

UNDP IEO Webinar: Evaluation During Crisis and Beyond, 31 March 2020

Agenda:

Moderation

Arild Hauge, Deputy Director (IEO, UNDP)

Introduction – Adapting the way we work

Indran Naidoo, Director (IEO, UNDP)

Rethinking evaluation plans and design

Guy Thijs, Director (EVAL, ILO)

Reconfiguring evaluation teams

Carlos Tarazona, Senior Evaluation Officer (OED, FAO) & Fumika Ouchi, Chief ICPE Section (IEO, UNDP)

Collecting data remotely

Monica Zikusooka, Monitoring and Evaluation (WHO, Ankara)

Closing remarks

Oscar Garcia, Director (IEO, UNDP, effective 1 April 2020)

Summary:

On 31 March 2020, the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) organized a webinar “**Evaluation during Crisis and Beyond**” in order to share and exchange practices and thoughts on carrying on evaluations during the COVID-19 crisis. Over 100 participants from about 25 UN agencies¹ attended the virtual meeting. Arild Hauge, Deputy Director of UNDP IEO, moderated the 1-hour webinar. Key messages are summarized as follows.

Indran Naidoo, Director (IEO, UNDP)²

Indran shared six (6) tips on evaluation practice during the crisis in order to adapt to the fast involving context:

1. **Rethinking evaluation plans:** The COVID-19 pandemic will have a profound impact on the methods and key indicators used for evaluation. Programme countries will have new priorities and governments and stakeholders need more relevant information addressing the current situation. The classic evaluation plan, as well as the evaluation methodology, needs to be rethought. In cases of technical, and other barriers associated with working remotely, evaluation units should consider delaying the evaluation.
2. **Reconfigure evaluation teams:** The COVID-19 has spread globally and evaluation activities have to ensure the safety of the evaluation teams, including national consultants. Terms of Reference (TOR) for contracted consultants should be modified to reflect remote arrangements and changes as per new evaluation plans.

¹ Participants’ agencies include FAO, IFAD, ILO, IMO, IOM, OHCHR, OIOS, UNAIDS, UNCDF, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNITAR, UNRWA, UN Women, WHO and WIPO.

² Indran Naidoo served as Director of UNDP Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) since 2012 and he was also a UNEG vice-Chair. The webinar took place on 31 March 2020, the last day of his tenure as UNDP IEO Director.

3. **Collect data remotely:** Due to absence of field visits and lack of local evaluation team members, data could be collected remotely using technologies, including geographic information systems (GIS) and other information and communication tools. Some work has already been done (see below). Evaluators will need to be equipped with necessary skills, as well as rethink the modality of data collection and how to use technologies without losing the human dimension. Expertise can also be drawn from academic and research sector for remote data collection.

[*Information and Communication Technologies for Development Evaluation*](#), edited by Oscar A. Garcia and Prashanth Kotturi, Routledge, 2019.

[“Local, National, Global: Evaluative Evidence of Scaling Up the SDGs”](#), by Juha Uitto and Indran Naidoo, 2019.

4. **Engage stakeholders virtually:** UNDP IEO has successfully led several virtually debriefing with stakeholders to disseminate evaluation findings and recommendations. It is time to think how to connect with voices on the ground, including those from beneficiaries.
5. **Share evaluations globally:** At a time of social distancing, social platforms can enable connecting networking and engaging with stakeholders, governments, donors, partners, and decision makers. Global outreach using these platforms can drive discussions. Evaluators will need to work in a more virtual manner and rethink the evaluation mandates. In this context, UNEG may need to rethink its strategic plan.
6. **Connect with evaluation networks:** Stay connected with other evaluation networks to help each other adapt to evolving evaluation approaches, methods and technologies.

[The infographic brief of the six points is available here.](#)

Guy Thijs, Director (EVAL, ILO)

Guy introduced the efforts made by the ILO Evaluation Office (EVAL) to address issues and challenges raised by the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, those concerning decentralized evaluations.

ILO EVAL oversees decentralized evaluations that are conducted by a network of certified evaluation managers, departmental evaluation focal points and designated evaluation officers at the regional level. ILO EVAL has an online platform showing the stages of evaluations and developed guidelines on reducing number of travels due to cost and environmental concerns. As the COVID-19 crisis started, keeping in mind the safety of staff, consultants, stakeholders and beneficiaries, ILO EVAL drafted an initial **guidance note presenting nine (9) scenarios on how to carry on decentralized evaluations**, such as the scenarios of “business as usual”, “using national consultants for field work”, and “online methods”. The guidance note is operational, and it will be adjusted following the fast-evolving context. Adjustments for conducting an evaluation need to be reviewed in terms of its methodology and new timeline. Not all countries will be able to cope with the adaptation approaches. ILO EVAL is looking into possibilities of cross project evaluations in a single country. Assessment needs to be undertaken to ensure that adaptation will not undermine evaluation standards and quality.

There are several challenges emerging during the current COVID-19 crisis:

- **Engagement with country offices** becomes more intense as they have been overwhelmed. If not careful, the established evaluation culture could be damaged.
- **Database of contact details of stakeholders** are not complete, with most of government contacts but few beneficiaries and others.

- There is a **decline of national consultants' availability**.

As much as possible the TOR should include clear methodology with flexibility and guidelines on virtual methods where needed. There will be a need to interact more with national consultants if recruited. **Evaluability assessment** is important from the start, as well as assessing if data are sufficient and of good quality.

Carlos Tarazona, Senior Evaluation Officer (OED, FAO) & Fumika Ouchi, Chief ICPE Section (IEO, UNDP)

Fumika and Carlos shared their thoughts on evaluation design and team. Once a work plan is set, the question of “How do we carry out data collection/analysis with limited/no missions” transfers to “How to maximize non-mission activities during an evaluation”. **During the COVID-19 pandemic, making the safety of evaluation staff and consultants a primary and overarching concern is essential.**

There are several **alternatives to field missions**:

1) **use of more national consultants** who have valuable local knowledge and better access. But ethical consideration must be taken into consideration as protecting the health of staff, team members and national stakeholders is a paramount. The evaluation TOR and consultant contracts should reflect how to address potential disruptions in work due to COVID-19.

2) **strengthening of desk reviews** by ensuring quality and quantity (availability) of documents and data and exploring non-traditional data/info sources for analysis. This would require the ability of local staff to gather documents.

3) **use of online modalities** for interviews and meetings. This approach requires checking physical availability, psychological readiness and receptiveness of stakeholders to receive interviews online, as well technical infrastructure.

4) **use of surveys and questionnaires** that involves thorough design and administration and depends on the capacity of the country office and connectivity of all recipients.

5) **Examine the required skillset** of the evaluation team.

The pandemic is affecting everyone. There is a need for flexibility in terms of work scope and use available capacity wisely. In case of limited stakeholder engagement, evaluators shall ask “What is the purpose of the evaluation” and “Is the evaluation of good use (what is the utility of our evaluation)”. In the event of suspension of planned evaluation, this crisis could also be an opportunity to **re-prioritize the evaluation plan** and carry out knowledge products and activities, such as synthesis pieces, review of country programme methodology and develop methodological guidance, real-time evaluation of agencies' response to the COVID-19 crisis, and national evaluation capacity development.

Monica Zikusooka, Monitoring and Evaluation (WHO, Ankara)

Monica presented her experience in remote data collection in Somalia, where there were difficulties to achieve data even through internet. Internet-based methods rely heavily on internet access. When the internet access is limited, mobile/smart phones could be used to collect data remotely, including receiving voice messages to specific questions sent. Pictures of locations/project sites could be collected through smart phones, providing a sense of what is happening as photographs sometimes tell a lot. In addition, photos of materials and documents sometimes could be equivalent to a field visit. This requires the clarity on what kind of data are wanted and from whom, and the time to analyze them. Limitations include how reliable the data are as they could be biased. Building trusted relationship with the country office is a good practice to minimize biased data, as well as ensuring that the meaning and benefits of the evaluation

is well understood. During the current COVID-19 crisis, evaluators should think about what must be done and communicate the necessity and meaning of the evaluation (if one has to take place).

Closing remarks: Oscar Garcia, Director (IEO, UNDP, effective 1 April 2020)

Oscar emphasized that the webinar was very timely as the COVID-19 crisis is changing the modus operandi of many activities. This crisis is unprecedented and there is a need to start thinking ahead about the recovery. Evaluation can provide a precious source of evidence to inform policy making. It is important to gather evidence and being creative and flexible to identify solutions. Safety of all staff, evaluation teams and stakeholders is a priority. He also thanked Indran for his leadership at UNDP IEO for the past 8 years.

During the open discussion, colleagues from different agencies shared their practices, challenges/concerns and thoughts. Question about the criteria for adjusting/postponing (if so for how long)/cancelling an evaluation was raised; UNICEF's U-report approach to gather information/data remotely was mentioned; considering new evaluation questions at the Headquarter level (such as efficiencies, operational processes, systemic topics) were alluded to, as well as the proposal of making data quality review a stand-alone function giving its importance.

Follow-up webinars will be organized in the coming days to continue the discussion.

Resources mentioned during the webinar:

Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the Social-Economic Impacts of COVID-19: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_report_socio-economic_impact_of_covid19.pdf

A webinar from J-PAL on conducting phone surveys: <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/blog/3-20-20/best-practices-conducting-phone-surveys>
