The Science of Delivery: Taking Context Seriously

Expanding the Range of Ideas, Evidence and Strategies for Enhancing Development Effectiveness

**Michael Woolcock, DECPI**

DEC Policy Research Talk

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Overview

1. Clarifications
   - what this talk is and is not about
   - of key concepts
2. Development problems for which context *really* matters
   - managing change (in multiple dimensions)
   - building robust, legitimate public institutions
3. Why taking context seriously is so hard for the Bank…
   - (and everyone else)
4. …but not impossible
   - some current examples
5. Implications
   - for research, operations…
   - …and forging stronger relations between them

What this talk is not about...
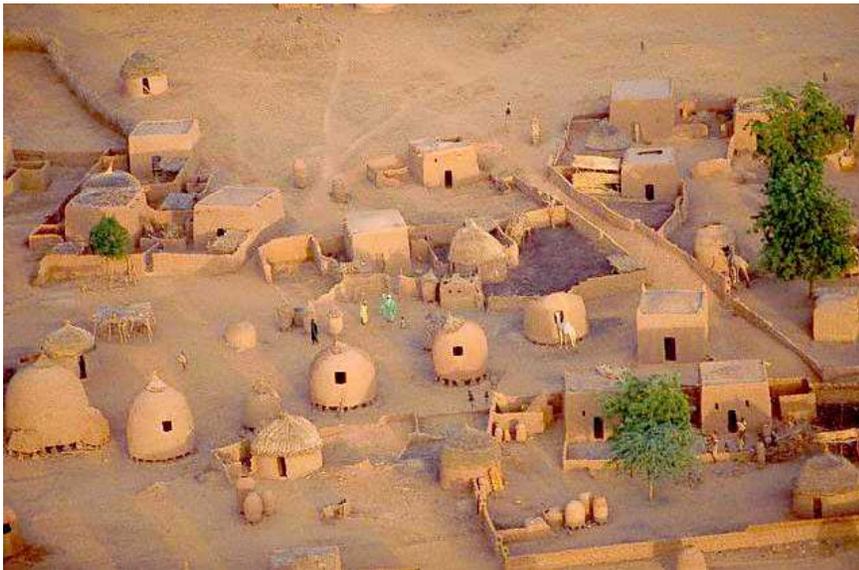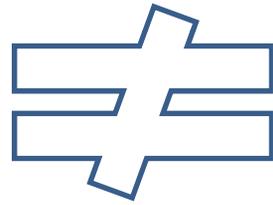
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It is not an easy task to go through a period of transition, and it becomes even harder when extraneous factors intervene in the renovation process, greatly hindering a normal adjustment.

How often we have been misled by presumed needs which we considered natural but which we later realized were proper to alien forms of civilization. We discover too late that such demands can be satisfied only with difficulty or not at all from our own resources. Dissatisfaction has thus befallen us, and worse: slowly but surely we have become alienated from our own people and our own environment. This alienation would have been bearable had it not been that in our case the abandonment of our own culture did not at the same time bring access to another civilization. Thus we have sacrificed what was ours but have not gained in its place anything that might be considered its equivalent; *we have lost our world, but we have not entered another*.

Who is to blame? Our answer is that it is our own fault, though only indirectly so. We had to choose, and we made our choice… We have added much new cultural material, the value of which cannot be discounted; however, *it often fits so ill with our own style or is so far removed from it that we can use it at best as a decoration and not as material to build with*. It is quite understandable why we have been so mistaken in our choice. In the first place, much has to be chosen, and there has been so little to choose from.

Ki Hajar Dewantara, 1935 (Indonesian educator)

Clarifying key concepts (1):
'Science of Delivery'

- **Science** = mechanisms + theory
  - Mechanisms = knowledge of contents of black box
  - Theory = explanations, predictions
    - E.g. how to stop scurvy: from citrus fruits to Vitamin C

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  - Theory = explanations, predictions
    - E.g. how to stop scurvy: from citrus fruits to Vitamin C
- **Delivery** = implementation
  - Which varies enormously...
    - Constructing schools is 'easy'; teaching children is 'hard'
- Thus, a *Science of Delivery* should provide
  - mechanisms-based explanations of how and why implementation capability varies, as a guide to action

Clarifying concepts (2): 'Development Effectiveness'

- Today, two 'developments':
  - **Big Development**
    - 'Modernization' of
      - <u>Economy</u>: enhanced productivity growth
      - <u>Politics</u>: power structures reflect popular will
      - <u>Social relations</u>: declining determinacy of 'conditions at birth'
      - <u>Administration</u>: large, meritocratic professional organizations

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      - <u>Administration</u>: large, meritocratic professional organizations
  - **small development**
    - Enhancing welfare of targeted individuals, in specific places
      - Long voiced as opposition to 'big development'
    - Manifest in NGOs
      - Have their corresponding strengths and weaknesses
  - **Effectiveness** = capability for making real change happen
 - ➢ Capability to build robust, proximate planks + safety nets
- But…

…the 'relentless revolution' rolls on
## (Joyce Appleby, 2010)

- Being 'effective' can be deeply destabilizing. Why?
  - **'Creative destruction'** (Schumpeter) not limited to rise/fall of firms; also affects identities, ideas, ideals, 'incentives', 'interests'
    - Marx: 'all that is solid melts into air'
    - Lippmann: 'the acids of modernity'
    - cf. Dewantara: 'we have lost our world, but not entered another'
  - **Ever widening mismatches** between
    - prevailing institutions and the new – often qualitatively different – challenges they confront
      - Especially governance, law (dispute resolution), land, natural resources
    - expectations and experience (de Tocqueville)
      - India (Gupta 2012); Turkey, Brazil, Egypt as we speak…
  - **Power shifts**: existing forms/sources of authority and power do not go quietly
    - Machiavelli (among many others)

Mostly poor to mostly rich (?), 1700 – 2100

Adapted from *The Escape from Hunger and Premature Death, 1700-2100*
by Robert Fogel (Cambridge University Press, 2004)
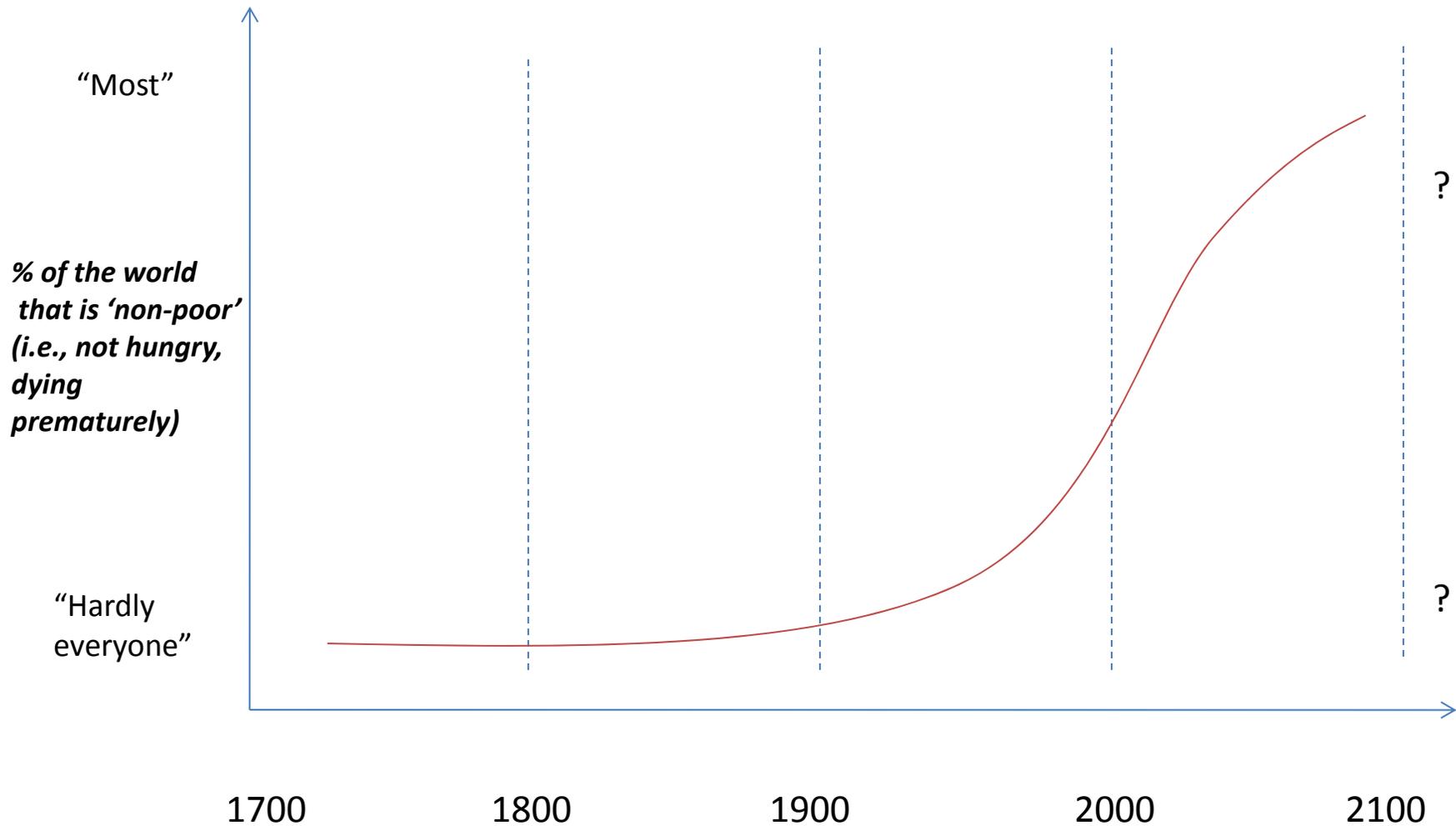
Ending slavery, colonialism; expanding civil rights, women's suffrage…
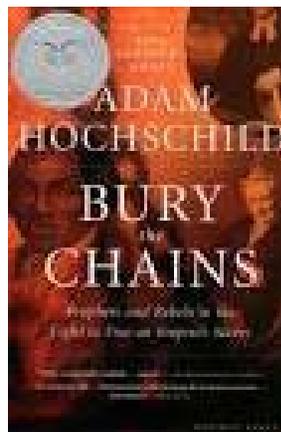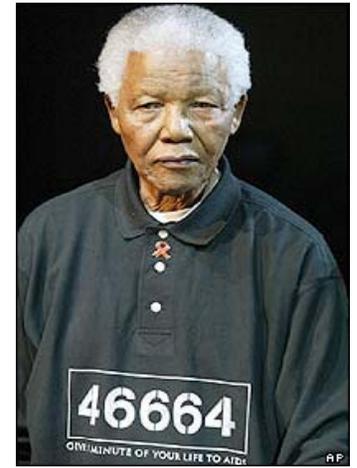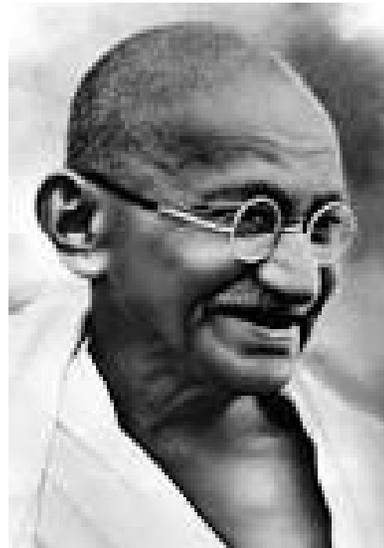
'The problem we all live with'

The 21ˢᵗ C Development Challenge

- **Building robust, legitimate public institutions for managing these seismic transformations**
- Writ large, 'Development' has been – and likely will remain – a highly non-linear, widely uneven, deeply contentious process
- This is the big picture *context* in which we all work, and to which we contribute every day
  - The more 'Development' succeeds (or fails), the harder it gets
    - Because modernity is mostly a package deal
- But do we (does anyone) know how to build robust, legitimate public institutions?
  - Current approaches not very encouraging (Andrews 2013)
  - Engaging diversity itself requires a more diverse array of ideas, evidence and strategies
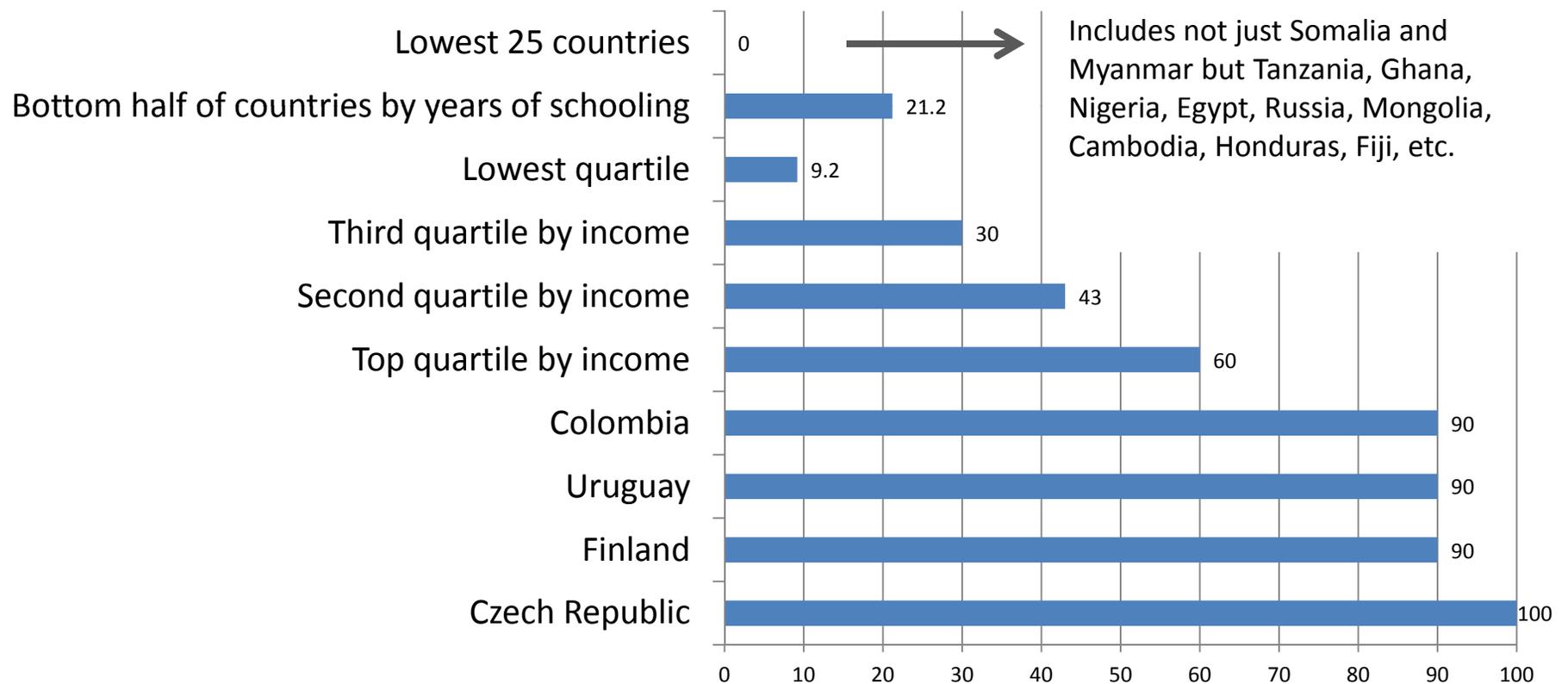
How big is the challenge?

- Laudable, well-design social programs struggle to be implemented
  - Akhil Gupta (2012) *Red Tape*

- Many countries can't even deliver the mail
  - A logistical, non-controversial activity
  - Chong et al (2012)

- The quality of 'governance' institutions in most developing countries is getting worse or stagnating, not improving
  - Pritchett (2013)
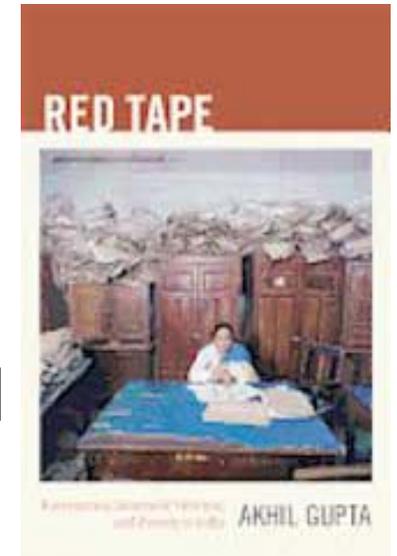
Delivering the mail (literally)—testing the post office in 157 countries

Percent of 10 misaddressed letters coming back to USA within 90 days

Category	Value
Lowest 25 countries	0
Bottom half of countries by years of schooling	21.2
Lowest quartile	9.2
Third quartile by income	30
Second quartile by income	43
Top quartile by income	60
Colombia	90
Uruguay	90
Finland	90
Czech Republic	100

Includes not just Somalia and Myanmar but Tanzania, Ghana, Nigeria, Egypt, Russia, Mongolia, Cambodia, Honduras, Fiji, etc.

Source: Chong, et al (2012)

Using the 'Quality of Government' rating there are few successes—*most* countries are going *backwards*

Classification by levels of Quality of Government in 2008		Classification by pace of change in (normed) Quality of Government, 1998-2008				
		Falling fast: (below -0.05 annual growth)	Stagnating (slow change, negative or positive)		Rising fast Above 0.05 annual growth	Row totals
			(Falling) below 0 but above -0.05 annual growth	(Rising) at or above 0 but below 0.05 annual growth		
High: (above 6.50)	Countries	BRN, MLT	SGP	BHS, CHL, ISR, KOR	TWN	
	Number	2	1	4	1	8
Medium: (above 4.00 but below 6.50)	Countries	ARG, BGR, BHR, BOL, CRI, GIN, GMB, GUY, HUN, IRN, JAM, LKA, MAR, MNG, MWI, NIC, PAN, PHL, POL, ROM, SUR, SYR, THA, TTO, TUN, ZAF	BGD, BRA, CUB, ECU, EGY, GHA, IND, JOR, MDG, MYS, OMN, PAK, PER, QAT, UGA, URY	AGO, ARE, BWA, CHN, CMR, DZA, ETH, KWT, LBN, MEX, SAU, VNM, ZMB	COL, IDN, TUR, TZA	
	Number	26	16	13	4	59
Low: (below 4.00)	Countries	CIV, COG, DOM, GAB, GTM, HTI, KEN, LBY, PNG, PRK, PRY, SLE, SLV, SOM, VEN, ZWE	BFA, HND, MLI, MOZ, SEN, TGO, ZAR	ALB, IRQ, MMR, NGA, SDN	GNB, LBR, NER	
	Number	16	7	5	3	31
Totals		44	24	22	8	98

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Institutional reform: the dominant model

Matt Andrews (2013) *The Limits of Institutional Reform* (Cambridge Univ Press)

- **Assumes function follows form** ('isomorphic mimicry')
  - An institution's visible, measureable 'design' is the primary causal agent of its performance
    - All manner of indexes, rankings (e.g. PEFA)
      - E.g., Uganda anti-corruption laws score 99/100
- **Problems often nominated, prioritized externally**
- **Focus on inputs delivered, not outcomes obtained**
- **Search for verified 'best practice' solutions**
  - Little concern for their external validity
- **Set unrealistic expectations**
  - Short timeframes ("History in a hurry")
  - Premature load bearing (too much, too soon, too often)

What to do? Elements of alternatives

- **History**
  - Of countries (US, Chile),
  - Of organizations (Toyota, MIT)
  - Of sectors (public health, education, social protection)
- **Academic literature**
  - "Good-enough governance" (Grindle)
  - "Just-enough governance" (Fukuyama and Levy)
  - "Deliberation, not blueprints" (Evans)
  - "Best fit, not best practice" (Booth)
  - "Second-best institutions" (Rodrik)
  - "Positive deviance" (Pascale et al)
- **Operational initiatives**
  - Results Based Management
  - Cash on Delivery Aid (CODA, GPOBA), et al

Common Operational Principles

1. **Local Solutions for Local Problems**
   - Intensive, extensive, ongoing engagement with political, organization context
   - What exactly is the problem, for whom?
     - Field research to document nature, extent, frequency
2. **Explore Problem-Driven Positive Deviance**
   - Indentify, document the variance (SD)
   - Someone, somewhere probably has a better way
     - Find them! What are they doing? How?
3. **Try, Learn, Iterate, Adapt**
   - Need tight, quality feedback loops (i.e., good monitoring)
4. **Scale Learning Through Diffusion**
   - Sharing ideas (GE), building community of practice
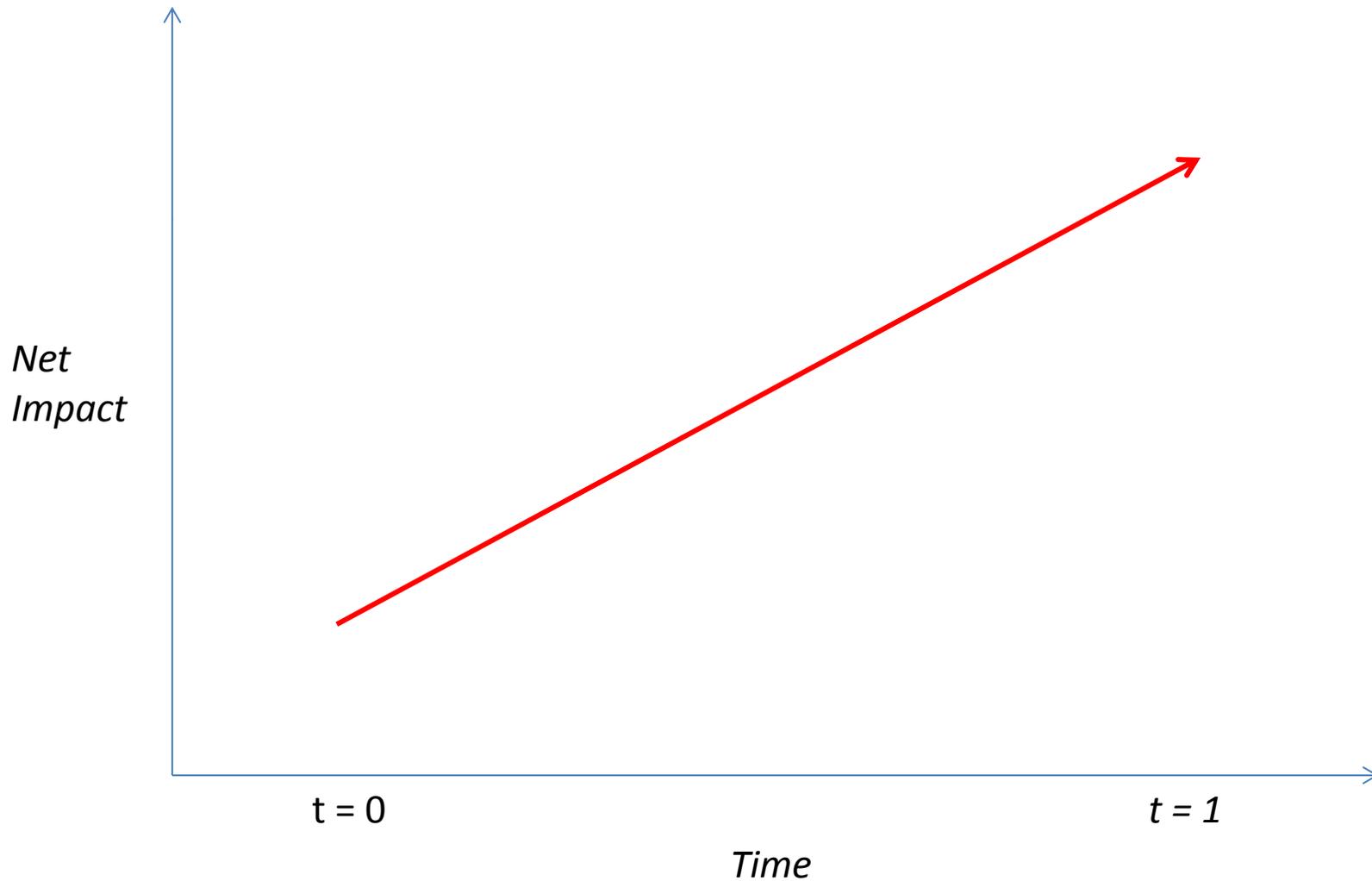   - Facilitating evidence-based policy dialogue
➢ **Success Builds Good Institutions** (not vice versa)
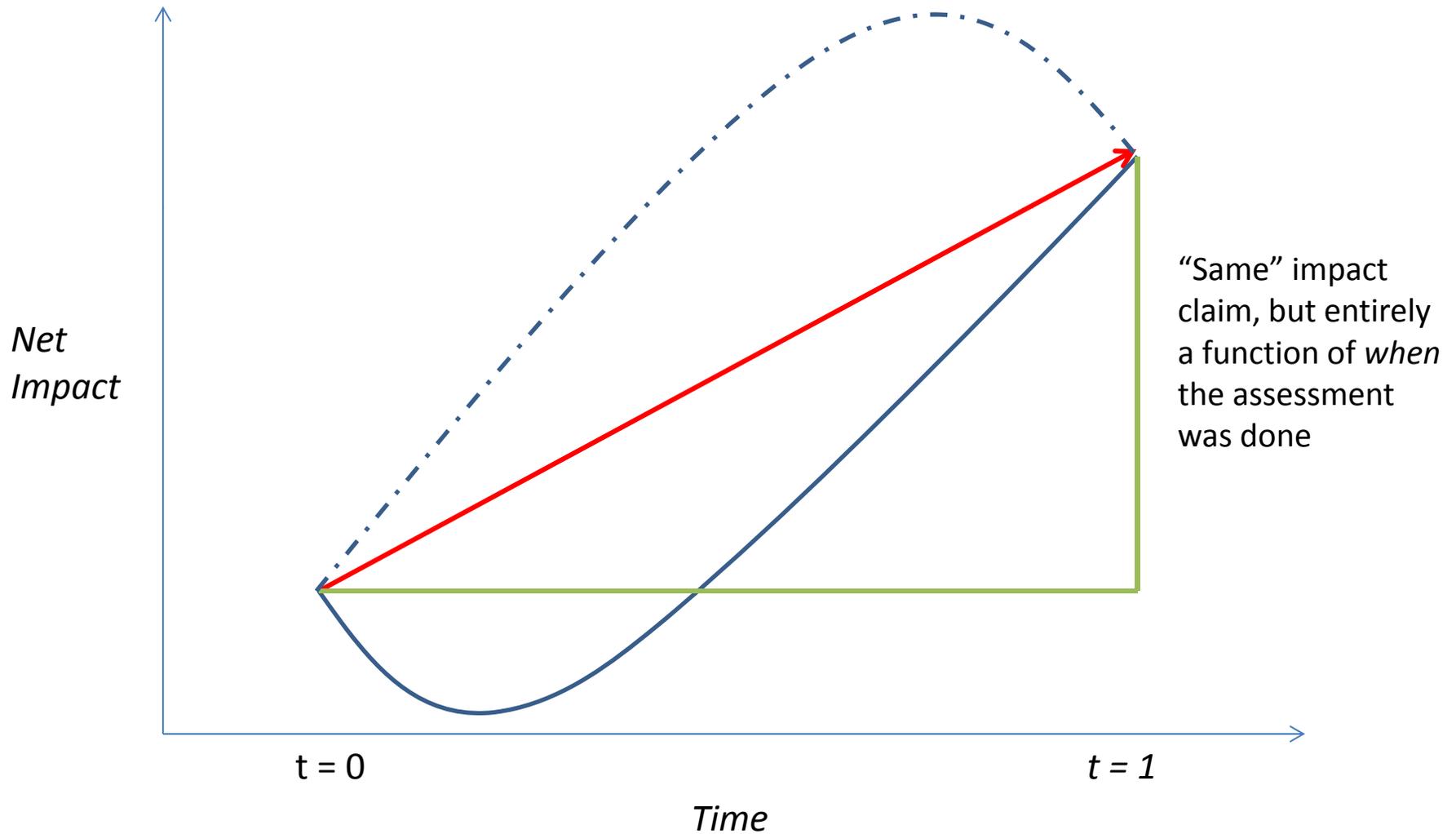   - Esp. in persistently low capability countries, sectors

Why this is hard for the Bank
(and everyone else)

- Development is politically weak, so we're bound to be risk-averse…

- …and everything about institutional reform is risky
  - Difficult to isolate 'true' impact
    - "The project" constantly changing (across time, space, groups)
  - Uncertain timeframes (Brown)
  - Likely to have high variance, non-linear trajectory
  - Difficult to infer likely impact elsewhere
    - i.e., likely to have low external validity
  - Understanding *how* and *why* (not just whether) impact is achieved is crucial
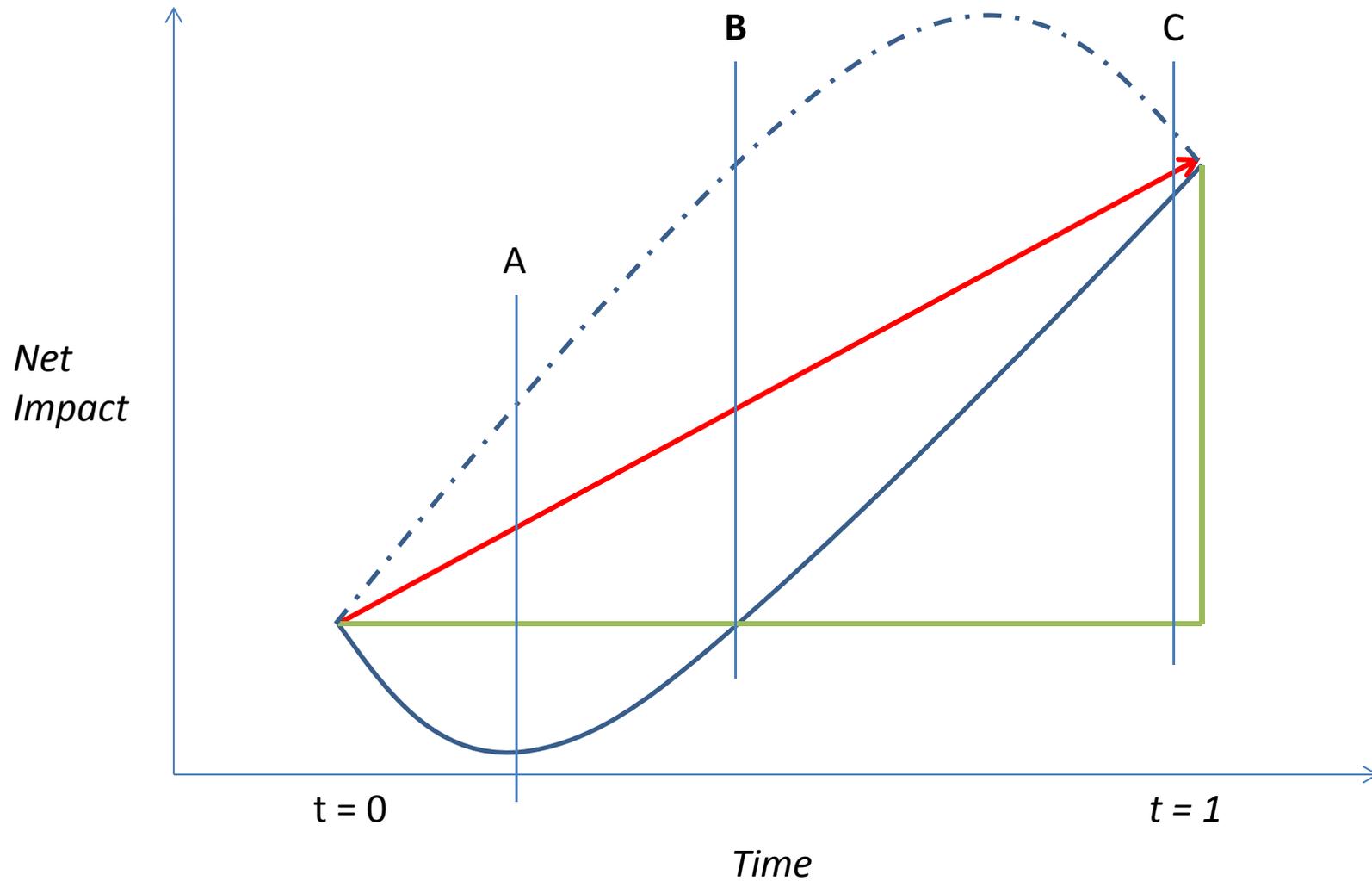   - Process Evaluations, 'Realist Evaluations', etc

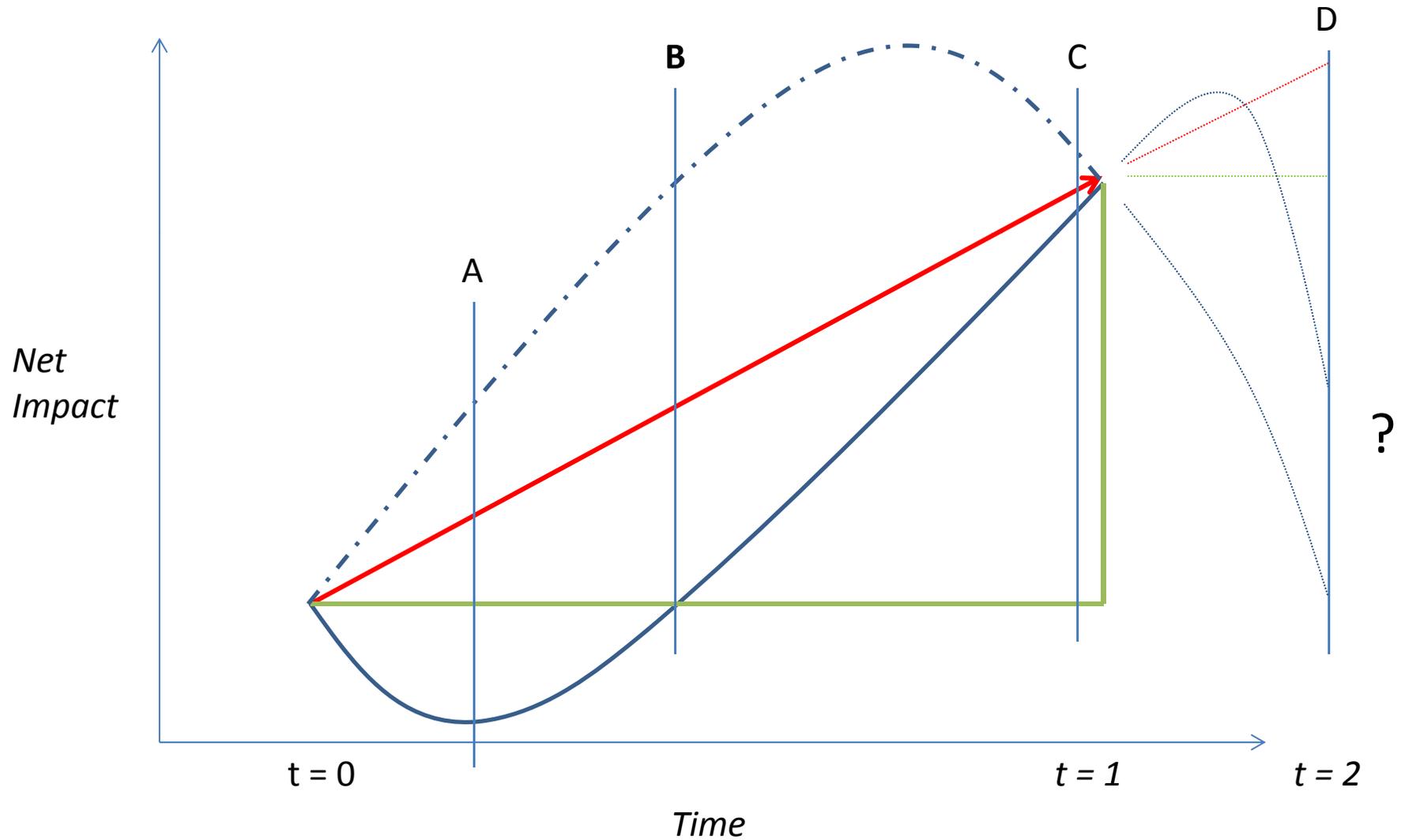# Assessing institutional reform: Expanding BAU evaluation
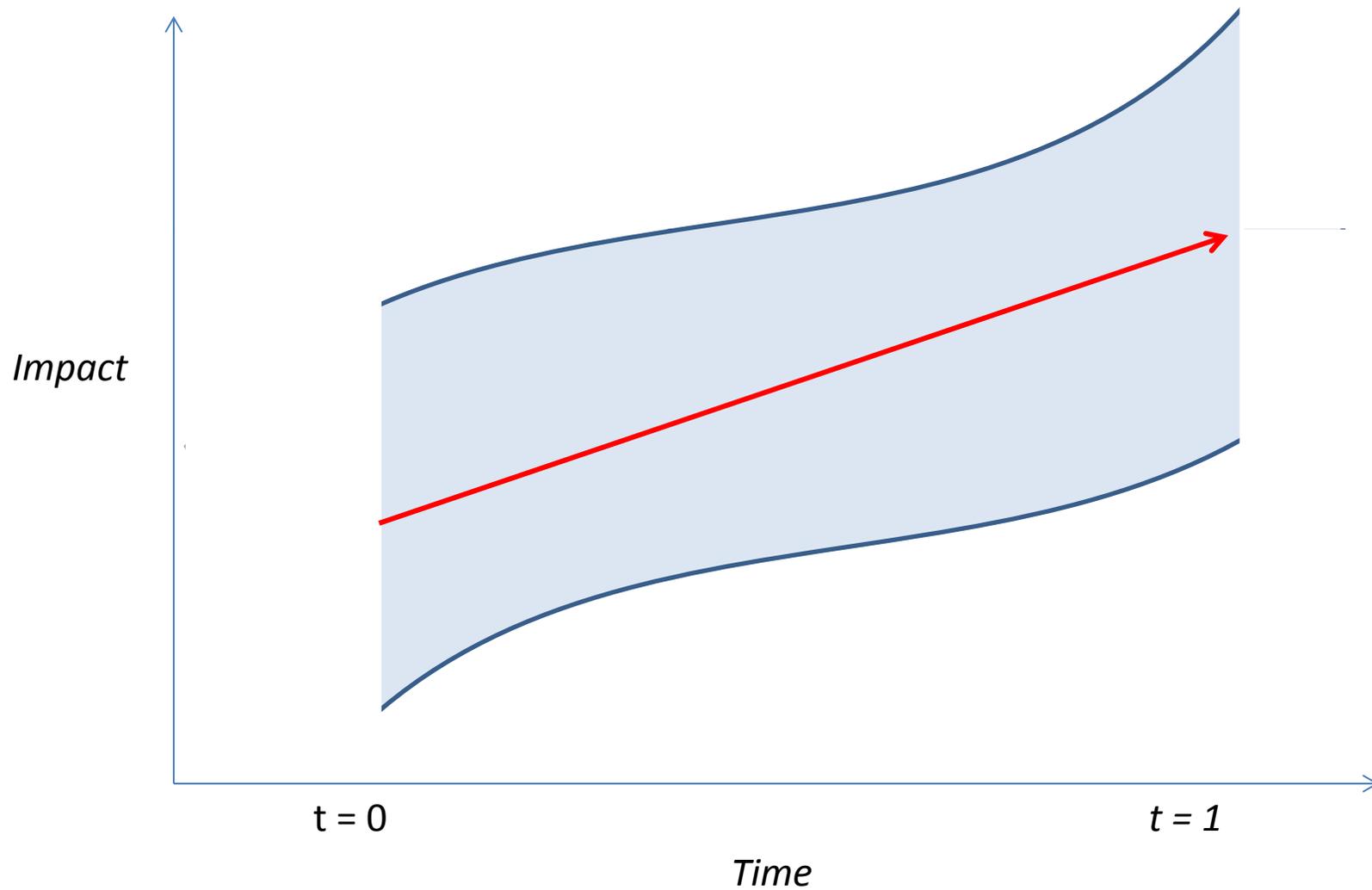
Understanding impact trajectories

Net
Impact

"Same" impact
claim, but entirely
a function of *when*
the assessment
was done

t = 0

t = 1

Time

Understanding impact trajectories

Net Impact
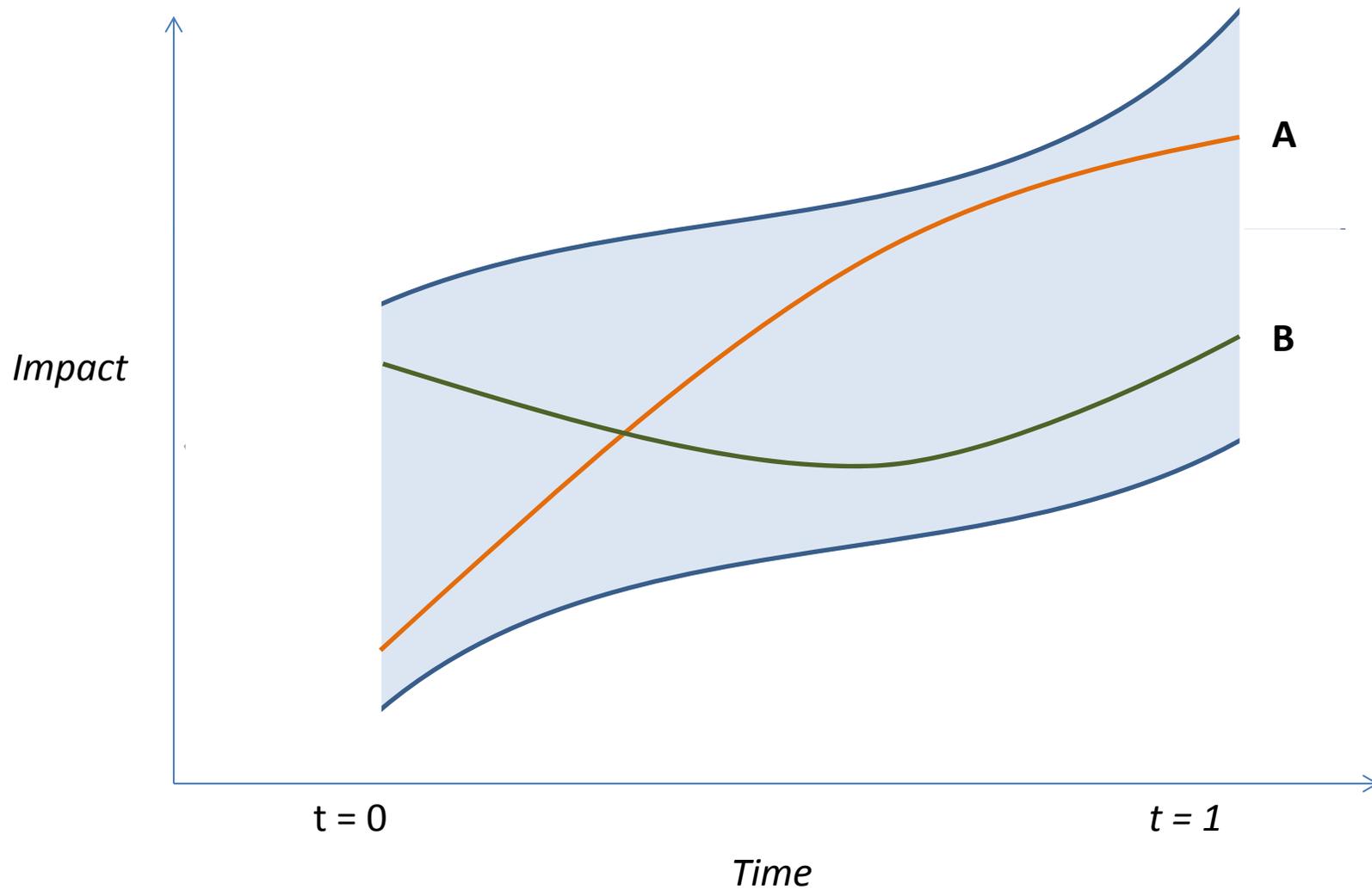
t = 0

A

B

C

t = 1

Time

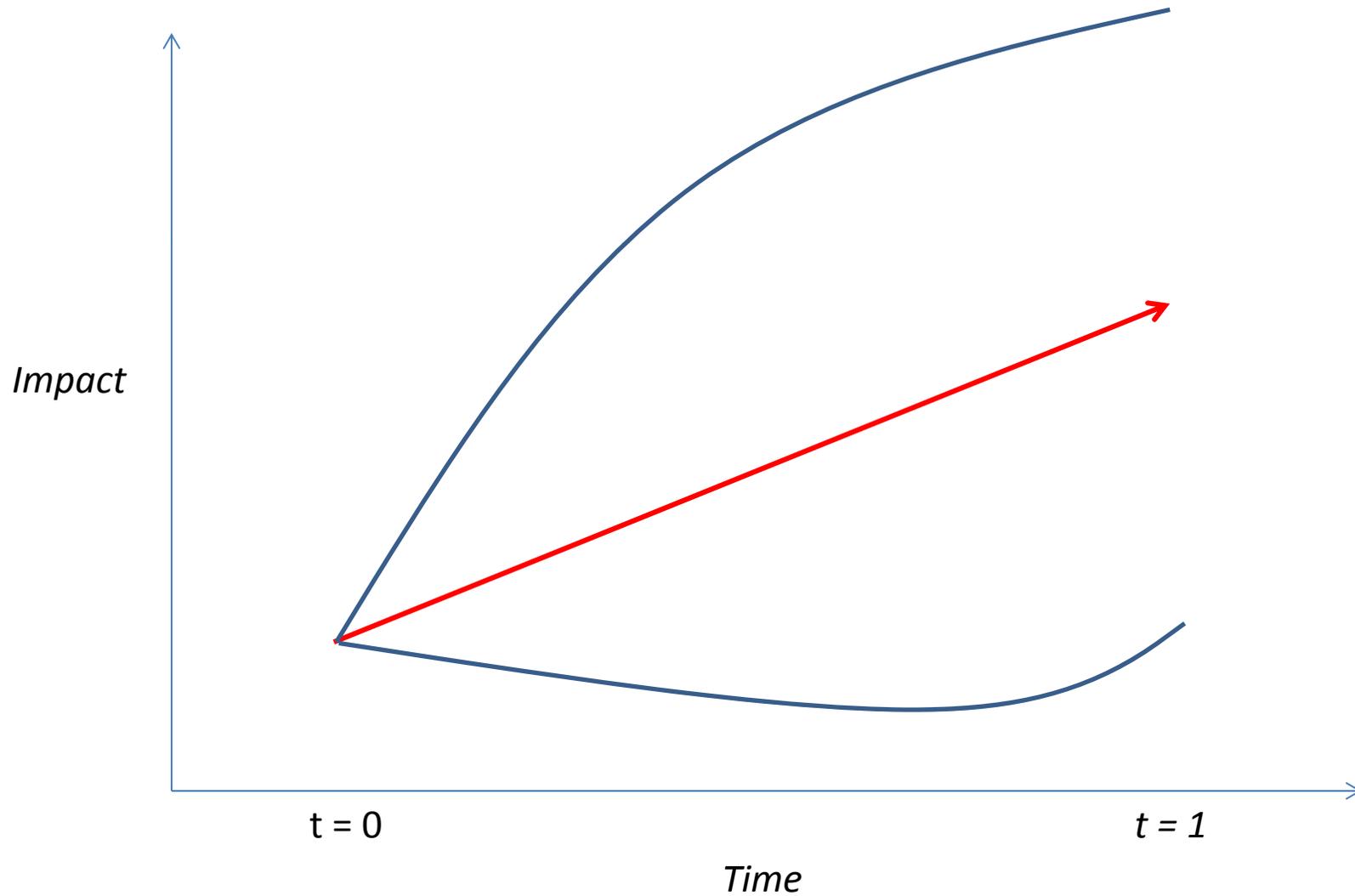# Understanding impact trajectories

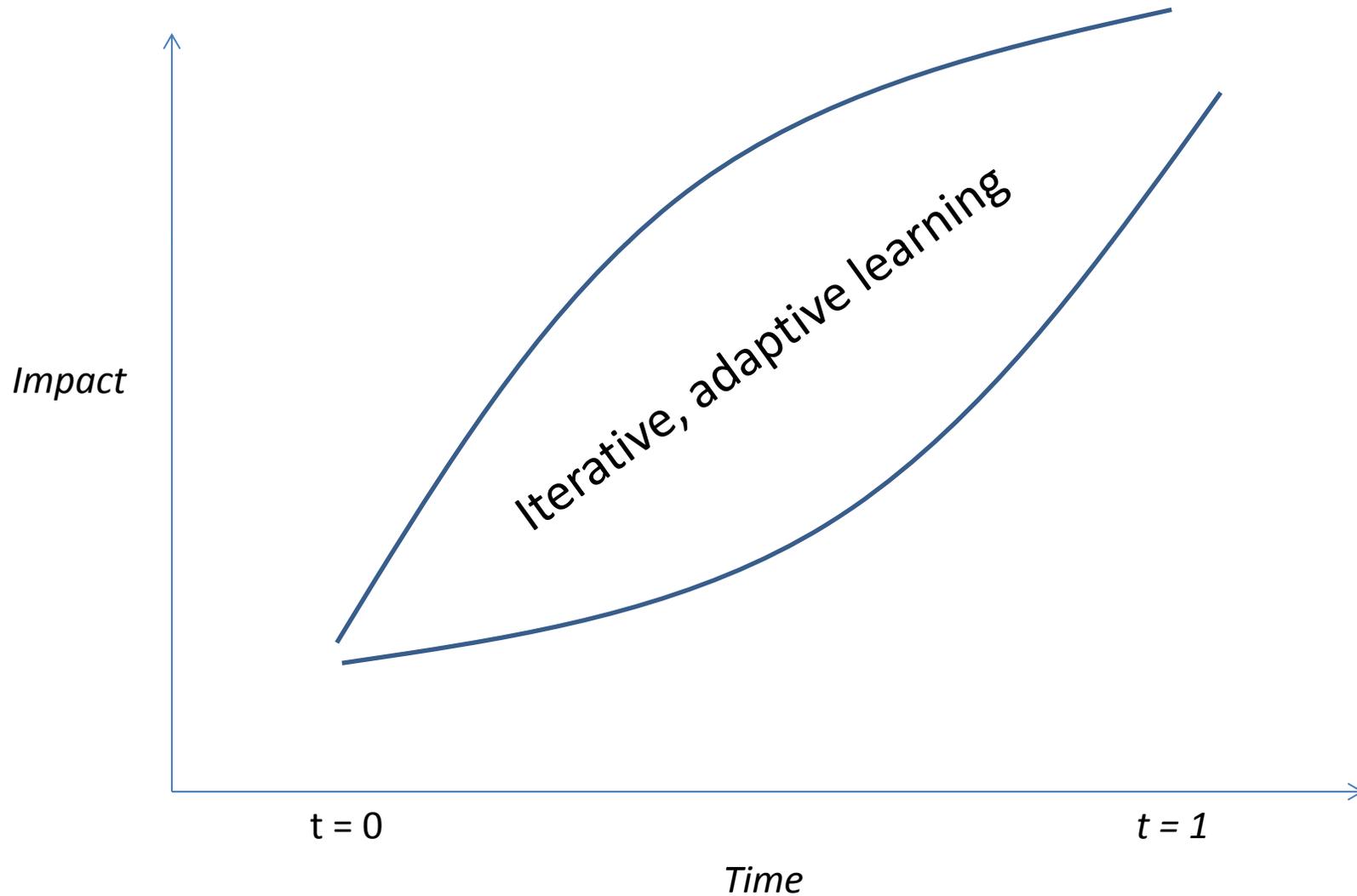# Learning from intra-project variation

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Some current examples

- From the archives (Kapur)
- From SDV
  - 'Institutions Taking Root' study
  - 'Local Level Institutions 3' study
  - 'Mapping Context for Social Accountability'
- Health in LAC
- Social Observatory for Indian Livelihoods
- Justice for the Poor program

Engaging with country programs

- What do J4P activities look like?
  - Indonesia
    - Aceh peace consolidation
    - Paralegals, Identity registration
    - Women's rights
      - Inheritance, domestic violence
  - Cambodia
    - Land disputes, Labor negotiations (textiles)
  - Kenya
    - Arid lands management
  - Papua New Guinea, Sierra Leone
    - SA mechanisms on NRM
  - Solomon Islands, Vanuatu
    - 'Island courts', 'Justice Delivered Locally'

Summary

- Delivering on global poverty reduction and inclusive economic growth is going to get harder, not easier, over the next 25 years…
- …because the types of challenges we will increasingly confront are those that stem from fundamental transformations of context
  - Which in turn are a product of development's inherently uneven success and failure, and citizens' increasing awareness of this
- To deliver on this agenda, the central challenge will be building robust, legitimate public institutions, a challenge for which orthodox approaches only get us so far. Engaging with these challenges requires taking context seriously, and thus tapping into the full range of human knowledge and experience.
- Doing this well is, and will continue to be, hard for the World Bank and everyone else; hard, but not impossible, and indeed we have examples already in place. This type of work can be a valuable complement to, not substitute for, the Bank's current work.

Implications

- **For research**
  - More diversity
    - Across disciplines, methods, product 'genres'
    - Think big (again), but be useful (Bardhan 2013)
    - 'Getting beyond averages' (Ravallion 2000)
  - Integral part of country teams
    - In-country, for years (cf. Indonesia, India)
    - Training, learning from, local researchers
- **For operations**
  - M&E as learning (not disciplining) instrument
    - More, better tools for 'navigating fitness landscape'
    - For understanding impact variation: in situ, in real time
  - Explicit about current knowledge (ESKI), theory of change
    - We're all slaves to some defunct theorist (Keynes)
    - Projects as 'policy experiments' (Rondinelli 1993)
      - So much to teach researchers, students, each other

Development depends...on calling forth and enlisting for development purposes resources and abilities that are hidden, scattered, or badly utilized.

Albert Hirschman, *Strategy for Economic Development*

Source material

- Woolcock, Michael (2009) "Toward a Plurality of Methods in Project Evaluation: A Contextualized Approach to Understanding Impact Trajectories and Efficacy" *Journal of Development Effectiveness* 1(1): 1-14

- Barron, Patrick, Rachael Diprose and Michael Woolcock (2011) *Contesting Development: Participatory Projects and Local Conflict Dynamics in Indonesia* New Haven: Yale University Press

- Pritchett, Lant, Michael Woolcock and Matt Andrews (2013) "Looking Like a State: Techniques of Persistent Failure in State Capability for Implementation" *Journal of Development Studies* 49(3): 1-18

- Andrews, Matt, Lant Pritchett and Michael Woolcock (2013) "Escaping Capability Traps Through Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA)" *World Development* (forthcoming)

- Woolcock, Michael (2013) "Using Case Studies to Assess the External Validity of Complex Interventions" *Evaluation* (forthcoming)