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STANFORD SOCIAL INNOVATION *review*

Upfront

When You Build It and They Still Don't Come

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EVALUATION

When You Build It and They Still Don't Come

According to an in-house review of World Bank projects, over the past five years only 2 percent of programs had been properly evaluated to see whether they had made a difference. Last summer, World Bank chief economist Francois Bourguignon launched an initiative to change that by requiring evaluation in all big projects the bank funded.

Already, one surprising finding has rolled in. Its evaluation of school enrollment in 21 of the world's poorest countries found that building more schools did not significantly increase enrollment and sometimes even exacerbated inequalities of education between wealthy and poor students. The study determined that it was more effective to invest in improving the quality of existing schools and bolstering the demand for quality education among local populations.

Ariel Fiszbein, lead economist in the World Bank's human development department, further explains that conducting evaluations on a case-by-case basis is critical, because it is rarely as simple as giving a program a thumbs up or a thumbs down. Some innovative programs, like putting parents in charge of local schools, can be effective in getting more kids to go to school. But this same program is less effective once the bar is raised to improving test scores and the overall quality of education. —*Andrea Orr*