policy lessons that apply to local policy priorities
- Helps determine whether a context is “similar” for those lessons to apply

J-PAL Regional Offices

- Actively work with policymakers to incorporate policy lessons and work through implementation details

