
All That Glitters Is Not Gold. A Political Economy Approach of Randomized Evaluations in Development

Florent Bedecarrats* , Isabelle Guérin¹, and François Roubaud²

¹Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD) – Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, Cessma – Adresse du siège - Le Sextant 44, bd de Dunkerque, CS 90009 13572 Marseille cedex 02, France

²UMR DIAL - IRD (DIAL - IRD - Unité Développement Institutions et Mondialisation) – Institut de Recherche pour le Développement - IRD (FRANCE), Université Paris IX - Paris Dauphine – 4 rue d'Enghien 75010 Paris, France

Résumé

Randomised Control Trials (RCTs) have a narrow scope, restricted to basic intervention schemes. Experimental designs also convey specific biases when implemented in the real world. Despite such limitations, this method has been advertised as the gold standard to evaluate development policies, including public development policies. This paper takes a political economics angle to explore this paradox. It argues that RCT success is mostly driven by a new scientific business model based on a mix of simplicity and mathematical rigor, media and donor appeal, and financial profitability. This in turn meets current interests and preferences in the academic world and the donor community.

Mots-Clés: Impact evaluation, Randomised control trials, Experimental method, Political economy, Development.

*Intervenant