

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG:

Lessons Learnt and Not-yet Learnt from a Multi-country Women's Economic Empowerment Program

Pierella Paci

Female entrepreneurship: Obstacles, innovative interventions, and impacts

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The Results-Based Initiatives

Program of **5 pilots** (initially 8 envisaged): Egypt, Kenya, Liberia, Mekong (Laos/Cambodia), Peru

OBJECTIVE: to acquire rigorous evidence on what works in fostering women's economic empowerment

- **COMMON ELEMENTS:**
 - small programs (250 beneficiaries in Liberia to 1500 in Peru)
 - limited budgets (\approx USD 300,000) and relatively quick to implement and evaluate (about 2 years)
 - rigorous impact evaluations with randomized selection of beneficiaries
 - focus on training
- **BUT ALSO LARGE HETEROGENEITIES:**
 - cultural, geographic, and socio-economic context: three different regions, low/middle income, rural/urban settings, poor and non-poor groups
 - targeted beneficiaries and details of intervention: (i) three training only (Egypt, Kenya, and Peru) while two training+grants and equipment (Liberia and Mekong); (ii) in Egypt focus on wage workers while all others on self-employed women, (iii) group level v/s individual level pilot, (iv) training in business skills only v/s additional training on production techniques
 - technical details of the randomization of the impact evaluation, of the roll-out and of the final methodology.

A pioneering and promising program

- **PIONEERING:**
 - begun in 2007 when small scale pilots and rigorous evaluation technics still rare,
 - emphasis on economic empowerment rather than health and education,
 - focus on business training/coaching
- **HIGH POTENTIAL VALUE:** The scale and innovative character of the program → potential to provide useful lessons on
 - impact of interventions on female economic empowerment and
 - design and implementation of small scale pilots (with a gender focus).

.... that turned into a missed opportunity?

Problems with design and implementation

Findings on impact too weak to derive any firm conclusions

Heterogeneity of interventions and context

Findings cannot be generalized

Missed opportunity to know about impact

But wealth of information on the *dos and don'ts* of pilot design and implementation

Lessons not yet learnt: impact

Questions:

- *What* impact did each pilots have?
- *How reliable* are these findings?
- Is there a *consistent message* emerging across countries?

Lessons learnt:

- NO consistent message emerges
- Peru → significant improvement in business earnings
- Other pilots → NO statistically significant impact on wages, earnings, or business outcomes.
- NO increased investment in children's education/health. Mildly positive impact emerged on agency

But it would be a mistake to infer any general conclusions about the potential effectiveness of the interventions
→ *We have learnt little about these questions (about impact)*

Lessons learnt: pilot design 1

Issue:

Budget envelopes too small for complex programs spanning highly diverse countries, and with full-fledged impact evaluations

Lessons learnt:

Savings do not pay: Pilots require more resources than similar small programs because of higher costs of:

- diligence and preparation,
- detailed monitoring and evaluation,
- impact evaluation,
- dissemination

Lessons learnt: pilot design 2

Issues:

The **compressed time frame** for planning and design, implementation and evaluation **cut down essential stages** of the pilot process, including:

- clients' consultation and
- understanding the theory of change behind the intervention

The **complexity and time requirement** embedded in the change processes leading to progress on gender equality **underestimated**

Lessons learnt:

- **Saving time do not pay:** Need to balance pressures for quick results against benefits of (i) good planning, (ii) allowing enough time for implementation and adaptation, and (iii) for solid impact evaluation
- **Testing logistical arrangements** and feeding the findings back into the design of the intervention **is essential** but takes time
- When prior evidence is scarce, it is important to conduct **focus groups**, **pilot** the questionnaire, or **pre-test** part of the intervention

Lessons learnt: pilot design 3

Issue:

All pilots (but Liberia) faced **difficulties in recruitment**

This signals two potential problems:

- inherent **design problems** linked to questions on the relevance of the program and/or its accessibility for potential beneficiaries;
- **reduction in sample size**, which lowered the probability of finding statistically significant impacts

Lessons learnt:

Recruitment stage critical for small scale pilots

It takes time and effort for potential beneficiaries to learn about the intervention and

The target population may have **difficulty in physically accessing** the intervention

Lack of resources + tight time-frames → make the recruitment problem more acute and pressing

Lessons learnt: monitoring and IE 1

Issue:

Despite being designed a “program” the **heterogeneity** across pilots **too high** to allow for generalizable conclusions

Lessons learnt:

Generalizable lessons require **consistency** in design, implementation and impact evaluation methodologies across interventions

Too much weight given to **country context** prevents solid conclusions and using different evaluation methodologies generates doubts about measured impacts

Lessons learnt: monitoring and IE 2

Issue:

Difficulties in recruiting beneficiaries → number of beneficiaries too small to give statistical confidence to the findings

Lessons learnt:

To ensure reliability of results the targeted group need to be large enough for findings to be

- relevant to the whole population (*external validity*); and
- consistent with chosen evaluation technique (*internal validity*)

Size also needs to be consistent with objectives of replicability and/or scalability

Lessons learnt: monitoring and IE 3

Issue:

Too little focus on **real-time monitoring and adoption**:

- Monitoring protocols not fully followed
- monitoring systems varied in design, feedback mechanisms, and depth
- No effective way of allowing for effective adaptation of the program in response to real-time feedback

Lessons learnt:

Real-time monitoring of processes and performance is an **essential** component of pilots

Having an effective way of **adopting** in response to feedback is **also essential** to ensure impact and IE need to have flexible designs to incorporate the feedback

Monitoring information integrated in the evaluation contributes to better interpret the findings of the IE