Using Evaluative Thinking to Support Effective Implementation of the SDGs – It’s NOT ‘Business as usual’ for Evaluators

Presentation to EVALSDGs Webinar

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September 11, 2018
Background

Challenges in Measuring and Understanding SDG Progress & Performance

Converting SDG Challenges into Opportunities

Adjusting to an SDG Environment – It’s not ‘business as usual’
  ➢ Evaluators and the broad evaluation community
  ➢ International agencies and partners
  ➢ Country-level officials responsible for follow-up & review of the SDGs

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Background – Some Important Milestones

2015
- UN declared ‘Year of Evaluation’
- End of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

2016 – Introduction of UN ‘Agenda 2030’ for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- 17 goals
- 169 targets
- 230 indicators
SDG Goals

# 1 - No Poverty
# 2 - Zero Hunger
# 3 - Good Health & Well-being to People
# 4 - Quality Education
# 5 - Gender Equality
# 6 - Clean Water & Sanitation
# 7 - Affordable & Clean Energy
# 8 - Decent Work & Economic Growth
# 9 – Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure
# 10 – Reduced Inequalities
# 11 – Sustainable Cities & Communities
# 12 – Responsible Consumption & Production
# 13 – Climate Action
# 14 – Life Below Water
# 15 – Life on Land
# 16 – Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions
# 17 – Partnerships for the Goals
Mechanisms for Measuring Progress of the SDGs

- **Global Monitoring**
  - Focus on statistics and indicators

- **Follow-up and Review**
  - Country-led
  - Voluntary
  - Will this involve ‘Evaluation’?
Some Challenges in Measuring and Understanding SDG Progress

- Continued focus on statistics and indicators – still little attention on evaluation and ‘learning’

- SDG goals and targets – ‘political’ and ‘aspirational’

- Regarding SDG indicators, Inter-Agency Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) has noted:
  - Don’t cover all aspects of goals & targets
  - Data for several remain unavailable
  - Targets not always quantified
  - Data/measurement capacity gap in countries needs to be addressed
Evaluation: A missed opportunity in the SDGs’ first set of Voluntary National Reviews

“Most Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) show little awareness about just what evaluation is and how it could be used to support the 2030 Agenda.”

EVALSDGs/International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED): May 2017
Some possible challenges for country-driven focus

- Will SDGs be linked to National Plan?
- Coordination of SDG implementation across country agencies
- Coordination of possible measurement and evaluation efforts
- Is there a data development strategy for the country?
- Addressing sub-national and cross-cutting issues – data and capacity issues
- Will evaluation of SDGs be linked to NMES? OR, Stand-alone?

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Some possible challenges for country-driven focus

Current readiness of national monitoring and evaluation system (NMES)?

Is there an ‘E’ in M&E?

Current capacity and experience with evaluation?

Is there political support for evaluation; i.e. the ‘demand’ side?

Is there an awareness, and understanding of how evaluation can be used to support country performance?

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Turning SDG ‘Challenges’ into ‘Opportunities’ for Evaluation

1. Start with a reality check on current situation – a quick ‘readiness assessment’; i.e. a ‘snapshot’ of where country is/wants to be re evaluation capacity

2. Take a broader ‘systems’ approach – factors of demand, supply, context: enabling environment, political drivers

3. Don’t assume that senior officials know or want evaluation. Ask the question: ‘If you were a senior official, what would you want from evaluation?’

4. Proactively challenge officials on why evaluation should have a ‘seat at the table’ re monitoring and review of the SDGs
Adjustments to improve likelihood of success

- Evaluators and the broad evaluation community
- International agencies and partners
- Country-level officials responsible for VNRs (Follow-up and Review, FUR) of the SDGs

Adjusting to an SDG Environment – It’s not ‘business as usual’
Evaluators and the Evaluation Community

- The Evaluator as a ‘facilitator’ to support SDG implementation

- Working with other sectors to find common ground around needs and approaches relevant for the country

- ‘Evaluative thinking/learning’ through SDG implementation process

- Supporting SDG implementation in ‘non-traditional’ ways
  - A focus not simply on ‘results’/outcomes – ‘process’ issues also important
  - Formative evaluation to support learning & adjustments
  - Supporting SDG evaluability through ‘Theory of Change’ application
  - Broader use of evaluator’s skill set

- Not letting ‘independence’ limit role of evaluator
UN Agencies, Development Banks and International Partners

- Need to bridge gap between SDG aspirations at HQ level and SDG realities at regional/country level

- More effort to support the ‘how to’ re SDG implementation

- SDGs introduce horizontality – a blurring of roles/turf across UN agencies – more collaborative efforts needed

- Importance of UN Country Team – Challenge: Going beyond sharing information to coordinating efforts

- Coordinating efforts towards evaluation capacity building – key, given country-driven focus – Important role for UNEG

- Need to do more than simply addressing ‘supply side’ gaps – go beyond traditional approaches to training

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Country-level Officials responsible for SDG Follow-up and Review

- Integrate SDG ‘M and E’ into National Monitoring and Evaluation system (NMES) rather than as a ‘stand-alone’

- Work to build evaluation into SDG ‘Voluntary National Reviews, VNRs - Follow-up and Review’ - need for plan and development

- If limited evaluation capacity, focus evaluation efforts on select priority areas for evaluation – plan for future capacity building efforts

- Use this evaluation as a ‘demonstration’ for where and how evaluation can be used and contribute to learning to support national development

- Seek capacity building support of UN agencies, development banks, international partners and national and international Voluntary Organizations of Professional Evaluators (VOPEs), IOCE, EvalPartners - EVÁLSDGs

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Some Further Considerations to Help Ensure Evaluability of the SDGs

Think of data needs/data development beyond simply targets and monitoring

Establish a ‘road map’ for evaluating the SDGs

Build evaluation into an SDG Implementation Plan

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Some Further Considerations to Help Ensure Evaluability of the SDGs

- Identify real country-level needs re the use of evaluation – Put a focus on the *demand* side

- Put a focus on more than simply measuring ‘outcomes’ or ‘results’

- Proactive engagement of key players in all sectors early on – Importance of fora for sharing/using information, transparency & engagement

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Some References

• EVALSDGs/International Institute for Environment & Development (IIED):
  ➢ ‘Counting critically: SDG ‘follow-up and review’ needs interlinked indicators, monitoring and evaluation’, Briefing: July 2016
  ➢ ‘Five considerations for national evaluation agendas informed by the SDGs’, Briefing: September 2016
  ➢ ‘Realizing the SDGs by reflecting on the way(s) we reason, plan and act: the importance of evaluative thinking’, Briefing: October 2016
  ➢ ‘Evaluation: a missed opportunity in the SDG’s first set of Voluntary National Reviews’, Briefing: May 2017
  ➢ ‘Embedding evaluation in national plans and policies to foster transformative development’, Briefing: May 2018


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