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Research paper

Supporting local institutions for inclusive green growth: Developing an Evidence Gap Map

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ABSTRACT

We conduct a structured search of the academic literature that assesses the impact of development interventions that aim to build and strengthen local-level institutions to facilitate Inclusive Green Growth. Inclusive Green Growth extends the standard growth perspective to include welfare enhancements both the poor ('inclusive') and for future ('green') generations. We restrict our search to studies in the domain of agriculture and poverty alleviation in the developing world. We access ten online databases and various working paper series and focus on summarising evidence from quantitative studies that use rigorous evaluation methods. Together, this yields 158 studies. We then retain 66 studies that contain a credible counterfactual. We visualize the interventions and outcomes in an Evidence Gap Map, highlighting both the available evidence and remaining knowledge gaps. Most studies suggest that strengthening local institutions can improve the delivery and targeting of public services and overall satisfaction with local governance. There are however, clear limitations and knowledge gaps highlighting priorities for future work. Few studies assess impacts on final outcomes such as household income or agricultural productivity and no studies assess inclusive and green outcomes jointly. We discuss the key benefits of a structured literature search and Evidence Gap Map for policy-makers and development practitioners and illustrate how it serves as a knowledge repository and identifies where evidence is lacking, thus setting the agenda for future work.

1. Introduction

The past decades have seen a growing recognition of the role of institutions in the development processes. A consensus view has emerged suggesting that institutions rather than geography are the main determinant of growth (or lack thereof, see [Acemoglu et al., 2001](#); [Easterly and Levine, 2003](#); [Rodrik et al., 2004](#); [Rodrik, 2006](#)). Besides featuring prominently in academic work, debates over the role of institutions and how to change them have influenced the scope of international development assistance. Views have varied and encompass “big push” and “blue print” approaches (think of the U.N. Millennium Development and Sustainable Development Goals initiatives, see also [Sachs, 2005](#)) to “bottom up” and diagnostic approaches incorporating local constraints ([Easterly, 2006](#); [Rodrik, 2010](#)). Recently, Inclusive Green Growth (IGG) has become a term central in the in global donor community discourse. Coined by the [World Bank \(2012\)](#), it is referred to as ‘the economics of sustainable development’ as growth that improves the welfare of both current (‘inclusive’) and future (‘green’) generations. The term has become a buzz word for development

planning and cooperation and is viewed as a means for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While IGG typically encompasses a broad range of policy themes, ranging from clean energy development to sustainable urban planning, we focus on the sub-domain of agricultural and rural development. Within this domain, the stimulation of Inclusive Green Growth often entails interventions that build or amend local institutions to internalize (environmental) externalities, support an equitable distribution of benefits and deliver a more optimal provisioning of public goods ([World Bank, 2012](#)).

Despite the policy enthusiasm for an institutional focus to achieve inclusive and green growth, the available evidence has been scattered and until recently limited. In addition, generic statements like ‘development interventions should strengthen local institutions’ is of little practical use for policy-makers and development practitioners seeking clear guidelines on most effective interventions in novel project locations. Have such interventions resulted in the desired effect always and everywhere? How can we learn from the cumulative set of relevant studies for guiding more effective development practice? We conduct a structured literature search to identify the available evidence on

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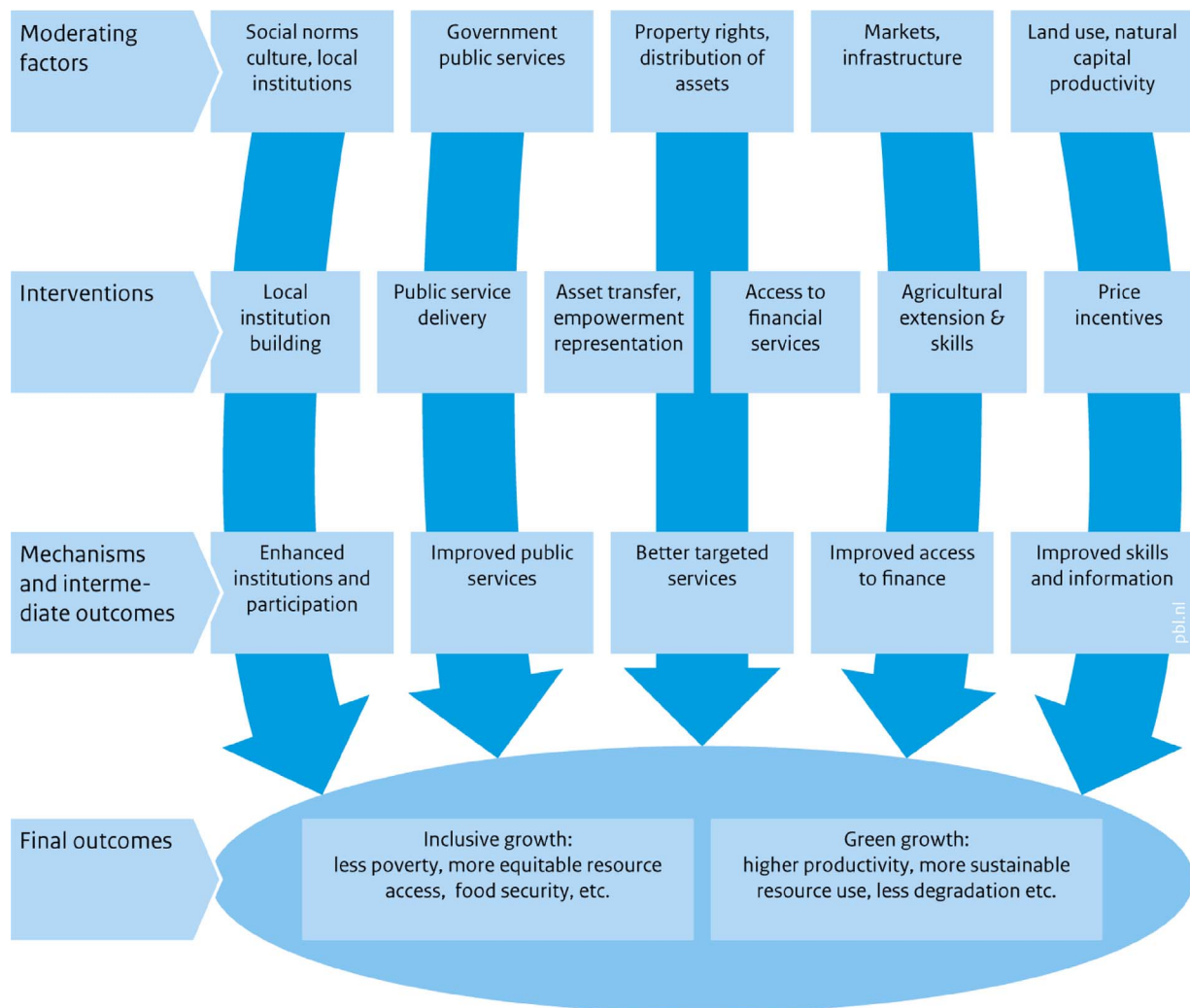


Fig. 1. Theory of change.

institutional interventions that aim to foster Inclusive Green Growth in the developing world. We then construct an Evidence Gap Map (EGM) where we identify the set of institutional interventions and outcome (or impact) categories (Snilstveit et al., 2013).

EGMs provide policy-makers with relevant evidence in a transparent way. Evidence Gap Maps uniquely synthesize the available information and facilitating the development of evidence-based policies for policy-makers, development practitioners and researchers alike. In addition, EGMs show where evidence is lacking setting the agenda for future research.

Fig. 1 roughly outlines the type of institutional interventions, distinguishing between contextual, or moderating, factors, intermediate outcomes and final inclusive growth, or green growth outcomes (World Bank, 2012; Bouma and Berkhout, 2015; and papers identified in our structured search). With institutions we refer to “systems of established and prevalent social rules that structure social interactions” (Hodgson, 1988). Following this definition, institutional interventions may be directed at strengthening informal and community type of institutions, like village committees and microcredit groups, or contribute to building or strengthening formal organizations like farmer cooperatives or government organisations, like agricultural extension departments.

The institutional interventions considered can be grouped in two types: (i) interventions directed at the distribution of resources (inclusive growth- equity) and (ii) interventions directed at the productivity of resource use (green growth- efficiency). Examples of interventions in the first category include efforts to empower or increase representation of marginalized stakeholders and interventions that secure access for poor households and reduce their vulnerability. Examples from the second category are those that invest in improved access to information, market facilities and property rights, thereby reducing market failures and information costs. Also considered are efforts to strengthen institutions aimed at improving public good delivery and creating incentives for sustainable resource use.

Moving from interventions to policy outcomes is not straightforward. For example, training a village committee to become more transparent may enhance local participation in village meetings, but this does not necessarily lead to enhanced public good provision. Similarly, empowerment of marginalized groups may increase participation in meetings, but this does not necessarily imply that they benefit more. Hence, both intermediate and final outcomes should be considered, as interventions may contribute towards improving the quality of the institutional environment in the short-run, but to a final objective

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