

Summary of UNEG High-Level Panel
Fourth Development Cooperation Forum (DCF)
“Empowering Countries through Evaluation: Evaluation as a country-level tool”
July 11, 2014

Background

The UNEG High-Level Panel at the 2014 DCF explored the role that evaluation can play in empowering countries. It considered how building evaluation capacities at the country level can lead to greater ownership of the development agenda and how stronger national evaluation systems can be part of an inclusive and robust global accountability framework. The event put the issue of national evaluation capacity building on the post-2015 development agenda, acted as a catalyst for evaluation at the national, regional and global levels and within the UN system, and helped create an enabling environment for evidence-based decision making.

The speakers included Mr. Arsenio Balisacan, Director General of the National Economic and Development Authority (Philippines), Mr. Kabir Hashim, Member of the Sri Lankan Parliament, Ms. Amina Mohammed, Special Advisor of the Secretary-General on Post-2015 Development Planning, Mr. John Hendra, Assistant Secretary-General Deputy Executive Director for Policy and Programmes at UN Women and Ms. Deborah Rugg, UNEG Chair, who also chaired the meeting.

Summary of Presentations (Key Messages)

Evaluation is critically important for countries pursuing a development agenda. Evaluation is essential for understanding how development is improving the lives of people. It provides evidence about what works, what doesn't work, and why, which, in turn, informs decision-making. It is a powerful tool for transparency and accountability. Mr. Balisacan remarked that “when spending priorities of governments are subjected to evaluation and when evaluation results are widely disseminated and discussed, particularly in the public domain, and when the agencies or individual mandated to allocate or spend resources are placed under public scrutiny, these agencies or individuals are likely to make decisions that are guided by evidence.”

“We need to better understand how development is affecting the lives of people around the world. We need to understand what works, what doesn't work and how to change it...hence evaluation is a critical tool for the post-2015 development agenda.”

Mr. John Hendra

Several speakers spoke to the importance of evaluation at the country-level. Mr. Hendra explained that because country contexts differ so greatly, evaluation, like the new targets, will need to be customized to take into account specific national circumstances. Evaluation at the country-level is also critical for national ownership of evaluation results which, in turn, is essential for uptake and real policy change.

There is lots of data, little analysis. Mr. Hashim remarked that while there is ample data, countries must build effective evaluation systems to cope with this “information overload”. Ms. Mohammed observed that evaluation is neglected under the headliner ‘monitoring and accountability’; there is much monitoring, but very little evaluation. Speaking of her experience with the Nigerian

government, she lamented that a large amount of data that was collected was never analysed. Mr. Hendra remarked that indicators for monitoring are certainly necessary, but not sufficient.

Evaluation has a vital role to play in the post-2015 agenda. Mr. Hendra remarked that one reason we cannot assess the impact of the MDGs is because we cannot evaluate them as robustly as we would like to. In the new agenda, evaluation must be embedded from the outset. As an important part of the learning process, evaluation can help ‘right the wrongs’ as the new agenda is implemented. It is also essential because the accountability framework will not be legally binding; it will rely on political will and persuasion. By assessing how programmes and policies are contributing to results, evaluation can help establish incentives for effectiveness, transparency and accountability. Going forward, evaluation will have to include new stakeholders. Governments can reach out to civil society and to consultants who can bring independence to the evaluation.

“Citizens increasingly want to know: is this the best way to deliver humanitarian aid and development? Are we doing it the most effective way possible? The only way to know is to do evaluation.”

Ms. Deborah Rugg

There must be more demand for evaluation. The demand must be engendered within a country; this demand can come from legislative, administrative or policy regulations. It can also come from citizens and civil society groups. Evaluation can answer citizens’ demands to know how public money is being spent and if the development interventions are the most effective way to achieve results. In this sense, ***evaluation is a right.***

As demand grows, so must capacity. Building capacity means strengthening local institutions, statistical agencies, universities, academics at the national and subnational level. Ms. Mohammed, referring to her experience with the Nigerian government, explained that a lack of capacity and skills meant that evaluation tools for education developed in Europe were not properly used at the country level. Initiatives such as EvalPartners, which offers evaluation training, can play an important role in national evaluation capacity development.

There must be resources in place to support evaluation. Resources must be mobilized to support the design, conduct, dissemination and use of evaluations. Ms. Mohammed warned against forgetting how much evaluation costs and stressed the importance of funding for evaluation. Mr. Balisacan surmised that because research of this kind does not show tangible benefits immediately it is not a priority for politicians who are concerned with the next political cycle. However, the long-term results of investing in evaluation will be tangible and will go a long way to help achieve the national and global development agenda.

Political leadership is needed to realize the potential evaluation has to offer. To ensure that evaluation is used to its full potential there must be political support. Mr. Hashim remarked that there is currently a huge divide between politicians and the evaluation community but that this need not be the case; there are numerous success stories of politicians supporting evaluation.

“If evaluation is truly going to be a country level tool, and if it is going to empower countries, then integrating the parliamentarians and policy makers with the evaluation community is going to be essential.”

Mr. Kabir Hashim

There are ongoing initiatives to address the lack of political support: UNEG is working with Member State representatives to call for a General Assembly resolution on evaluation, the South Asian Parliamentarian Forum for Development Evaluation is working to bring parliamentarians and the evaluation community together and the EvalPartners initiative, a global network of voluntary professional evaluation associations that seek to strengthen evaluation, is growing rapidly, with now over 150 members.

As a professional community, evaluators are ‘standing by’ ready with strong training courses, excellent guidance materials, applied real-world approaches, and peer-to-peer mentorship programmes. Now what is needed to realize the real potential benefits of evaluation, is the political will to support it, concluded Ms. Rugg, UNEG Chair.