



2018 Asian Evaluation Week

Making Evaluation Work at the Country Level

10–14 September 2018 | Chengdu, People's Republic of China

2018 Asian Evaluation Week Sessions Summary

(Prepared by each session's rapporteur)

Session 1: Opening session

Marvin Taylor-Dormond, Director General, Independent Evaluation Department, Asian Development Bank. The Asian Evaluation Week is planned to be the leading evaluation knowledge sharing platform for Asia and the Pacific, and after two highly successful editions this vision is clearly on track. This year's theme of Making evaluation work at the country level is important given the need for sound evidence in decision making processes (in fact the criticality of evaluation is recognized for realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the country level), effective use of scarce resources, and addressing accountability to the public. Building country-level evaluation systems requires collective efforts from all stakeholders.

Session 2: State governance and performance-based management in PRC

Session 3: Public sector evaluation in the People's Republic of China

Session 4: Using and adapting international norms and evaluation criteria to strengthen country and institutional evaluation systems

The session discussed OECD DAC's evaluation norms, standards, and criteria that can be used and adapted locally to strengthen country and institutional systems. OECD DAC explained why evaluation system is important, the efforts to strengthen evaluation quality standards and benefits, and the evaluation criteria and role. It further discussed the use and influence of DAC evaluation criteria and inquired if the criteria need to be changed, adopted, amended, or have a new set of criteria to focus on country experience.

Sri Lanka presented the usefulness of the DAC evaluation criteria in partner countries as bases for evaluation questions, findings, and ratings; reviewing the criteria post-2015 SDG era; adapting the criteria to strengthen country evaluation; and using international standards in the conduct of country evaluations. It presented a summary of Sri Lanka's evaluation of Small and Medium Industries Industrial Estate. It concluded on the merits of adapting and localizing international norms and standards to strengthen national evaluation system.

Session 5: Making joint evaluation work: A case study on its application to Disaster Risk Reduction and Management

JICA and the Philippines' Department of Finance discussed the benefits and challenges of development partners working together to produce joint evaluation in disaster risk reduction and management. The session presented the pros and cons of conducting a joint evaluation, and provided learning experiences. The joint evaluation aimed to help build capacity of the Philippine Government on project evaluation and draw lessons from the evaluation to enhance effectiveness of future projects. It facilitated the transfer of evaluation techniques and sharing of evaluation results. Both sides benefited from being flexible and open to accommodate deviations from the traditional evaluation system and found out that prior understanding of the objectives, agreeing to undertake a common approach in the conduct of the evaluation, early consultation, and continued participation allowed better

implementation of the evaluation. The innovative feature of the loan financing product enabled the government to access timely concessional financing and contributed to its prudent management objective.

Session 6: Performance evaluation: Standards, methods and procedures

Session 7: What impact evaluation is and how it purports to inform policymakers

Impact evaluation is essential in understanding the actual effects of intervention but it is not influential enough to inform policy reforms. Practical actions were proposed to make impact evaluation inform policies and programs better. The use of impact evaluation has been long practiced in social science, which had become core building blocks to policy demand but only expanded influence on international development until the 1980s. Instrumental use of impact evaluation can influence policy dialogues in expanding or discontinuing programs, as in the cases of Mongolia in their food stamp program and in Mexico and the Philippines in their conditional cash transfer programs. Strengthening the influence of impact evaluation will require (i) a shift of focus from project to intervention; (ii) broadening of information search to require that evidence be used; and (iii) embracing of process use, impact evaluation designed ex ante, and promotion of impact evaluation as the intersection of research and development to test assumptions and innovations.

The Green Climate Fund (GCF) looks at impact evaluations as a determinant of how programs should be delivered, which program works (and its implicated cost if it did not), and where can the difference be done in the climate change sector. Randomized Control Trial is a valued approach in GCF because it can construct a counterfactual with measurable outcomes. In their evaluation process, GCF uses a mixed study approach to produce both quantitative and qualitative results of impact evaluation. GCF presented their Learning-Oriented Real-Time Impact Assessment (LORTA) Program performed by its Independent Evaluation Unit that has embedded theory-based impact evaluation in eight of their projects. The program design requires GCF to work closely with implementation colleagues, ensure country engagement through capacity building, build a good baseline data and information, and provide real time feedback to program managers. GCF sees the value of setting up impact evaluation at the start of the project (measuring as you go).

Session 8: Integrating big data in evaluation

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) discussed how calculating results through big data sources, e.g., use of geospatial data, can answer new and complex evaluation questions and avoid traditional data-related constraints. It can be used for mapping of where your projects are, integration of statistical purposes/regression, etc. Using geospatial data when there is no baseline data would be really helpful and is done by using historical satellite data or even geographic indicators. GEF can partner with global institutions and use mixed approaches, while exploring new methodologies and data sources.

German Institute for Development Evaluation illustrated how evaluation can benefit from computational methods when faced with large amount of data. An example is text mining, which is done through mixed quantitative and qualitative approaches leading to long-term automating processes in evaluation. Machine learning-based classification is another innovative method done through information extraction, change detection, and triangulation with survey data. Remote sensing data, GIS-based hazard assessment, and geostatistical diffusion analysis are the other computational methods used in the DEval's "Enhanced land-use planning in the Philippines" evaluation.

Session 9: Why does evaluation matter for inclusive and sustainable development?

The session provided the conceptual argument and practical examples on ‘why evaluation matters for inclusive and sustainable development.’ BRAC presented how evaluation helped improve the delivery of the oral rehydration therapy program that saved half a million lives annually. IADB, OECD, Korea, and ADB shared their experiences on how evaluation contributed to inclusive and sustainable development in their respective organizations. Based from the discussions, factors that could make evaluation entrenched into decision making process include: commitment of senior management; environment propitious to accept failure; buy in from evaluation users; community and beneficiary involvement; partnerships with other evaluation actors; trust; recognizing complexity; good regulatory framework; capacity; attention to evaluability of projects/programs/policies; consideration of the costs of evaluation; and standardization of evaluation practices.

Session 10: Overall implementation of performance-based budget management in China from the perspective of local governments

Session 11: Promoting country-level evaluations for better results

The session focused on the significance, challenges, and initiatives in doing country-level evaluations and how these could be improved to promote better development results. The Asian Development Bank discussed IED’s evaluation system and how efficiency is improved through finance and knowledge track. India shared its perspective that the capacity of implementing agencies and development of an evaluation process are essential in having an effective evaluation mechanism. The upside and downside of using midterm evaluation as a tool for midcourse correction was also reflected upon. The role of MDBs in providing some experience to catalyze improvements was emphasized.

Session 12: National evaluation systems and capacities for evaluating progress of the SDGs

The session covered what necessitates localization of SDGs and how evaluation could stimulate transformative development in achieving SDGs at the national, regional, and global levels. Indonesia described their experiences in incorporating SDGs in their national plans and recognized the importance of capacity building, leadership, and an enabling environment in facilitating local achievements. UNICEF’s partnership with the Indonesian government in evaluating their policies and processes strengthened the country’s alignment in achieving the 2030 development agenda. Indonesia is one of the countries that pursues the UN process of Voluntary National Review Reporting to demonstrate their progress in meeting their SDG targets and use this as a guide to check their performance in achieving SDGs.

Session 13: How to fully implement performance-based budget management nationwide in China: Theories and methodologies

Session 14: Integrating evidence from impact evaluations into country programs

The PRC and Philippine case studies showed how to integrate evidence from impact evaluation to contribute to country programs. The session took specific lessons from the PRC and the Philippines, looking at impact evaluations that address the issue of causality and how they were taken up for decisions at the country level.

Key lessons drawn from the case studies are to: (i) ask relevant questions; (ii) ensure early engagement and emphasize the importance of the learning aspect of evaluation as much as that of accountability; (iii) secure buy-in from the higher ups because they will help in the journey to achieve results; and (iv) understand that impact evaluations are not one-offs but part of a system of learning, which contributes to a global knowledge base.

Session 15: Building large-scale evaluation systems: Lessons from South Africa

The session provided the framework and principles of developing a large-scale evaluation system, including the critical success factors and experiences, challenges, and lessons of South Africa's development, from Public Service M&E System, African Peer Review Mechanism, Government-wide M&E System, to National Evaluation System. The presentation and subsequent discussions showed that South Africa—like other countries in Asia and the Pacific—shares the same aspiration—that is, finding ways to make evaluation work at the country level and learning based from its experiences. Large-scale evaluation systems are complex with solid challenges. In developing such a system, it is important to start small but think big. Good communication, along with good participation and continued engagement of all stakeholders, is key to a successful development of large-scale evaluation systems.

Session 16: The Sustainable Development Goals: A private sector perspective for evaluating progress

The session talked about evaluating the progress of SDGs from the private sector's perspective. The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, UK introduced opportunities that are aligned with the SDGs, the challenges they faced, and the work of the Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures in evaluating the SDG progress. The Alibaba Cloud Research Center shared their practice of promoting big data to push forward the SDGs and evaluate its progress.

Session 17: How Evaluation Societies work and how they can act as catalysts and effective networks for promoting public sector evaluation

The session discussed about the nature of evaluation societies, their activities, the challenges they faced, and the results that have been achieved in promoting evaluation in their countries. The Community of Evaluators India presented on the evaluation societies' features, objectives, roles, and functions (e.g., partnerships, networking), and the challenges they face.

Sri Lanka Evaluation Association (SLEVA) discussed the rationale and objectives of SLEVA, its initiatives and achievements in the evaluation front. These include supporting government on national evaluation policy; conducting knowledge conferences; training members, practitioners and the public sector; and networking with other evaluation societies, academic institutions, and regional and global partners. They also discussed the challenges and coping strategies in sustaining their association.

Session 18: Evaluating policy advocacy: The science and art

The session discussed the different methods of evaluating policy advocacies drawing on the presentations from the United Nations Population Fund and the Green Climate Fund. Both approaches showed the importance of having a clear theory of change (or being clear about the theory), and mechanisms underpinning advocacy efforts whether it is to achieve policy or behavioral change. This was followed with the sharing of experiences from Sri Lanka and Cambodia on effective advocacy engagement in national policy making and implementation.

Key insights highlight the need for evaluation approaches to exercise flexibility to follow adaptive long-term processes. Both evaluation and policy advocacy process require the ability to work with policy makers; focus on bringing multi-partners perspectives through clear consultation; look at policy making in a multi-faceted way; and be aware of the changeability and mutability of these processes and the changing political interests.

Session 19: The IMF and countries in fragile and conflict-affected situations

The session presented how the Independent Evaluation Office of IMF assessed IMF's engagement with

countries in fragile and conflict-affected situations (FCS), including its overall approaches. IMF came up with recommendations on how it could improve its performance in the future. The presentation elaborated on the role of donor partners in using evaluation as a tool to improve and sustain assistance to FCS, and outlined lessons that could be used in moving forward.

Session 20: Performance evaluation in China's poverty and alleviation

Session 21: Evaluation of public-private partnership (PPP) programs and projects: Challenges and approaches

The session discussed key challenges of evaluating PPP programs and projects, and evaluation techniques that can overcome these challenges and deliver effective evaluations.

Richard Foster of Foster Infrastructure highlighted the difficulties in evaluating PPP projects. First, PPP projects have generally long-term arrangements and the challenge is on evaluating outcomes to be achieved over several decades and the value of evaluating original decisions made several decades ago. Second, PPP projects are usually just one part of a system/network and the challenge of evaluating them in isolation from the rest of the system is difficult. An example is the future changes in the management of the surrounding road network which will affect whether a PPP toll road project delivers its expected benefits. Third, PPP projects involve multiple decisions and there are multiple evaluation perspectives, which make evaluating it more challenging. Some decisions include several aspects, including the investment part, the procurement part, the type of PPP structure, governance and management, tendering, and determination of winning bidders. These decisions are made at different points in time, in different contexts, and by different levels in the government. Lastly, PPP is just a delivery method. How can evaluation separate out the results of the PPP delivery from the results of the investment? If the project performs badly or fails, does that indicate that it was a poor PPP? Or is it just a poor project? Usually, there is no non-PPP comparator project. Example: If construction is not completed on time, is that a PPP issue, or would it have happened anyway?

Given these challenges, Richard Foster provided some techniques available for evaluation, as follows: (i) post implementation reviews / “lessons learned” processes; (ii) gateway review processes (point in time review by other government agencies or a panel of experts); and (iii) performance audits (by Auditors-General). Important considerations are (i) the progressive evaluation on a phase by phase basis, and (ii) clarity of what is being evaluated – not “PPPs” but specific decisions or management processes, or the government’s programmatic use of PPPs.

Jeffrey Manalo of the PPP Center of the Philippines shared experiences in evaluating PPP projects. Accordingly, the main challenges are the legal and policy frameworks, scattered data and information benchmarks, no *one size fits all* analysis, the need for various fields of expertise, and the assessment of project impact. He mentioned that it is critical to lay down the foundations for project evaluation, such as the clarity of institutional arrangement and roles, the approaches in appraising projects, guidelines on risk allocation across PPP projects, and the availability of robust data and information for decision making during project review and approval. Overall, PPP project evaluation needs to strike a balance among economic viability, financial viability, and project bankability.

Session 22: Expanding evaluation to cover heritage site restoration: Korea's support to Lao PDR

The session discussed the restoration work in Hong Nang Sida temple in Lao PDR, believed to be the starting point of the Angkor Wat, is a good first step in looking at the M&E aspect of restoration projects

due to its small size. For this project, new methods and principles for evaluating had to be developed since conventional evaluation methods will not work in measuring long term projects.

Conducting M&E should be done each time a process becomes measurable because lessons from restoration projects are about real time learning from evaluation, and that they are not about providing inputs for next project.

Session 23: Open discussion and recess/Field Visit

Session 24: Data and evidence: Creating a strong foundation for development policy and effective program implementation

Session 25: How Supreme Audit Institutions support evaluation: The case of evaluation and audit working together for the SDGs

The Fiji Supreme Audit Institution (SAI) discussed the role of SAI and how it complements evaluation, and provided example of SAI Fiji's collaboration with evaluation institutions and experts to strengthen national and institutional capacity. Botswana presented the institutionalization of evaluation, specifically the collaboration of audit and evaluation in Botswana. The session emphasized that auditors and evaluators, though with different focus, methods, and capacities, can work together for the realization of SDGs.

Session 26: Innovations in evaluation: How to choose, develop, and support them

The session engaged the participants into a free-flowing discussion on the strategies for improving evaluation practices and effective implementation of innovative methods in evaluation. BetterEvaluation introduced six of the most useful innovations in evaluation: (i) negative theory of change, (ii) triple row/column logic model, (iii) data rehearsal, (iv) contribution analysis, (v) process tracing, and (vi) Rubrics. It encouraged everyone to reflect on where innovation is needed, choose the best innovation to adopt, and come up with strategies to overcome the challenges and support innovations.

Session 27: Country level and country-led evaluations: Making them credible, independent, and well used

The session discussed the experiences of two countries, Nepal and Sri Lanka, in implementing national evaluation policy and how this is used by decision makers. Nepal described how politicizing evaluation can improve the implementation of evaluation policy in Parliament. Evaluation raises political consciousness and upgrades the commitment of decision-makers in development evaluation in the country. Government leaders can use development evaluation to achieve country development targets along with the goals of development agencies, bilateral agencies, and other donor organizations.

Sri Lanka shared the insights of Nepal towards development evaluation to learn about unavoidable mistakes, roles of parties involved, and how to adjust projects and plans accordingly. Evaluation helps countries formulate good projects with sound "theory of change" well designed and results oriented programs at the country-level to achieve the SDGs. Joint evaluation shifts from donor driven focus to country ownership and leadership.

Session 28: Closing plenary: Making evaluation work at the country level- How far and what it takes?

Session 29: Closing session

