

**National Evaluation Capacities 2017**  
**Pre-conference workshop**

**Impact Evaluation: Scope and Limits in the Real World**

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She is the author and coordinator of several publications about the use of evaluation (Cejudo & Maldonado 2011); the development strategies of Brazil and Mexico in comparative perspective (Magaldi & Maldonado 2014); the emergence of evaluation as a discipline (Maldonado & Pérez Yarahuán 2015) and the state of the art of national evaluation systems in Latin America (Pérez-Yarahuán & Maldonado 2016), among others.

**Workshop Content**

It is often claimed that randomized controlled trials (RCTs) for impact evaluation are the gold standard of evaluation, because they meet scientific standards for causal inference. However, in the world of evaluation practice as well as scholarly debate, interrelated terms like *result*, *evidence* and *impact* are controversial concepts whose meaning is often challenged and debated by groups in different epistemological and methodological traditions. Although few would deny the relevance of credibly identifying the development impact of policies and programs and the need to shift focus on results, there is great variation and discussion around what constitutes rigorous evidence of impact and what type of methodological strategies can and should be pursued.

This workshop presents a review of the theoretical and methodological foundations of experimental (and quasi-experimental, by extension) impact evaluation in order to clarify the purposes, logic and limitations of these evaluation strategies, and offer a critical reflection on the scope and limits of impact evaluation.

For the purposes of this workshop, a pluralist perspective will be adopted in order to discuss three relevant dimensions of this debate: 1) methodological diversity and complementarity, 2) ethical and logistical considerations; 3) decision-making value of impact evaluation.

#### Objectives

- I. Introduce key terms and concepts behind impact evaluation (the problem of attribution, experimental causal inference, biases and identification strategies)
- II. Describe experimental and quasi-experimental methods, and show the problems they solve (and do not solve), given specific conditions.
- III. Critically discuss the scope and limits of experimental impact evaluation

#### Structure

- I. What is impact? What do impact evaluations do? Why are randomized controlled trials considered rigorous?
- II. How is experimental and quasi-experimental impact evaluation done?
- III. What are the real scope and limits of these strategies in the real world? In the context of SDGs?

The workshop does not require previous readings or knowledge of quantitative impact evaluation methodologies, but a certain familiarity with notions of causal inference and sources of bias can be useful.