

# Towards a baseline study: insights on national evaluation capacities in 43 countries<sup>1</sup>

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**At the UNDP-sponsored Third National Evaluation Capacities (NEC) Conference** (São Paulo, 2013), national government representatives from 43 UNDP programme countries discussed solutions to challenges related to the use of evaluation, its independence and credibility. The Conference produced 18 commitments to further enhance national evaluation capacities. This paper highlights the findings of a study prepared to document the state of national evaluation capacities in the 43 signatory countries to those commitments.<sup>2</sup>

The study revealed a variety of institutional settings and legal frameworks among the countries analysed, reflecting a multiplicity of government interests, political contexts and national developmental stages.

Regarding **national evaluation policies**, various legal frameworks are in place. Some countries (Benin, South Africa, Uganda, Uruguay) have a national evaluation policy system in place; others lack a specific evaluation policy but have provisions for national evaluation in their legislations. A number of countries do not yet have a national evaluation policy but have policy proposals or drafts awaiting legislation (Bhutan, Kenya, Niger). Many countries (Colombia, Malaysia, Mexico) have formalised (or semi-formalised) the legal frameworks upon which evaluation functions are built or structured. Others (Costa Rica, South Africa) have specific national evaluation systems in place. There are also a number of countries that do not yet have a national evaluation policy or a legal framework.

National governments exhibit diverse **institutional settings**. In almost all countries, international donor pressure and requirements for evaluation have facilitated the creation of a minimum structure (Ethiopia, Afghanistan). Some governments (Colombia, Mexico) have developed sophisticated structures and policies, incorporating mechanisms to ensure that evaluation processes are both credible and independent. They also aim to ensure that evaluation results are useful and used for decision-making (Mexico and Colombia).

The planning ministries in various countries have evaluation units tasked with monitoring; many of these units evaluate the implementation of national plans (Brazil, India, Malaysia, Nepal). In many cases, decentralised evaluation units exist across line ministries to facilitate this work, such in the ministries of social development, education and health.

Regarding the **use of evaluations**: in general, evaluations are used widely. The lack of a national policy does not indicate that evaluations are not used; many countries that do not have a national evaluation policy nonetheless make ongoing use of evaluations. Almost all countries are making efforts to promote the use of evaluations, be it through parliamentarians, voluntary organisations for professional evaluation (VOPEs), universities, international donors or other stakeholders. Numerous countries have a national evaluation society (some more than one). In some countries, administrative reform is pushing for modern management techniques that incorporate evaluation (Lebanon). Conversely, some governments (such as in Albania, Burundi, Egypt, Russia) do not show much progress regarding the use of evaluation.

Several issues that limit the use of evaluation have been identified. For example, some national governments have used evaluation as a

political mechanism or as a marketing tool to assess the performance of programmes that are political priorities.

In any case, the **existence of technical evaluation capacities** is key for many governments, and investments have been made to develop monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacities, guides and methodologies for the implementation of a variety of such 'evaluation' processes. Some evaluation units have managed to gain full respect for the quality of their work due to the level of staff expertise. In other cases, even if there is demand for the M&E of national development plans, some governments lack the requisite evaluation capacity.

Regarding **stakeholder involvement**, many governments require the direct involvement of representatives of the programmes under evaluation. Some governments have structures in place to enable programme beneficiaries to participate in evaluation processes. Many countries post their evaluation reports on the Internet. In contrast, others restrict public access to evaluation information.

National **budgets** often limit evaluation processes. There are situations in which budgets are in place but are insufficient to conduct the full range of evaluation work. There are also situations in which, despite evaluation units ostensibly having their own budgets, resources are not in fact available. Ultimately, budgets are highly influenced by governments' political agendas.

Although some evaluations consider **gender issues** somewhat extensively, many evaluations limit their treatment to merely including sex-disaggregated data. Barring a few exceptions, evaluation work seldom considers ethnic and cultural issues (except when they are the main focus of the evaluation).

In some countries, **international donors** have been pushing for broader public-sector and administrative reforms in support of improved transparency, accountability and good management practices.

In **conclusion**, it is important to understand that the fabric from which countries and national governments are woven is not uniform. The granular aspects of 'national' evaluation capacities are complex and intrinsically linked to each country's development agenda. There is a relationship between the stage of democratic governance in the countries surveyed and the capacity of their governments to conduct evaluations and to ensure the independence, credibility and use of their results.

## Notes:

1. This paper provides a high-level overview of the study 'Towards a Baseline Study: Insights on National Evaluation Capacities in 43 Countries' prepared for the United Nations Development Programme – Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) and the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG). The study was presented at the 4th International Conference on National Evaluation Capacities (NEC) in Bangkok, 26–30 October 2015, with the goal of helping inform the future development of a Global Evaluation Agenda for the post-2015 Development Agenda (the Sustainable Development Goals—SDGs).

2. The study focused on compiling and assembling a collection of resources by country through a desk review based on Internet documents and websites, complemented and validated through a consultation process involving an online survey of representatives from the countries.