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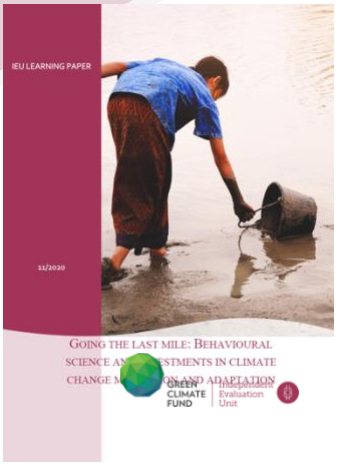


LEARNING PAPER SUMMARY:

Going the last mile: behavioural science and investments in climate change mitigation and adaptation

The IEU's Learning Paper Series fosters learning and discussion of climate evaluation, low-emission and climate-resilient development pathways.
This 2-page summary provides a quick overview of the IEU's learning paper on behavioural science and climate investments.[1]

Background

With its focus on catalysing low emission climate-resilient pathways, the GCF assumes its investments will change the behaviour of beneficiaries and communities in ways necessary to ensure the investments' success. However, the IEU learning paper summarized in this brief questions this assumption and argues that most climate actions ignore the *last mile* in their causal pathways.

Approach

The IEU learning paper examines the potential for including behavioural science interventions in GCF investments and funded proposals to increase adaption or mitigation action within communities. The paper identifies *last mile gaps* in the GCF's approach to behaviour change in these investments.

The last mile

The last mile is the gap between the knowledge provision and skills creation usually included in investments, and changes in practices and behaviour on the ground. Ignoring last mile gaps can cause large investments to fail by not changing people's practices, processes and behaviours due to psychological barriers.

Key drivers of behaviour

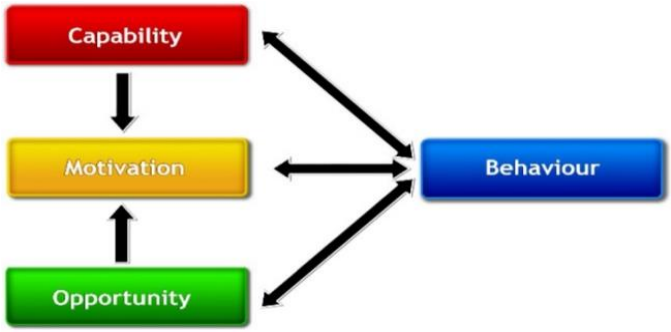
The learning paper uses the COM-B model of behaviour to identify what must happen for a behaviour change intervention to be effective. See figure 1.

Capability encompasses all individual attributes that enable a certain behaviour. This includes knowledge and skills, but also mental models.

Opportunity is the environment's impact on conditions for behavioural change. For example, infrastructure, processes, social norms and hierarchies may conflict with a change in behaviour.

Motivation refers to incentives and values. This category includes cognitive biases, emotional responses and habits related to decision-making.

Figure 1: COM-B framework for understanding behaviour. (Michie, van Stralen, and West, 2011)



Psychological barriers & climate action

A complex set of interrelated psychological factors hinder climate awareness and action. The learning paper examines three of these.

Perceived distance: Experiences, not data, generally inform people's decisions. Climate change is often explained scientifically and focuses on the distant future. This makes it difficult for individuals to relate their actions and experiences to the bigger phenomenon. Research has found that last week's weather highly influences people's perceptions of climate change.

Framing: How climate information is presented (framed) can affect people's response to it. Current framings of climate change largely focus on its disastrous effects, often leading to people being disinterested. Framing an action as a loss often elicits a different reaction when the same action is presented as a gain. For example, presenting mitigation costs as foregone gains can increase support for emission cuts.

[1] The citation for the IEU learnining paper discussed in this summary is Krüger, Cornelius, Jyotsna Puri (2020). Going the last mile: Behavioural science and investments in climate change mitigation and adaptation. IEU learning paper, November 2020. Independent Evaluation Unit, Green Climate Fund, Songdo, South Korea.

Cognitive dissonance: If a person supports climate change actions but feels their actions are ineffectual (e.g. they cannot afford solar panels), they may be experiencing "cognitive dissonance". To resolve this, they may adjust their beliefs or ignore the issue instead of changing their behaviour.

Interventions based on behavioural insights

Nudges are positive reinforcement and indirect suggestions used to influence behaviour and decision-making. They are effective because following them requires less mental effort than deliberative thinking, while too much nudging can undermine one's self-reflection and deliberative action.

A sub-category of nudges is the use of social norms and social influence. Humans are prone to social influence, such as that exerted by groups that define desirable behaviour. Commending a majority for its desirable behaviour exerts social pressure on others to do the same.

Boosts foster the individual's competencies instead of inducing a specific behaviour. They assume individuals wish to enact the desired behaviour but lack the means to achieve it. Examples include making information easily understandable and teaching people rules of thumb to improve decision-making with low cognitive load.

Applying this knowledge to GCF projects

The learning paper selected 11 GCF investments to examine the potential of behavioural interventions in helping projects close the last mile gap and increase the likelihood of changing people's behaviour. Of the 11, three examples are discussed below.

Nudges and GCF partners: In a GCF project involving the financing of a multilateral bank that funds climate finance institutions, due diligence depends largely on local operators. A nudge in the form of a requirement that relevant officials sign a declaration of honesty could increase honesty in reporting.

Social norms and social influence in a water project: In Kiribati, a GCF project supports the construction of a desalination plant while conducting a behaviour change campaign regarding water use and sanitation. This campaign could use the positive deviance approach for increased effectiveness, which assumes society already has solutions, but only a few people apply them. The deviance approach encourages these people to share their knowledge with the community.

Boosting competencies in a farming project: In Ethiopia, a GCF project providing adaptive farming technologies for rural communities includes training that addresses gender inequalities. However, this training may be undermined by traditional gender roles that shape women's understanding of what they are able and allowed to do, thus limiting their achievements. Value-affirmation exercises, such as participants writing a short essay about what they value, can empower women by reframing their identity and creating a healthy sense of self.

Findings and recommendations

The learning paper found 82 per cent of GCF investments potentially have a last mile gap. The paper concludes that behavioural science approaches to completing the last mile require context-specific analyses, mental models to understand barriers and enablers, and behavioural science interventions that are tested before being used and scaled up. Using such approaches can clarify what works in climate projects. The paper recommends a set of steps on how behavioural science tools can be developed to increase the effectiveness of climate investments, as explained in Box 1.

Box 1. Applying behavioural science to project design

1. Build a theory of change and identify the last mile.
2. In the last mile of the project's theory of change, identify barriers to and enablers of desired behaviour.
3. Map these barriers and enablers and create *mental models* customized to the project context.
4. Build a distribution of these behaviours and determine the incidence of different behaviours in the population.
5. Design possible behavioural science interventions and test their efficacy.
6. Test the uptake of efficacious interventions in experimental settings.
7. Implement tested behavioural interventions in the field and test them further.
8. Work with project designers and implementers to use and scale up tested and successful interventions.
9. Report and disseminate as much as possible.

Conclusion

The authors of the learning paper believe the GCF is potentially a trailblazer in understanding what works, for whom and under what circumstances, for developing-country contexts and climate change investments. It can achieve this by identifying and testing behavioural science interventions that are well suited to developing-country contexts.

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