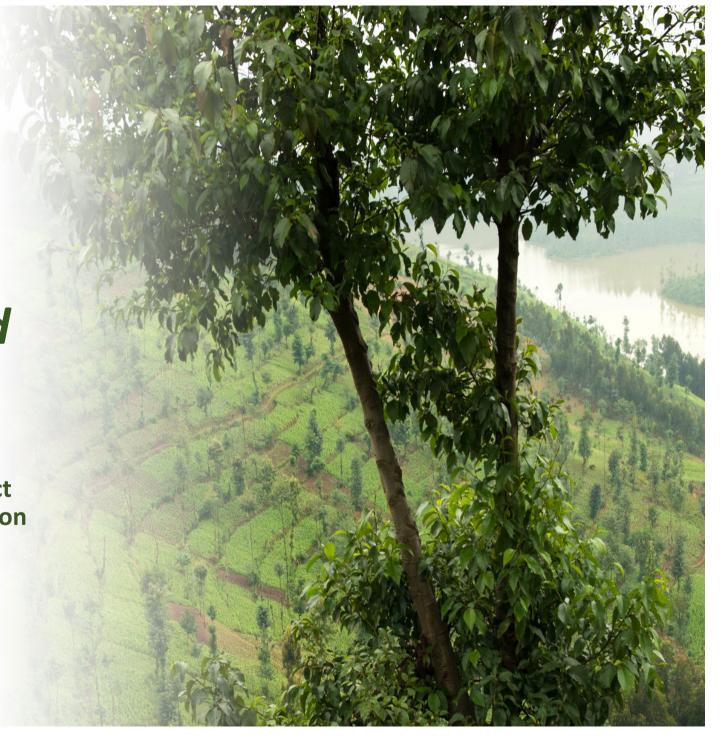
Some musings on evaluating the impacts of integrated systems research

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Is the system large N or small N?

LARGE N, e.g., farming systems

Statistical counterfactual impact estimation (with/without) theorectically possible

Statistical counterfactual impact generally not possible, so need to rely on mechanistic (explanatory) approaches

And often efforts undertaken to improve both systems simultaneously, e.g., improving farm-level production while strengthening other value chain nodes

How does change in complex systems happen?

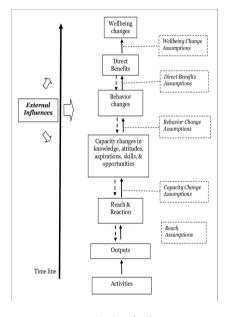


DUNCAN GREEN

"....change in complex systems occurs in slow steady processes such as demographic or technological shifts, punctuated by **sudden**, **unforeseeable jumps**. Often these jumps...are driven by crises, conflicts, failures and scandals, which disrupt social, political or economic relations, creating an appetite for new ideas and opening the door to previously unthinkable

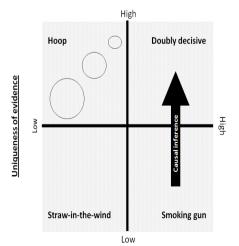


How relevant then is evidencing the unfolding of our own prospectively developed Theories of Change?



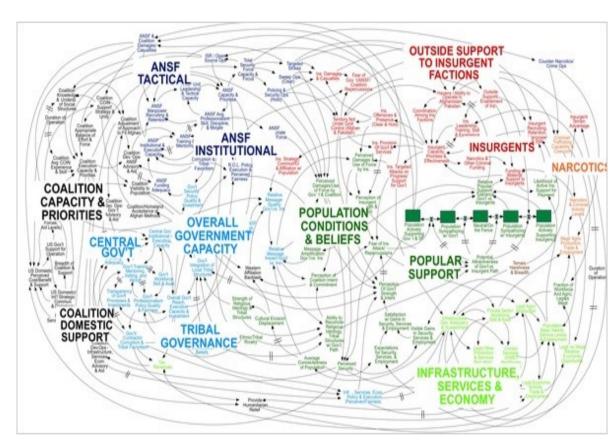
Certainty of evidence

Retrospective
approaches,
e.g., Process
Tracing, would
therefore seem
attractive to
evaluators...



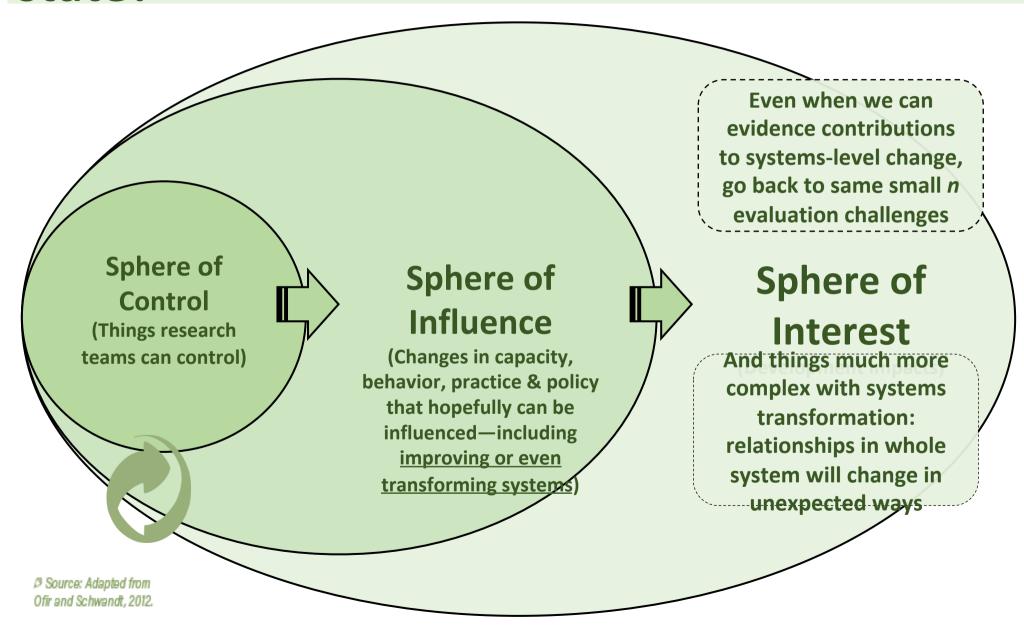
...but often need for "deep" understanding of system & context

- Not always easy for evaluators to gain such an understanding
- Actual decision-making processes (or reasons for reforms, etc.) often inaccessible
- Insider knowledge useful & important but high potential for confirmation bias
- Consensus on methods for addressing bias in large n studies not same degree as for small n
- Historians & political scientists often debate reasons for big changes in history—things



A diagram developed for the U.S. military mapping spheres of influence in Afghanistan

How to link systems changes to changes in state?



R4D impact evaluation (& R4D impact expectations)?

- Arguably, the demand for direct impact evidence has made R4D less effective at inducing (or contributing to) desirable systems transformation
- We (and donors) need to recognize (and embrace) the inherent complexity, and, in turn, limitations
- Systems oriented R4D should focus—
 through well targeted research &
 engagement—on increasing the likelihood
 that the system will pivot (or jump)
 towards a more positive trajectory—
 without assuming control or ability to
 predict exactly what this trajectory will be
- Evaluation can stop there if a jump has not

