Regaining and accelerating progress towards the SDGs: Why Country-led Evaluation is the missing piece of the jigsaw

What are Country-led Evaluations?

Country-led evaluations of the SDGs are evaluations that are designed, commissioned, managed and used by governments themselves. They meet governments’ own information needs and enable them to take evidence-based decisions on their national transformation towards Agenda 2030. The SDGs are country-led, country-managed and country-monitored. They also need to be country-evaluated so that governments are in the driver’s seat of their own development.

Why are Country-led Evaluations important?

Country-led evaluations are critical to stay on course in this Decade of Action. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, and multiple other political and economic crises, many countries have been falling considerably behind on their commitments to achieve the SDGs. This has disproportionately negative impacts on the lives of the most vulnerable. Country-led evaluations can provide governments with timely and credible evidence to regain and accelerate progress towards Agenda 2030 and leave no one behind. They can help identify the problems that hinder the desired transformation and determine which policies and programmes are most effective in addressing those problems. Country-led evaluations thus help channel scarce resources to interventions that work, in particular for those most in need.

How do Country-led Evaluations complement the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process?

In accordance with paragraph 74 of the 2030 Agenda and the reporting guidelines for the VNRs, the VNRs should be “based on evidence, informed by country-led evaluations”. The VNRs are the platform for reporting on progress in achieving the 169 targets of the SDGs. Based on monitoring data, they answer questions of what and how much was achieved. Country-led evaluations can answer questions about why there is or isn't progress on the respective indicators and what can be done about it. Evidence from country-led evaluations is complementary to monitoring data and should feed into ALL VNRs.
A growing number of governments, UN agencies and civil society actors see the need for a new Resolution on Country-led Evaluations. The Nigerian Government is leading this global initiative and is supported by a multi-stakeholder taskforce*.

The following key events have been organized in support of country-led evaluations:

- Two informational sessions for permanent representations on 21 December 2020 and 30 August 2021, with more than 50 countries participating each time
- Two side-events** to the High Level Political Forum on 7 and 9 July 2021 that together attracted almost 300 participants

In January 2021, the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) has declared its support to the initiative during their Annual General Meeting.

Why is a Resolution on Country-led Evaluations needed?

Following the 2014 UN Resolution 69/237, some progress has been made in developing national evaluation capacities. Yet, to date relatively few countries have conducted country-led evaluations of the SDGs; namely Finland, Nigeria, Costa Rica, and Peru. A Resolution is required to give new momentum to country-led evaluations.

Who supports a new Resolution and what has happened so far?

In January 2021, the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) has declared its support to the initiative during their Annual General Meeting.

How can Member States engage?

Member States are invited to join a Discussion Group on Country-led Evaluations and contribute to additional virtual consultations and discussions on Country-led Evaluations that lead to the drafting and adoption of a Resolution in 2022. To join the discussion group, please reach out to trossmuller@unicef.org

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*The taskforce consists of representatives from EvalPartners and associated networks, IDEAS and the evaluation offices of UNICEF, UN Women and the UN World Food Programme

**The first HLPF side event was organized by EVALSDGs, UNICEF, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, DEval, IIED and IDEAS and the second by the taskforce