

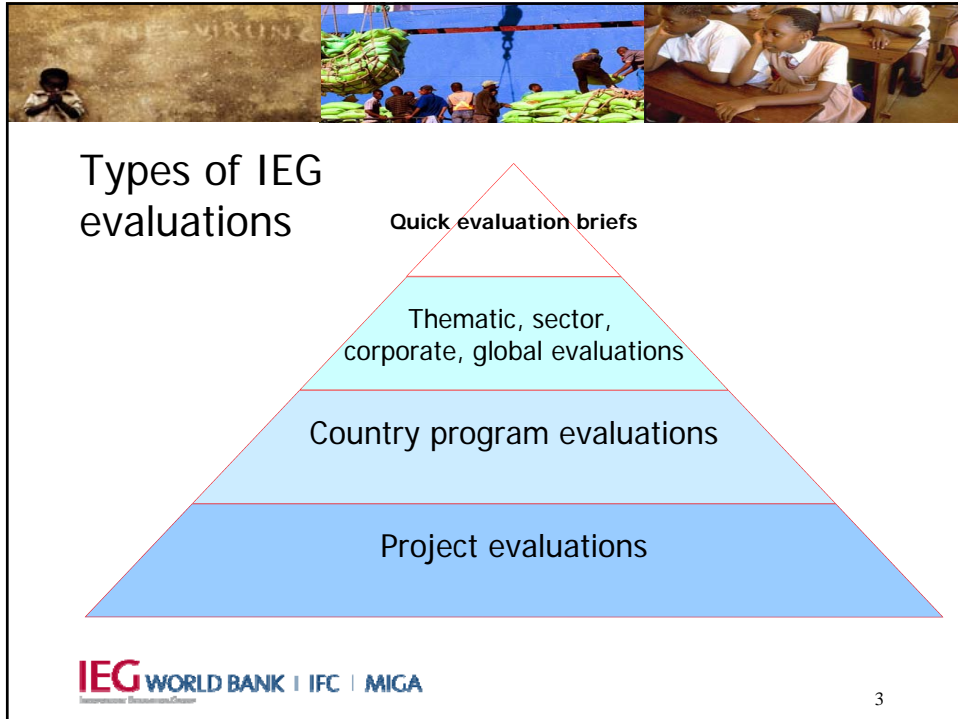


# The "Messy" World of Development Evaluation

Cheryl W. Gray  
Independent Evaluation Group, World Bank

AES, Canberra, Sept. 2009





- 
- ### Examples of major evaluations:
- *Environment / climate change*
  - *Municipal development*
  - *Natural disasters*
  - *Health, nutrition and population (HNP)*
  - *Agriculture and agribusiness*
  - *Water*
  - *Transport*
  - *Gender*
  - *Social safety nets*
  - *Post-primary education*
  - *Information and communication technology (ICT)*
  - *Financial crisis response*
- IEG** WORLD BANK | IFC | MICA  
Independent Evaluation Group



## 10 observations from IEG practice



### **1. Defining the topic**

It is important yet difficult to define the scope of an evaluation appropriately.

- Breadth vs depth
- Ideal: relevance + rigor
  - ex: "Doing Business", Guarantees, HNP



## 2. Clarifying objectives

Evaluators need to be explicit about objectives and standards of performance.

- multi-dimensionality of development
- “fads” in development thinking
- multiple (sometimes conflicting) objectives
  - ex: “quality of growth”; CBA vs. PRSCs



## 3. Deciding what to measure

*Impact* (against counterfactual) is the ideal, but even measuring *outcome* is an achievement.

- Strong forces work against results measurement
  - ex: environment/infra; health/water
- Impact evaluation (incl RCTs) expensive, ltd applicability
- IEG’s evaluations build on upstream M&E



## 4. Collecting evidence

Evaluators typically triangulate across numerous sources of evidence.

- Issues and data drive methods and evidence
  - portfolio reviews, strategy reviews, surveys, case studies, meta-analyses, focus groups (ex: gender, HNP, PRSCs)
- Donors can help support data collection
  - ex: LSMS, CPIA, energy prices, investment climate



## 5. Ensuring the quality of evidence

Beware mistakes that compromise quality and undermine credibility.

- Biased sampling
- Misconstruing findings
- Neglecting trade-offs



## 6. Attributing causation

The most difficult challenge in development evaluation is attribution.

- Donors and clients (country evaluations)
- Donor collaboration (PRSCs, SWAps, Paris Decl.)



## 7. Drawing implications

Generalizing to lessons and recommendations is a key part of evaluation – and an art.

- build on nuanced understanding of context
- be specific, include indicators of progress
- Follow-up on recommendations is Board's concern



## 8. Ensuring objectivity

Independence is essential at every stage of the process.

- Independence of thought
- Bureaucratic independence
- Trade-offs in staffing, incentives
  - ex: internal/external, recusals, re-entry



## 9. Making a real difference

Even if all hurdles are tackled, it is not easy for development evaluation to influence behavior.

- Learning: hard for evaluatees to accept negative feedback
  - ex: DB, HNP
- Accountability: requires effective governance
  - IEG-Mgmt protocols; disclosure and transparency
  - IDA Deputies



## 10. Keeping optimistic

More knowledge is better than less, and the process matters as much as the product.

- “Messy” – complex and often confusing picture with unclear causation and uneven progress
- Short-run tensions vs. longer-run appreciation
- Overall focus on results more important than evaluations themselves



Thank you

[www.worldbank.org/ieg](http://www.worldbank.org/ieg)