

Developing national evaluation capacities¹

Evaluation is an effective way to capture lessons drawn from experience that can be used to improve development policies and programmes. In this way, evaluation helps to meet performance standards such as efficiency, effectiveness and equity.

Evaluation provides much needed feedback for informed decision-making by putting the best available evidence at the center of the policy process.

Therefore, a strong capacity and culture of evaluation carries the potential to become a powerful tool for improvement and change. Exercising evaluation in an independent, credible and useful way contributes to good governance, public accountability and transparency in the use of resources and the results.

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, endorsed in 2005, and the 2008 Accra follow-up meeting, state that national ownership and leadership are overarching factors for ensuring good development outcomes. The implication for the evaluation function is fundamental. The principle of ownership means that partner countries should own and lead their own country-led evaluation systems, while donors and international organizations should support sustainable national evaluation capacity development. The 2012 Busan High-level forum re-affirmed the above principles while recognizing the need for partnerships for effective development cooperation.

Evaluation is:

- a source of evidence for good practices, and lessons for improved programme and policy design;
- a knowledge resource of strategic intervention designs which work;
- a means for ensuring accountability through focused reporting; and
- a key input in advocacy strategies to make the case for important public policy decisions.

Within the efforts to implement development strategies, the real challenge is to translate policy statements into development results. For this reason, a strong national evaluation system with adequate capacities is crucial to provide essential information and analysis. It helps to review policy implementation and design; and, to detect bottlenecks and inform on adjustments needed to enhance systemic capacities, which in turn, depends on strong national commitment. However, strengthening national evaluation capacities is not an end goal in itself, but should be seen, rather, as a means to support more effective development activities and informed policy-making. These strategies should be comprehensive and integrated, based on a systems approach to National Evaluation Capacity Development.² Above all, capacity development should be context specific, which means capacity must be understood in terms of a specific cultural, social and political context.

In the past, evaluation capacity development focused on strengthening the capacities of individuals' knowledge and skills. However, it is by now clear that capacity development should be based on a systemic approach that takes into account three major levels (individual, institutional, and external enabling environment), and two components (demand and supply) tailored to the specific context of each country. See Figure 1 below.

¹ This section is adapted from UNICEF, EvalPartners, IOCE in partnership with CLEAR, IEG World Bank, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, OECD Development Assistance Committee Network on Development Evaluation, UNEG and UNWomen. (2013). *Evaluation and Civil Society: Stakeholders' Perspectives on National Evaluation Capacity Development*. Available at http://www.mymande.org/Evaluation_and_Civil_Society and UNICEF. (2010). *Evidence for Children, Developing National Capacities for Country-led Evaluation Systems, A Conceptual Framework*.

² Adapted from UNICEF. (2010). *Evidence for Children, Developing National Capacities for Country-led Evaluation Systems, A Conceptual Framework*.

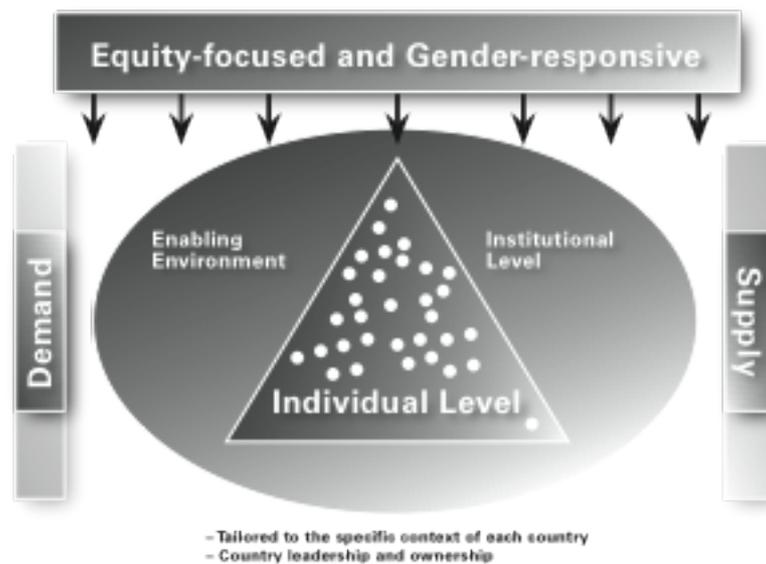


Figure 1: A systemic and integrated approach to national evaluation capacity development³

The enabling environment for evaluation is determined by a culture of learning and accountability, meaning the degree to which information is sought about past performance, the extent to which there is a drive to continuously improve, and to be responsible or accountable for actions taken, resources spent, and results achieved. This may involve designing, adopting and implementing legislation and/or policies to institutionalize national evaluation systems. A two-tier strategy should be put in place focusing on policy-makers and citizens. This would entail strengthening the capacity of policy-makers (duty-bearers) to provide sound evidence through exercising evaluation and ensure its use, while developing citizens' (rights-holders') capacity to demand and to assess policy implementation, by putting in place systems and participatory mechanisms and processes to engage citizen groups, and to capture and utilize their feedback.

National evaluation organizations should, therefore, be supported and enabled to foster national demand and supply of evaluation, including by setting national evaluation standards and norms. An enabling environment is also created and supported through governance structures that demand independent evaluation, be it through parliaments or governing bodies, and is further enhanced through VOPEs that set standards and strive towards greater professionalism in evaluation.

The institutional framework for evaluation ensures that a system exists to implement and safeguard the independence, credibility and utility of evaluation within an organization. **At the individual level**, a capacity development strategy should strengthen senior management capacity to strategically plan evaluations and to identify the key evaluation questions; and to manage and use evaluations.

The demand and supply of evaluation

The use of evaluation evidence in policy-making, policy reform and implementation depends on the combination of capacity to provide quality and trustworthy evidence (supply) on the one hand, and the willingness and capacity of policy-makers to use it on the other (demand).

³ UNICEF, EvalPartners, IOCE in partnership with CLEAR, IEG World Bank, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, OECD Development Assistance Committee Network on Development Evaluation, UNEG and UNWomen. (2013). *Evaluation and Civil Society: Stakeholders' Perspectives on National Evaluation Capacity Development*. Available at http://www.mymande.org/Evaluation_and_Civil_Society

An increasingly necessary skill for policy-makers is to know about the different kinds of evidence available; how to gain access to it; and, how to critically appraise it. Without such knowledge and understanding it is difficult to see how a strong demand for evaluation evidence can be established and, hence, how to enhance its practical application. The extent to which evaluation evidence is demanded and used by policy-makers also depends, in turn, on the policy environment. *(For more information on policy analysis see [‘Question 2: Who can give it to us?’](#) in Section 2)*

To strengthen an enabling policy environment, policy-makers may need incentives to use evaluation evidence. These include mechanisms to increase the pull for evaluation evidence, such as requiring spending bids to be supported by an analysis of the existing evidence-base, and mechanisms to facilitate evaluation evidence-use, such as integrating policy-advisors at key stages of policy implementation. Similarly, disincentives or sanctions could also be developed for not using the evaluation evidence in policy-making.

Once we have generated demand for evaluation we need to have the required capacities at national level for undertaking evaluations and/or translating evaluation reports, as required, into development actions or policy legislation.

‘Demand’ refers to the capability by policy-makers and senior managers to request sound and trustworthy evaluative evidence with the aim of using it in strategic decision-making processes. “Supply” refers to the capability of professional evaluators to provide sound and trustworthy evaluative evidence. Therefore a distinction is required between the capacity of policy-makers to use evaluation evidence and the capacity of evaluation professionals to provide sound evaluation evidence.

Capacity to demand and supply evaluation information entails the following⁴

Capacity to demand and use information from evaluation:	Capacity to supply information from evaluation:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity within government institutions and CSOs to incorporate and use information from evaluation as part of the normal process of business (e.g. capacity to critically gauge evaluative evidence, to access timely evidence etc.). • Governments and civil society stakeholders are clear about where and how evaluation information can and will be used within government (e.g. planning, policy or programme development, decision-making, budgeting). This can evolve over time. • Policy-makers, government bodies, and CSOs have an appreciation of evaluation concepts and use of evaluation information. • Adequate incentives within organizations and the system to ensure that evaluation information is used, and that evaluations report credible information in a timely fashion. • Reinforces the need within organizations for formal or informal mechanisms and forums for reporting and sharing evaluation information. • Laws governing access to information would increase transparency and the potential for evaluation information to be made available to the media, civil society among others and facilitate their participation in the national system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The technical capacity and infrastructure to undertake evaluation. • Availability of skilled personnel to gather, analyze and report on the quality, value and importance of different levels and types of performance of government policies and programmes, including potential partners within the country, such as universities, research institutes, think tanks, among others. • A national statistical agency to facilitate a national data development strategy and assist ministries and agencies in capturing and storing data. • Existence of credible and relevant data (disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, etc.) and information-gathering systems. • Infrastructure to ensure a systematic, comprehensive and credible approach to evaluation. This would include policies and standards intended to: clarify roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for performance monitoring and evaluation; establish expectations across the system for evaluation, monitoring and timing, and a high level of performance reporting; and, set out quality standards for conducting evaluations. • Organizational structures to conduct and/or manage evaluation exercises. • A policy center to provide policy direction, oversight and assistance for the system-wide development of evaluation.

⁴ The table is adapted from: UNEG Task Force on National Evaluation Capacity Development. (2012). *National Evaluation Capacity Development: Practical tips on how to strengthen National Evaluation Systems*.