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Standardizing evaluation process: Necessary for achieving SDGs – A case study of India

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ABSTRACT

A set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 are to be implemented and achieved in every country from the year 2016 to 2030. In Indian context, all these goals are very relevant and critical, as India missed the target on many components of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The author strongly feels that one of the key reasons was lack of an in-built robust system for measuring the progress and achievements of MDGs. Monitoring and Evaluation of programmes and schemes, aiming at different SDGs, in a robust and regular manner is therefore need of the hour. A National evaluation policy (NEP) would set the tone in the right direction from the very beginning for achieving SDGs.

The paper taking India as a case study discusses different critical factors pertinent for having a well laid down national level policy towards standardizing evaluation. Using real examples under different components of an evaluation policy, the paper discusses and questions the credibility and acceptance of the present evaluation system in place. The paper identifies five core mantras or pre-requisites of a national evaluation guideline. The paper emphasizes the importance of an evaluation policy in India and other countries as well, to provide authentic data gathered through a well-designed evaluation process and take corrective measures well on time to achieve SDGs.

1. Introduction

The **Sustainable Development Goals** (**SDGs**) are an inter-governmental set of aspiration Goals with 169 targets post Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to transform our world. The goals aim at **Poverty**, **Food**, **Health**, **Education**, **Women**, **Water**, **Energy**, **Economy**, **Infrastructure**, **Inequality**, **Habitation**, **Consumption**, **Climate**, **Marino systems**, **Ecosystems**, **Institution and Sustainability**.

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In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly formally adopted the “universal, integrated and transformative” 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The goals are to be implemented and achieved in every country from the year 2016 to 2030. The idea of the SDGs has quickly gained ground because of the growing urgency of sustainable development for the entire world (Sachs, 2012).

India is SDG signatory and has ambitious targets that were missed out during MDGs. In Indian context, all SDGs are very relevant and critical. As far as MDGs are concerned, India missed the target on 8 out of 12 targets identified as important from India’s perspective (Millennium Development Goals India Country Report, 2015). While providing outlines of the various development plans which inter-alia envisage attainment of the MDG targets, the Government of India’s Report takes a close look at the programme components and their performance in producing desired results. However, such an assessment is hampered in the absence of disaggregated data at sub- State levels and also for different groups of the population. The Millennium Development Goals, in fact, emphasized the effectiveness of Statistics in monitoring development process at national and international levels, by specifying measurable indicators for the targets. In India, the national statistical system does not have independent statistical machinery exclusively focused on quantitative monitoring of the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals India Country Report, 2015). Encouragingly, NITI Aayog with the Prime Minister of India as its chairperson, has carried out a detailed mapping of the 17 Goals and 169 targets to Nodal Central Ministries, Centrally Sponsored Schemes and major government initiatives. Most sub-national governments have carried out a similar mapping of the SDGs and targets to the departments and programmes in their respective states. The Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation has developed a list of draft national indicators in light of the global SDG indicators. This draft has been placed in the public domain for wider consultation (United Nations High level Political Forum, 2017).

As a part of its oversight responsibility, NITI Aayog has led the process of Voluntary National Review (VNR) report preparation. A multi-disciplinary Task Force was constituted to coordinate the review and process documentation. From the sub-national level, state and union territory governments reported their progress on the various programmes and initiatives. While reporting about the various facets of the SDGs, this VNR focuses on the progress made towards achieving Goals 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 14 and 17. These Goals have been agreed upon in the HLPF as focus areas for this year. The nature of SDGs, however, is such that the advancement of one global goal may lead to progress in other goals as well. the SDGs and targets to the departments and programmes in their respective states. The Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation has developed a list of draft national indicators in light of the global SDG indicators.

In this context, it can be said that governments at different levels, national and sub-national too recognizes that Monitoring and Evaluation of programmes and schemes, aiming at different SDGs, in a robust and regular manner is therefore need of the hour. As understood, while monitoring is a regular process, evaluation is periodic but more insightful to gauge progress and take corrective measures for avoiding any deviation in programme progress towards its goal. Evaluation is a methodological area that is closely related to, but distinguishable from more traditional social research. Evaluation utilizes many of the same methodologies used in traditional social research, but because evaluation takes place within a political and organizational context, it requires group skills, management ability, political dexterity, sensitivity to multiple stakeholders and other skills that social research in general does not rely on as much (Trochim, 2006).

2. National evaluation policy

A National Evaluation Policy (NEP) in India for monitoring and evaluating all government Policies, Programmes and Schemes would set the tone in the right direction from the very beginning of our journey for achieving SDGs. Of the 115 countries investigated, 20 have a written, legislated evaluation policy. The remaining countries fall into sub-categories: developing a policy (23), conducting evaluation routinely without a policy (34) and those with no information indicating they are developing one at the moment (38) (Rosenstein, 2015).

Evaluation including monitoring and thematic research related to development policies, programmes and schemes in India, is not something which was completely missing from the government system. In India, Program Evaluation Organization (PEO) was set up in 1952 as an independent agency in the erstwhile Planning Commission to evaluate programmes funded by the plan (Mehrotra, 2013a). However, the focus was restricted to the programmes funded under Five Year Plans of India. This monitoring and evaluation exercise also helped to evaluate the performance of states/UTs as well, as far as implementation in respective states/UTs is concerned. In addition to this, the respective Ministries and Departments also commissioned from time to time evaluation studies. Hundreds of evaluation studies are being carried out in the country each year, but not much is known about the follow-up actions taken on their findings. There is no evaluation data bank in the country and one does not know how such studies are initiated and whether such studies are carried out in keeping with accepted standards of evaluation practice (Pal, 2011). In 2009, a Development Monitoring Unit was created by the Prime Minister's office along with a Performance Management and Evaluation System (PMES) under the Cabinet Secretariat. For a brief period, the Planning Commission decided to create a new Independent Evaluation office in 2013. However, with the change of government at the Union level in 2014, two major changes have taken place- one, NITI Aayog was established to replace the Planning Commission of India, with a new vision, mission and objective, wherein NITI Aayog was set up as a think tank with no power to impose policies or to allocate funds unlike Planning Commission. The second major change in context of evaluation set up at the government level was replacing PMES, which used to ensure that every Union ministry make a Result Framework Document (RFD) every year against which its performance was measured at the end of the year, with e-SAMIKSHA (e-Assessment) and PRGATI (Progress) projects to directly monitor the different programme and schemes sponsored by Union Government of India. Prime Minister and Cabinet Secretary are intensely monitoring the performance ("NITI Aayog to monitor, evaluate government policies", 2015).

At the state level in India, Karnataka state government has been the leader, and it has taken the evaluation function seriously, and has a well-articulated policy on the subject (Mehrotra, 2013b). In 2011, the state realizing the need and importance of evaluation formed Karnataka Evaluation Authority (KEA) to carry out the evaluations of all major government programmes, Boards, corporations, and urban/rural local bodies. Karnataka is the first, and till date the only State of the country, to have established an authority for transparent, effective and efficient practice of evaluation of the development schemes and programmes (Karnataka Evaluation Authority, 2014).

However, absence of the national policy on evaluation at national and sub-national levels, except in Karnataka, has its affect. Politics and political economy play an important role in the decision of whether to conduct an evaluation of a programme. Some of these aspects act to increase the likelihood of undertaking evaluation, but most serve to deter evaluation (Blomquist, 2003). In fact, absence of a clear evaluation policy for public investment and development programmes may lead to evaluation practice that is ad hoc, at times merely symbolic, aimed at only justifying and expanding what the policy makers and programme planners want to do and not usable because of poor quality (Agrawal & Rao, 2015). A national policy provides an environment for a professional, unbiased and effective evaluation culture. It helps to introduce a structured process and format of evaluation and eliminate conflict of interest. It puts into place a mechanism by which the findings and recommendations are acted upon (Dikshit, 2015).

With the present Union Government in India aspiring for more transparency and accountability and at the same time working with the motto of "Minimum government and Maximum governance", it therefore becomes pertinent for the government to track its performance and progress in a very scientific and systematic manner.

Advocacy for NEP should be initiated at all levels, right from policy makers, which include Parliamentarians, to donors, funding agencies, implementers to community members. Sensitizing and capacity building across these stakeholders on the relevance of a systematic monitoring and evaluation of development policies and programmes is a must.

The process of development, in any society, should ideally be viewed and assessed in terms of what it does for an average individual. For any approach or development framework to be meaningful and effective in directing public policies and programmes it has to be anchored in a social context. More importantly, it should reflect the values and development priorities of the society where it is applied. It is therefore necessary for countries like India to develop a contextually relevant approach to human development, identify and devise appropriate indicators to help formulate and monitor public policy. This is more so keeping in view many unique concerns and development priorities in some sense tied with India's stage of development as well as her social and economic diversity. Planning Commission has taken a lead in doing this (National Human Development Report, 2001).

However, in absence of a well laid down national level policy towards standardizing evaluation (and research), the outcome and impact findings lack ownership at all levels including commissioners of evaluation and evaluators/evaluating agency. An evaluation policy is expected to address some of the critical components necessary for an acceptable evaluation exercise undertaken. The five core *mantras* or pre-requisites include,

1. Detailed and well laid out Terms of References
2. Sufficient time frame for conducting Evaluation
3. Selection of credible evaluating agency/evaluator
4. Ownership and Utilization of Evaluation
5. Ethical Review of Evaluation Protocol

2.1. Detailed and well laid out terms of reference

Well begun is half done. In other words, clarity and detailing helps not only the bidding agencies or bidders in terms of well-defined scope of work, milestones and deliverables. To carry out monitoring, evaluation or research, one of the prerequisites is to ensure scientific approach and methodology in place. To initiate evaluation process, a detailed Terms of Reference (ToR), also called as Request for Proposal (RfP) document, is developed by the agency interested in sponsoring or commissioning the assignment. The commissioning agency could be either the one implementing the programme/scheme or the one which has funded the programme.

What Is a ToR? A ToR presents an overview of the requirements and expectations of the evaluation. It provides an explicit statement of the objectives of the evaluation, roles and responsibilities of the evaluators and the evaluation client, and resources available for the evaluation. A ToR provides clearly detailed parameters for— 1. Why and for whom the evaluation is being done 2. What it intends to accomplish 3. How it will be accomplished 4. Who will be in involved in the evaluation 5. When milestones will be reached and when the evaluation will be completed 6. What resources are available to conduct the evaluation.

(source: The World Bank)

As understood, "terms of reference" refers to the document that details an assignment for an individual evaluator or team of evaluators (The World Bank, 2011). The understanding and identification of study spread, size and selection of study participants before inviting proposals is a must for commissioning body while developing ToR as well as during review of proposals submitted. Often it has been observed that RfPs and ToRs are released/advertised so late, that time required for the study is curtailed, particularly if it is end line evaluation, as report have to be shared with donor agencies(s). A detailed ToR also ensure that there is no ambiguity in the approach proposed by bidding agencies and put all agencies, more or less at par. Of late, e-tendering is gaining momentum and several agencies are putting their ToRs and RfPs on their respective websites or central e-tender portal. This measure has definitely increased its reach in terms of visibility and all bidding agencies getting same time to develop and share their proposals unlike newspaper advertisements or sending it through posts or courier, which used to take different time to get delivered depending upon the location of the bidding agency. Another good initiative is acceptance of e-proposals. In Indian context, this is practiced more by private organizations including multi-lateral and bi lateral agencies such as UN agencies, World Bank among others where financial proposals are password protected and bidding agencies are requested to share the password only if they technically qualify. As noticed, in recent past some government bodies/departments have started both e-tendering as well as electronic submission of proposals. This is an encouraging trend and needs to be practiced across government and non-government bodies. But prior to electronic submission of proposal, floating, equally critical is to have a comprehensive ToR/RfP.

A ToR/RfP must include but may not limit to the following components

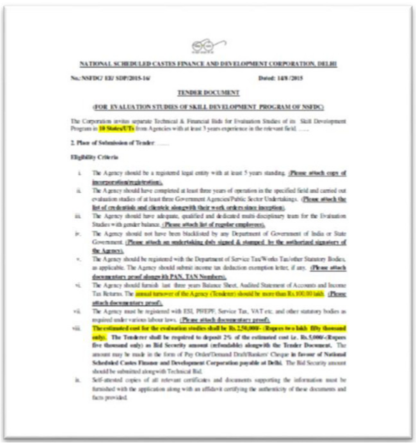
- Vision and objectives of the programme
- Scope of Work
- Stakeholders and Target Population
- Resource, financial and quality plans
- Work breakdown structure and Time Frame
- Deliverables and Dissemination plan
- Guiding principles-clauses/sub-clause
- Structure of the proposal and submission guidelines- documents/information to be shared with proposal
- Contracting and Procurement procedures
- Important dates – pre-bid, query, submission, bid opening, selection intimation

While the ToRs/RfPs developed by international and national agencies of repute do cover most of the points expected in a model ToR/RfP document, as listed above. However, what has been found wanting in most of the cases is adherence to the time line indicated in the documents. In most ToRs/RfPs it has been noticed that the dates for shortlisting/selection of evaluators/agency; signing of Memorandum of Understanding/Association (MoU/MoA) are either not mentioned in ToR/RfP or not adhered to. It has also been observed that in majority of the cases, even as a courtesy, unsuccessful bidders are not informed or sent any regret mail informing about not being selected for the study.

2.2. Sufficient time frame for conducting evaluation

A very critical pre-requisite is to ensure sufficient time for carrying out evaluation including research. A good many times, the scope of the study mismatches with the time allotted for the study. For example, in a pan-India studies or studies with 10 or more states to be visited, a time frame of 12–16 weeks to complete the study is too much to expect.

A screenshot of one of the ToRs shared is given as an illustration.



NATIONAL SCHEDULED CASTES FINANCE AND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION, DELHI

No.:NSFDC/ EE/ SDP/2015-16/ Dated: 14/8/2015

TENDER DOCUMENT

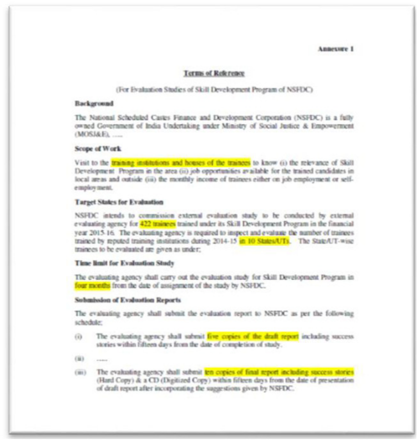
(FOR EVALUATION STUDIES OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM OF NSFDC)

The Corporation invites separate Technical & Financial Bids for Evaluation Studies of its Skill Development Program in **10 States/UTs** from Agencies with at least 3 years experience in the relevant field. ......

2. Place of Submission of Tender ......

Eligibility Criteria

i. The Agency should be a registered legal entity with at least 5 years standing. **(Please attach copy of incorporation/registration).**
ii. The Agency should have completed at least three years of operation in the specified field and carried out evaluation studies of at least three Government Agencies/Public Sector Undertakings. **(Please attach the list of credentials and clientele alongwith their work orders since inception).**
iii. The Agency should have adequate, qualified and dedicated multi-disciplinary team for the Evaluation Studies with gender balance. **(Please attach list of regular employees).**
iv. The Agency should not have been blacklisted by any Department of Government of India or State Government. **(Please attach an undertaking duly signed & stamped by the authorized signatory of the Agency).**
v. The Agency should be registered with the Department of Service Tax/Works Tax/other Statutory Bodies, as applicable. The Agency should submit income tax deduction exemption letter, if any. **(Please attach documentary proof alongwith PAN, TAN Numbers).**
vi. The Agency should furnish last three years Balance Sheet, Audited Statement of Accounts and Income Tax Returns. The annual turnover of the Agency (Tenderer) should be more than Rs.100.00 lakh. **(Please attach documentary proof).**
vii. The Agency must be registered with ESI, PF/EPF, Service Tax, VAT etc. and other statutory bodies as required under various labour laws. **(Please attach documentary proof).**
viii. **The estimated cost for the evaluation studies shall be Rs.2,50,000/- (Rupees two lakh fifty thousand only). The Tenderer shall be required to deposit 2% of the estimated cost i.e. Rs.5,000/-(Rupees five thousand only) as Bid Security amount (refundable) alongwith the Tender Document.** The amount may be made in the form of Pay Order/Demand Draft/Bankers' Cheque **in favour of National Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation payable at Delhi.** The Bid Security amount should be submitted alongwith Technical Bid.
ix. Self-attested copies of all relevant certificates and documents supporting the information must be furnished with the application along with an affidavit certifying the authenticity of these documents and facts provided.



Annexure 1

Terms of Reference

(For Evaluation Studies of Skill Development Program of NSFDC)

Background

The National Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC) is a fully owned Government of India Undertaking under Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment (MOSJ&E). .....

Scope of Work

Visit to the training institutions and houses of the trainees to know (i) the relevance of Skill Development Program in the area (ii) job opportunities available for the trained candidates in local areas and outside (iii) the monthly income of trainees either on job employment or self-employment.

Target States for Evaluation

NSFDC intends to commission external evaluation study to be conducted by external evaluating agency for 422 trainees trained under its Skill Development Program in the financial year 2015-16. The evaluating agency is required to inspect and evaluate the number of trainees trained by reputed training institutions during 2014-15 in 10 States/UTs. The State/UT-wise trainees to be evaluated are given as under;

Time limit for Evaluation Study

The evaluating agency shall carry out the evaluation study for Skill Development Program in four months from the date of assignment of the study by NSFDC.

Submission of Evaluation Reports

The evaluating agency shall submit the evaluation report to NSFDC as per the following schedule;

(i) The evaluating agency shall submit five copies of the draft report including success stories within fifteen days from the date of completion of study.
(ii) .....
(iii) The evaluating agency shall submit ten copies of final report including success stories (Hard Copy) & a CD (Digitized Copy) within fifteen days from the date of presentation of draft report after incorporating the suggestions given by NSFDC.

Some key points of the ToR put as an illustration are- i) 10 states/UTs to be visited; ii) Annual Turnover of the bidding agency should be around INR 10 million (0.17 million USD); iii) estimated cost for the study is INR 2.5 lakh (approx. 4000 USD); iv) visit to the training institutions and houses of the trainees; v) to be completed in 4 months; vi) deliverables include 5 copies of draft report and 10 copies of final report.

The study needs development of tools, pre-test/pilot testing, orientation of team; data collection and validation, data entry, analysis and report writing. If state specific reports are expected, then it further raises concern on data and report quality. Involving a big team, not necessarily required, may have implications on quality of data and information gathered. Though the counter-argument could be that organization is not capable of handling studies, which need big team of professionals, and hence not in favour of more people put to work simultaneously. However, certain activities like report writing based on analysis of data cannot be given to many people and a good evaluation report needs a minimum person hours of involvement. With the given upper cap on the cost for the study and scope of work involved, it is not feasible to complete the study in a professional manner and ensuring good quality of the study deliverables. This is not one off case but several such examples come across, which needs to be addressed for ensuring quality evaluation and research. In today's world where so much emphasis is being given to ICT and digitalization, it is surprising to see the demand and need for 5–10 hard copies of the report. With given budget, this is certainly unwanted.

2.3. Selection of credible evaluating agency/evaluator

Selection of a credible agency is a must for any work and true for evaluation as well. Request for capability statement highlighting professional bench strength, years of experience, types of studies undertaken across sectors, annual turnover is a must to get a feel of any organization's experience and expertise. However, a recent trend, particularly in government sponsored studies, noticed is the mandatory condition of submitting an Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) along with the proposal. EMD amount ranges between INR 50,000/- to INR

Table 1
An illustration of QCBS scoring sheet.

Bidding Agency	Marks for technical qualifications	Weightage for technical qualifications	Financial Cost Quoted *(in lakh)*	Points for financial proposal	Weightage for financial cost	Total Point *(2 × 3) + (4 × 6)*
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	67	0.7	80	56	0.3	63.8
B	65	0.7	45	100	0.3	75.5
C	80	0.7	90	50	0.3	71.0

2,50,000/-. How and why is it essential-the question arises? The discussion with senior government officials indicate that this has been made mandatory, primarily, as a measure of restricting too many organizations from bidding for each study, if they do not have sufficient surplus fund to invest. Generally, EMDs remains with the concerned Ministry/Department for 3–4 months, depending upon when they finally select a successful bidder. After the process of selection is over, the unsuccessful bidders are returned their Bank Order/Demand Draft of EMD. Since this money is not deposited in any bank, the bidding agencies do not get any interest on the principal amount. Post selection, the agencies also deposit a Bank Guarantee amount, which is generally equivalent to the 1st installment of the study budget. Bank Guarantee statement is released only after final deliverable. The issue of EMD and Bank Guarantee is demanded mainly by the government agencies. However, making EMD a pre-condition is more to favour multi-national bidding agencies with huge turnover and surplus funds. For national organization, EMD is a major hurdle in spite of having a good experience and professionals for the proposed study. As all ToRs are not floated at same point of time in a year, organizations try to bid for as many tenders as possible, as and when they are advertised. In fact, EMD is no means to ensure that bidding agency is competent to take up the assignment just because it has sufficient fund to pay as EMD. Financial strength of an organization cannot be a mandatory pre-requisite i.e. before even assessing the technical expertise of the organization to complete the study in a professional and sound manner. Income Tax (IT) Return or Balance sheet could be sufficient enough to assess the financial health of the bidding agency. Moreover, as has been observed any contracting agency if forced to block too much of funds may divert funds for other purposes which in turn could affect the study's quality and deliverable. The practice of EMD should be desisted with as it serves no purpose.

Another important aspect related to financial proposal of the study, particularly in case of India and government sector specifically, is to select agency which is the lowest bidder through Least Cost Selection (LCS). While Quality and Cost Based Selection (QCBS) is most often followed by international and government institutions in India as well. Quality- and Cost-Based Selection (QCBS), a method that takes into account the quality of the proposal and the cost of the services (ODA Japan, 2009). The weights are usually more for technical (or quality) and less for commercial (or cost) aspects of the bid, usually 60:40 or 70:30 or sometimes even 80:20 (e-gov blog, 2010). However, QCBS too have its flaw and it has been observed that weightage of financial proposal plays a major role in selection of successful bidder.

QCBS appears to be a sound and unbiased one as it gives higher weightage to the technical proposal. It is effective if bidding agencies financial quotations are in similar range. However, if one of the bidders quotes even 20–25% less than others then in spite of having lesser technical score manages to win the bid.

Two illustrations on QCBS scoring sheet from one of the bidding process will make the things clearer. In Table 1, the weightage for technical and financial proposals is 70:30 while in Table 2, it is 80:20.

As could be seen in Table 1, agency 'B' is the successful bidder in spite of having lesser technical score as compared to agency 'C' but have more total points because of lesser budget. So, in spite of giving more weightage to technical component (80%), the financial component (20%) actually plays a major role. This flaw needs to be addressed for ensuring quality of the evaluation.

Also in many cases, it has been observed that the technical parameters, which mainly include bidder's experience and expertise; study team proposed and evaluation approach and methodology, are such that generally chances of one bidding agency scoring higher than others by a huge margin on technical component is not much and therefore financial cost in spite of having only 20% weightage plays the main role in selection of successful bidder, as could be seen if we compare bidding agency 'A' and 'B' score in both the tables. So financial cost plays the key role but at what expense needs to be explored. Too low financial quote may play havoc with the entire evaluation exercise.

This is something similar to the other method commonly followed for selection, known as Least Cost Selection (LCS) method. Steps generally followed is to identify based on technical proposal/presentation, agencies who have qualified technically and all of them are considered as 'at par'. Next step is to select among the shortlisted bidders the lowest bidder in terms of financial cost quoted. The lowest bidder, referred as L1, is selected. However, one of the key concerns with this selection method is that many a times the one selected had quoted almost as low as half of the cost quoted by other agencies. The question arises whether the one who has quoted low will be really able to deliver as per required deliverables and also ensure quality of the activities to be undertaken and team to be engaged are up to the mark. The question also arises whether agency(s) which have quoted almost double or even 1.5 times of the cost quoted by L1 agency have inflated their budget or for achieving the deliverables by following a proper approach, as suggested in their proposal or mentioned in ToR, the cost to the study will be around the quoted amount. It is therefore expected that tendering agency, should do their own calculation to assess the cost which may be incurred to fulfill the scope of the work identified in ToR. This will help to assess what is reasonable and appropriate budget for the study. Beyond the range, the difference is questionable and raises curiosity. In fact, informally many concerned government officials have admitted that they doubt whether agency will be able to do a 'descent' work with the quoted 'low' budget but have to go by rules and select the lowest bidder. This method is only appropriate for selecting consultants for

Table 2
An illustration of QCBS scoring sheet.

Bidding Agency	Marks for technical qualifications	Weightage for technical qualifications	Financial Cost Quoted *(in lakh)*	Points for financial proposal	Weightage for financial cost	Total Point *(2 × 3) + (4 × 6)*
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	67	0.8	50	72	0.2	68.0
B	65	0.8	36	100	0.2	72.0
C	80	0.8	90	40	0.2	72.0

assignments of a standard or routine nature (audits, engineering design of non-complex works, and so forth) where well established practices and standards exist (MoHRD, 2009).

For fair selection and later on ensuring quality evaluation exercise as per scope of work, one option could be to mandatorily put an upper cap on the cost i.e. the financial cost for the study should not exceed ‘x’ amount. However, in none of the ToRs/RfPs, it has been noticed that any lower cap, i.e. the price for the study should not be quoted less than ‘y’ amount, is mentioned. Ideally, it should be practiced as it ensures that too low budgets are not quoted. It is thus expected that before floating any ToR, the donor/funding agencies essentially calculate an estimated cost (in fact, I believe many must be doing it even now) for the study based on the prevailing market rates of major expenses heads such as professional fee, out of pocket expenses include food, lodging and travelling plus miscellaneous expenses such as printing, consumables, training, communication and administrative cost plus taxes. Standardizing the selection process, as much as possible is essential. One of the options could be two-stage selection, wherein a broad ToR may be shared with the bidding agencies to come up with their proposal and suggest appropriate sample design and approach for the evaluation. The commissioning agency after reviewing these proposals, should select one or two sample options, and then request the bidding agency to share their financial cost. This will ensure level playing as all agencies will quote for same sample size, spread and selection approach as well as other deliverables decided by the commissioners of the study.

2.4. Ownership and utilization of evaluation

Another very critical aspect is to own the evaluation and utilize evaluation for improving not only evaluated programmes but also future evaluations. Utilization can be broadly categorized as two-one, to sensitize and make aware the evaluators community about the approach and process followed in evaluation of a particular development programme. This will help to understand, identify and accordingly adapt evaluation approach for studies in different sector. Other way of utilizing an evaluation is using the findings. Post completion of a study, it should be a must to share the findings of the evaluation with the stakeholders. In other words, it should also be expected for optimizing the resources used in conduct of evaluation. evaluation directly affects decision-making and influences changes in the programme under review. Evidence for this type of utilization involves decisions and actions that arise from the evaluation, including the implementation of recommendations (Bayley, 2008). In fact, in a time bound manner i.e. within a given time frame, both evaluation approach and findings should be made public through proper dissemination channel(s) such as workshop, seminars, press release and uploading on websites. Delay in disseminating and utilizing the evaluation findings, will make the entire effort futile and will be of no use. Sharing of evaluation findings with community in a simplified manner will help community to assess their contribution in project/scheme’s progress and take ownership of change or even no change due to project intervention. A step further, it should be expected from the evaluation funding/tendering agency that an update be shared with evaluating agency/evaluators about the dissemination of the findings, as and when carried out with different stakeholders. Stakeholders on their part should keep tendering agency and evaluators updated with an action taken report based on the findings of the evaluation and research.in case no action has been taken should also be reported along with the limitations and constraints in doing so.

2.5. Ethical review of evaluation

Protocols by accredited body should be mandatory for ensuring ownership at all levels. Most common way of defining “ethics” is ‘norms for conduct that distinguishes between acceptable and unacceptable behavior’.

In fast growing and expanding sector of evaluation (and research) with big and small organizations, individuals and institutions undertaking evaluations, relevance and importance of practicing ethical norms is very critical as it ensures objectivity, promotes fair practices in conduct of evaluation and provides ground for acceptance of findings by stakeholders. As far as practicing ethical norms in evaluation, including social research is concerned, without hesitation one can say that in India no well-laid ethical guidelines are in place; but practiced more on a case to case basis (Srivastava, 2015). Currently, evaluation or research on non-clinical health issues, in some cases, do follow some basics of ethical clearances but in most of the cases it is more of a voluntary choice and less as a pre-requisite for initiating an evaluation or research. Further it has been observed that evaluation of programmes and initiatives concerning juvenile, social groups, differently-abled, prisoners or on issues such as domestic violence, human trafficking among other sensitive issues is rarely reviewed to ensure ethical appropriateness of the evaluation/research design and protocols.

While on one hand, evaluation involving human participants must not violate any universally applicable ethical standards, on the other hand, an individual evaluator (or consultancy firms) needs to consider local cultural values when it comes to the application of the ethical principles to individual autonomy and informed consent. Important ethical issues include voluntary participation and informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, and accountability in terms of the accuracy of evaluation design, analysis and reporting.

The main reason for considering ethical norms in evaluation is because it prohibits immoral approach towards information/data collection. Further, restricts misrepresentation of information/data and restricts evaluators from being biased. Also, to an extent, emotional conflicts of surveyed population are addressed properly. On evaluators’ part, accountability towards the community gets ensured and last but not least, institutions/organizations more likely to fund evaluations can trust the quality and integrity of evaluation outcomes. A step further, the ethical norms include efforts for dissemination and utilization of evaluation findings i.e. follow-up with donors/implementing agencies.

Who can ensure? An institutional review board (IRB) on ethical issues is primarily a duly recognized committee that is formally designated to approve, monitor, and review evaluation involving humans Initially, IRBs were committees at academic institutions and medical facilities to review research studies involving human participants. However, in India, Institutional Review Boards on ethics for non-clinical/non-medical research are very few, almost non-existent. Mostly universities in India have duly-constituted ethics committee but their review is limited to research by their faculty and students and not to research done outside the University purview.

Since, the purpose of an IRB review is to assure, both in advance and by periodic review, that appropriate steps are taken to protect the rights and welfare of humans participating as subjects in the evaluation. IRBs attempt to ensure protection of subjects by reviewing protocols and related materials. Currently, in India, only a few IRBs such as one at Centre for Media Studies (CMS-IRB) registered and accredited by the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS), USA is active in India for reviewing non-clinical behavioural research protocols. In spite of number of evaluations and research undertaken in social sector, in absence of any mandatory condition, very few evaluators/agencies submit their study protocols for review to IRB. To add to it, India do not have any government body for accreditation of institutions willing to set up Institutional Review Board on Ethics. In short, strong relationship between ethics and evaluation can be summarized as one, Ethics OF Evaluation and two, Ethics IN Evaluation. While the former will take care of standardizing of all the practices prior to assigning/selecting the evaluation consultants, the latter one will ensure that the evaluation protocol has considered all ethical measures needed for undertaking an evaluation.

3. Summary

To achieve SDGs by 2030, close watch over set targets is certainly a necessary requirement, given our experience with MDGs. As experience during MDGs clearly indicate that apart from monitoring, evaluation at regular periods of programmes and schemes aiming at different goals is a must to ensure that the country is on track and not far off from the set target. Evaluation gives insights and helps to identify gaps and reasons thereof between 'desired' and 'achieved' outputs and outcomes.

A well-defined evaluation with proper time frame, by a credible agency/individual using appropriate resources and approach is essential. A standardized evaluation process will ensure utilization of findings, as well and take corrective measures, if needed in the programmes and schemes, to ensure achieving the 17 SDGs.

For uniformity and consistency in approach for taking up evaluation, a National Evaluation Policy (NEP) will be the critical step to be taken by the policy makers as early as possible. Guidelines within NEP will ensure that national and sub-national (provincial) governments follow a standardized process and use evaluation for the betterment of community at large as well as bring more transparency and accountability in the system. A standardized process followed at national level for evaluation of programmes leads to achieve SDG's outcome results. Uniformity in sharing of findings by sub-national governments to gauge the progress effectively helps to take remedial measures in an effective manner. For sub-national governments, the findings will be helpful to locally contextualizing the interventions and adapt initiatives of other sub-national governments, which have yielded results.

NEP at national level should mandate for setting up of accreditation statutory body for IRBs similar to the existing non-Indian institutions like OHRP or ICC/ESOMAR (ESOMAR, 2018), looking into non-clinical evaluation and research being undertaken following an ethically approved process.

In short, National Evaluation Policy in India and other countries will help to provide empirical authentic data covering length and breadth of the country and play an important role in transforming citizens from have-nots to haves vis-à-vis 17 SDGs.

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