

Abstract

This paper reviews the main challenges and opportunities for incorporating mixed method approaches into research and evaluation on the effectiveness and impacts of international development. It draws on the authors' experience over several decades working in both academia and with a wide range of multilateral and bilateral development agencies, non-profit organisations and developing country governments on the evaluation of the effectiveness and impacts of development interventions. Development research is informed by current research trends in Northern countries, but it is often conducted within very distinct economic, political, cultural and organisational contexts. While certainly not unique to the international context, many development evaluations are subject to a range of budget, time, data, political and organisational constraints that tend to be more severe than those faced by researchers working in industrialised nations. Moreover, due to the more limited opportunities to conduct research in developing countries, individual studies or evaluations are often required to address a broader set of questions. So while a researcher in the US may be able to focus exclusively on a rigorous summative evaluation designed to address a limited range of questions on quantitative impacts, the same researcher evaluating a major development intervention in Latin America, Africa or Asia may be asked to address a wider range of summative and formative questions. We argue that the demand for multi-purpose evaluations in developing countries opens up opportunities for a broader application of mixed method approaches than is usually the case in 'mainstream' mixed method research. We hope that this paper will help readers to understand the unique challenges, and also the great opportunities, for strengthening the use of mixed methods in the international development context.

Keywords: Mixed methods, program evaluation, impact assessment, context

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