

The Iterative Process of Generating and Using Evidence to Address Learning Crisis in Madagascar: A Case from the JICA-supported Project

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Extended Abstract:

While impact evaluation has become a common method to verify the effectiveness of development program, evidence use remains an issue. The process of generating and using evidence should be iterative as development program is continuously improved and scaled up. In Madagascar, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has conducted a series of impact evaluations to rigorously evaluate the impact of the package of interventions, called “PMAQ-TaRL,” on children’s foundational literacy and numeracy. More than approximately 80 percent of students in the last grade of primary education have not reached the minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics. The package of interventions comprised the school management and pedagogy components, which was designed to realize extra-curricular remedial activities using the pedagogical approach “Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL)” through the collaboration of the school and the local community.

First, the concept of the package of interventions was verified in a pilot through the randomized controlled trial (RCT) in the 2018-2019 school year. Based on evidence, the Ministry of Education in Madagascar progressively scaled up the package to increase the coverage of regions. Employing the difference in differences strategy for the phase-in design, the second impact evaluation was carried out to measure the impact on literacy in the 2020-2021 school year. The second evaluation targeted the schools in communes near the border of the neighboring regions with similar social backgrounds. The third impact evaluation was successively conducted for the same schools to investigate the impact on numeracy in the following school year.

In a series of evaluations, the learning agenda was identified and updated through project activity and research cycles. A learning agenda is a set of broad questions directly related to the work

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an agency conducts that, when answered, enable the agency to work more effectively and efficiently. For example, when the JICA-supported project developed the package of intervention, the impact on children's learning was not clear. The learning agenda was whether the package was effective to improving children's foundational literacy and numeracy. In the scaling-up phase, the delivery modality of the interventions such as teacher training had to be modified to respond to an increased number of targeted schools. While the small-scale pilot successfully demonstrated the impact of the package, was it effectively scaled-up in a different modality of delivery? The learning agenda was addressed in the second and third impact evaluations.

Evidence from the impact evaluations was used by different actors in their decision-making and practice. For example, the Ministry of Education and JICA referred to evidence from the first impact evaluation in their decision-making to scale up the package of interventions in Madagascar. Evidence also contributed to the development of JICA's sector strategy in education, which mainstreamed the approach of the package of interventions in their cooperation. In terms of practice, the JICA-supported project modified the modality of intervention delivery and the content in the scaling-up phase based on evidence from the second impact evaluation.

In the case of Madagascar, the process of generating and using evidence was iterative, and evidence was used in the decision-making and practice. The case demonstrates three lessons on evidence use for development agencies. First, evidence use was integrated into the decision-making process by identifying and updating the learning agenda through mutual discussions between practitioners and researchers. Second, the timely sharing of tentative results of impact evaluation from researchers helped the decision-making of the Ministry of Education in Madagascar and JICA. When the evaluation results were not delivered on time, the Ministry of Education and JICA could have missed the "window of opportunity" for using evidence for their decision-making. Third, both practitioners and researchers shared the global objective of addressing the learning crisis through their practice and research, which facilitated the smooth collaboration. It would be worth exploring how to integrate and institutionalize the lessons in the organizational arrangement and routines of development agencies.

Reference

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