

Discussion Paper

IED EVALUATION PERSPECTIVES KNOWLEDGE SERIES

EVALUATION FOR DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

2023 ASIAN EVALUATION WEEK

NOVEMBER 2023

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Abbreviations

ADB	–	Asian Development Bank
AEW	–	Asian Evaluation Week
AI	–	artificial intelligence
COVID-19	–	coronavirus disease
CSO	–	civil society organization
EBRD	–	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ECD	–	evaluation capacity development
M&E	–	monitoring and evaluation
OECD	–	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDG	–	Sustainable Development Goal
UNDP	–	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	–	United Nations Children’s Fund
VCIP	–	Venture Capital Investment Program
WHO	–	World Health Organization

Executive Summary

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has made a large dent in the progress made in poverty reduction and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. This has necessitated a change in the way governments approach their problems, and thus how evaluators approach their work as well. To remain relevant and consequential, evaluators must respond to the changes happening around them.

The overriding narrative of the flagship event of ADB's Independent Evaluation Department—Asian Evaluation Week 2023—was how to strengthen the evaluation processes and functions in an increasingly complex environment.

The main messages from the event were:

1. The link between better evaluation and development effectiveness is evident in the twin objectives of determining accountability and enhancing learning, both of which are critical.
2. People, technology, systems, processes, and structures all support evaluation. Collectively, they enable better public policies and development interventions which, in turn, help yield development effectiveness.
3. Strengthening accountability and learning are key objectives of evaluation. They can be achieved by facilitating an evaluation culture, building a capable national evaluation ecosystem and evaluation capacity, and adopting and adapting international evaluation norms.
4. Sustaining collaborative evaluation partnerships and managing innovations are important parts of strengthening evaluation processes.
5. Private sector development, application of technological advances (such as artificial intelligence), and ensuring that evaluation work is inclusive are important recent focuses.
6. For evaluation to be credible and impactful, evaluators will need to be not only flexible and agile but also be willing to try new approaches (for example, being ready to reconsider initial plans even as evaluation work has commenced). The independence of evaluation work is important; however, independence doesn't mean isolation. It is essential to engage in dialogue while maintaining an independent mindset.

A. Introduction

1. The pandemic made a large dent on the progress made on poverty reduction and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Countries across the world now face high inflation, food insecurity, growing inequality, retreats from cross-border trade, and the existential threats posed by the climate crisis.
2. For the evaluation community, the context of its work will now be characterized by resilience, inclusive partnerships, and taking advantage of technological leaps. This, in turn, means that, to remain relevant and consequential, evaluators must also respond to the complex environment and adapt to the changes happening around them.
3. These issues were articulated strongly throughout the discussions at the 2023 Asian Evaluation Week (AEW2023) event in Bangkok.¹ The overriding narrative of AEW2023 was how to strengthen the evaluation processes and functions, particularly as the operating environment for organizations and development functions has become increasingly complex.
4. The purpose of this discussion paper is to present the main points from discussions among attendees at AEW2023 on the key issues and the way forward for evaluation work. It summarizes the responses to several queries posed on specific themes and topics as a way to highlight the substance of the discussions.

B. Core Theme: ‘Beyond Recovery—Evaluation for Development Effectiveness’

5. At the heart of the evaluation function is the need to drive towards development effectiveness, i.e., the evaluation function should be structured to enable organizations to be effective in fulfilling their mandates. At the Asian Development Bank (ADB) this is expressed in its Strategy 2030 as “an Asia-Pacific region that is prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable, while sustaining efforts to eradicate extreme poverty”. At a global level, development effectiveness is articulated in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
6. The core theme of AEW2023 can be seen in the analytical framework (Appendix 2), which highlights three main components that formed the primary thrust of AEW2023:

How has the evaluation function strengthened in the new post-COVID environment? What is the process of linking stronger evaluation work with development effectiveness? What enabling factors strengthen the evaluation function?

¹ This paper picks up from the discussions that took place at the AEW event, which covered: (i) knowledge exchange across sectors and themes, (ii) networking and peer learning, and (iii) future thinking in the field of evaluation. Participants included evaluation specialists, policy makers, government officials from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and other countries across the Asia and Pacific region, academics, representatives of civil society, evaluation practitioner groups, and staff members from multilateral and international organizations. This paper is not the proceedings of AEW2023 since it dwells only on selected issues that were raised and discussed at the event. Details of the conference proceedings, including materials presented, can be accessed at <https://asianevaluationweek.adb.org/> The agenda is in **Appendix 1**.

- (i) The objectives of evaluation work: accountability, and learning enhancement.
- (ii) The enablers of evaluation work. These can be grouped under four headings: (i) people (including not only capable evaluators themselves but also champions and informed users); (ii) technology (including the rising use of artificial intelligence); (iii) systems and processes (including robust public management systems, the regulatory ecosystem, and the performance culture in organizations); and (iv) structures (including partnerships, incentives, capacity building initiatives, and legal provisions).
- (iii) The results chain whereby evaluation work contributes to better public policies, leading to better development interventions, resulting in increased development effectiveness (as reflected in, for example, attainment of the SDGs).

C. Key Issues and Challenges Facing the Evaluation Community

What are some of the issues and challenges facing the evaluation community at present?

- 7. The complexity of the development setting across countries, particularly in those characterized by fragility and other structural weaknesses, means that the evaluation community generally has a constrained environment in which to operate. The overriding narrative at AEW2023 was on how to strengthen evaluation processes and functions, particularly as the operating environment for organizations and development functions becomes increasingly complex.
- 8. Several issues and challenges facing the evaluation community were extensively discussed at AEW2023:
 - (i) determining accountability mechanisms to ensure that governments, international financial institutions, and others are answerable to their authorizing environments (plenaries 1 and 2);
 - (ii) maintaining a focus on sustainability as part of evaluation work as well as evaluating greening of development policies and the SDGs (parallel sessions 8 and 19);
 - (iii) considering issues of inclusiveness (broadly defined) in evaluation work (parallel session 6);
 - (iv) maximizing innovations in evaluation work (parallel sessions 5, 9, and others);
 - (v) focusing on evaluation in the private sector (parallel session 8);
 - (vi) engaging in collaborative partnerships for evaluation work (parallel sessions 2 and 13);

- (vii) strengthening an evaluation culture, including effective communication, in organizations (parallel sessions 1, 18, and others);
- (viii) enhancing national evaluation capacity, including boosting young and emerging evaluators (parallel session 12); and
- (ix) adopting international evaluation norms (parallel session 17).

1. Accountability and Learning

9. Accountability is a core element of evaluation. In particular, questions such as “accountable to whom, and for what?” as well as “how can unintended effects of evaluation work be managed?” are often raised.
10. The issues of “accountability to whom?” and “for what?” picks up from accountability mechanisms which ensure that governments and others are answerable to their authorizing environments. These vary, and can include the electorate, tax payers, the political environment, the ultimate beneficiaries, and oneself.² As for “accountability for what?”, discussions at the AEW2023 showed that the answer needs to include accountability for the mission of the agency, the evidence itself,³ achievement of targeted results, and stopping unintended effects. These accountability structures and systems are generally complex.
11. The issue of “accountability to whom?” raises the issue of inclusiveness. Being inclusive means bringing the evaluation results back to those who provided the information and to those for whom specific policies and programs were designed and implemented. Governments and organizations need to focus on actual results and not on mere reporting of activities.
12. The need to move from evaluation results to their effective communication and transfer of learning has become imperative. Evaluators have an important role to play not only in informing decision makers and stakeholders, but also in fostering an evaluation mindset and learning culture.

How is accountability reflected in evaluation work? What is the relationship between accountability and learning?

2. Focus on Sustainability in Evaluation

13. Sustainability is a critical element in the treatment of evaluation for development effectiveness. It implies embedding environmental sustainability in all evaluations, not just in the evaluation of environment programs. Knowledge about natural systems needs to be engaged with

What does the value of sustainability imply in evaluation work? And how can it be enhanced?

² Accountability to oneself lies in maintaining a high standard of ethics and integrity in whatever one attempts. It emphasizes the importance of accountability in personal life, professional endeavours, and public service, emphasizing honesty, integrity, and vigilance as key principles.

³ Accountability of evidence is central to evidence-based decision making and to the need to ensure a robust evaluation methodology.

⁴ For example, evaluation results (positive or not) should be shared in advance with management so that there are no surprises.

and the theory of change in the evaluation exercise should be expanded to include such systems. Evaluators need to draw explicit conclusions and emphasize the collaborative use of the findings.

14. A range of key actors working to strengthen national climate responses can help ensure a better understanding of the importance of promoting evaluations of green development policies and practices. Adaptation projects tend to be more complicated than mitigation projects.
15. At the International Fund for Agricultural Development, evaluation has played a crucial role in promoting effective climate responses and green policies. Innovative evaluation approaches, including geospatial analysis and ecological forecasting, have provided valuable tools for quantifying land cover change, estimating carbon stocks, and evaluating ecosystem services. Effective communication and outreach efforts have been employed to ensure that evaluation results reach the intended audience and influence policy decisions. However, capacity limitations,⁵ economic interests, communication barriers, and financial constraints can hinder the translation of evaluation recommendations into climate action and these constraints need to be addressed.

3. Unbundling Inclusiveness

16. Generally, inclusiveness refers to a state of not neglecting specific groups of actors, stakeholders, and beneficiaries in evaluation, both during the evaluation itself and in determining the respondent pool. In the SDGs, the principle of “no one left behind” signifies a strong focus on inclusiveness in development action, and thus in evaluation work as well.
17. A second dimension of inclusiveness is the environmental, social, and governance (ESG) aspects of development work. ESG evaluation has tended to be more readily applicable in the public sector; inclusive aspects of private sector projects are, by and large, subjective to the investor.
18. Inclusiveness is increasingly viewed in the context of providing opportunities for resource access, skills development, and being part of the evaluation planning and implementing exercise. As part of the drive to be inclusive, evaluators are cautioned to be respectful of the culture of respondents in indigenous communities. Understanding the context and value systems of these communities requires evaluators to reflect on their own positions and biases to ensure a fair and respectful assessment process. This reflects a commitment to inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, and self-awareness in evaluation work.

What does the value of inclusiveness signify in evaluation work?

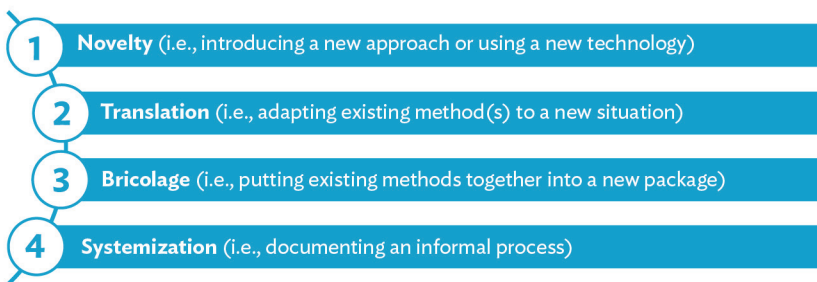
⁵ The Green Climate Fund’s Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme is a direct response to these capacity limitations. It provides financial support to countries for various climate-related purposes, ranging from institutional capacity building to formulation of adaptation plans. Despite the small grant amounts, some countries have effectively utilized the grants to integrate climate considerations into their development policies, including national adaptation plans and climate change investment programming.

4. Innovation in Evaluation Work

19. Organizations can consider various forms of innovation in evaluation work (**Figure 1**). Innovation can affect efficiency (e.g., through automated tasks). It can also democratize access to knowledge and evaluation practices.
20. Innovative evaluation approaches, improved communication and outreach, and a focus on supporting decision making can help steer policy development and resource management, addressing complex challenges in areas such as climate response policies. Other innovative approaches include prospective coordinated data planning and analysis, new guidance for adaptive evaluation, community-driven innovations in evaluation work, and “learning in action.”

What forms of innovation exist in evaluation work, including through the use of technology (e.g., artificial intelligence)?

Figure 1: Forms of Innovation in Evaluation Work



Source: AEW2023

21. Innovative evaluation approaches, improved communication and outreach, and a focus on supporting decision making can help steer policy development and resource management, addressing complex challenges in areas such as climate response policies. Other innovative approaches include prospective coordinated data planning and analysis, new guidance for adaptive evaluation, community-driven innovations in evaluation work, and “learning in action.”
22. The Green Climate Fund’s experiences in incorporating AI in various stages of an evaluation exercise show that it can revolutionize the evaluation process by: (i) enhancing efficiency gains, (ii) improving evidence extraction and synthesis; and (iii) enabling real time evaluation by supporting data collection and timely feedback and analysis. AI can also help enhance evaluation communication.⁶
23. However, powering evaluation with AI also comes with risks and pitfalls which need to be identified and mitigated. Privacy concerns need to be respected when dealing with confidential information. Discussions at the AEW on this topic highlighted a few approaches that could be considered to reduce harm and mitigate risks, including: (i) robust testing and validation; (ii) highlighting transparency; (iii) regular monitoring

⁶ See also the use of AI in UNICEF and UNFPA (para. 52 and Box 2).

and maintenance; (iv) public awareness and education; (v) strong cybersecurity measures; and (vi) enhanced digital and AI literacy to combat the digital divide. These can help ensure that, when AI is deployed in evaluation, efficiency is maximized while risks are minimized.

As the private sector grows in importance in efforts to attain the SDGs, what is the test in evaluation while assessing corporations in which public sector money has financed private sector operations?

5. Evaluation and Private Sector Development

24. The focus here is on how to achieve transformational impact with a focus on the private sector, and on the role of evaluation in doing so.
25. The evaluation by the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) of the Venture Capital Investment Program (VCIP), launched in 2011, provides a good example. VCIP is a direct financial capital investment instrument, where innovation takes place very rapidly. Evaluation work showed that EBRD had not moved as rapidly as the venture capitalist ecosystem required (e.g., in terms of the length of time to get approvals for evaluation work). It had focused more on financing gaps than on intellectual property rights. This lowered the efficacy of the evaluation.
26. The private sector moves quickly in understanding, and applying, impact methodologies, and new ways of measuring impact. Multilateral development banks need to keep pace with this, including adjusting their standard evaluation frameworks⁷ which, as the venture capital example showed, sometimes need some adjustment.
27. The experiences of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and ADB Ventures show that private sector evaluation has its own characteristics in assessing corporations in which public money has been used to finance private sector operations. Requirements for success include: (i) the rationale for using public money to finance private sector operations (what were the market failures that justified use of public funds?); (b) additionality (what is the extra value that is being created?); (c) profitability (how profitable is the business?); and (d) results testing.

How are collaborative partnerships in evaluation carried out? What lessons have emerged when such partnerships are not robust?

6. Collaborative Partnerships

28. To strengthen evaluation work, strong partnerships within the evaluation community need to be built. Such collaboration can help governments and organizations to identify, and engage with, champions who can embed the enhanced evaluation culture.
29. Partnerships can cover global, national, and community levels, as well as the private sector. However, as the experiences of the Islamic Development Bank showed, only a few instruments of collaboration exist, including memoranda of understanding, knowledge partnerships,

⁷ What will not need to be adjusted are the provisions around ESG; in EBRD all venture capital investments are subject to the Bank's environment and social performance requirements. There has to be full compliance, with no exception.

and cooperation agreements. Ill-designed partnerships come with high transaction costs. While joint evaluations can be a useful way to reduce transaction costs to governments and to improve the quality of the evaluation work being done, the challenge has always been how best to bring together all relevant parties together to work effectively towards a common goal.

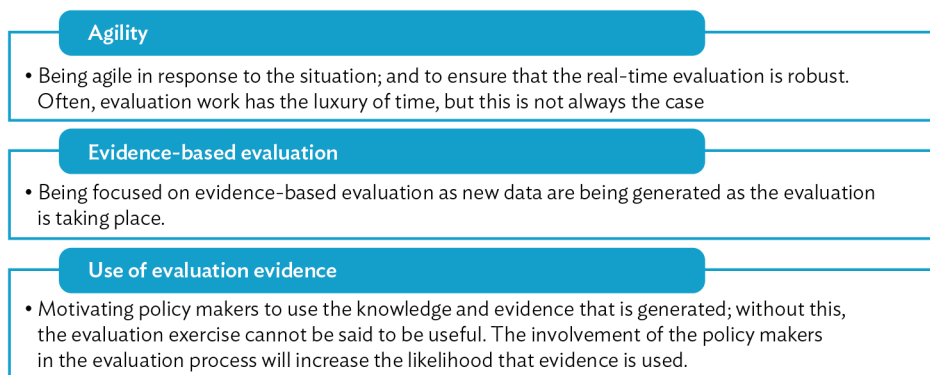
30. The United Nations’ SDG Partnership Guidebook says “ongoing collaborative partnership among organizations of different stakeholder types and with common vision, combining complementary resources, competencies, and sharing risks will maximize value creation”. However, experiences highlighted in the AEW2023 generally showed that partnerships, if not planned and managed properly, tend to be: (i) limited in scope, (ii) not sustainable beyond the immediate action period, (iii) of limited replicability, and (iv) buffeted by each partner’s internal administrative processes and constraints.

7. Evaluation Culture

31. Enhancing the evaluation culture in organizations, particularly new ones, has always been on the agenda of organizational development. At the macro level, it has become necessary to strengthen the evaluation ecosystem across countries, keeping in mind that what works in one setting does not necessarily mean that it will do so elsewhere.
32. There are three key aspects of the evaluation culture that merit mention (Figure 2).

What are the key aspects of evaluation culture, including that of use of evaluative evidence?

Figure 2: Aspects of Evaluation Culture



Source: AEW2023.

⁸ See also the use of AI in UNICEF and UNFPA (para. 52 and Box 2).

What has been the focus on building evaluation capacity in countries? What do the experiences of UN Evaluation Development Group for Asia and the Pacific show?

8. Enhancing National Evaluation Capacity

33. Central to the advancement of the evaluation culture and enhancement of skills in carrying out robust evaluations is the issue of building the capacity of national systems in general, and of evaluators in particular.⁸ A robust operating space for young and emergent evaluators needs to be created.
34. Enhancing capabilities in evaluation at the country level is important if evaluation is to contribute to development effectiveness. Generally, the focus has been on (i) the diagnostics of the evaluation ecosystem; (ii) evaluation policy formulation; (iii) institutional strengthening; (iv) joint and country-led evaluations; (v) capacity strengthening and training; (vi) evaluation standards and guidelines; and (vii) advocacy, awareness, and knowledge sharing.
35. The experience of the United Nations Evaluation Development Group for Asia and the Pacific (UNEDAP),⁹ as well as others, shows that a well-established monitoring and evaluation system is increasingly recognized as invaluable for legislatures to carry out their oversight functions. Such a system enables thorough reviews of government policies and programs to enhance governance and accountability. This increased appreciation of the importance of monitoring and evaluation reflects a positive shift toward evidence-based decision-making and improved program effectiveness.

Will adopting international evaluation norms address individual country contexts?

9. Adopting International Evaluation Norms

36. Individual country contexts differ, which means not all evaluation protocols apply equally in all settings.
37. Nevertheless, shared international evaluation norms and standards can create a common language and facilitate collaboration, while at the same time, evaluation must be locally owned and contextualised to the priorities and needs of local communities. Any evaluation work will need to be understood in the context of the individual evaluation, the intervention being evaluated, and the stakeholders involved. This means that evaluation criteria should not be applied mechanistically but should allow for flexibility in the evaluation process.
38. The use of international standards provides a common frame of reference that facilitates comparisons across different countries and regions. Standards must be used as a tool for improvement rather than as a rigid

⁸ This issue can be seen as being in a continuum: (i) at the macro and strategic level the national evaluation ecosystem needs to be strengthened, and (ii) at the individual and operational level, it is critical to build the capacity of evaluators, including young evaluators. These are complementary in nature.

⁹ UNEDAP, an inter-agency network of the United Nations, promotes an evaluation culture and contributes to UN coherence in its approach to evaluation. UNEDAP aims to strengthen regional evaluation capacities among UN agencies and their partners. UNEDAP also aims to contribute to the professionalization of the evaluation function in the Asia and Pacific region.

imposition that does not add value. Balancing standards with the pursuit of meaningful insights is crucial in the evaluation process.

39. Considerable work is being done by governments and national evaluation associations to align their evaluation standards with international best practices. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is instrumental in this standardization process, which includes credentialing evaluators).

D. Selected Experiences in Evaluative Practices: Lessons from China

40. The People's Republic of China (PRC) is putting in place a comprehensive system of performance-based budgeting management (linking the results of performance evaluation with policy improvement and budgeting adjustment). Also, critically, it seeks to increase the disclosure of performance evaluation information to the public.
41. Since 2017, the PRC has mandated close links between performance evaluation and budgetary allocation processes as way to focus on results in budget management. Departmental performance evaluation results are publicized as a way to enhance accountability in the system.
42. The PRC's use of performance evaluation results in the public sector shows that the following measures have been effective:
- focusing on results in budget management;
 - shifting the focus from the rigid discipline of economics to a more comprehensive and holistic approach;
 - ensuring coordination among the various policies of the government so the holistic nature of public management work is facilitated;
 - focusing on publicizing evaluation results, public scrutiny, and enforcement of performance accountability;
 - taking into account the time lag in the application of financial evaluation, which inherently negatively impacts the selection of new projects and budgetary allocations to them;¹¹
 - instituting an open learning mechanism¹² that allows managers to better understand where the weaknesses are in the performance evaluation and budgeting system, and then to rectify them; and
 - looking at performance evaluation results at the local level.

What lessons have emerged from the PRC's experience of linking results of performance evaluation with policy improvement?

¹⁰ This is a relevant concept here since budget system improvements lead to public expenditure management improvements which, in turn, contribute to development effectiveness. The PRC's experiences were largely brought out in the opening session as well as parallel sessions 3 and 7.

¹¹ Any delay in carrying out a financial evaluation negatively impacts the selection of new projects since the results of the evaluation need to be waited for so new projects can benefit from them.

¹² This mechanism was cited as being needed to counteract a "closed loop of management mechanisms."

43. Three particular constraints are of note in the PRC’s focus on performance evaluation results in the public sector: (i) not all departments are capable of effectively putting in place effective performance evaluation and budgetary management processes; (ii) there is as yet insufficient support for the public sector’s work from third party organizations such as professional associations; and (iii) the public sector does not always appreciate that performance culture is a long-term proposition.

E. Good Practices and Actionable Ways Forward in Key Areas

How can evaluation culture be enhanced?

44. Discussions during the AEW2023, with evidence drawn from on-the-ground evaluation work, identified some practical ways forward that governments can apply.
45. A robust evaluation culture is demonstrated by: (i) consistently high-quality evaluations; (ii) use of rigorous methods, and transparency in their usage; (iii) evidence-based decision making, and (iv) an understanding of the importance of partnerships in evaluation work.
46. A strong evaluation culture is bolstered by able leadership that includes: (i) proactively resolving conflict before it flares up;¹³ (ii) ensuring that there is no compromise on the quality of the evaluation; (iii) supporting the evaluation team to adapt to new situations as they arise; and (iv) actively involving the leadership in changing mindsets within the organization.

What is needed to get more buy-in to evaluation work?

47. How to motivate policy makers to use evaluative evidence has always been a primary consideration of evaluators. Experience shows that the following can motivate policy makers:
- (i) making sure that what is being evaluated is what matters to them, and by ensuring that there are practical and realistic ways forward (i.e., by focusing on learning as much as on accountability);
 - (ii) making more concerted efforts to use diagnostic findings to systematically inform priority setting for country-level policy dialogue, capacity building, and operations;
 - (iii) avoiding surprises (by communicating evaluation results in advance);¹⁴
 - (iv) focusing on transparency wherever possible, which helps builds trust; and
 - (v) reaching out to new stakeholders and champions (e.g., to legislators) and engaging continuously with policy makers.

¹³ This refers to scenarios where there is disagreement within the organization (or evaluation unit) on, for example, the methods adopted in the evaluation, or the specification of the theory of change that is the basis of the evaluation work.

¹⁴ Communication is often an overlooked aspect of evaluation. Evaluation materials need to be communicated effectively and made available in multiple formats, including digital platforms such as social media. It is essential to remove barriers to access so that the materials can be widely and easily accessed. Overcoming the issue of confidential information and promoting a transparent communication strategy is essential for the successful dissemination and use of evaluation materials.

Box 1. Real-Time Evaluation

The need to constantly work in a complex environment and still be consequential means evaluators need to consider real-time evaluation. Such evaluations highlight the value of being adaptable and responsive.

Real-time evaluation needs to: (i) maintain the quality of the evaluation process; (ii) acknowledge the limitations of such evaluations, prioritize a robust methodology, and ensure the credibility of the evaluation work; (iii) fully disclose the evaluation work (while protecting sensitive data); and (iv) attract leadership support in promoting the value of real-time evaluation and the integration of results into decision-making processes;

However, there are challenges: (i) there should not be too many real-time evaluations, to avoid duplication; (ii) evaluators may lack experience and the budget may be insufficient; and (iii) early learning assessments could be perceived as intrusion or investigation.

Generally, evaluators should not prioritize acting quickly over evaluation quality. Real-time evaluations should be grounded on an understanding of what information is requested and what evidence is available. Real-time evaluation reports should be produced quickly and should contain short, crisp, and readily actionable recommendations.

48. Experiences shared at the AEW2023 revealed several measures that can be taken to strengthen collaborative evaluation partnerships, including: (i) ensure proactive engagement by all parties; (ii) carry out risk management and due diligence exercises in advance; (iii) emphasize the transparency of information and processes; (iv) make available dedicated and ring-fenced resources and capacities for the joint evaluation activity; (v) minimize transaction costs to governments; and (vi) be clear upfront about measures that may be required to address any constraint faced by the partners.
49. The AEW2023 discussions showed that joint evaluations, if designed rigorously, can efficiently assess projects that involve multiple funding entities, despite the different timelines and methodologies across different stakeholders and funders. While joint evaluations offer significant benefits, their success depends on building effective teams, navigating organizational mandates, coordinating data sources, and prioritizing the voices of beneficiaries and stakeholders. By focusing on leveraging and

What actionable measures have been shown to strengthen partnerships in evaluation work?

contributing, rather than solely following each organization's mandate, joint evaluations can support country systems and development goals. The development community should encourage country evaluation systems and country-led evaluations, wherever possible.

50. Actionable measures include:

- (i) encouraging use of national systems, wherever possible;
- (ii) supporting young and emerging evaluators, enhancing their skills, exposing them to real-life evaluation work, and providing them with opportunities to gain credentials;
- (iii) professionalizing evaluation by adapting international norms to regional and national contexts, preparing competency frameworks, and enhancing national evaluation and monitoring systems (a good model is the work of the Global Evaluation Initiative in helping carry out multisectoral assessments, establishing clear country objectives, indicators, and milestones);
- (iv) financing capacity building to support climate change policy evaluations;
- (v) reaching out to evaluation constituents, including legislators and civil society organizations, and building the capacity of the users of the evaluations;
- (vi) supporting country-led evaluation work and fostering effective partnerships; and
- (vii) using learning by doing to build capacity in countries and in partner organizations.

51. There is clear evidence of an increase in the use of technology in carrying out evaluations across organizations and countries. While this is encouraging, there is still value in using traditional surveys systematically and in bringing the data they generate to the attention of policy makers. Attention needs to be paid to preventing harm to individuals, communities, institutions, and ecosystems.

52. The experience of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in using AI for evaluation work is instructive and suggests some guidelines that need to be followed: (i) use informed consent when collecting data from stakeholders; (ii) apply all relevant international standards on AI; (iii) create data technologies that eliminate biases; (iv) continue advocating open-AI solutions; (v) emphasize staff upskilling for digital and AI literacy; and (vi) concentrate on governance structures and a regulatory framework.

Technological advancements in the evaluation domain are appealing, but how can technology be used more judiciously?

Box 2. UNFPA's experiences in GenAI-powered evaluation

UNFPA's use of AI solutions led to an implementation road map that countries could consider:

1. collaborative change management;
2. phased approach to adoption and deployment;
3. iterative digital transformation;
4. capacity development and upskilling;
5. allocate adequate resourcing;
6. agility in implementation; and
7. ensure relevant legislative and other requirements are in place.

F. Conclusions

53. Evaluation should: (i) be an activity which is embedded in all the work and processes of an organization; (ii) involve learning at the collective individual levels; (iii) involve a greater role for the beneficiaries of projects and programs in conducting evaluations; and (iv) emphasize “self-evaluation,” led by local stakeholders, with international organizations providing technical assistance and guidance as needed. In cases where international organizations conduct independent evaluations, local stakeholders should be engaged from the beginning in the design and review process to ensure transparency and local input without compromising the analysis's independence of the analysis.
54. One of the main conclusions to emerge from the AEW2023 was the **need for evaluators and evaluation to be consequential**. This concept has many angles. Evaluators should:
- (i) be adaptable and flexible (a result highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic), while also ensuring that the evidence and validation that clients and communities require is provided;
 - (ii) make actionable recommendations that accurately reflect the on-the-ground situation and constraints;¹⁵
 - (iii) ensure the timeliness of evaluations both in the topics selected and in the delivery of the evaluation;
 - (iv) apply new technologies; and
 - (v) establish a culture of learning and of results accountability—management too has to be ready to learn.

¹⁵ One pervasive on-the-ground constraint on development effectiveness in developing countries is that of effective procurement systems (discussed in parallel session 11). Given that procurement has the potential to impact development effectiveness, and that procurement reforms have proven to be very difficult to sustain, effective procurement systems not only ensure that goods and services are received at least cost but that they help deliver outcomes. A combination of results-based or impact-based solutions, capacity building programs, and technology will lead to more effective procurement of works, goods, and services.



55. Evaluators need to be willing to leave their “comfort zones” in their approach and work. There is a tendency for evaluators to operate within traditional linear, well-defined theories of change, adherence to initial plans, and an emphasis on independence. However, such an approach may lead to less adaptable and less flexible evaluations.
56. Evaluators are struggling with how to address complexity. Governments, multilateral development banks, and others are increasingly introducing more sophisticated solutions to the problems they face and in their reactions to global and regional uncertainty, and the challenge of climate change. Ultimately, raises questions about the relevance of evaluation. Is the methodology that was developed for a defined project still useful? Are the models too linear in dealing with non-linear challenges? What will the next generation of evaluation look like?
57. While evaluation work must be independent, independence doesn't mean isolation. Evaluators need to engage in dialogue while maintaining an independent mindset.

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Appendix 1: Program of the Asian Evaluation Week, 2023, Bangkok, Thailand



2023 ASIAN EVALUATION WEEK
Agenda At a Glance

11-14 September 2023
InterContinental Hotel,
Bangkok, Thailand

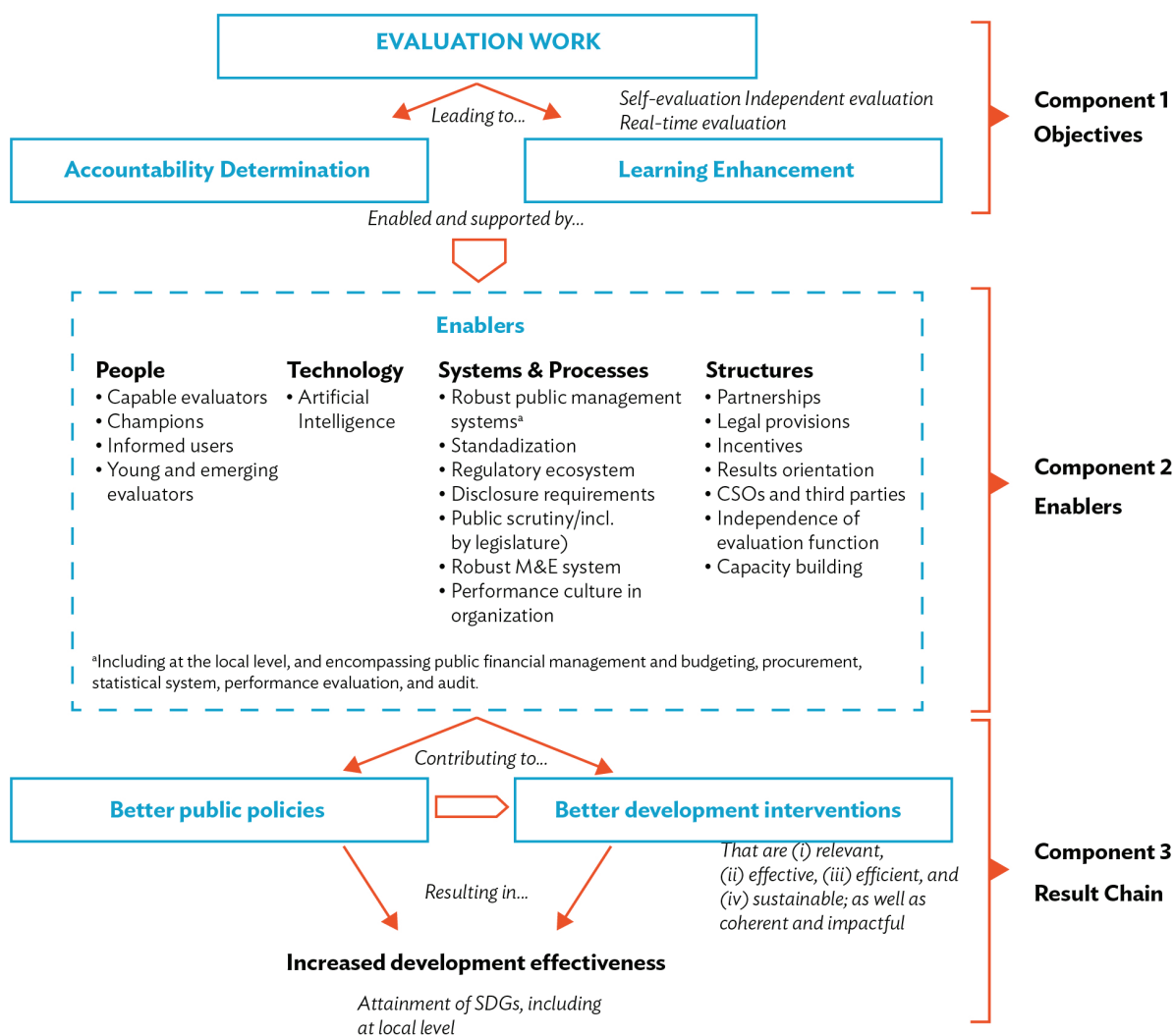
DAY 1 11 September	8:15	Registration - Claiming of badges (4th floor Halway)		
	8:30 - 9:15	Opening Session (Ballroom 1)		
	9:15 - 9:45	Evaluation to promote the high quality development in China's path to modernization (Ballroom 1)		
	10:00 - 11:00	Plenary 1: Accountability Talks (Ballroom 1)		
	11:00 - 12:30	Parallel 1: Learning in action: Expanding the evaluation toolbox? (Pinnacle Rooms 1-3)	Parallel 2: Building engaging and inclusive partnerships for ending hunger: Effectiveness of a child development program focusing on the mediating effect of religious belief (Pinnacle Rooms 4-6)	
	12:30 - 2:00	Lunch Break [Espresso Restaurant, Mezzanine (3rd Floor)]		
	2:00 - 3:30	Plenary 2: Accountability Talks (Ballroom 1)		
	3:30 - 4:00	Coffee Break		
	4:00 - 5:30	Parallel 3: Cost-effectiveness analysis-based performance evaluation: experiences from China (Pinnacle Rooms 1-3)	Parallel 4: Insights and innovations: What works to build data and evidence capacity in government (Pinnacle Rooms 4-6)	
	6:00	Cocktails (Ballroom foyer)		
DAY 2 12 September	9:00 - 10:30	Parallel 5: Innovations in Evaluations: experiences from international donors (Pinnacle Rooms 1-3)	Parallel 6: Leaving no one behind: Community driven innovations to improve livelihoods of indigenous people in the Asia Pacific region (Pinnacle Rooms 4-6)	
	10:30 - 11:00	Coffee Break		
	11:00 - 12:30	Parallel 7: The use of performance evaluation results in public sector in China (Pinnacle Rooms 1-3)	Parallel 8: Are MDBs ready to promote innovation for sustainability and private sector development? (Pinnacle Rooms 4-6)	
	12:30 - 1:30	Lunch Break [Espresso Restaurant, Mezzanine (3rd Floor)]		
	1:30 - 3:00	Parallel 9: Boosting young, innovative firms with equity and quasi-equity support: Evaluation insights from EIB, EBRD, and ADB (Pinnacle Rooms 1-3)	Parallel 10: Going big, going small, and going outside your comfort zone: Pushing the boundaries of development effectiveness evaluations (Pinnacle Rooms 4-6)	
	3:00 - 3:30	Coffee Break		
	3:30 - 5:00	Parallel 11: Improving procurement process: Lessons learned (Pinnacle Rooms 1-3)	Parallel 12: Going big, going small, and going outside your comfort zone: Pushing the boundaries of development effectiveness evaluations (Pinnacle Rooms 4-6)	
DAY 3 13 September	9:00 - 10:30	Parallel 13: The Role of joint evaluations as a tool for boosting development effectiveness country system (Pinnacle Rooms 1-3)	Parallel 14: Building resilience and accountability: Motivating policy makers to use knowledge and evaluative evidence (Pinnacle Rooms 4-6)	
	10:30 - 11:00	Coffee Break		
	11:00 - 12:30	Parallel 15: AI-powered evaluation: Maximizing efficiency while minimizing risks (Pinnacle Rooms 1-3)	Parallel 16: Infrastructure for inclusive and sustainable development: Experience of the New Development Bank, the Global South, and other Key Development Partners (Pinnacle Rooms 4-6)	
	12:30 - 1:30	Lunch Break [Espresso Restaurant, Mezzanine (3rd Floor)]		
	1:30 - 3:00	Parallel 17: One size does not fit all: Adapting and adopting international evaluation norms in the Asia-Pacific region (Pinnacle Rooms 1-3)	Parallel 18: The communication rhapsody (Pinnacle Rooms 4-6)	

Appendix 1: continued

DAY 4 14 September	9:00 - 10:30	Parallel 19: Evaluations for greening development policies (Pinnacle Rooms 1-3)	Parallel 20: Evaluating SDGs from the “world we want”: Measurements, innovations and challenges (Pinnacle Rooms 4-6)
	10:30 - 11:00	Coffee Break	
	11:00 - 12:30	Plenary 3: From crisis recovery to long term development: Role of policy-based lending (Ballroom 1) Organizers’ Closing Remarks (Ballroom 1)	
	12:30 - 1:30	Lunch Break [Espresso Restaurant, Mezzanine (3rd Floor)]	

Subthemes: ST1 Sustainability and resilience ST2 Inclusive Partnership ST3 Innovations in evaluation

Appendix 2: Schematic Flow: From Evaluation to Development Effectiveness



CSO = civil society organization, M&E = monitoring and evaluation, SDG = Sustainable Development Goal.
Source: Author.