


# EVIDENCE IN ACTION

Leveraging impact evaluation to drive policy change and reduce poverty

12 / 13 / 24

*2024 (LIS)2ER workshop: "Fighting poverty:  
Measurement and policy challenges"*

 Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research

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**Global Director, Poverty & Equity**

# From a policy perspective, why should we care about impact evaluation?

Knowing what works is critical for decision makers to allocate the scarce resources they have in the most effective way to improve development outcomes

## Two points:

- 1) Practical
- 2) Methodological

**Practical:** In practice, this evidence infrequently translates into actual policy changes

**We have a lot of evidence on what policies work to change outcomes**

Over the past twenty-five years, impact evaluations have been conducted around the world – in both developed and developing countries – on a vast array of policy issues

**But we know less about when that evidence works to change policies**

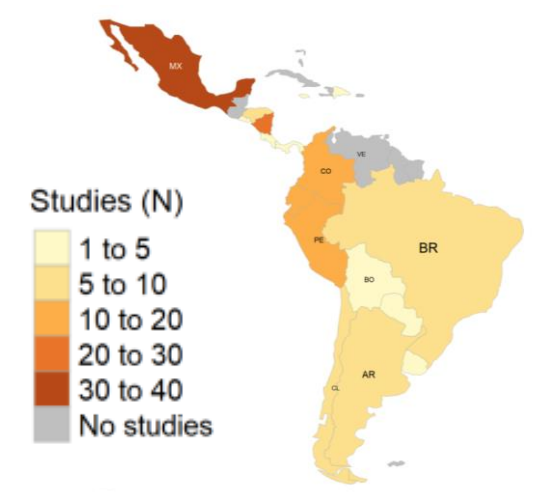
We need to better understand the extent to which this research is actually translating into policy changes (or not)

## *Example:* How impactful have the (many) CCT evaluations been in LAC?

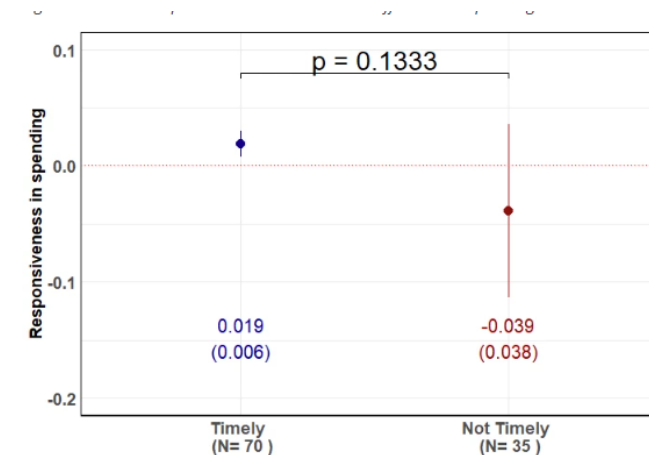
Rao (2024) looks at 128 evaluations of CCT programs (2000–2015) and finds:

- **Robust and precise zero relationship** between evaluation findings and policy spending
- **One Exception:** Spending was influenced if evaluations were conducted quickly (within 4 years of the effect year) and political constraints were low (e.g. outcome attributable to political party in power)

Number of aggregate program evaluations on CCTs in LAC countries in 2015:

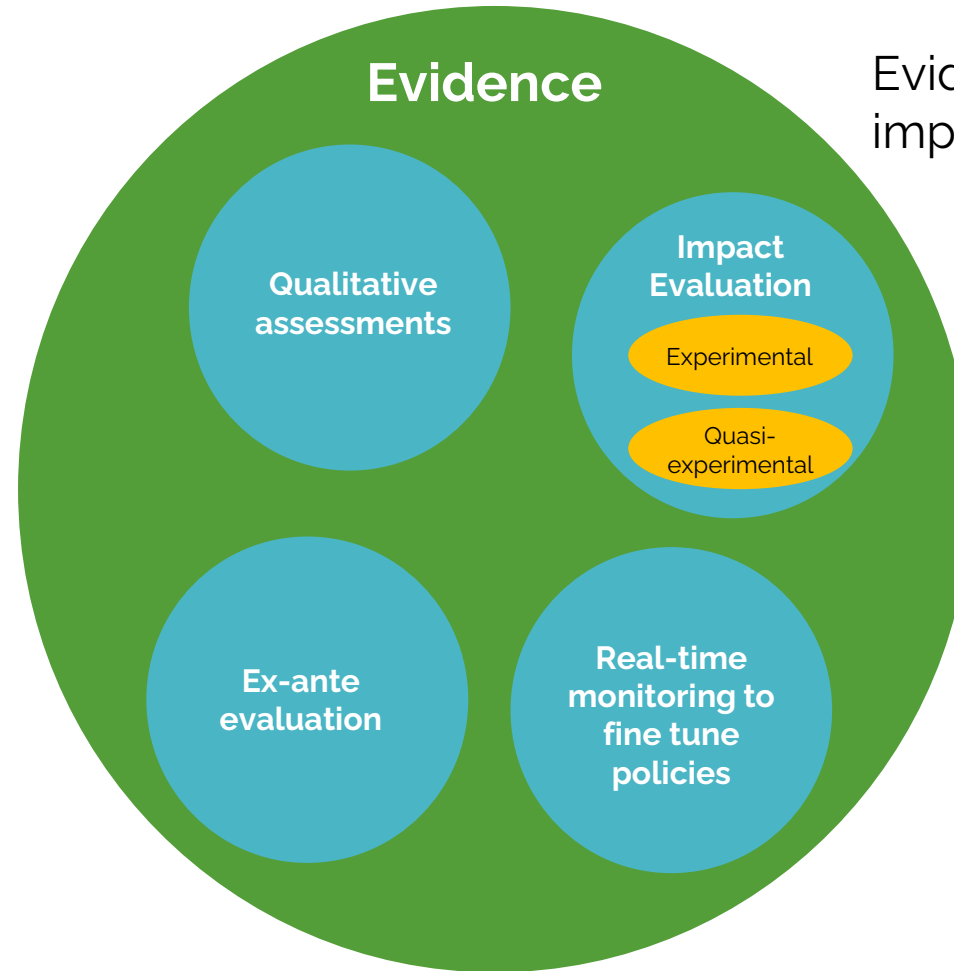


Relationship between mean treatment effect & CCT spending on the evaluated program:



Source: Michelle Rao, 2024. "Program Evaluations and Policy Spending." London School of Economics. [Job Market Paper](#) and [World Bank Blog Post](#)

# Methodological: “Evidence-based” policy making goes beyond impact evaluation



Evidence is not just about impact evaluation

And impact evaluation is not just about RCTs

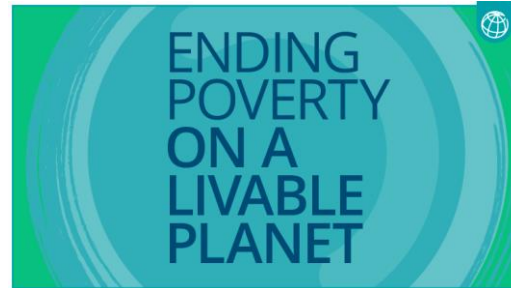
I will leave aside the controversy about the epistemological validity of causation in social sciences (Basu 2014)

# Impact Evaluation

@ the World Bank

- Overall, the experience of impact evaluation at the World Bank has been positive
- Different approaches led at global and country levels, with applications across sectors
- This work has been expanded and scaled up with growing demand, but we can go further in reducing barriers to policy uptake

# Learning from two World Bank global approaches to impact evaluation

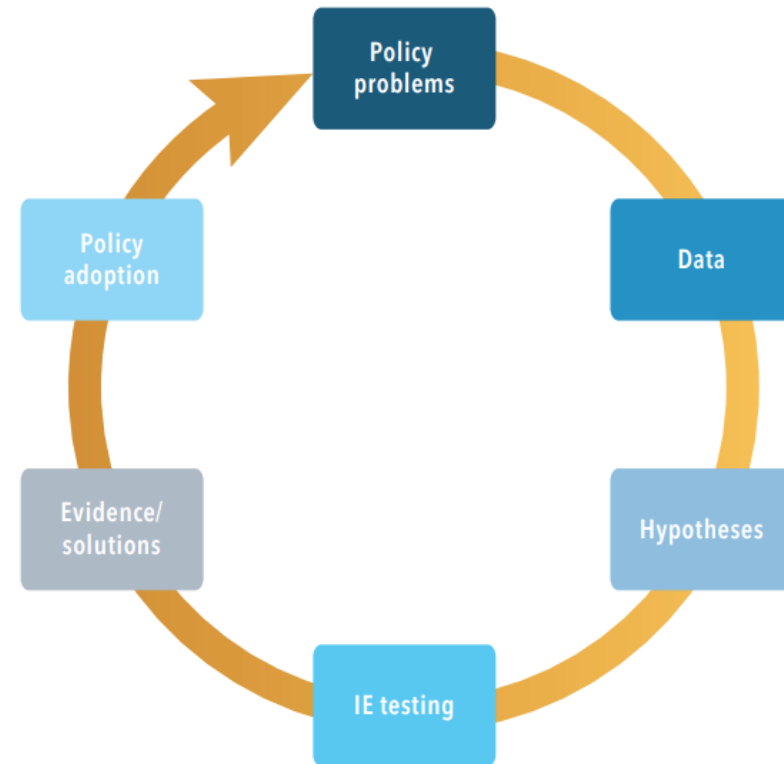


## Circular with co-production

■ ■ **Figure 1.1** The traditional evaluation model



■ ■ **Figure 1.2** DIME's evaluation model





## Country engagement

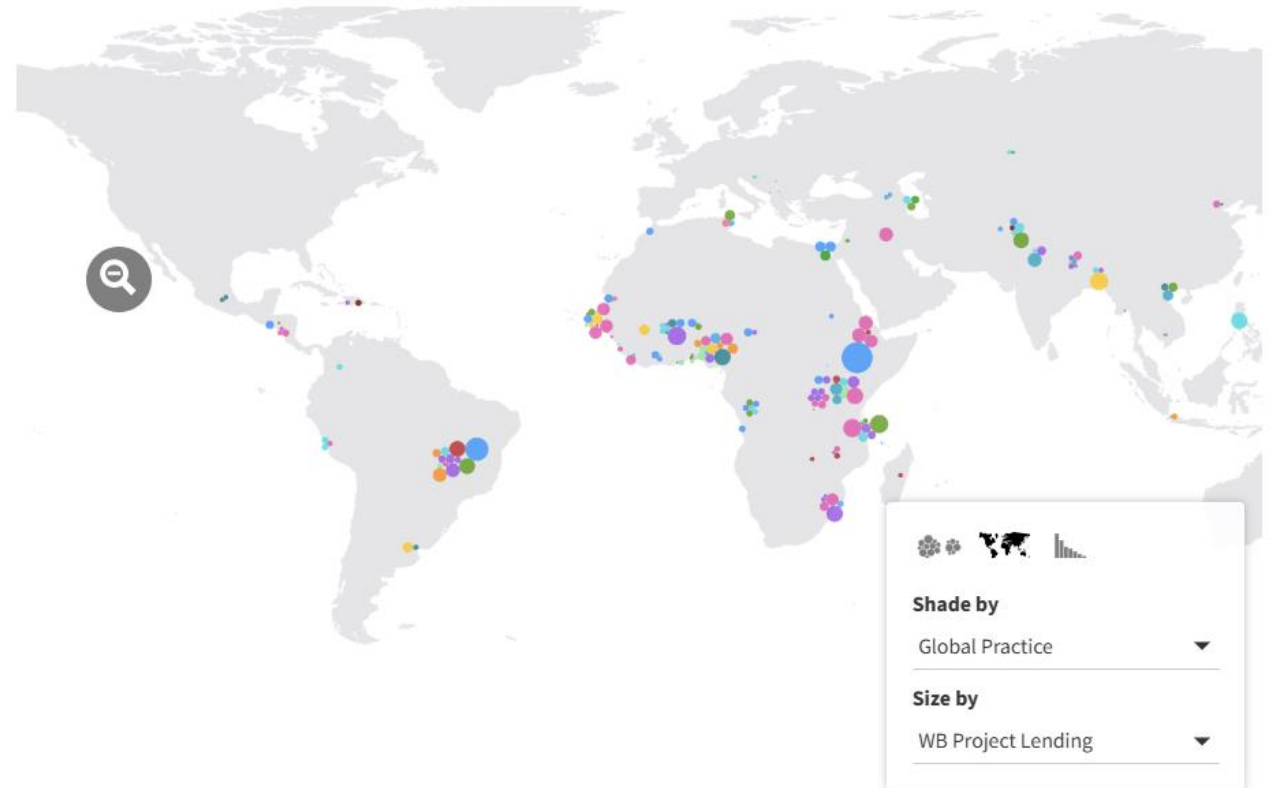
- 200+ evaluations across 60+ countries
- Influencing \$26B in development finance
- Advising 30+ multilateral and bilateral agencies.

## Global public goods

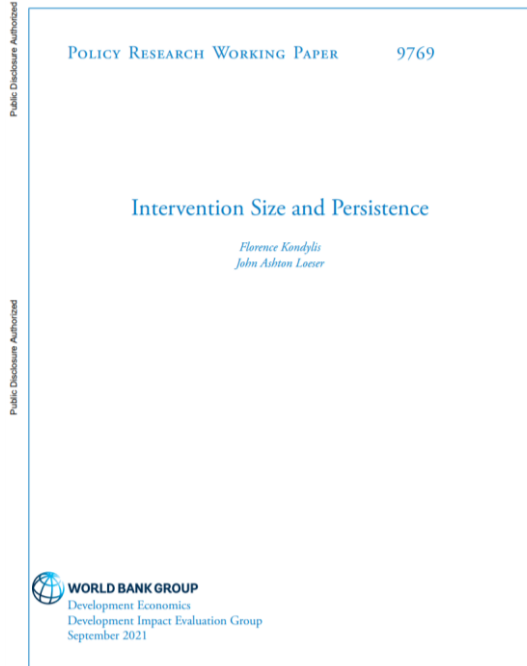
- DIME Wiki
- Toolkits
- Training programs

## Development Impact Group Projects

**Global Practice** Agriculture Digital Development Education Energy Environment & Natural Resources  
Finance, Competitiveness & Innovation Governance Health, Nutrition & Population Jobs & Development  
Macroeconomics, Trade & Investment Poverty Social Protection Social, Urban, Rural & Resilience Transport  
Water



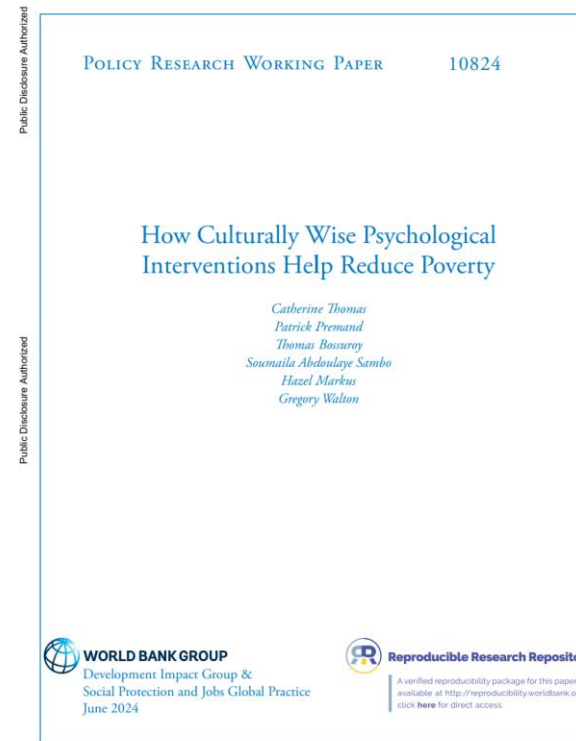
## Designing cash transfers programs



**Approach:** Meta-analysis of 38 experimental estimates of dynamic consumption impacts from 14 developing countries

**Result:** Larger interventions are not necessarily better, but complementary graduation programs can be important for impact and persistence

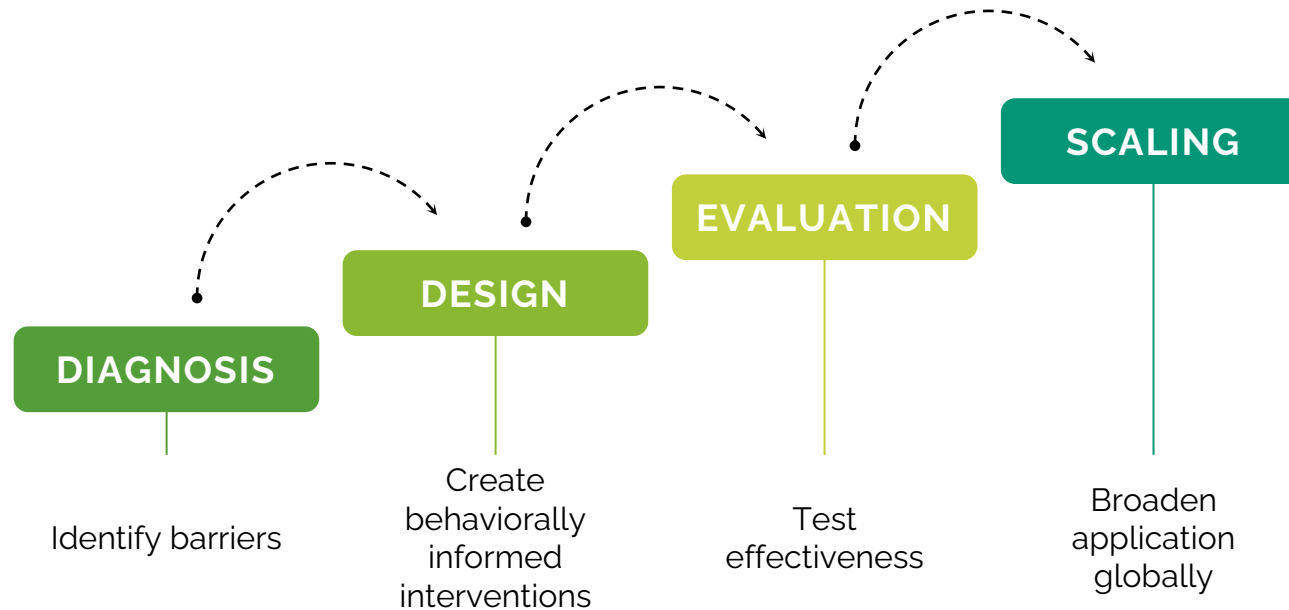
## Going beyond tangible assets



**Approach:** Field experiments to assess the causal impacts of personal vs interpersonal initiative training to build women's agency in rural Niger

**Result:** More "culturally wise" interventions (interpersonal) led to greater effects on economic outcomes

### Scaling Behavioral Informed Interventions



Source: Project Completion Report, 2023

## Global coverage

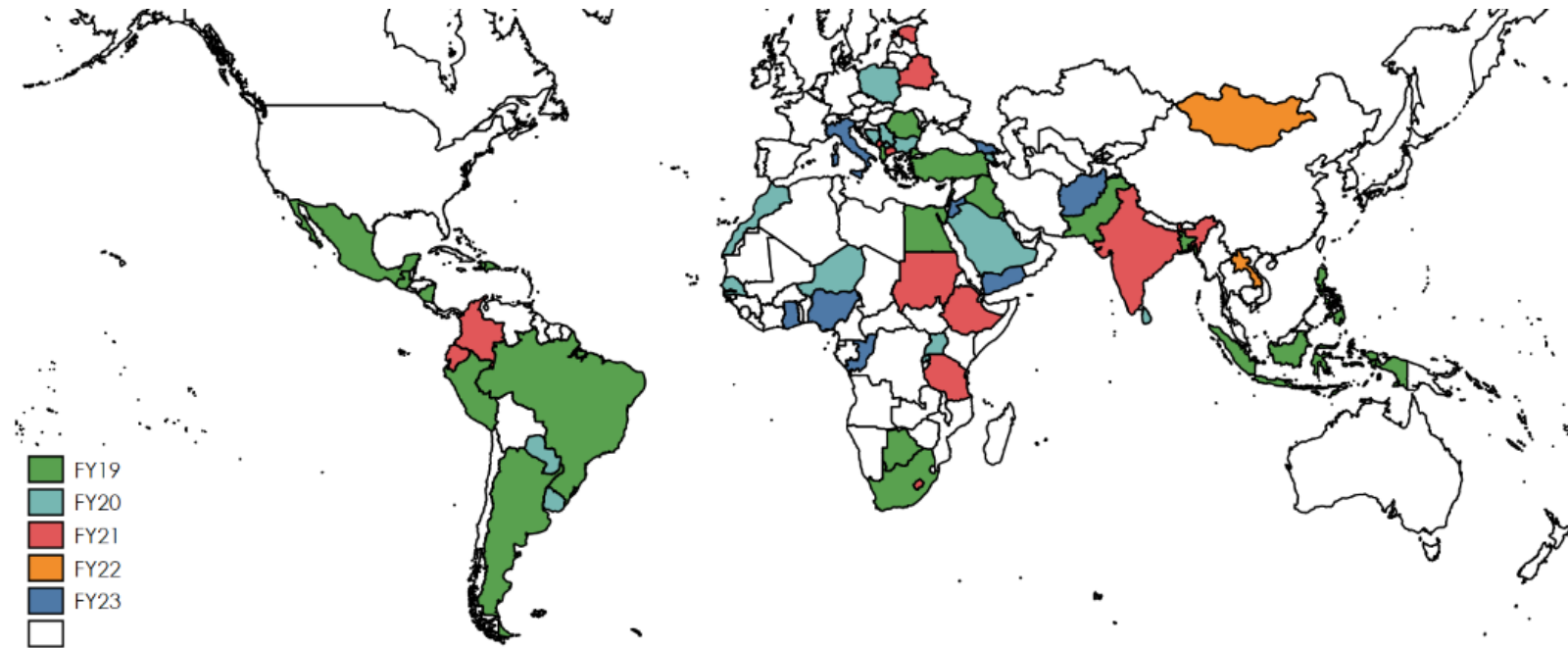
Evolution of eMBeD projects across the world:

### Country engagement:

- 108 projects from 2019–2023
- Work across multiple sectors, including climate, health, and education

### Global public goods

- 180 publications
- Trained 10,000+ World Bank staff and policymakers
- Publicly accessible toolkits and resources



Source: Project Completion Report, 2023


## Reducing COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy


Public Disclosure Authorized

POLICY RESEARCH WORKING PAPER 10981

**Behaviorally Informed Messages Increase COVID-19 Vaccination Intentions**  
Insights from a Global Meta-Analysis

*Daniel Alejandro Pinzon Hernandez  
Jungkyu Rhys Lim  
Michelle Dugas  
Ellen Moscoe  
Mohamad Chatila  
Corey Cameron  
Renos Vakis  
Zeina Afif  
Victor Hugo Orozco Olvera*

 **WORLD BANK GROUP**  
Development Economics  
Development Impact Group  
November 2024

 **Reproducible Research Repository**  
A verified reproducibility package for this paper is available at <http://reproducibility.worldbank.org>, click [here](#) for direct access.

Public Disclosure Authorized

**Approach:** Social media surveys and randomized experiments to understand people's beliefs about COVID-19 and vaccination intentions across 23 developing countries

**Result:** Behaviorally informed messages significantly increased the odds of vaccination intention by 1.28 times overall

## Advancing financial inclusion

Public Disclosure Authorized

**eMBeD**  
Mind, Behavior, and  
Development Unit

Our project showed that it is possible to encourage low-income Tanzanians to increase savings by up to 11% using the right messages.

**How to encourage people to save money**

**The Project**

In 2014, Tanzania's regulators made the country the first in Sub-Saharan Africa to permit interest payments on mobile money wallets. Currently, annual interest rates range from seven to nine percent, four times greater than the average deposit in a US bank. Despite this, mobile savings balances remain low, especially among low-income users.

In order to understand what influences the saving behaviors of low-income Tanzanians, our team, eMBeD, together with the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP), Financial Sector Deepening Tanzania, the Busara Center for Behavioral Economics, and Airtel Money Tanzania worked on a savings study informed by behavioral economics.

Project participants received tailored SMS messages over a period of 14 days in a randomized controlled trial (RCT). Participants with similar profiles were divided into five groups: the control group received no messages, and the other four groups received SMS messages applying different behavioral concepts.

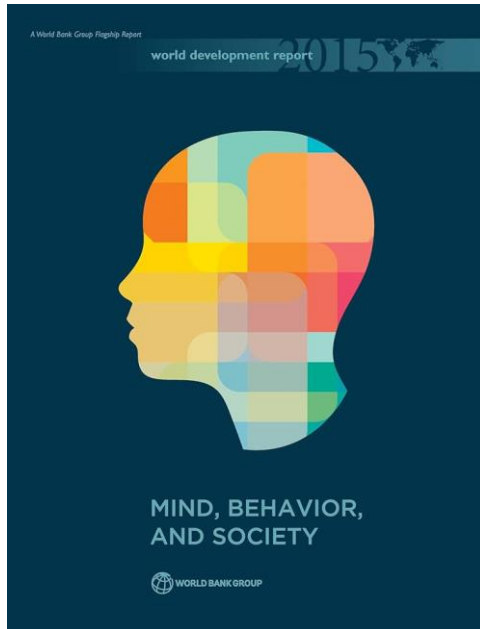
The first group received generic SMS messages that reminded them to save. The second group received messages that fostered their ability to take control of their actions, using insights from psychology that emphasize agency and control. The third group's messages were tailored to each individual's savings purpose, utilizing mental accounting to determine whether labeling the account for a specific outcome would lead to greater savings by making the goal more salient. And the fourth group received messages that informed them of how much top savers in the group had saved, taking a cue from tested success using social norms to increase a desired behavior.

Public Disclosure Authorized

**Approach:** RCT using behaviorally informed text messages to promote savings among low-income individuals in Tanzania

**Result:** Most successful intervention (social influence) increased savings by up to 11%– but not every treatment worked to improve savings rates, and some had negative outcomes (agency)

# A start-up success story



2015



**WORLD BANK GROUP**  
Poverty & Equity

2017



2024

Three constraints for impact evaluation to be more widely used in policy

Timeliness

Resources

Regulatory,  
political, and  
ethical barriers

# Revisiting the case for a broader approach to “evidence-based” policy making



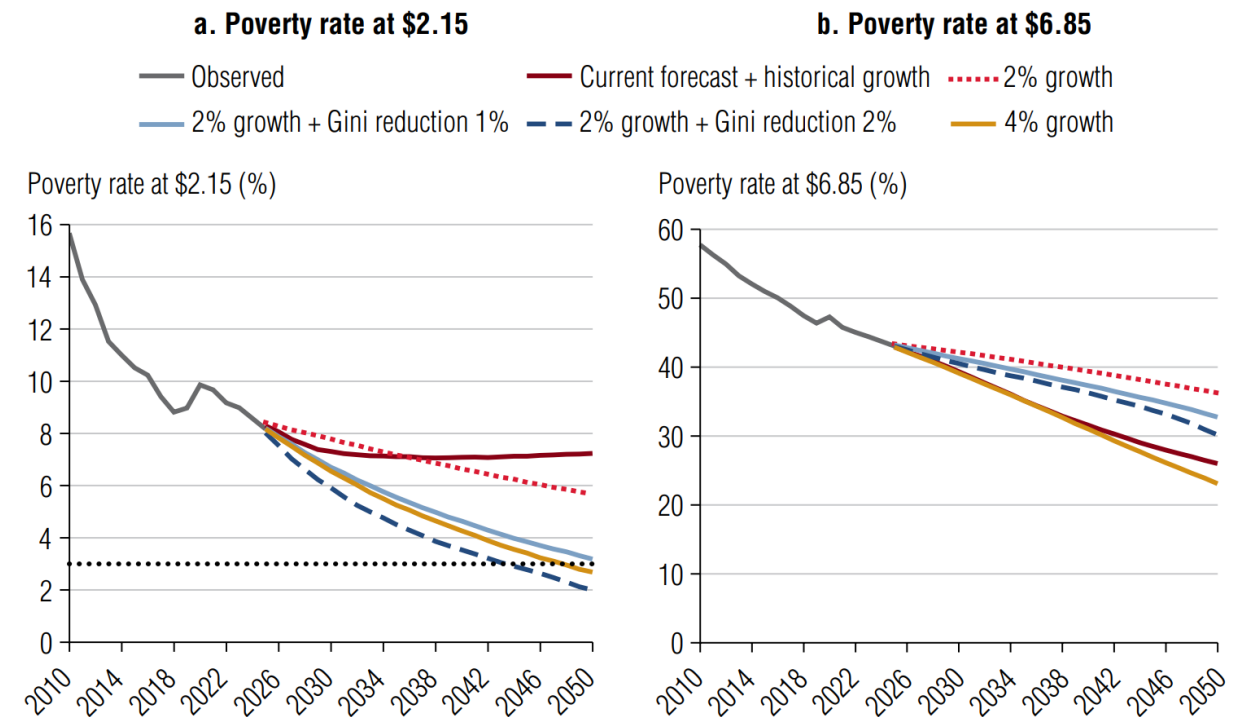


# We must use all of the tools in our toolbox if we are going get back on track to achieve SDG1

This requires strengthening the impact of policies by both:

- Enhancing the **evidence base** of what works to reduce poverty
- But also supporting countries to use that evidence base to **change policies**

Projections of poverty until 2050 under different scenarios



Source: World Bank (2024). Poverty, Prosperity, and Planet Report. Pathways out of the Polycrisis.



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Poverty & Equity


# THANK YOU

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