



BREAK OUT SESSION – LEARN

Demystifying Impact

Format: *Debate*

Background

The Learn session sought to stimulate debate on whether mainstream impact assessment indicators are doing a disservice to the cause of jobs creation. It was envisaged that the discussion would throw up ideas and partnerships to influence, through learning and evaluation mechanisms, the necessary changes in the job creation ecosystem. The session solicited opinions on best practices in enterprise development and measurements of impact, keeping in mind the triple-bottom line assessment framework.

Key Discussion and Observations

The session centred on issues of job creation and its measurement in the micro-enterprise development space. Discussants spoke primarily from prior project and program implementation experiences. Major points which emerged were as follows:

Impact Evaluation

The question of evaluation was discussed with regard to what is focused on and studied when the impact of a program or project is thought through. The significance of longitudinal studies was mentioned since it allowed one to evaluate impacts over and beyond what a one-time interaction would allow. The overall tone of the discussion was rooted in the understanding that a program isn't independent of its surroundings – and therefore its impact cannot be studied in a vacuum. It is necessary to study the sum-total impact of projects, especially the question of job creation. The evaluation cannot confine itself to a certain group or community, and the impact a project has on them – it must also focus on the impact that the project could have had in the region and the transformations or ripples it sets off in the ecosystem.

Impact Indicators

With reference to impact indicators, the group spoke about the adequacies of existing ways of measurement – and whether such measurements can also be used to study factors such as 'aspiration', 'agency', 'aptitudes', and 'motivation'. There was consensus on the fact that indicators need to take in account a complex understanding of the contexts – socially and economically – before they can accurately represent the region. It was also mentioned that data collection exercises, and studying certain indicators, should remain cognizant of feeding into the program implementation. Relating to the question of entrepreneurship creation – it was emphasized that this cannot happen in a frame where other developmental factors are not working, things such as supply of basic needs also need to be studied/evaluated to see when people even begin thinking of entrepreneurship



Research Design

Designing the research itself was an aspect that was brought up through various points in the discussion. Agency at various levels such as individual, village, and community were discussed. The questions of sustainability of research and the project were spoken about. Considering the program's focus on developmental evaluation, the discussion delved into the distinctions between traditional evaluation models and continuous evaluation models which embed themselves into the program, and allow for reflection and reworking. It was also mentioned that understanding context should be seen as a dynamic process. It was stated that some evaluation frameworks may see the very design of the research as intentionally exclusive, when studying who was reached out to and why. The need to bring in more beneficiaries in the evaluation process which would embed self-improvement within the program process was also mentioned as an improvement to research designs.

Facilitator

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Discussants

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Dr. Charvi Mehta, Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship
Dr. K. R. Viswanathan, International Climate Change Specialist, Practical Action
Kezia Yonzon, Sambodhi Research and Communications
Lukhimai Linnebank, Programme Officer – Policy & Partnerships, Aga Khan Development Network
Dr. M. V. Ashok, Former Chief General Manager, NABARD
Monica Jain, Senior Evaluation Specialist, International Initiative for Impact Evaluation
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