National Evaluation Capacity Development – what is involved, some early lessons

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Summary

1. A more nuanced view of evaluation?

2. What is National Evaluation Capacity Development?
   - Capacity to undertake evaluations
   - Capacity of national systems to promote and use evaluations (national evaluation systems)
     - Examples from Africa, Latin America
   - Some lessons

3. Why is it important for international organisations to support NES’s – not just their own evaluations
What is evaluation?
• An evaluation is an assessment, conducted as systematically and impartially as possible, of an activity, project, programme, strategy, policy, topic, theme, sector, operational area or institutional performance. It analyses the level of achievement of both expected and unexpected results by examining the results chain, processes, contextual factors and causality using appropriate criteria such as relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.

• An evaluation should provide credible, useful evidence-based information that enables the timely incorporation of its findings, recommendations and lessons into the decision-making processes of organizations and stakeholders. (P14 guideline)
Evaluative work – traditional, emerging

- Normal rigorous evaluations taking 12 months + (implementation, outcome, impact...)
- Rapid evaluations taking 2-3 months (eg mid-term reviews)
- Evaluative workshops
- Annual review models

- Normal independent ones, emerging more rapid collaborative models
What do we mean by NECD?

1. Capacity in-country to undertake (and use) evaluations

   And/or

2. Developing capacity of national systems to promote and use evaluations (national evaluation systems)
1 Capacity in-country to undertake evaluations

• In most of Africa and Asia push for evaluations has been linked with donors
  • often transactional – for this programme my systems say I must do an evaluation and I must follow my system (what about Paris Agreement?)
• Accompanied by N evaluation specialists
  • Tied aid (eg US) or procurement process (eg EU)
  • Complex evaluations, especially experimental/quasi experimental designs
    • Privileges methodology over context knowledge
    • Privileges view of methodological rigour – often quant over qual, IE over process (implementation) evaluation
Seen evolution in approach to evaluation

• Since mid 2000s prioritised rigour rather than timely policy contribution

• Seen evolution since 2010, eg 3ie adding process evaluations with IEs, funding process evaluations in Uganda, J-PAL looking at costs

• Increasing emergence of countries promoting national/sectoral evaluation systems, wanting systems to build capacity in a genuine way

• Significant capacity exists in Latin America, South Africa, India…

• However often limited capacity development in Africa
  • Often local partners more token, do the field work, rather than equal partners
In all three countries it was possible to conclude that, to date, supply has generally been adequate to meet demand, apart for some exceptions for highly specialist evaluations. In South Africa there appears to be a real risk that supply may not be able to meet demand in the next few years, due to a projected rapid increase in government evaluations. However, this is complicated by the finding that government clients might experience an apparent lack of supply due to suppliers choosing not to work for them because their supply management is poor, rather than a real shortage of supply.

**Barriers to entry**

In all three countries, one of the main barriers to entry was weaknesses in government capacity to formulate, procure and manage evaluations. In Benin and Uganda, the donor policy preference for international evaluators was also a barrier to entry for local evaluators.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

In all three countries, there needs to be an ongoing process of strengthening the culture of evaluation.

The governments of the three countries should put in place and implement plans to address the demand-side shortcomings identified in this diagnostic report. This should include:

1. Development of whole-of-government procurement strategies for evaluations. These strategies should aim to create a conducive environment for the growth of the local supply market. They could include procurement and contracting mechanisms to require the larger suppliers or international suppliers to subcontract local or emerging suppliers and to develop their capacity over a series of evaluations
2. Standardising the experience and qualification requirements in Request for Tenders (RQFs) and the method of appraising them
3. Standardising as many other parts of the evaluation process as possible
2 Developing capacity of national systems to promote evaluations (national evaluation systems)
What is a National Evaluation System?

“...one in which evaluation is a regular part of the life cycle of public policies and programmes, it is conducted in a methodologically rigorous and systematic manner in which its results are used by political decision-makers and managers, and those results are also made available to the public”. Evaluation systems are a function of values, practices and institutions as outlined below. (Lazaro, 2015, p. 16)

Characteristics of a NES

• Presence of evaluation in political, administrative and social discourse
• Need for consensus on what evaluation is, what type of knowledge is produced, and how evaluations should be conducted
• Organisational responsibility
• Permanency

The Building Blocks

• Individuals
• Institutions
• Environments
National evaluation systems in LMICs

- **Latin America**
  - Mexico – national system for evaluation – run by CONEVAL for social sector and Ministry of Finance for economic
  - Colombia – national system run by Department of National Planning
  - Chile – national system run by Ministry of Finance
  - Costa Rica – national system

- **Africa**
  - National system run by Office of Prime Minister (Uganda)
  - National system run from Presidency (SA, Benin)
  - Emerging systems – Ghana, Kenya, Niger...
Institutionalising evaluation in government (country-led evaluations)

Some key elements of systems include:

• A national **Evaluation Policy** to standardise approaches and terms. In Mexico and Colombia also a **law**.
• A rolling **plan** e.g. over 3 years for which evaluations will be undertaken
• Evaluation **budget** in programmes
• **Roles and responsibilities** are identified including a **champion**, **specific people** entrusted with the evaluation role, with the required skills. This could be an M&E Unit, a research unit, a policy unit…..
• **Guidelines**, standards, competences
• Requirement to follow the system, including potentially donor-funded evaluations
• **Capacity development** systems, including links to universities
• **Buy-in** across government
• In some places eg Mexico and SA clear system for improvement plans/monitoring
• **Results of evaluations used** to inform planning and budget decisions, as well as general decision-making processes.
• Building on the wider ecosystem which supports evaluation eg VOPE, universities training in evaluation, NGOs doing evaluations etc
Example of SA national evaluation system

**Approach**
Utilisation - focus

Unit of analysis - programmes, plans, policies and systems

Focus – programme importance

Types of evaluation – diagnostic, design, implementation, impact, economic – different stages of programme cycle, now rapid

**Systems**
National, Provincial Dept, Evaluation Plans

27 guidelines, standards, competences, 5 training courses, trained >1500 people, emphasising use

Quality assessment system

Repository (currently 140+ evaluations)

**People and organisations**
Evaluation Unit in DPME to drive the system (16 people)

M&E units in departments – most people monitoring skills

Cross-gov Evaluation Technical Working Group to support

Senior Managers to demand evidence
Why focus on institutionalisation at country level

- Strategic approach linked to policy and decision-making cycles (not ad-hoc)
- Planning for evaluations over the life-cycle of a policy/programme
- More likelihood of evaluation responding to real government demand, offer policy relevant evidence and increase use
- Build national capacity over time
- Encourage incremental investment in the wider ecosystem (Universities, VOPEs, parliament, etc.)
- Don’t only institutionalise rigorous long evaluations but also rapid as part of adaptive management
- Ethos of SDGs and VNRs is country-driven processes
Some lessons to date

• Not all countries are interested in evaluation – requires being prepared to face failure

• Countries have developed national systems which are influencing policy and practice

• Donors can be supportive of country process (eg basket fund in Uganda) or go their own way (and in the process probably weaken capacity)

• Need for multiple tools, and see evaluation as one of a basket of evidence tools, including citizen engagement, research, data etc, including more rapid tools and methods which can feed back quickly into policy and practice

• Start by looking at existing evidence not just new evidence, and synthesising results from a number of evaluations as well as research

• Look at bigger picture evaluations not just programme evaluations, especially once a number of programme evaluations done

• Consider executive, Parliament, as well as broader country systems with VOPE, NGOs etc and decentralising capacity – can lead to more resilient systems as leaders change (eg SA, Mexico)

• Need to move beyond generation to evidence use, especially in countries such as Uganda or SA where there has been a lot of evidence generation
Be realistic - policy is not simply derived from evidence

- Pragmatics & Contingencies
- Experience & Expertise
- Evidence
- Judgement
- Values
- Resources
- Habit and Tradition
- Lobbyists and Pressure Groups
Need to be conscious about methodology for supporting evaluation use

So what role should international organisations including UNEG play

• Explicitly support development of capacity of government systems (funding, expertise) (especially bearing in mind SDG focus of country-driven approach)

• Work with partners such as Twende Mbele, Relac to share experience and build capacity

• Where a programme/policy evaluation, do with government to pilot how to build the system (example of first evaluation in SA NES with UNICEF)
Start by supporting countries to develop an evidence map of existing evaluations, as in Uganda.

Evidence and Gap Map of Development Evaluations in Uganda. (Includes 235 process evaluations, 203 impact evaluations, and 1 formative evaluation.)

269 process evaluations, 207 impact evaluations & 7 formative evaluations
So what role should international organisations including UNEG play (2)

- Build in explicitly from the beginning a use/utilisation-focus – means big emphasis on process and less on product.
- Help build the evaluation ecosystem – standards, guidelines, competences, training courses etc which are needed to make the system work.
- Be explicit about using local or regional evaluation capacity – helping to create a market.
- Use Northern evaluators more as facilitators, to help design evaluations – at least capacity building must be explicit part. No more S evaluators as data collectors.
- Be more flexible about evaluation types, and consider use of collaborative and rapid evaluations.
Thank you
Asante sana
Merci beaucoup
Muchas gracias

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