



IEO INDEPENDENT
Evaluation Office
United Nations Development Programme



LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND: EVALUATION for 2030

2019 National Evaluation
Capacities Conference

AT A GLANCE...

ABOUT THE INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OFFICE



At UNDP, evaluation is critical in helping countries achieve the simultaneous eradication of poverty and significant reduction of inequalities and exclusion. By generating objective evidence, evaluation helps UNDP achieve greater accountability and facilitates improved learning from past experience. The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) promotes accountability and learning by conducting independent evaluations at the country, regional, and global levels, as well as on thematic topics of importance to the organization. It also promotes development of evaluation capacity at the national level.

#NECdev

Contents



Leaving no one behind: Evaluation for 2030	3
Architecture for evaluation effectiveness	7
Strengthening national evaluation systems for the SDGs – country experiences	8
Evaluation tools and techniques	10
Partnerships for transformative evaluations	12
Gender equality and reaching the furthest behind first	13
NEC conference 2019 in a nutshell	15



LEAVING **NO**
ONE BEHIND:
EVALUATION
 for **2030**

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of Egypt, Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform, partnered to organize the 2019 Conference on National Evaluation Capacities (NEC).

The conference was held in Hurgada, Egypt from 20 to 24 October 2019 with the theme of **Leaving No One Behind: Evaluation for 2030**. The event took place over five days, with two days dedicated to intensive evaluation training workshops followed by a three-day conference event.

Over the first two days, 30 evaluation experts from around the world offered 21 workshops in three languages. These workshops were provided to 280 participants from government, civil society, UN and other development partner agencies.

NEC workshops in a nutshell





The implementation of the SDGs can be accelerated globally by bolstering evaluation, a powerful tool that improves public accountability and contributes to positive development change.

- **Amina J. Mohammed,**
Deputy Secretary-General,
United Nations

The conference was opened with remarks by Ms. Amina J. Mohammed (Deputy Secretary General, United Nations). Welcome remarks were provided by Mr. Indran Naidoo (Director, IEO UNDP), Ms. Randa Aboul-Hosn (Resident Representative, UNDP Egypt) and Her Excellency Dr. Hala Helmy El Saeed (Minister, Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform, Egypt).

Following the opening ceremony, the first plenary session set the scene for the conference, with an exploration of what “leaving no one behind” means for evaluation in light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Pedro Conceição (Director, Human Development Report Office, UNDP) shared the emerging findings of the 2019 Human Development Report on inequalities, noting that “leaving no one behind” manifests itself in many ways. The distinguished panel members shared their thoughts on the implications of these findings for evaluation. Several interesting questions were brought forward for evaluators to consider and these included:

- What are we as evaluators bringing to the table?
- What are we doing?
- Are we doing the right thing?
- Are we doing it right?



There was panel consensus that evidence, strong accountability and learning generated through evaluation will advance the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The importance of credible evidence was echoed throughout the conference, with a participant from Colombia noting *“sometimes we say evidence speaks for itself, but actually, when fragmented, it does not. We need to translate evidence into knowledge.”* (Session 8).



The monitoring and evaluation process is crucial for the development process and technology is important in improving the monitoring and evaluation process.

- H.E. Dr. Hala Helmy El Saeed,
Minister of Planning, Monitoring
and Administrative Reform,
Egypt

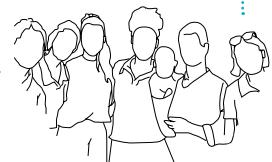
The IEO organized the first NEC Conference a decade ago in 2009 in Morocco, with 55 participants from 30 countries. Fast forward 10 years later, the **sixth NEC conference** held in Egypt brought together over **500 participants**  from  **100 countries**.

THE GOAL WAS TO PROVIDE PARTICIPANTS AN OPPORTUNITY TO:

 connect, engage and share lessons, innovations, experiences and perspectives in strengthening national evaluation systems;

 enhance evaluation skills and understanding in the context of the SDGs; and;

 explore ways to transform evaluation for transformative development.



Transforming evaluation: new evaluation criteria



On the second day, another important plenary session focused on evaluation criteria. Relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability: these five evaluation criteria – first articulated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in 1991 – have become a core part of evaluation policy and practice. Two years ago, at a plenary

5 EVALUATION CRITERIA

- Relevance
- Effectiveness
- Efficiency
- Impact
- Sustainability

session of the NEC 2017, a discussion was initiated, taking stock of experiences with the criteria and their use. Extensive global consultations on the criteria and their possible revision were then held. At NEC 2019, Megan Kennedy-Chouane (Evaluation Policy Advisor, OECD/DAC) presented the latest thinking on the criteria, including emerging new definitions and principles for use. Panellists shared their reflections and critiques from different perspectives, reminding the audience that evaluation criteria provide a foundation for better evaluation. It was acknowledged that better evaluation not only requires asking the right questions, but also examining *who* is asking the questions, and *how* the questions are answered. It was noted that “we need to go beyond relevance to context, approaches and needs, to lead to culturally sensitive evaluation.” (Plenary 3). These themes were echoed in a subsequent session on making the case for country-led evaluations of the SDGs, where it was reiterated that evaluation

is about value, assessing what is working, for whom, how and why (Session 17).

ARCHITECTURE FOR EVALUATION EFFECTIVENESS

The **evaluation profession** has rapidly grown globally, with most governments and development partners drawing on evaluative knowledge and expertise to demonstrate accountability and improve performance. In any oversight and accountability type of evaluation, key principles are critical and these need to infuse the evaluation architecture. The last day opened with a plenary session on architecture for evaluation effectiveness, which highlighted four critical areas for strengthening an evaluation function which include evaluation policy, evaluation quality, evaluation coverage and communicating results. There was audience consensus that building an evaluation culture is a “job for us all.” (Plenary 4). This session presented the



Evaluation is a universal, technical and professional dimension to good governance and public management; no matter the region or culture.

- Indran Naidoo, Director,
UNDP IEO

independent evaluation function of UNDP and described key issues that have been addressed in policy and practice. Speakers from different regions also shared their experiences, opportunities and challenges in strengthening the evaluation architecture in their countries.



STRENGTHENING NATIONAL EVALUATION SYSTEMS FOR THE SDGS – COUNTRY EXPERIENCES

Multiple conference sessions carried these themes forward, particularly with respect to strengthening national evaluation systems for the SDGs. In a panel with representatives from Finland, Nigeria and Bangladesh, it was noted that successful efforts to track progress on the SDGs require a “whole of government approach” with high level commitment. It was also observed that no country has yet introduced a credible plan of how the 2030 agenda will be achieved. The panelists concluded, **countries need credible road maps of how to achieve the SDGs**, which is why evaluation is needed (Session 2).

With respect to **evaluation policies**, in a session on strengthening demand for and use of national evaluation systems, participants agreed that “national evaluation capacities” means more than individual capacity of evaluators; it also means institutional capacity. To ensure institutional capacity, national evaluation policies are important for outlining

rationale, purpose, principles, definitions, roles and responsibilities, and resources (Session 10).

In another session which featured Egypt sharing its experiences in building an integrated and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system, it was highlighted, **“what can’t be measured can’t be assessed. What can’t be assessed can’t be improved,”** while a presentation from Botswana illustrated that strengthening an **M&E system is not an event, but a process that requires commitment** from all stakeholders (Session 11). In a session discussing institutionalizing equity through government M&E systems, it was further noted that monitoring and evaluation is not just a technical process, but also a political one, and therefore has implications for integrating equity in national evaluations. Addressing participation, voice and power are central to institutionalizing equity. However, engaging citizens and ensuring their voice is heard is an iterative process that takes time and considerable effort (Session 15).

Yet another session highlighted the challenges involved in strengthening an evidence based-decision making culture: linking global

goals to local context; establishing the right M&E architecture for the context; articulating roles and operationalization of feedback loops between planning, monitoring and evaluation; the development of data systems; and broadening inclusiveness and partnerships. **Thinking globally, acting locally and country led M&E will allow countries to take greater ownership** of their development policies, was a key message (Session 16).

Countries in the Asia Pacific region shared their common challenges in strengthening evaluation systems to meet the demands of the SDGs. However, diagnostics have

identified needs and countries are designing realistic approaches to move forward, especially with respect to disaggregated data, feedback loops and the culture of evaluation (Session 13). In a session featuring francophone countries, it was highlighted that **prioritization of SDGs at country level is necessary to determine what should be evaluated**. Countries should establish and continually reinforce their national evaluation and data collection systems, to make evidence available to inform national policies, as a mean to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. The participants in the session further highlighted the need for countries to develop a clear mechanism to generate demand for



and promote use of evaluation (Session 20). Yet another session with representatives from different regions highlighted the importance of paying attention to the approach followed in national evaluations, such as setting up an evaluation steering committee, putting in place measures for ownership, ensuring stakeholder engagement in different stages of evaluation, and communicating evaluation findings (Session 19).

EVALUATION TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

Another set of conference sessions explored lessons learned and new tools and techniques that can help transform evaluation



in support of the SDGs. One session zoomed in on SDG 13, climate action, noting that **one of the world's greatest collective challenges is coping with a changing climate**, and evaluation has an important role

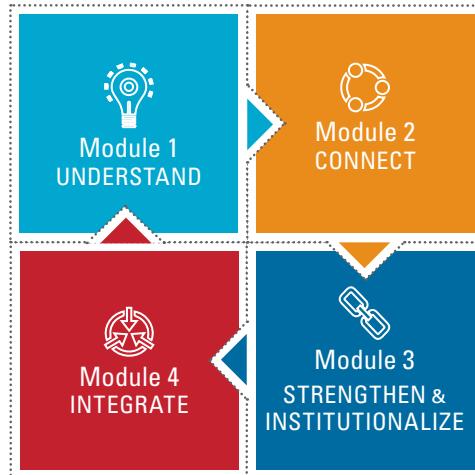
to play. All countries face challenges regardless of their level of development, but the impacts are most acute in developing countries. Evaluations of adaptation interventions show challenges: low adoption, limited sustainability and scaling-up; issues of trade-offs (economic, environmental, resource use efficiency); and a need for better adaptation to local contexts and priorities, all of which are critical to ensure that inequalities are not exacerbated by climate change (Session 7).

In another session, it was demonstrated that **geospatial data and methods offer powerful tools for evaluation**, with illustrations of how these tools can 'open up' theories of change to show unanticipated consequences and impacts. Satellite imagery can enable detailed analysis of development changes in hard to reach locations. Machine learning, propensity mapping and other techniques can harness large data sets to reveal insights on multiple evaluation criteria, including impact. Nevertheless, panelists concluded, using geospatial techniques for causal contribution remains challenging (Session 12).



Examples from Afghanistan, Liberia and Somalia illustrated that **new technologies can provide real-time, ground-truthed answers to key programmatic design and implementation questions** (Session 9). Another tool, developed by the IEO of UNDP, an Online National Evaluation Diagnostic and Strategizing Tool facilitates institutional self-assessment of evaluation capacities and enables a systematic approach to determine pathways and parameters for strengthening national evaluation (Session 5).

The tool is divided into 4 modules for step by step capacity diagnosis: ●●●●



PARTNERSHIPS FOR TRANSFORMATIVE EVALUATIONS

In a session that explored how a new generation of evaluators can transform evaluation, the link to technology was

emphasized: youth are strongly connected through technology and social platforms and can bring their skills to the evaluation table. In addition, the world is connected through these young people, which is important to reach the unreached and to hear the unheard. The panelists emphasized that young people should be involved in all evaluations as viable partners, not just in the evaluations of youth programmes (Session 14).

Several other examples of partnerships to strengthen national evaluations and evaluation capacities point to the importance of **user-friendly evaluations**, which are more likely to be used by partners as well as stakeholders. Another key message in developing partnerships for evaluation: “focus on what binds you, not on what divides you (Session 1).” **Engagement with the private sector is also crucial, even central**, to the achievement of the SDGs. Risk, reticence and reluctance makes evaluation essential to oversee and manage this partnership with the private sector and ensure proper use and intended impact from the use of public funds in pursuit of the SDGs (Session 6).



GENDER EQUALITY AND REACHING THE FURTHEST BEHIND FIRST

Leaving no one behind was by design a constant theme throughout the conference. Speakers pointed to the importance of asking, “why are we doing the evaluation? For whom?” (Plenary 3) and of **engaging communities in evaluation to strengthen credibility** and bring out people’s voices (Session 15). An important reflection was that, “data, and data collection, may be a challenge, but people are there, ready to tell their stories (Plenary 3).”

With respect to gender, it was found that despite progress, the **evaluation community needs to collectively advocate for more gender-responsive evaluation**. It was highlighted that gender mainstreaming plans should be grounded in comprehensive and consistent theories of change, which can be informed by evaluation (Session 4). Harking back to the opening plenary, it was observed that while there has generally been progress in gender equality, when progress touches evaluation power there may be a backlash: how do evaluations capture this (Plenary 2)?





Another session with presentations of four country experiences related to data and evaluations of programmes focusing on vulnerable populations concluded that **thorough and clear data collection, designed with and targeting vulnerable groups**, can clearly inform decision makers of intended and unintended consequences of policy implementation and provide evidence for ways forward and policy expansion. Key to this is including vulnerable groups beyond just data collection (Session 18). A session focusing on evaluation and sub-national governments concluded with a clear message: don't leave local governments behind, that's where SDG implementation happens (Session 21).

Taking to heart the challenge of the NEC 2019 to identify how evaluation ensures that it reaches the furthest behind first, one of the training workshops and related conference session developed six “Hurghada Principles” of evaluation that leaves no one behind.



These principles captured key messages of the conference:

- Map evaluation stakeholders thoroughly and in detail at the outset of the evaluation;
- Sustain stakeholder engagements throughout evaluation processes;
- Use diverse and appropriate evaluation methods;
- Always consider and be sensitive to the context;
- Disseminate evaluation findings;
- Be particularly vigilant about leaving no-one behind in conflict-affected and fragile contexts and in humanitarian crises.



• **NEC**
• **CONFERENCE**
• **2019 IN A**
• **NUTSHELL**
•

In conclusion, the three days of vibrant exchanges and sharing of lessons learned, experiences, thoughts and ideas provided over 500 participants with fresh knowledge, renewed motivation and revitalized commitments to advancing evaluation that leaves no one behind and helps accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

3
DAYS



5
PLENARIES



21
PARALLEL
SESSIONS



>500
PARTICIPANTS



>100
COUNTRIES

The **knowledge** and experience sharing continues: presentations and videos from the conference are now available on the IEO website, and the conference proceedings are under preparation. The IEO has also developed a NEC Information Centre where information from past conferences as well as country evaluation profiles can be found.



I will go back home a better evaluator because of such fruitful engagements at this NEC. I am so thrilled that I participated as a speaker in sessions where I have been continuously challenged by colleagues from all walks of life.

- A NEC 2019 participant

IMPORTANT LINKS FOR THE CONFERENCE



Videos



Power
Points



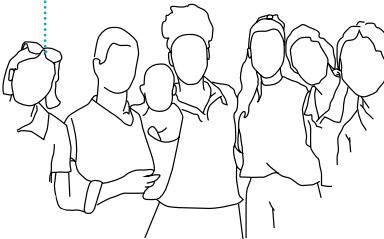
Photos



Social
media
highlights



Survey
results



Visit <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/nec2019>
for more information.





#NECdev

Independent Evaluation Office
United Nations Development Programme
One UN Plaza, DC1-20th Floor,
New York, NY 10017, USA
Tel. +1(646) 781 4200



/ undp.org/evaluation



/ [UNDP_Evaluation](https://twitter.com/UNDP_Evaluation)



/ [ieoundp](https://www.facebook.com/ieoundp)



/ [evaluationoffice](https://www.youtube.com/evaluationoffice)



#NECdev