Prioritizing the Learning Agenda: the CART Principles

Ben Tan
About Innovations for Poverty Action

More Evidence, Less Poverty
About Innovations for Poverty Action
Three complementary streams of work

1. Evidence generation
   Working with NGOs, government, foundations on scientific impact evaluations, in partnership with academics

2. Sharing Evidence
   Engaging practitioners and policymakers for actual use of the evidence

3. Right-Fit Evidence
   Supporting organizations with their broader M&E needs and learning strategies
Ten Reasons Not to Measure Impact—and What to Do Instead

1. Not the Right Tool: Excellent question, wrong approach.
2. Not Now: The program design is not ready.
3. Not Now: The program implementation is not ready.
4. Not Now: It is too late.
5. Not Feasible: Resources are too limited.
6. Not Feasible: Indirect effects are difficult to identify, yet critical to the theory of change.
7. Not Feasible: Program setting is too chaotic.
8. Not Feasible: Implementation happens at too high a level.
9. Not Worth It: We already know the answer.
10. Not Worth It: No generalized knowledge gain.

Dynamic settings, adaptive programs
Using the Theory of Change for adaptive management

- (Re)define Theory of Change
- Identify MEL questions
- Prioritize questions with CART
- Collect / analyze data
- Iterate program

Today’s focus
The core challenge

GET ALL THE INFORMATION YOU CAN, WE'LL THINK OF A USE FOR IT LATER.

Credit: www.CartoonStock.com
Can/should we really track all of this?
Our Tool: Prioritize MEL questions with CART

Credible
Collect high quality data and analyze the data accurately

Actionable
Commit to act on the data you collect

Responsible
Ensure the benefits of data collection outweigh the costs

Transportable
Collect data that generate knowledge for other programs

Prioritized learning questions
Credible

Data = valid, reliable, unbiased
Analysis = appropriate
Actionable

- If there is no plan for how to use the data, do not collect them
  - Specific action/change possible for each piece of data
  - Setting up the right systems to handle this information
Responsible

How do we get here?

Wrong data
- Too slow, not useful
- Non-credible “impact”

Right-Fit

Too little
- No accountability
- Limited learning

Too much
- Unmanageable
- Not actionable

LEARNING

COST
What’s your Theory of Change? Who else has a similar theory?

Does it replicate?
Questions? btan@poverty-action.org