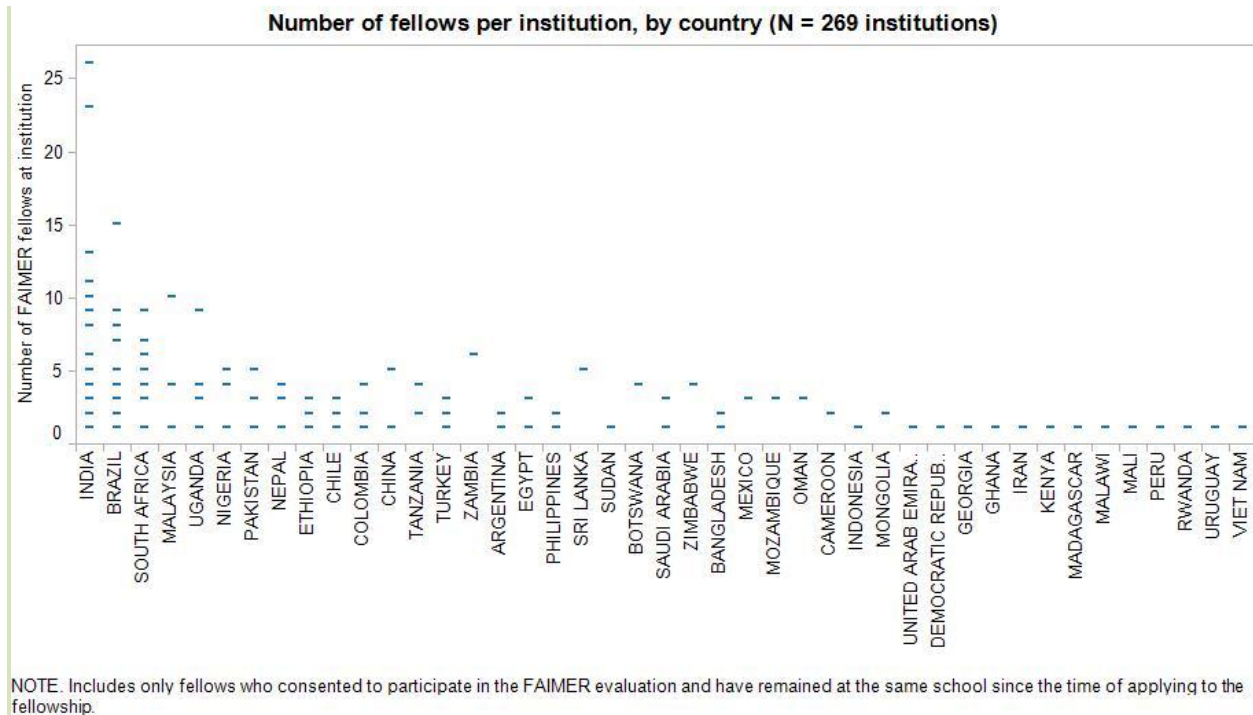


BRIEF REPORT, FEBRUARY 2013: Understanding “critical mass”

The number of FAIMER fellows at institutions varies widely. The figure below shows the number of fellows per institution, organized by country. In India, for example, institutions range from having one fellow to having more than 25. Many countries have institutions where there is just one fellow. Of all current and graduated fellows through 2012 program years, about 20% are in institutions with one fellow, 50% in institutions with 2-5 fellows, and 30% in institutions with more than 5 fellows.

Deans and fellows from institutions with more than two fellows saw that greater change can occur when a “critical mass” is reached. Deans suggested that as the number of fellows from the institution grows, there will continue to be a bigger impact. *(from January 2013 Brief Report)*

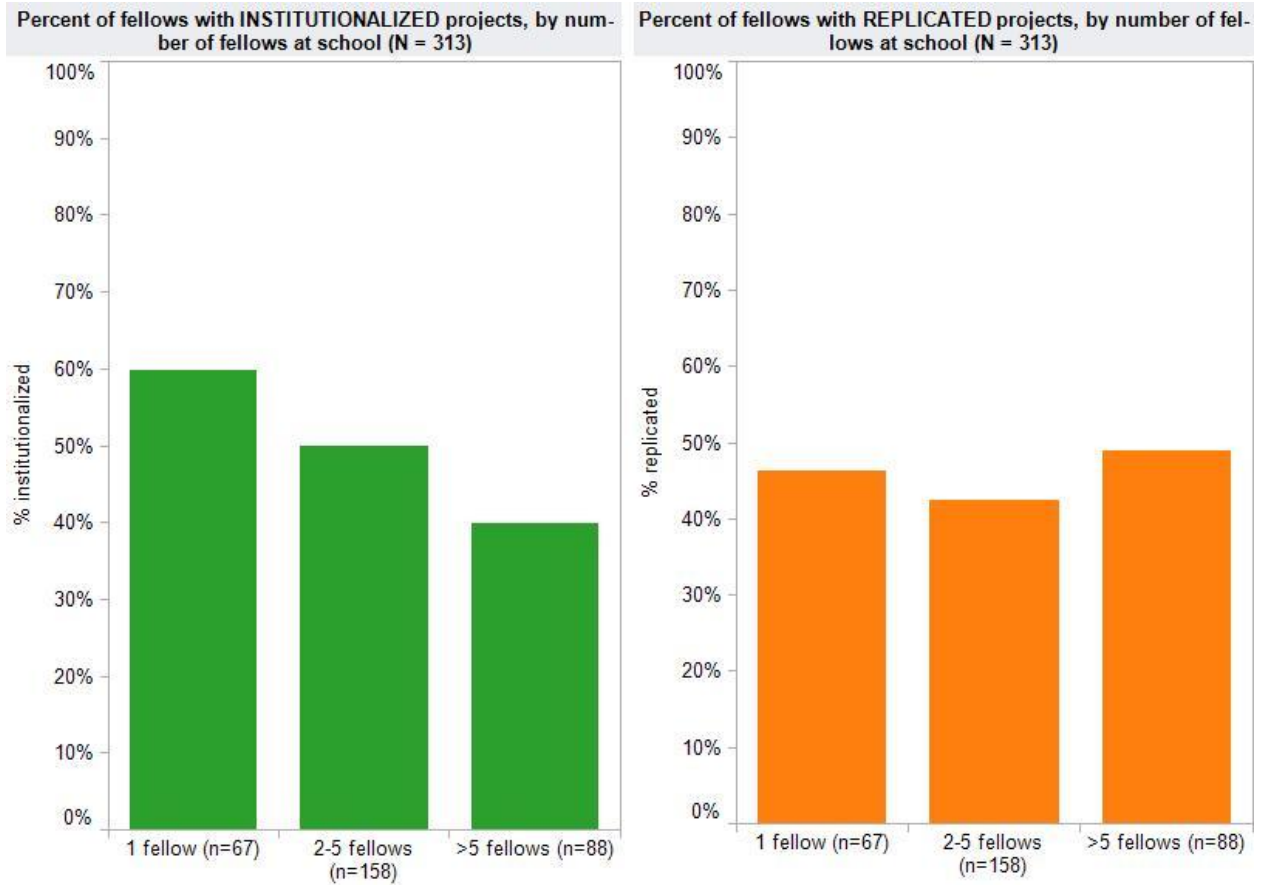


What does it mean to say that “greater change” can occur with more fellows at the same institution? Presumably “change” on an institutional level means some form of improvement in education. One way to examine this is to look at **FAIMER fellow education project replication** (i.e., replication in another course/module/year OR another setting OR another country) and **institutionalization** (i.e., incorporation into the curriculum OR as an institutional policy or procedure).

Clearly, where FAIMER is known, and where there is a critical mass of former fellows, **support <for projects> is easier to achieve.** *(from report on focus groups with 2011 FAIMER Institute Fellows, section on support for fellows’ projects)*

Based on responses of 313 fellows who completed Section 2 of the online Professional Development Portfolio (and who consented to participate in the FAIMER evaluation and have been at the same institution since applying to the fellowship), it appears that having more fellows at a school does not translate to greater likelihood of project institutionalization/replication. Rates of institutionalization range between 40% (for fellows from schools with more than 10 fellows) and 60% (for fellows from schools with one fellow). Rates of replication range between 42% and 49%.

BRIEF REPORT, FEBRUARY 2013: Understanding “critical mass”



We can easily imagine that many factors affect project success. And project institutionalization/replications is only one of many possible measures of “change” at institutions.

There are many factors potentially at play as we try to understand the potential for “greater change” in institutions with multiple fellows, including differences in individual fellows, their interactions, and their environments. It could also be that we need to look at other types of change, such as faculty development or curricular changes, in order to observe the impact of multiple fellows.

What are your thoughts and theories about the impact of “critical mass”?