HOW TO? Practical tips for supporting evaluation capacity and systems in partner countries

Evaluation capacity is important in order to provide timely and credible evidence to accelerate progress towards Agenda 2030. It is important to build demand for locally generated evidence for increased ownership and accountability.

This brief has been prepared by the Development Evaluation Unit of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. The purpose of this brief is to raise awareness on the topic and illustrate ways in which evaluations funded by the Ministry can strengthen local evaluation capacities with easy considerations and efforts. The purpose is also to direct the reader to useful additional resources.

Content

WHAT IS WHAT?

Evaluation Capacity Development (ECD)

According to OECD DAC, evaluation capacity development (ECD) is "the process whereby **people, organisations and society** as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain **capacity to produce and use evaluation** to effectively support accountability and learning. Producing and using evaluations requires individual skills and knowledge, organisational systems and policies, and an enabling environment." Strengthening evaluation capacities contributes to **effective institutions, good governance, mutual accountability and collaboration**.

(OECD; Developing evaluation capacities website; emphasis added)

National Evaluation Capacity Development (NECD)

According to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), National Evaluation Capacity Development (NECD) is "the process whereby state and non-state entities and individuals expand, reinforce and sustain **national capacity to manage, produce and use** evaluation. NECD is linked to **national priorities** and ultimately aims at **strengthening governance** through accountability and learning (...) Greater **demand for** and **better quality** of evaluations, and their **use in policy and practice** require individual skills and knowledge, institutional systems and policies, and an enabling environment, including a conducive evaluation culture." Typically capacity is strengthened at national level but linkages and synergies at subnational, regional and global levels are also relevant.

(UNEG NECD Report 2022; UNEG Working Group definition; emphasis added)

Country-led Evaluations (CLE)

One definition of CLE is evaluation which the partner country **leads and owns** by determining: **What** policy or programme will be evaluated; what **evaluation questions** will be asked; what **methods** will be used; what **analytical approach** will be undertaken; how the findings will be **communicated**; and how the findings will ultimately be **used**.

(Marco Segone in UNICEF 2009, p. 24; emphasis added)

UNEG set out to establish a general Theory of Change for national evaluation capacity development in the 2022 NECD Report. It illustrates some possible components of national evaluation capacity development.
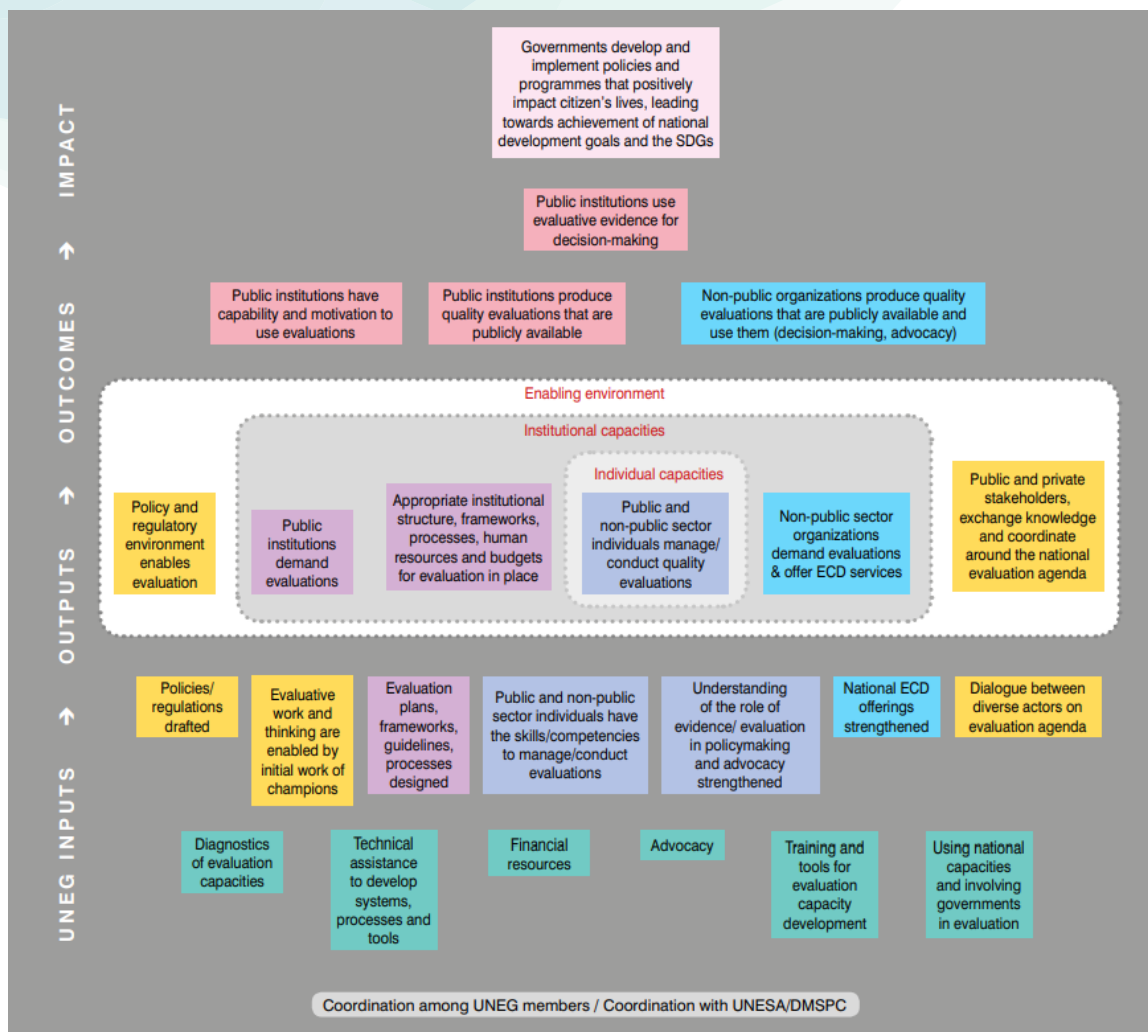
(Source: UNEG 2022; For more, see NECD Report 2022)

The support typically includes mapping evaluation capacities, financial and/or technical assistance to governments, training and tools, supporting joint and country-led evaluations, collaborating with voluntary organizations and other evaluation stakeholders as well as advocacy activities. (UNEG 2022; WFP 2022)

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Evaluation capacity development in partner countries and with partner organisations is important for many reasons. An evaluation aims to build a better world. Its purpose is to promote openness and transparency in governance and policymaking and in how policies are implemented in practice. At its best evaluations support democratic decision-making. An evaluation that focuses on inclusive practices which foster participation and collaboration promotes public accountability and transparency.

When eventually development cooperation activities have rendered themselves unneeded, there would be institutions in place that can ensure the continuation of evaluative practices and transparent, evidence-based decision-making. It is important to build demand for the use of government-owned official information, and to develop (integrated) data and systems rather than building too many parallel systems or data collection avenues. It is also important to appreciate the various evaluation paradigms, methodologies and practices that originate from the global South as equally applicable as others. Sometimes evaluations do not adequately consider the opportunities for capacity development, which can mean that learning from the evaluation falls short of its objectives. Particularly learning during the evaluation process could be better utilised for evaluation capacity development.

United Nations Resolution (2015) A/RES/69/237 calls for evaluation capacity development. Quite often are capacity development activities taking place within individual evaluations. As important as that is, it is also important to consider the wider systemic capacity aspects and needs. The follow up of Agenda2030 is based on evidence, including country-led evaluations. The outcome document 2015 calls for capacity development. Systems development should be based on partner country's or partner organisation's request.

Ownership and leadership by governments and other organisations responsible in partner countries can be built already during the evaluation process. It is also crucial for the adoption of the evaluation results.

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*The strength and effectiveness of the national evaluation capacities (NEC) of a country
are not measured by the production of one single evaluation but relate to the management and
coordination of a broad M&E system".
(GEI 2022, MESA, p. 13)*

*"[The follow up and review processes of the Agenda 2030] will be rigorous and based on evidence,
informed by country-led evaluations and data which is high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable and
disaggregated... – They will require enhanced capacity-building support for developing countries, including
the strengthening of national data systems and evaluation programs, particularly in African countries,
LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs and middle-income countries."
(Outcome document of the United Nations Summit 2015)*

*"Country led evaluations (CLE) require evaluation capacities at the country level.
At the same time, a crucial way to develop these capacities is through "learning by doing".
Suitable training and technical assistance can serve as catalyzers in the process of developing
evaluation capacities, but actual opportunities to use these capacities, such as those that can be
provide by a CLE, play a crucial role both in mobilizing these capacities and in ensuring their sustainability."
(OECD DAC 2003; A discussion note)*

HOW TO? Considerations when managing an evaluation process

Planning

- Mention the requirement of including capacity development as part of the evaluation process in the ToR
- Mention the requirement of using local evaluators in the ToR
- Include questions about evaluation capacity or systems where relevant and possible
- Consider the roles of the evaluation steering group and the reference group: Who is represented and what capacity development gains could be tangible?
- Strengthen the understanding of the importance of quality evaluation and usefulness of evidence
- Strengthen advocacy skills for evaluation use
- Define any specific outputs or products on capacity development as part of the deliverables
- Set aside separate budget for capacity strengthening and learning activities or products during the evaluation, and also as part of the project or programme during its planning phase
- Make sure evaluation process includes an interactive management response based on the findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Inception

- Scope existing evaluation capacities and systems to avoid duplication of tools and processes and to maximize complementarity of any new elements for capacity strengthening
- Make sure reference / steering group / supervisory board is engaged to guarantee learning and ownership on the results
- Scope relevant stakeholders and their evaluation related capacity or learning needs and opportunities and adapt them to the context
- Scope the enabling evaluation environment where relevant. Map out existing regional and national capacity development forums and avenues
- Define capacity development objectives that are feasible during the evaluation process
- Include evaluation approaches and methods that allow learning (participatory, developmental, facilitated self-assessment, focus group discussions etc.)
- Include a concrete plan and steps on how collaboration on capacity development and learning will take place
- Train stakeholders on relevant topics.

Implementation

- Ensure everyone understand the evaluation process and its steps and what learning can be expected at the different stages
- Ensure the planned learning loops are active at different levels, also ensuring institutionalization of the capacity and learning objectives
- Ensure timely feedback to enable feedback loops and clarity on issues by all
- Collect any evidence on the improved capacities during the evaluation process where relevant
- Document and share learning and lessons in suitable ways for institutional learning
- Use validation workshops with main stakeholders / steering group / supervisory board to discuss early findings, conclusions and areas of recommendation to improve learning, ownership of evaluation results and quality of the final versions.

Reporting

- Comment on draft reports and point out any gaps in recommendations that address aspects of evaluation capacity or systems development that could foster further commitment or investment into (evaluation) capacity development
- Focus on achieving clear and concrete findings, conclusions and recommendations to be discussed in the management response process
- Make sure conclusions and recommendations are based on evidence that have been validated
- Where relevant, include specific sections on lessons learnt, including those during the process.

Dissemination

◻ Plan and invest in dissemination, communication and use of the evaluation to maximize learning and capacity benefits

◻ Ensure that the evaluation findings are used when the organisation's capacity development plans or assessments are being updated

◻ Consider online platforms and sharing as a public good to maximize replication and scale up, wider effects and uses for advocacy purposes

◻ Collaborate with other actors that strengthen capacities to inform them of the evaluation results and lessons learnt.

Management Response

◻ Support and guarantee facilitation for the management response process, concluding in implementable actions based on the recommendations and findings of the evaluation. Assign clear responsibility for capacity building activities.

◻ Disseminate the resulting action plan and/or strategic and policy decisions

◻ Ensure that on activities related to capacity strengthening are also reported back on

◻ Monitor the levels of capacity and any new emergent needs.

HOW TO? Considerations when working with different types of partners

Are you collaborating with central or local government, sector authorities or other duty-bearers in the partner country?

◻ Can the evaluation be country-led or at least co-chaired by the partner, or is there a planned or an ongoing evaluation? Consider taking part in such a process when possible.

◻ Can you use diagnostic tools such as the MESA together with stakeholders to map out capacity needs and jointly develop an evaluation capacity development plan if requested?

◻ Would it make sense to take the whole of government approach?

◻ Can you use information or data that is already available and collected by the partner country such as through the MISs or Bureau of Statistics?

◻ Can you invite representatives of the duty-bearer in your evaluation management/steering group?

◻ Can you invite representatives of the duty-bearer in your evaluation reference group?

◻ Can you organize training sessions or workshops as part of the evaluation process to build capacity for any duty-bearers?

◻ Can you organize regular interactive briefing sessions with duty-bearers, including the office responsible for evaluation function in the country?

◻ Can you have the duty-bearers join the field missions or data collection activities if no interference with evaluation results?

◻ Can you use developmental evaluation methods or critical friends as part of the evaluation?

◻ Can you invite junior officials to take part in managing and monitoring the evaluation process with individualized learning plans?

◻ Can you get the partner contribute to the evaluation budget got increased ownership?

◻ Can you use the evaluation (process) as catalyst for advocating for developing national M&E frameworks or systems?

Are you working with a multilateral partner?

- Is the evaluation planned to be country-led? If not, can you advocate for the UNGA Resolution (A/RES/69/237)?
- Can you promote joint evaluations, including with partner government?
- Can you promote country-led evaluations and local capacity development in evaluation policies of the organisation?
- Can you prioritise national needs in joint evaluations, and ensure that the scope, design and timing is based on national needs?
- Does the UNSDCF include outcomes or activities on national capacity development for evaluation? Can you support such activities?

- Can you advocate for the use of local evaluators?
- Can you engage with local staff members or junior staff for a meaningful role?
- Can you liaise with a regional office to advocate for capacity development and coordinate with other capacity development initiatives?
- Can the UN country team and UN M&E working groups be mobilised for wider support and capacity development activities?
- Can you access any other capacity development resources or actors through any multilateral partners or their networks?

Are you working with local independent evaluators?

- Can you include local independent evaluators in your evaluation team with balanced mixture of characteristics and merits. Consider gender, age, disabilities, geographical and other diversities.
- Can you include lived experience, particular contextual or substantive local knowledge as a requirement in the ToR?
- Can you create capacity development opportunities for persons that may be particularly under-privileged in a particular context such as for indigenous and other marginalised groups or persons with disabilities that aspire to become evaluators?

- Can you provide additional support that might be needed for obtaining local evaluators and facilitating their access to evaluation assignments?
- Can you facilitate access to professional learning workshops, trainings or seminars e.g. on various evaluation methods?
- Can you invite emerging evaluators or students to take up a role in evaluation process or learning events?

Are you working with a Civil Society partner?

- Do they play a role in government evaluations that you could support? Do they produce any of the information or data?
- Do they have knowledge and expertise that other actors such as the government could benefit from?
- Can they have a leading role in managing an evaluation if there is no conflict of interest?
- Can you support any evaluation capacity or systems needs in their organisation?
- Can you have representatives of the civil society in the reference group of the evaluation, particularly persons who manage evaluations or M&E?

- Can you collaborate with a local evaluation associations or voluntary organisations for professional evaluation (VOPEs) and organise learning events jointly?
- Can you organise thematic trainings on evaluation topics for the wider evaluation community?
- Can you liaise with the CSOs to advocate for the availability of transparent and accessible evidence in the country?

References and useful resources

Agenda2030 outcome document: https://www.un.org/pga/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/08/120815_outcome-document-of-Summit-for-adoption-of-the-post-2015-development-agenda.pdf

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GEI (2022) MESA diagnostic tool: https://www.globalevaluationinitiative.org/publications/mesa-diagnostic-tool

IIED (2020) Evaluation to connect national priorities with the SDGs. A guide for evaluation commissioners and managers: https://www.iied.org/17739iied

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UNICEF (2009) Country-led monitoring and evaluation systems Better evidence, better policies, better development results: https://mics.unicef.org/files?job=W1siZiIsIjIwMTUvMDEvMzAvMDMvMjUvNTUvNTAwL0NvdW50cnlfbGVkX01FX3N5c3RlbXMuCGRmIl1d&sha=cdcc92ec34d8448b

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WFP (2022) Country Capacity Strengthening: Lessons from WFP Initiatives in National Evaluation Capacity Development: https://www.wfp.org/publications/country-capacity-strengthening-lessons-wfp-initiatives-national-evaluation-capacity

OECD Developing evaluation capacities: https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/evaluatingcapacitydevelopment.htm

OECD Supporting Evaluation Capacity Development Tip-sheet: https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/dcdn-dep/46306661.pdf

OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation - Task Team on Capacity Development: Working Consensus on Evaluation Capacity Development: https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/dcdndep/ECD_%20concept%20note_final%20%282%29.pdf

OECD DAC (2003) Country led evaluations: A discussion note: https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/dcdn-dep/31743019.pdf