

The Millennium Villages Project: Did it displace other development interventions?

This Briefing Paper is the fourth in a series to communicate key points from the independent impact evaluation of the Millennium Villages Project (MVP). The MVP aimed to demonstrate that rural Africa could address poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through low-cost, science-based interventions at the village level.

This mixed method impact evaluation of one MVP site in Northern Ghana took place over more than five years. The evaluation consisted of a statistically representative survey of over 2,000 households within 35 villages in the project site and 68 comparison villages. It also included three longitudinal qualitative studies that collected evidence on institutional change, a range of welfare measures and local perspectives (see MVP Briefing Paper 8). Undertaken by Itad, the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Participatory Development Associates Ltd (PDA Ghana) and commissioned by DFID, it is anticipated that the findings will be of interest to a wide range of people in the development sector.

Millennium Villages Project

Beginning in 2005, the MVP aimed to overcome the 'poverty trap' facing some countries by applying an integrated strategy for health care, nutrition, education, water supply and sanitation, infrastructure, agriculture and small business in clusters of villages. The idea was to achieve the MDGs by undertaking simultaneous investments, rather than the usual sectoral or step-by-step efforts. The synergies from these multiple interventions were intended to have a greater impact than that of separate interventions.

By 2016, the project had been implemented in 14 different sites in 10 African countries, reaching approximately half a million people in 79 villages. The MVP sites cover different agro-ecological zones and together represent farming systems used by 90% of the agricultural population of sub-Saharan Africa.

What have been the displacement effects of the MVP?

This Briefing Paper answers key questions about the validity of the evaluation findings in relation to the potential displacement of other development interventions. Did the MVP attract other development investments into the project or comparison villages? Or did it lead to the reverse and displace interventions that would have ordinarily taken place? Was there any noticeable diffusion or displacement of expenditure by government or non-governmental organisations (NGOs)?

These are important questions because if such effect was to occur in the project or comparison villages, it could undermine the findings from the evaluation.

Why might displacement potentially happen?

Governments and NGOs might:

- ▶ Reduce their spending in the project villages, especially if the same services are being offered by the MVP.
- ▶ Divert funds to comparison villages to avoid duplication of effort in project villages, or to match expenditure in comparison villages for political reasons.
- ▶ Decrease funds in comparison villages, if they are required to match funding or are attracted to support implementation in project villages.

The MVP in Northern Ghana

From 2012–16, the £11 million MVP in Northern Ghana targeted a cluster of 35 villages of up to 30,000 people in the West Mamprusi, Mamprugu Moagduri and Builsa South districts. This is an area of extreme poverty, with 80–90% of the population living below the national poverty line. The project was spearheaded by the Earth Institute (Columbia University), with operations overseen by the Millennium Promise and the Savannah Accelerated Development Authority (SADA), a semi-autonomous Government of Ghana agency.

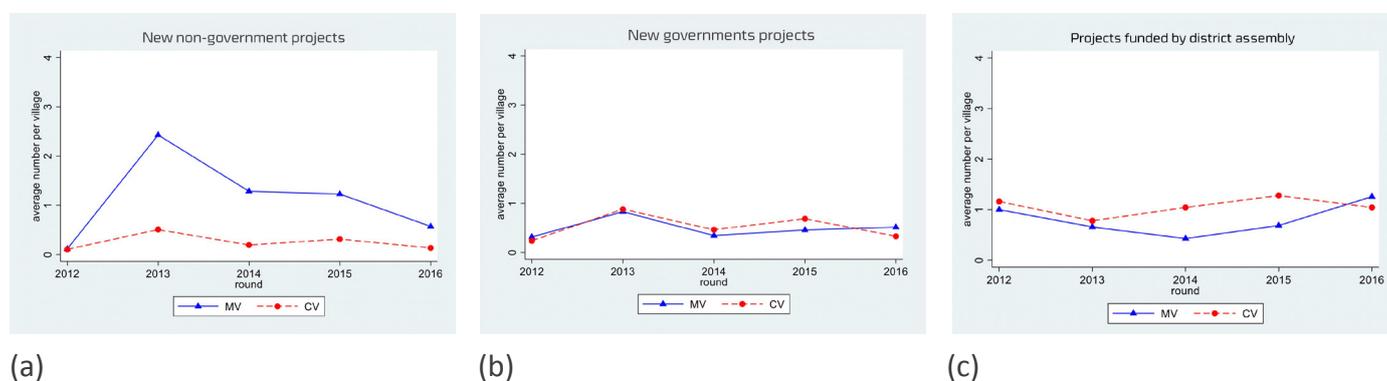
Assessing the effects of displacement

Evaluators investigated the effects of the MVP on government and civil society projects using community-level data collected in the 35 project villages and 68 comparison villages. The survey collected information every year on new projects implemented in each village for the previous year, which organisation implemented the projects, and in what sector (health, education, agriculture, etc.).

The information was gathered from small groups of knowledgeable people such as community chiefs, teachers or other community leaders. The survey also collected data on projects funded by the district assembly.

- ▶ Overall, findings show that there were no perverse effects on projects implemented in the comparison area. There is no sign that the number of interventions implemented by the government and the district assembly in comparison villages decreased in order to support the project villages – see Figure 1, (b) and (c).
- ▶ Patterns of NGO projects in the project area appear to increase but as the evaluation was unable to identify specific MVP interventions within this data, this may be mostly due to the MVP investments – see Figure 1, (a).
- ▶ Patterns of new government projects and district assembly projects appear very similar, suggesting the absence of substitution or displacement effects. There is a hint of an increase in non-MVP projects in the comparison area, but it is not significant – see Figure 1, (b) and (c).
- ▶ The analysis suggests that there are no perverse effects of the MVP intervention on projects implemented in the comparison areas. The size of any such bias is likely to be small.

Figure 1. Average number of projects per village in MVP and Comparison Village areas



Key evaluation findings

To put the findings of this brief on displacement in context, here are the overall findings of the evaluation as described in Brief no 1. It is worth noting that this Briefing Paper considers a specific way of assessing the impact of the MVP. MDG indicators are just one way of evaluating the success of the project, and the indicators as a whole are not definitive, nor do they necessarily reflect the lived realities of people in MVP areas.

- ▶ Overall, the project did not meet its stated aim of achieving the MDGs by 2016. However, it did have a statistically significant impact on seven of the 28 MDG outcome indicators.
- ▶ There was no observed impact of the project on the official MDG poverty or hunger indicators and it does not appear to have reduced poverty or hunger at all.
- ▶ The project did not improve some of the outcomes it explicitly targeted such as child mortality, immunisation rates, antenatal care, access to drinking water and usage of mobile phones.
- ▶ However, some encouraging impacts of the intervention in education and health are:
 - Primary school attendance increased by 7.7%.
 - Some intermediate health indicators improved such as births attended by skilled professionals, use of contraception and children sleeping under mosquito bed nets.
 - Access to improved toilet facilities increased.



The MVP Endline Summary Report and MVP briefings can be accessed from www.itad.com/knowledge-and-resources/MVEval

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Credits

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