



# **The disempowering discourses of impact evaluation: Who is excluded and how?**

**Panel 67: The Politics of Measurement: how what we measure influences  
what we do and ignore**

**The Development Studies Association, Annual Conference 2016**

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# Impacts or Effects?

## MICRO ENTERPRISE CREDIT AND ITS EFFECTS IN KENYA: An Exploratory Study

Final Report

Bureau for Asia & Private Enterprise  
Office of Emerging Markets


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September 1991

1991

 ERNST & YOUNG

## OVERVIEW OF STUDIES ON THE IMPACT OF MICROENTERPRISE CREDIT

June 1996

1996

Many early efforts to study ME credit impacts involved case studies and before/after surveys of borrowers. They generated a lot of useful micro level information on clients, the dynamics of their enterprises and households, the use of credit, and perceived benefits. While these studies have been helpful to implementors in confirming the benefits of credit and in identifying ways programs could be improved, the findings from these studies have been considered insufficient by donors and policy makers concerned with impacts on broader development objectives and whether or not ME programs are good investments.

Since 1990, a growing number of ME impact studies have used quasi-experimental designs in an effort to separate the effect of credit from other factors that may be promoting or inhibiting changes. Nineteen of the 32 studies included in this review used quasi-experimental research designs (Annex 1, Table 1). These studies take account of factors inherent to households,

This present review of previous studies reinforces the importance of research designs that separate effects of credit from other factors. One study which compared findings from experimental and non-experimental designs found differences not only in the amount of change that could be attributed to credit, but in the direction of change in certain variables (Pitt and Khandkar 1995).

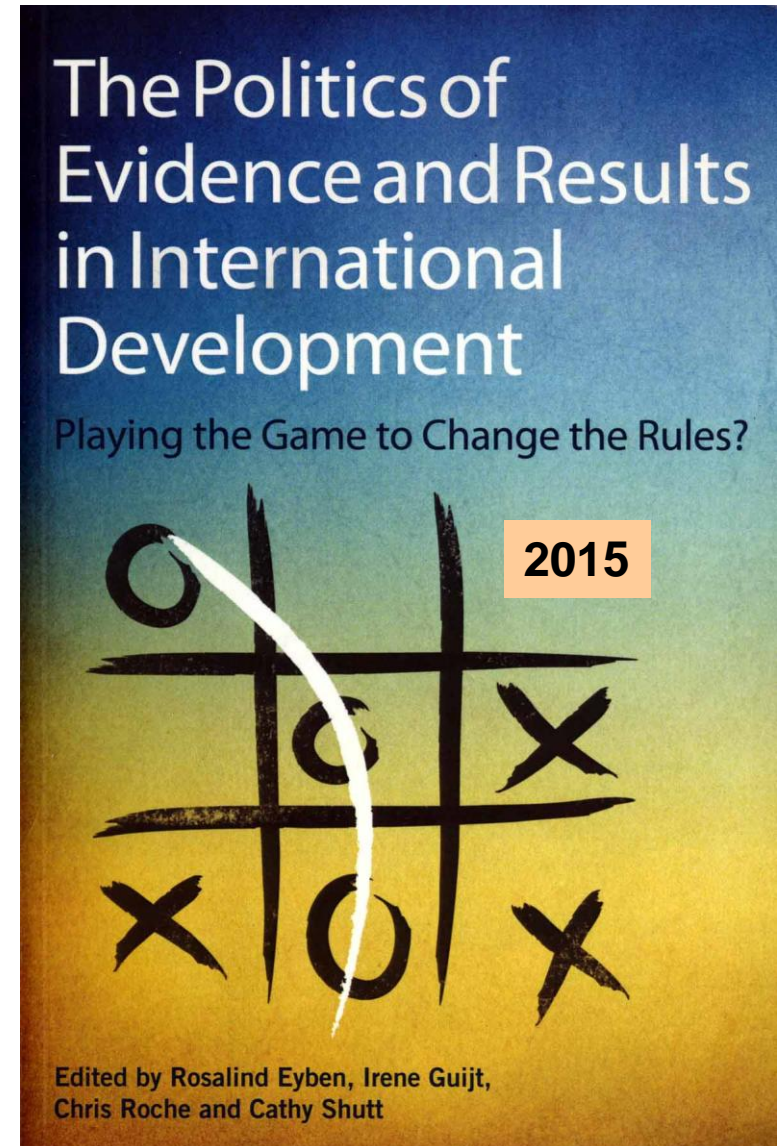
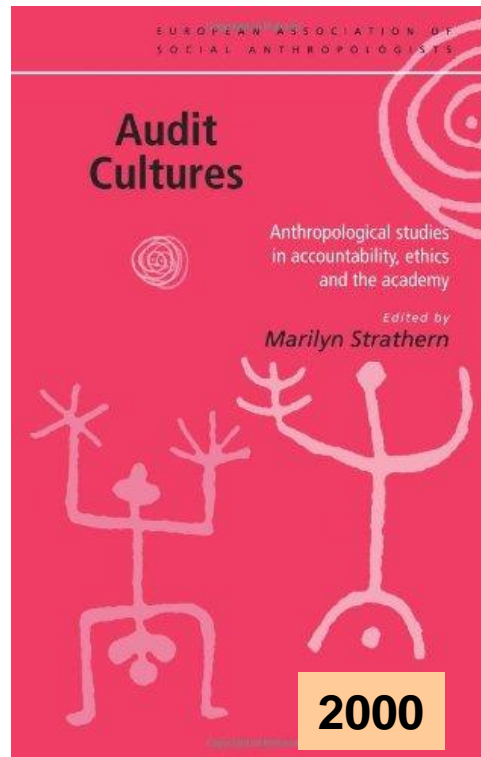
The review also suggests the limitations of quantitative survey data alone in understanding impacts. Context information, ethnographic data, and in-depth case studies have been critically important in interpreting quantitative data, in explaining why certain changes have or have not occurred, and in understanding the implications of certain changes for microentrepreneurs and their families. Eleven of the 32 studies included in this review, including some of the most rigorous, have used a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods in studying impacts (Annex 1, Table 1).



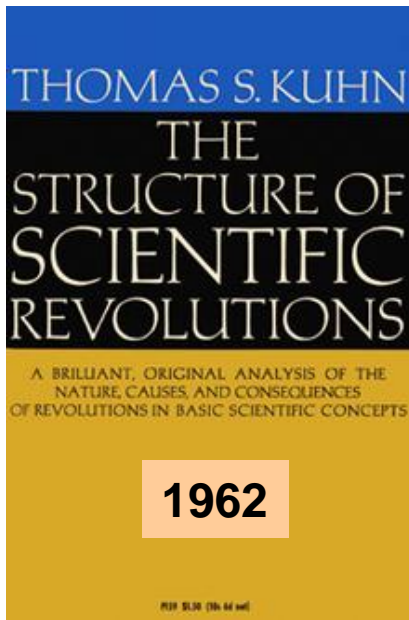
## The evidence & results agenda



Panel criteria  
and working  
methods

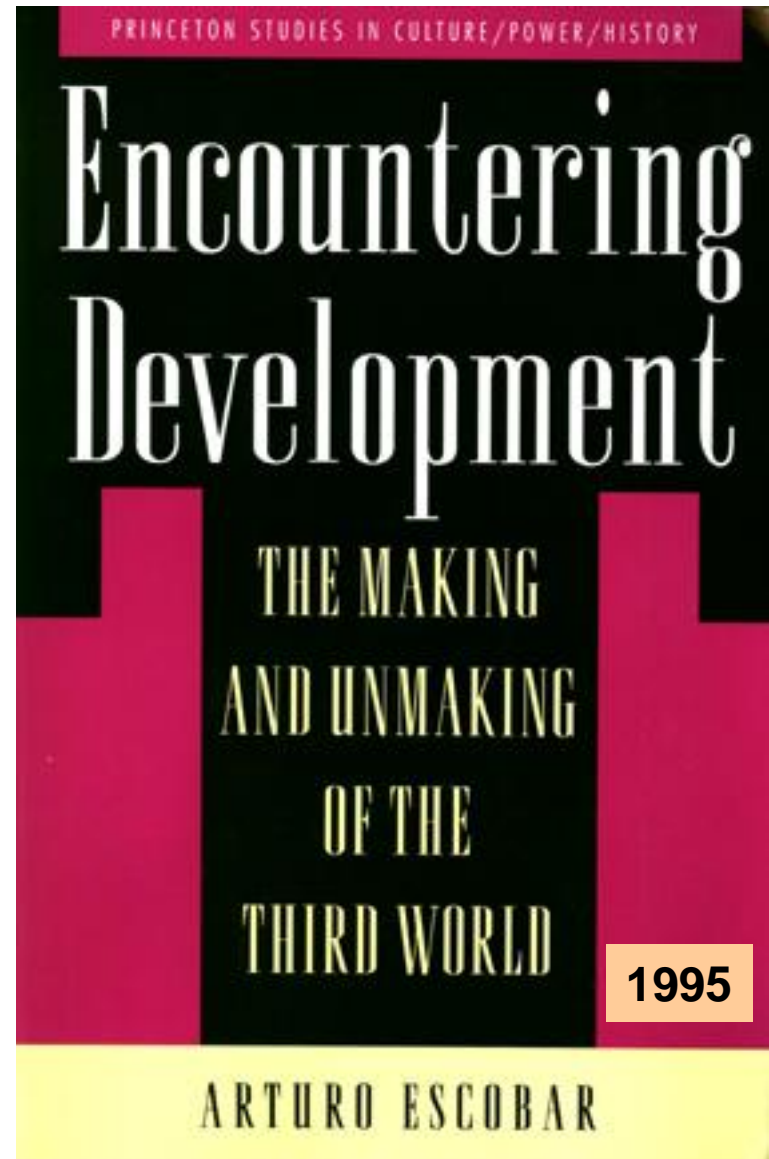


## Kuhnian paradigm, Foucauldian discourse, or...

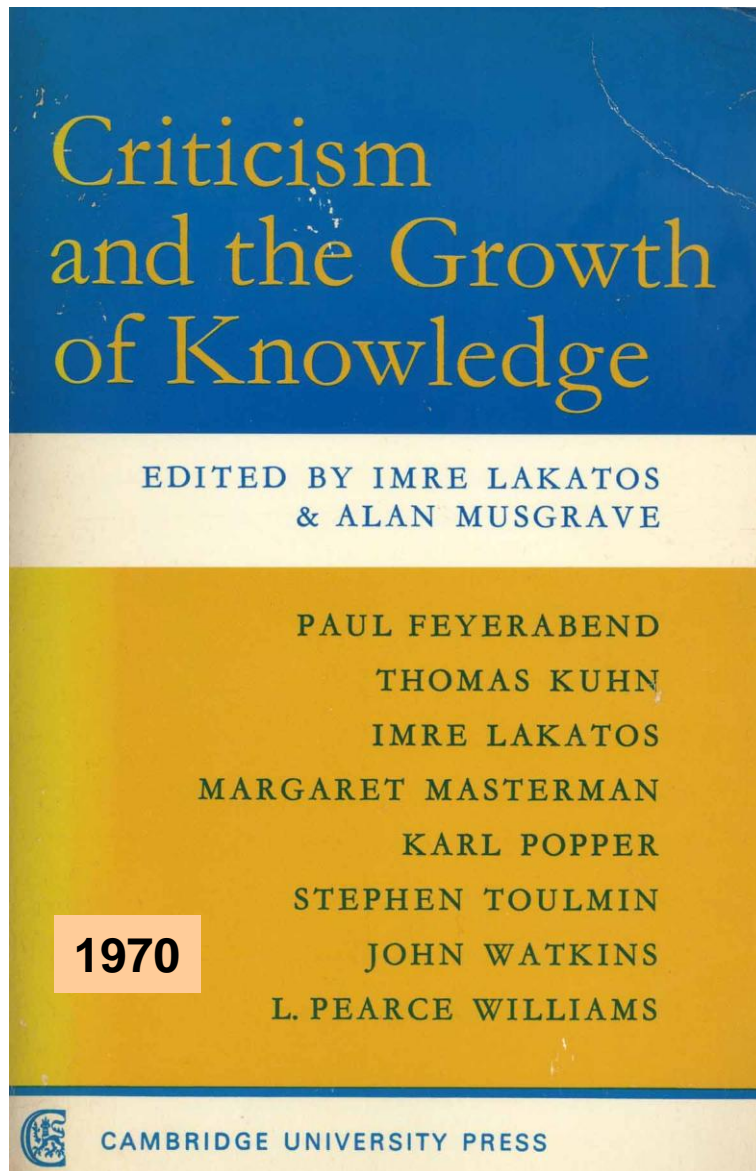


### Development discourse:

‘... an extremely efficient apparatus for producing knowledge about, and the exercise of power over, the Third World’;  
‘... a top-down, ethnocentric, and technocratic approach, which treat[s] peoples and cultures as abstract concepts, statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of “progress”’ (Escobar 1995: 9, 44)



... progressive research programme?





# Who evaluates the evaluators?



- pb Policy Briefs
- sr Systematic Reviews
- ie Impact Evaluations
- egm Evidence Gap Maps

Home > Find Evidence > Impact Evaluations

## Impact Evaluations

The 3ie impact evaluation database is an essential resource for policymakers and researchers who are looking for evidence on what works, what doesn't, and why in development.



The database contains information on over 4,260 impact evaluations and links to the original studies.

Impact evaluations provide the most rigorous evidence of what works in international development because they assess the true impact of an intervention, programme, policy, or project by developing a counterfactual. Counterfactual analysis is the comparison between what actually happened and what would have happened in the absence of the intervention. They use experimental and quasi-experimental methods as well as qualitative analyses.

## A flawed Theory of Change?

up published impact evaluations from the Impact Evaluation Repository as well as completed and ongoing 3ie-Funded Impact Evaluations

- Studies in the Impact Evaluation Repository are published either as journal articles, books or book chapters, reports, or working papers as part of a working paper series. The Repository contains summaries of all published reports of 3ie-funded studies as well as hundreds of non-3ie funded studies.

Find impact evaluations by entering keywords in the search bar above

### Have your say

Your feedback can help improve this database. All you need to do is complete this short survey.



more...

### What is an impact evaluation?

An impact evaluation measures the net change in outcomes of a development programme.

Glossary of terms related to impact

# Multiple challenges

## Effectiveness reviews



### At a glance

Effectiveness reviews evaluate the impact of our projects and the degree to which they meet agreed standards.



### Accountability / learning / impact

### Scale and cost

Oxfam operates in 52 countries, across 227 different programmes, within which sit over 1000 projects that are designed to help end world poverty. With an annual budget of £268.9 million, we are deeply committed to being accountable for what we do and improving how we understand and communicate our effectiveness. Our effectiveness reviews aim to evaluate the impact of our work using robust and reputable methods.

Effectiveness Reviews form part of our **Global Performance Framework**, developed to better capture and communicate Oxfam's effectiveness and promote evidence based learning. To be fully accountable, we want to determine whether our work is resulting in positive change and why. The undertaking of rigorous evaluations is the only credible way of doing this. With over 400 projects completing each year, doing full impact evaluations on each of these would be too resource intensive. Instead, projects are randomly selected and assessed under the thematic areas (see links to themes below).



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# Methodological challenges

*Journal of Development Studies*,  
Vol. 47, No. 11, 1619–1635, November 2011



## Against Excessive Rhetoric in Impact Assessment: Overstating the Case for Randomised Controlled Experiments

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*Final version received 7 June 2010*

**ABSTRACT** *The recent attention afforded to randomisation, or Randomised Control Trials (RCTs), in impact assessment is a welcome development. The case for RCTs in international development, however, has been quite overstated. This article critically examines the seminal model underlying RCTs, the Holland-Rubin Framework, with a view to make four claims about RCTs: (i) they have limitations as conceptions of causation; (ii) their 'idealised' model of causal inference is undermined by implementation issues; (iii) they are not necessary to make internally valid statements about impact; and (iv) in general, they do not provide sufficient information for many purposes of impact assessment. The key argument is that ultimately, the choice of approach to impact assessment should be driven by the research question at hand and not by the alleged superiority of method.*

### 1. Introduction

When we talk of hard evidence, we will therefore have in mind evidence from a randomised experiment, or, failing that, evidence from a true natural experiment, in which an accident of history creates a setting that mimics a randomised trial. (Banerjee, 2007:12)

Over the past 50 years, the use of randomised clinical trials has unleashed an explosion of new medical technologies. But this would never have been possible if medicine had continued in its old ways, with doctors basing treatment on their own individual experiences, their 'feel' for a patient or ancient remedies ... Armed with these ideas [about randomisation], we hope economists can generate similar breakthroughs in tackling the challenge of global poverty. (Fisman and Miguel, 2008: 192–193)

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# Implementation issues

### EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW SERIES

'enhancing effectiveness through evidence-based learning'



#### HOW ARE EFFECTIVENESS REVIEWS CARRIED OUT?

Every year since 2011, Oxfam Great Britain (GB) has conducted rigorous evaluations on samples of randomly selected mature projects (projects that are a substantial way through implementation or have finished) to help the organisation understand and evidence whether its work is resulting in positive change in the lives of the women and men with whom and for whom it works.

These 'Effectiveness Reviews' consider Oxfam GB's work across six thematic areas:

- Humanitarian Response
- Accountability
- Livelihoods support
- Resilience
- Women's Empowerment
- Good Governance (which brings together "Citizen voice" and "Policy Influence")

Evaluations under the first two thematic areas - humanitarian and accountability - consider the degree to which interventions meet agreed standards. Accountability Reviews consider the extent to which projects have met Oxfam's standards for accountability to partners and communities. Evaluations of humanitarian responses consider the extent to which the response under review met internationally agreed humanitarian standards.

Evaluations of the final four thematic areas – Livelihoods, Resilience, Women's Empowerment and Good Governance – aim to assess the impact of our projects. They consider whether there is evidence of a cause-effect relationship between the intervention and observed outcomes' impact, even where the intervention is only one factor contributing to that change.

Oxfam GB uses four distinct methodologies to evaluate projects selected as part of the Effectiveness Review series, as no one evaluation approach is appropriate for all programmes and contexts.



An enumerator in the Philippines carrying out an Effectiveness Review 2014/15 interview using a mobile phone. Photo: Emily Tomlins/Oxfam

Top: Climate change adaptation and advocacy project, Nepal, evaluated under resilience in 2012/13. Photo: Jisu Mok/Oxfam

Oxfam's Effectiveness Review Series: [www.oxfam.org.uk/effectiveness](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/effectiveness)



OXFAM RESEARCH REPORT

MAY 2014

## INFORMATION FLOWS FASTER THAN WATER



A District Flood Preparedness Plan, Muzaffargarh District, Punjab Province.

Photo: Jisu Mok/Oxfam, September 2013

How livelihoods were saved in Pakistan's 2010 floods

Lessons from a mixed methods evaluation of Oxfam's Community-based Disaster Risk Management and Livelihoods Programme in Pakistan

MARTIN WALSH & RICARDO FUENTES-NEIVA  
RESEARCH TEAM, OXFAM GB

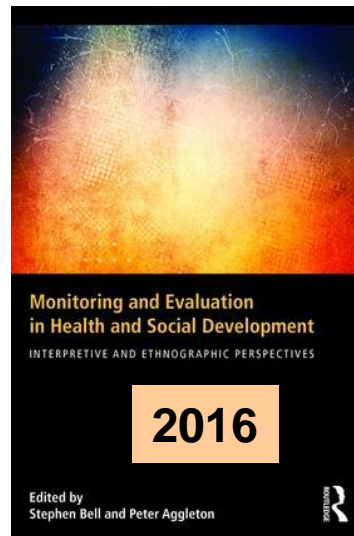
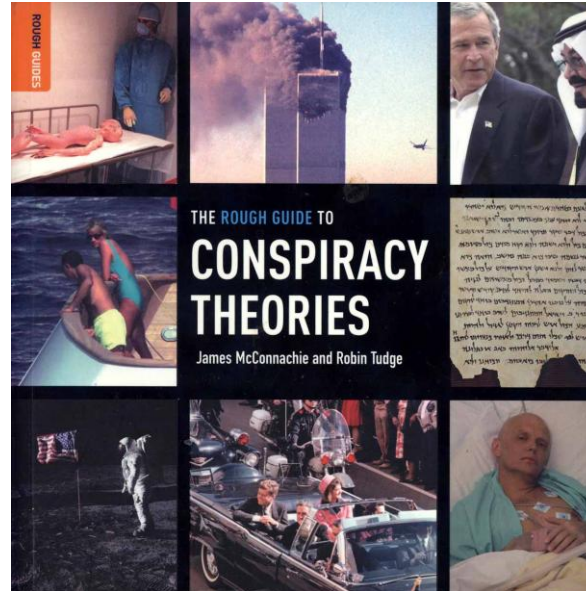
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[www.oxfam.org](http://www.oxfam.org)





## Winners and losers?





## Post-truth or pro-truth?

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### Experts (n)

What we no longer need in post-referendum

**Expert No longer required, as asserted by Michael Gove in a live TV debate**







THE  
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**3.5 BILLION**  
POOREST PEOPLE.

[January 2014]



LIFT  
LIVES  
FOR  
GOOD







**Thank you!**

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