

2009 International Campbell Collaboration (C2) Colloquium

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Abstract Information

Abstract Title:

Synthetic Review of the Impact of Microfinance

Format:

Paper

Themes:

microfinance, developing countries

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Abstract:

Over the past two decades, microfinance activities have spread across the globe, reaching tens of millions of poor households with tailored financial services. Current estimates vary between 133 and 190 million microfinance borrowers worldwide. This growing importance has resulted in a vast number of research and evaluation studies, including impact studies. The growing evidence base on impact allows us to infer some important lessons on the effectiveness and impact of microfinance at different levels of change. Moreover, the diversity in processes of change and effects across regions, types of services, clients (etc.) can be captured and synthesized by using a theory-based approach, uncovering context-mechanism-outcome configurations of positive and negative microfinance experiences. This paper synthesizes high quality evidence from a wide range of study designs, including experimental, quasi-experimental, econometric and other approaches. Given the size of the microfinance sector and the enormous diversity in contexts, the paper emphasizes the importance of a thorough mapping and delimitation exercise, by type of instrument, context and level and mechanism of change. The paper develops a methodology based on a combination of Campbell standards and realist theory-based principles. The presentation will focus on methodology and preliminary findings from the study.
