

EVOLUTION OF UNDP'S APPROACH TO NATIONAL EVALUATION CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Roberto La Rovere and Ana Rosa Soares

Evaluating the performance of public policy is fundamental to good governance, government accountability and development effectiveness. Accordingly the Evaluation Policy of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) emphasizes the priority of national evaluation capacity development. In this context, UNDP programme units promote and coordinate South-South and trilateral cooperation in support of capacity-building for evaluation at country level by strengthening communities of practice in evaluation and maintaining regional rosters of evaluation experts and institutes.

Since 2009, International Conferences on National Evaluation Capacities (NEC) have been privileged instruments through which the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of UNDP has contributed to improved enabling environments for national evaluation capacity development. The latest such event (www.nec2013.org/) was held in 2013 in Brazil (papers and proceedings, also of the 2009 and 2011 NEC conferences, can be found at: <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/nec/proceedings.shtml>). It sought "solutions to challenges related to independence, credibility and use of evaluation". The Conference brought together representatives of national institutions responsible for commissioning, conducting and using evaluations of public policies, projects and programmes, as well as civil society representatives, eminent evaluation practitioners and academics Voluntary Organizations of Professional Evaluation (VOPEs) leaders and senior UN/development agencies officials.

Building upon prior national scale events these biannual conferences have provided forums for debate about the issues that confront evaluators in diverse country contexts. They have enabled participants to share innovative experiences and to identify South-South solutions. For example, the 2013 event used a participatory approach that empowered participants, allowed in-depth discussions of evaluation issues, showcasing of best practices and culminated in a list of 18 NEC commitments: see *Actions and Com-*

mitments. Institutions and representatives from 52 countries formally endorsed these commitments thus highlighting their interest in collaborating and committing to national evaluation capacity development.

Emphasis was placed on interconnected aspects of establishing national M&E systems; follow up mechanisms for dialogue and enhanced network cooperation based on concrete agreements. This is expected to improve international standards for the evaluation of public programmes, policies and initiatives.

With live webcasts of key sessions, viewers from all over the world were able to join the proceedings. For each sub-theme parallel solution forums were organized. The solutions were then presented to plenary sessions to encourage broad based commitments to South-South cooperation on evaluation. This process highlighted several innovative initiatives designed to promote critical partnerships between governments, parliamentarians and VOPEs with a view to strengthen the demand for (and effective use of) evaluations. Four key evaluation capacity building elements were identified: 1) promoting evaluation use through national and global advocacy initiatives, 2) defining and strengthening evaluation processes and methods, 3) engaging existing and new stakeholders; and 4) exploring different institutional solutions for evaluation governance and management.

Looking ahead, it is expected that participants will keep engaging in knowledge exchange and cooperation to help implement their commitments. UNDP will monitor these efforts, track the results of cooperation agreements and help in follow up. It will also link interested parties to potential partners and UNDP programmatic units able to support south-south cooperation initiatives.

Examples of actions in progress, or planned to start soon, are:

1. Results based monitoring and evaluation framework under development by Interna-

tional Policy Center for Inclusive Growth to track governments and partners' efforts and results of NEC commitments.

2. Platforms for exchange of knowledge on NEC development under adaptation for upcoming dialogues linked to regional evaluation events in 2014 (NEC CoP: www.unteamworks.org/NEC).
3. NEC oriented events under the aegis of RedLACME, Peru (November 2013), AfrEA, Cameroon (March 2014); UNEG Bangkok; South Asia Regional Consultation on National Evaluation Policies; Sri Lanka (April 2014); Improving Statistical Data and Strengthening National Statistical Institutions by Brazilian Ministry of Social Development/EO. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, August 2014; and at International Program Evaluation Network (IPEN) operating in the Newly Independent States in Kirgizstan (September 2014)
4. Publication by Parliamentarians Forum for Development Evaluation: "Mapping Status of National Evaluation Policies". December 2013
5. UNDP programmatic units to engage with interested parties and support implementation of commitments.

All in all the NEC Conference created an inclusive and collaborative process that engaged NEC Commitments' signatories and grassroots organizations in sustaining enthusiasm and momentum. Specifically partners, NEC participants and other stakeholders will engage in opportunities to exchange knowledge and explore how national governments and partners will implement the 18 NEC commitments through south-south cooperation. In 2015, the Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP will take stock of implementation progress on the NEC commitments. The outcome of these diverse initiatives will be presented to the 4th International Conference on National Evaluation Capacities to take place in Asia in the last quarter of 2015. To lay the groundwork for this synthesis the EES 2014 Biennial Conference to be held in Dublin in October 2014 will feature a session about the NEC development vision and the main challenges ahead.