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# Developing Practical Methodologies to Assess the Spatial, Temporal and Socio-economic Distribution of the Impacts of Public Works Programme Assets

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McCord, A, Ludi, E, Levine, S and Duvendack, M  
Research Fellows and Associates of the Overseas  
Development Institute

**Bonn, 16 April 2015**



- Research rationale
  - Innovative contribution
  - Research question
  - Methodology
  - Approach – the causal chain
  - Learning points
  - Recommendations
-



- Public works programmes (PWP) are main form of social protection for working age poor
  - Livelihoods benefits of PW assets are key justification for PWP approaches to social protection
  - Livelihoods benefits of these assets are widely *assumed* rather than *empirically* assessed.
    - asset is fit for purpose, continues to function, is accessible and used as anticipated
    - asset plays role in providing livelihoods benefits
    - distribution of benefits is pro-poor, thus having intended impact on poverty and food insecurity
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## Major challenges

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- Capturing changes in livelihoods over time
- Attributing impacts to PW assets
- Incorporating medium term impact evaluation into donor project cycles



### The research **subject**

- No existing work focuses on livelihoods change caused by PWP assets
- Current approaches to M&E limited by time frames of project funding
  - limits longer term learning

### The research **approach**

- Dominant approaches are based on either identification of survey correlations (quant) or self reporting (qual)
  - Both face largely unaddressed challenges of conceptual & methodological rigour
  - Causal chain analysis allows more integrated use of multi-disciplinarity and of mixed methods. This promotes intellectual rigour.
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- LIPA – Livelihoods Impact of Public Works Assets
  - ODI research project 2013-2015
  - Funded by Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)
  - Objective:
    - “Develop and field test an innovative mixed methods multidisciplinary methodology with the capacity to identify livelihoods impacts of PWP assets and to assess their temporal, spatial and social distribution”
  - Tested on PSNP in Ethiopia and WFP FFA in Kenya (2014 & 2015)
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## Logic model approach to assessment using causal chain as basis for analysis

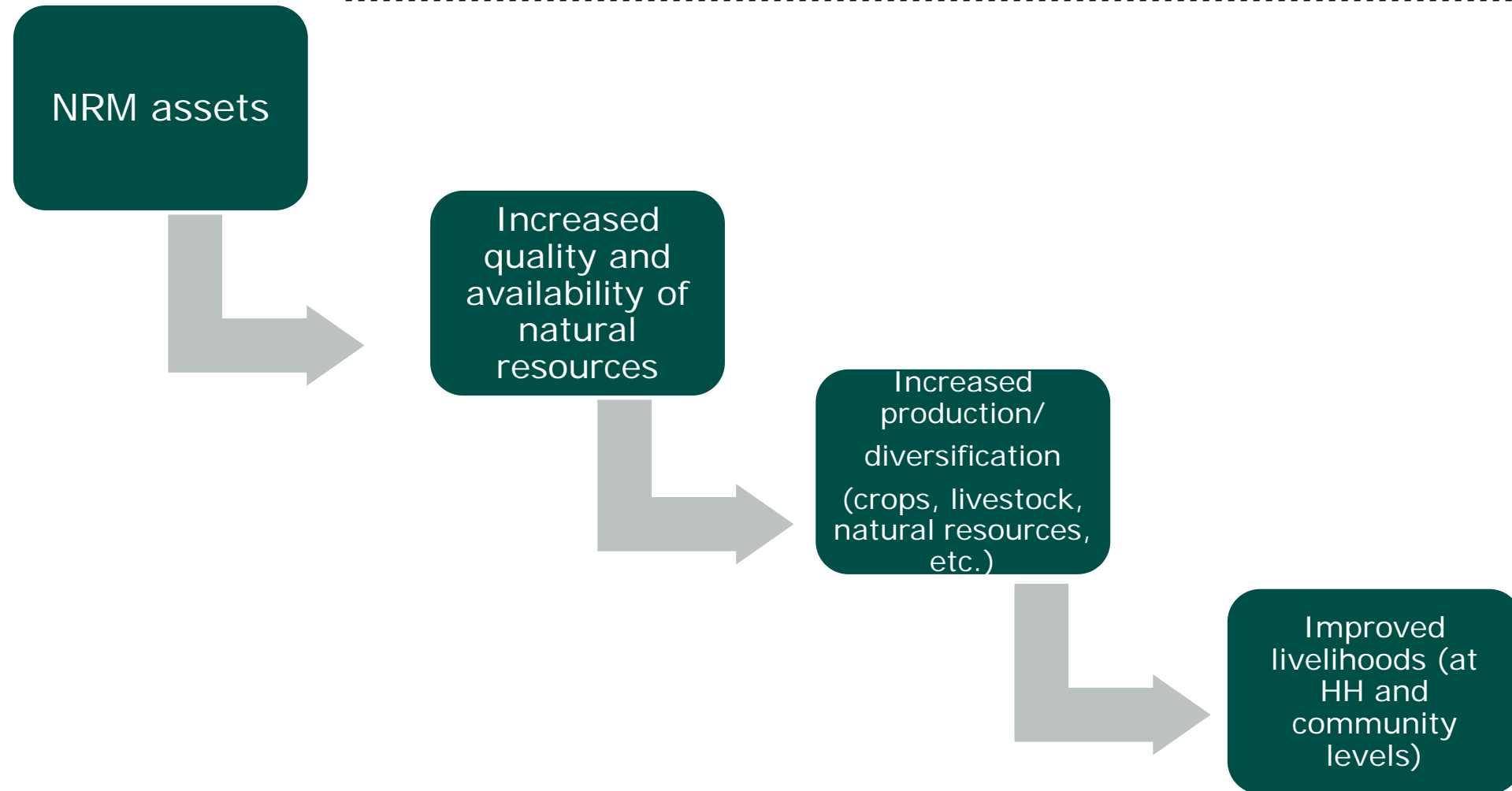
- Open the 'black box' between intervention and outcome
  - Identify assumptions underlying each link of causal chain from asset to l'hood
  - Assess different links using different tools and approaches
  - Cross disciplinary: combine NRM, livelihoods and social protection (geographers, anthropologists, sociologists, and economists, local and international)
  - Mixed methods: quantitative and qualitative tools, used in different ways on different links
  - Focus on usefulness of research: consider insights gained for level of investment
  - Comparative exercise to appraise the relative merits of alternative approaches
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## Example: PSNP (Ethiopia) causal chain

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## Challenges

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- No centralised information on which assets were created & where
  - No formal monitoring of assets once completed
  - No data on continued existence, functionality or usage
  - No baseline data
  - Where baseline data gathering introduced, data not linked to logic model, but outcomes - may permit statistical correlations, but limited understanding of impact
  - Lack of knowledge & data on scale of impact, geographical distribution of benefits, socio-economic distribution of impacts or relevance of benefits at household level
  - Existing 'success story' approach to "monitoring" (positive changes ascribed to projects)
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## What's different?

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- Focus on the causal chain
  - Explicit treatment of limitations and challenges
  - Way in which tools and disciplines are combined
  - Revisit convention of linking inputs (PWP assets) with livelihoods outcomes through statistical correlation - causality is assumed to be dealt with by use of 'control'
  - Use of multidisciplinary test of rigour of controls
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## Survey - learning points

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- Quant survey of limited use without detailed prior qual.
- Sample frame challenges when i) adequate population lists not available, ii) data on asset existence, usage and functionality not available
- Can recall questions substitute for baseline?
- Survey must be tailor-made for each area to contribute to a logic model approach
- May not be sufficient to inform causal chain approach
- High cost – time, money for researchers and also beneficiaries
- Quasi-experimental (RCT-type) surveys require credible controls – how possible is this? (Often this challenge is not acknowledged)

*Quasi-experimental approaches are regarded as methodological gold standard. Is it time to learn from economists who long ago abandoned gold standards because they are a methodological straight jacket - and neither appropriate nor practical?*

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## Qual interviewing/FGD - learning points

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- All the usual challenges and biases
    - avoid starting with the intervention – respondent bias
    - risk where positive responses are associated with continued aid (needs & impacts)
    - political bias –tendency to repeat official messages
  - Causal chain approach enables use of scientific appraisal to challenge and interpret responses - multi-disciplinary triangulation
  - Apply political lense to understanding why people say things contrary to empirical evidence
  - Rapid approaches seen to need complementing with more detailed work
    - asset usage monitoring
    - quantification of scale/coverage
    - individual level economic analysis of economic activity
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## Cost/insight trade offs

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- Require iterative process and triangulation rather than linear approach (research question, collect evidence, present answer) – resource implications
  - Approaches accepted in academic research not widely adopted in project evaluation (time and cost implications?). How far is real investment guided by academic vs 'practice-based' research ?
  - Real world constraints - time resources, political economy constraints, perverse incentives
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## How to get quality insights within this reality?

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- How to manage cost/insight trade off ?
  - Fewer, more rigorous studies
  - More investment in monitoring and information management
  - 'Spending smarter' considering costs of different methods to optimise insights
  - More critical appraisal of usefulness of RCT and quasi-experimental approaches despite preference among IDIs ('gold standard'):
    - VFM
    - Adequacy of controls
    - Reliance on standard (pre-identified) impacts to be measured
    - Black box approach to causality
    - Focus on strength of correlation rather than on importance of impact (the difference between significant for real people and 'statistical significance')
  - Reconsider allocation of funds across evaluation process - high up front investment of time to identify most appropriate evaluation approach
  - Need for flexibility and iteration
  - Accommodate funding for medium term evaluation
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## Fundamental issues emerging

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- Overall evaluation weakness in appraising livelihood outcomes
  - Limited critical scrutiny within SP sector
  - Adverse implications for programme accountability
  - ***What are the incentives to address these challenges*** on the part of donors, implementing agencies, national governments and evaluators?
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- Thank you



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