

Economic Research and Impact Evaluations in Sub-Saharan Africa

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CREPOL

A diagnostic exercise

- Three questions
 - What is the state of quantitative economic research in Africa?
 - To what extent can greater participation in impact evaluation help lift some of the constraints?
 - What can we do about it?
- Four country case-studies (CREPOL-AFD)
 - Senegal, Ghana, Mali, Kenya
 - Interviews with training institutions, research institutions, policy-makers, donors
 - Four reports soon available at www.crepol.org and www.afd.fr
- Complement to DIAL's report

Outline of the presentation

1. The state of quantitative economic research in Africa: some lessons
2. African researchers-led impact evaluations: situation and potentials
3. Proposal for a new architecture

Economic research in Africa

Historical perspective

- Context-specific policies are key to socio-economic development
 - ➔ High quality local economic research = necessary condition
- But historically weak level of economic research in SSA.
 - Low level of training
 - Crowding out by foreign research institutions
 - Brain-drain towards northern research centers or international institutions
- Result = misguided and ill-appropriated economic policies (e.g. Structural Adjustment Programs)

The scene is changing: support

- Renewed interest and support by African policy-makers
 - High demand for policy research in every country
 - Renewal of training capacities (ENSAE, NPTCI, ASE etc.)
 - Significant public investments in research organizations
- Renewed international support to local research
 - Networking (e.g. PEP)
 - Individual support (e.g. AERC)
 - Core funding to research centers (e.g. TTI)
 - And others

The scene is changing: capacities

- Research centers
 - Critical mass (13 researchers on average)
 - Core grants have helped develop long-term research plans – move away from consultancy
- Researchers
 - High technical capacities
 - Macro: Computable General Equilibrium models
 - Micro: poverty analyses and micro-econometrics
 - Particularly among young researchers

But challenges remain

- Weak links with research ‘communities’
 - Limited collaboration between research centers
 - Limited publications outside centers’ own
- Limited career prospects
 - Younger researchers (highly pyramidal research organizations)
 - Women
- Fragile research centers
 - Depend on one key individual
 - Depend on one funding source
 - Limited managerial capacities
- Important heterogeneity across countries
 - E.g. francophone / anglophone

Impact Evaluations in SSA

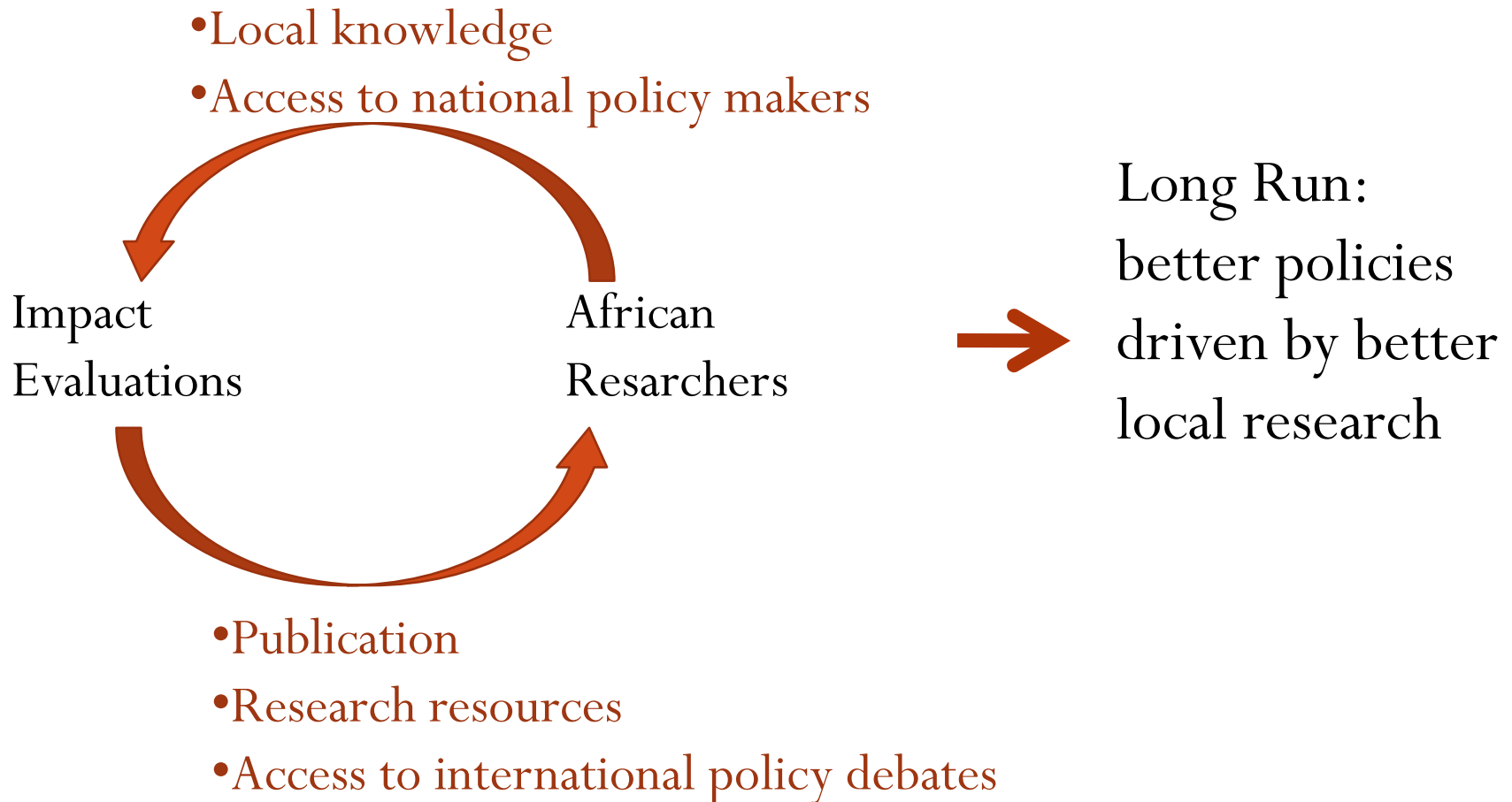
Last decade's developments

- Large and increasing number of IE studies
 - Various areas (Health, Education, Agriculture, Finance, etc.)
 - Large resources available (3ie, WB, NONIE members, etc.)
 - Increased interest by local and international policy makers
- Geographical imbalance
 - Across countries: Francophone / anglophone
 - Within countries: focus on particular districts (e.g. Kenya, Ghana)
- Absence of African researchers
 - In conducting IE: Vast majority without african researchers
 - In debating results: most are not aware of IE being done (e.g. in Kenya!)

Potential for greater african involvement

- IE have reached a point where replications are needed
 - Call for external validity of results found
 - Call for context-specific design and interpretation of results
 - ➔ Clear room for greater involvement of local researchers
- Capacities
 - High-level economic and statistical schools re-emerging in the region
 - As for CGE's and poverty analyse(measures, mapping and others), clear transferable capacities to African researchers.
 - Local knowledge: design research question, interpret results, link with local policy-makers
- Proof: handful of succesful African-led impact evaluations
 - Partnership with northern universities
 - specific donor support (e.g. IDRC's Poverty Impact Evaluation Research Initiative (PIERI))

A win-win potential



Proposal for a new architecture

Constraints

- Risk of involving unknown local researchers
- Funders:
 - IE cost hundreds of thousands of dollars → Risky investment
 - Value involvement of local researchers in proposals (e.g. 3ie), but marginal
- Northern academics:
 - involved in replications of some of their studies, but risk credibility on quality (e.g. J-PAL, IPA etc.)
 - Include local researchers, but mostly at data-collection / Research Assistant stage

Reducing risk: a network strategy

- An Africa-based consortium (Centers with a regional focus?)
- Short Term:
 - Identify high-level local researchers in quantitative economics
 - Create a network
 - Provide training to top standards in IE with help of northern research centers
- Medium Term:
 - Provide mentorship for african-led impact evaluation studies
 - Team up African PI with world-class academics: review design, monitor quality, monitor/help with analyses
- Long Term:
 - African IE network with peer review system (proposal, data, analysis)
 - Similar to the Latin American Impact Evaluation Network (IEN)

Conclusion

African researchers' participation in the IE movement :

- Necessary:
 - locally adapted and appropriate impact evaluations
 - long term development of high quality/dynamic research community on the continent

- Feasible:
 - Renewed interest in quantitative economic research
 - Renewed quantitative skills of younger researchers

- Requires pro-active actions
 - Proposal for the African Impact Evaluation Consortium

Thank you.