



SUMMARY NOTE

Asian Evaluation Week 2025

Xi'an, People's Republic of China
1-4 September 2025



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Independent Evaluation: SN-11

CONTENTS

A. Introduction	1
B. Evaluation Results Framework	1
C. Focus on Reinforcing Evaluation Culture	1
D. Focus on Evidence-Based Interventions	2
E. Focus on Learning Institution	4
F. Focus on Use of Evaluative Knowledge to Influence Policy	5
G. Focus on Building Stakeholder Capacity	6
H. Conclusions	8



Abbreviations

ADB = Asian Development Bank

AEW = Asian Evaluation Week

EBRD = European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

ECG = Evaluation Cooperation Group

EKM = Evaluation Knowledge Management

IED = Independent Evaluation Department

PRC = People's Republic of China

OECD = The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

YEEs = Young and Emerging Evaluators

Xi'an
2016

Hangzhou
2017

Chengdu
2018

Kunming
2019

Virtual Event
2020

Virtual Event
2021

Virtual Event
2022

Bangkok
2023

Shanghai
2024



ASIAN EVALUATION WEEK 2025

NAVIGATING CRISES: BUILDING ON SUCCESSES

1-4 September
InterContinental Xi'an Hi-Tech Zone
People's Republic of China

#AsianEvaluationWeek
#AEW2025



A. Introduction

This note captures the key ideas and discussions from the 10th Asian Evaluation Week (AEW), held in Xi'an, People's Republic of China (PRC), 1–4 September 2025. The event was jointly organized by the Independent Evaluation Department (IED) of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Asia-Pacific Finance and Development Institute in Shanghai, PRC.

The theme of the event was “Navigating Crises: Building on Successes.” In keeping with AEW’s tradition of emphasizing topical relevance, the meeting explored pressing issues that matter to both evaluation experts and decision-makers. These included how to build stronger evaluation systems, how to involve young people in making evaluation a part of institutions, and how global changes are influencing the way evaluations are done. These themes were all in line with AEW’s founding purpose of fostering dialogue between evaluation practitioners and users.

B. Evaluation Results Framework

An evaluation knowledge management (EKM) results framework developed by the Evaluation Cooperation Group (ECG) provides a useful structure for this note, highlighting how the event contributes to broader evaluation goals.

The framework focuses on five key areas. Together, they show how evaluation can support better development outcomes:

1. using evaluation findings to guide policy decisions,
2. promoting a strong culture of evaluation,
3. building the capacity of stakeholders to use evaluation,
4. strengthening IED’s role as a learning institution, and
5. encouraging collaboration and shared learning.

C. Focus on Reinforcing Evaluation Culture

1. What Evaluation Culture Emphasizes

Discussions at AEW 2025 highlighted several ways to strengthen evaluation culture:

1. building stronger national systems that prioritize high-quality evaluation,
2. using real-time monitoring to track progress continuously,
3. promoting transparency to reduce gaps in access to information,
4. improving oversight of government policies and performance, and
5. encouraging evaluation approaches that reflect each country’s unique context.

Understanding and respecting local context is especially important, as countries have different systems and conditions that shape how evaluation is done.

2. Evaluation Norms as Living Global Public Goods

Participants reflected on the evaluation norms developed by the Development Assistance



Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD-DAC), recognizing them as evolving global standards rather than fixed rules. These norms serve as a valuable foundation for promoting ethical and effective evaluation practices across development contexts.

However, discussions emphasized the need for flexibility in applying these norms, especially in domestic public service evaluations. Unlike development-focused evaluations, domestic evaluations often pursue goals such as improving service delivery, responding to political mandates, or fostering institutional learning. These priorities may require different methods, data sources, and engagement strategies.

This conversation underscores AEW’s founding objective: to provide a space where evaluation practitioners and users can jointly examine how global standards can be adapted to diverse national and institutional realities — maintaining such core principles as credibility, fairness, and clarity, while remaining responsive to local needs.

3. Evaluation Culture and Culture of Evaluation

AEW 2025 also explored the difference between evaluation culture and the culture of evaluation:

- Evaluation culture is about doing strong, meaningful evaluation work that helps balance accountability with learning through lessons across the organization.
- Culture of evaluation refers to how local values and practices as well as stakeholder perceptions are reflected in evaluation processes.

The discussions emphasized that building a strong evaluation culture requires changes in behavior across all evaluators, policymakers, institutions, and communities. It’s not just about systems, but also about mindset and commitment to learning and improvement.

“Building a culture of evaluation is less about compliance and more about shaping incentives for learning and adaptation. For the Philippines, this means linking evaluation results with planning and budgeting, making evidence consequential for decisions to scale, modify, or discontinue programs—an approach that sustains trust and drives meaningful progress.”

Aldwin U. Urbina, Director IV
Monitoring and Evaluation Staff,
Department of Economy, Planning and Development, Philippines

D. Focus on Evidence-Based Interventions

1. Role of Evidence in Evaluation

Good evaluations are built on strong evidence. An evidence-based approach means looking at issues carefully and systematically, and making sure the evidence is clear and available from the start. New technologies are helping to improve the quality and availability of data and information—the building blocks of evidence—thus making evaluations more reliable.

2. Targeting the Private Sector

AEW 2025 emphasized the importance of using evidence to attract private sector partners to development projects. When governments base their projects on solid evidence, they can clearly show the risks involved and how they plan to manage them. This builds trust and helps the private sector feel more confident about working with the public sector.

Evaluators play a key role here. By linking development goals with private sector interests such as financial returns or regulatory compliance, evaluators help make the case for collaboration. In green finance, for example, evaluators need to use smart tools and shared frameworks to track climate finance and reduce the burden on clients. The challenge is to encourage financial institutions to see green finance not just as a responsibility, but as a business opportunity.

3. Evaluation-Informed Design in Crisis Response

In times of crisis, decisions must be made quickly. But without good data, it is hard to respond effectively. Missing information can weaken both the immediate response and future evaluations. The European Investment Bank's experience shows that using evaluation insights during the design phase has helped shape better crisis responses.¹

4. Mantras on Evidence and Evaluation

Evaluators should focus on maintaining and updating relevant evidence, rather than relying too heavily on any single study. This means thinking in terms of systems of how different pieces of evidence fit together.

One key idea from AEW 2025 was the concept of “right-fit evidence,” which depends on the type of question being asked: is it diagnostic, predictive, or evaluative?

Evaluators should also avoid over-reliance on one source, even if it is a strong study. Instead, they should combine evidence using a clear theory of change to improve reliability. Another important principle is that cost-effectiveness analysis should be included both when planning actions and when evaluating results.

5. Other Points of Note

Using existing evidence is often more practical than waiting for new studies. However, it is important to avoid using poor evidence, especially if it has the scope to influence policy decisions.

Independence in evaluation is crucial as it allows evaluators to report both successes and failures honestly. Finally, ongoing dialogue with policy makers is essential to ensure that evidence continues to be used judiciously in decision-making.

¹ See, for example, European Investment Bank. 2025. *Evaluation Activity Report 2024 and Work Programme 2025-2027*, p. 27. Luxembourg.



E. Focus on Learning Institution

1. AEW's Unique Selling Proposition

AEW brings together evaluators, policymakers, and researchers in a cross-sector dialogue that bridges evidence generation and use. Its strength lies in anchoring discussions in Asia-Pacific priorities while connecting them to global trends, making it both locally grounded and internationally informed. This blend of regional relevance and global insight continues to define AEW's value as a trusted platform for advancing evaluation practice.

“Independent evaluation is our anchor. IED's evidence shows what works in specific contexts. It surfaces risk and complexity early in design. It supports mid-course correction. And it informs future strategies... Learning from what works and adapting quickly is not just important it is essential to delivering impact at scale.”

Roberta Casali
Vice President, ADB

2. Instances of Learning Enhancement

AEW 2025 featured many examples of learning in action, including:

- the PRC's performance budgeting system, which helps institutions learn from mistakes;
- continuous improvement in evaluation practices across countries;
- use of monitoring data to strengthen national evaluation systems (e.g., in Mongolia);
- peer learning among local governments in the region; and
- stronger stakeholder involvement in projects such as the Tianjin eco-city in the PRC.

3. Shortening the Learning Loop

To become better learning organizations, institutions need to monitor performance regularly and to maintain strong systems for tracking and sharing information. Flexibility in operations is also key, especially during crises.

For example, climate change is a complex issue involving many sectors and actors, which makes it hard to evaluate actions taken to adapt to and to mitigate its effects. The time gap between when climate adaptation projects start and when lessons from them are available needs to be shortened, so that insights from evaluation can be used sooner to improve future actions.

4. Institutional Fragmentation as a Constraint

One major barrier to learning is institutional fragmentation, when government agencies work in isolation and do not coordinate well. This is common in many countries and goes against the idea of a “whole-of-government” approach.

Fragmentation leads to poor communication and disconnected decision-making. Before a crisis, it weakens planning. During a crisis, it makes response efforts less effective. In both cases, fragmentation limits the ability of institutions to learn and improve.

5. Pathways to Accelerating Learning

ADB's experience shows that learning during crises can be improved through:

1. policy innovation and better coordination between institutions;
2. technology upgrades, such as early warning systems;
3. flexible operations that can adapt quickly; and
4. community involvement, especially in planning and decision-making.

Community engagement is especially important because local people are often the most affected by crises and therefore can contribute valuable insights.

6. Importance of Collaboration

Independent evaluation plays a key role in shaping policy. For example, the PRC's success in reforming performance budgeting was driven not just by evidence-based decisions, but also by learning from independent evaluations.

Connecting policy design with real-world practice is essential and evaluation results should guide improvements.

F. Focus on Use of Evaluative Knowledge to Influence Policy

1. Closing the Loop Between Policy Design and Practice

Independent evaluation plays a key role in shaping policy. For example, the PRC's success in reforming performance budgeting has been driven not just by evidence-based decisions, but also by learning from independent evaluations.

Connecting policy design with real-world practice is essential and evaluation results should guide improvements.

2. Evaluation as Part of the National Policy Framework

While the PRC's example shows how evaluation can influence policy, many developing member countries of ADB still do not demand enough independent evaluations. For example, legislatures often do not ask for evidence from evaluations, even though they have the authority to do so.

For evaluation to truly shape public policy, it must be integrated into national development frameworks and not treated as an add-on. Without such integration, evaluation findings may not be used effectively in policymaking or implementation.





3. Lessons from Evaluation Work of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

In many countries, there is more focus on operational metrics than on measuring long-term impact. This becomes even more challenging during crises.

Lessons from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) show that evaluation during crises should focus on:

- timeliness: delivering insights when they're most needed,
- trustworthiness: ensuring methods and findings are credible, and
- independence with engagement: staying objective while working closely with stakeholders.

4. Evaluation and Policy on Climate Action

One area where evaluation is starting to shape policy more meaningfully is climate action. Insights from organizations working in this space suggest three key priorities:

- taking a broad view: climate action should involve not just government agencies but all parts of society;
- reducing bias: evaluations must be fair and transparent, especially in how data are selected, shared, and published; and
- improving consistency and access to evidence: gaps in data and inconsistent reporting must be addressed so that evaluation findings influence policy effectively.

G. Focus on Building Stakeholder Capacity

1. Strengthening National Evaluation Capacities

The fifth area in the evaluation knowledge management (EKM) results framework focuses on building the capacity of stakeholders, especially national evaluation systems. AEW 2025 highlighted several key elements in this regard:

- peer-to-peer learning among evaluators;
- supportive environments at national, organizational, and individual levels,
- a whole-of-government approach, not just isolated efforts in individual silos,
- strong engagement with national partners on consultations and data collection,
- reliable and robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems, and
- internalizing lessons from results achieved in a continuous and adaptive way.

“AEW has been serving as a unique and safe platform that is accessible for all types of stakeholders in evaluation ranging from voluntary organizations for professional evaluation, government, private sector, academia, and young and emerging evaluators, where all gather to learn not only the latest approaches and developments in evaluation but also have candid discussions for more efficient and effective collaboration for evaluation capacity building and evaluation work overall.”

Erdenechimeg (Chimgee) Ulziisuren
Founder & President (Mongolian Evaluation Association)

2. Motivating Young and Emerging Evaluators (YEEs)

A growing focus is on supporting young and emerging evaluators (YEEs) across the region. This has moved from simply inviting them to events to actively involving them in evaluation work.

Young evaluators are quick learners and are very often skilled in using technology, which helps them contribute meaningfully to the evaluation system. Building their capacity is key to creating strong partnerships between generations and developing resilient evaluation systems.

Challenges remain however, such as limited funding and difficulties in realizing opportunities for mentorship, peer learning, and networking platforms to support their growth.

3. Incentivizing Legislatures to Seek Evaluation-Derived Evidence

Parliaments and national assemblies should be encouraged to seek out evaluation findings as part of their oversight role. This can push government agencies to use evidence more effectively in both implementation and evaluation.

In Mongolia, where no central evaluation body exists, such legislative interest could help build momentum that eventually strengthens evaluation systems.

In smaller countries such as the Cook Islands, the focus is on strengthening existing institutions. However, frequent staff turnover in the public sector weakens the long-term capacity building process. Another challenge is the lack of professional certification systems for evaluators, which limits formal recognition and development.

4. Sustained Engagement and Its Implications

Building national evaluation capacity takes time. Systems need space to adjust and stabilize after reforms. Long-term engagement is needed at all levels: individual, organizational, and national.

Efforts must also be sensitive to local contexts, involve stakeholders meaningfully, and remain flexible. Country ownership is essential, especially when donor funding plays a major role in capacity-building efforts.

H. Conclusions

In today's world of multiple crises and overwhelming information, some of it unreliable, independent evaluation is more important than ever, but also more difficult to carry out.

AEW 2025 discussions highlighted how countries can strengthen evaluation culture and achieve the goals outlined in the EKM results framework. Two key ideas emerged:

- **forward-looking:** evaluation must evolve from looking backward to providing real-time strategic support with a forward perspective, and
- **alignment:** no institution can address complex problems alone; shared tools, shared knowledge, and shared purpose, in meaningful alignment, are essential.







Other consistent messages that emanated from AEW 2025 included: (i) country context is important in adopting evaluative methods that may have been successfully used elsewhere; (ii) there is an urgent need for adaptive and responsive evaluation approaches during crises that employ a crisis-specific lens, and that prioritize timeliness and immediate impact; and (iii) as evaluators are often perceived to create defensiveness, policymakers and others need to shift from evaluation phobia to evaluation embrace.

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Independent
Evaluation 
Knowledge for Development Effectiveness

Summary Note: Asian Evaluation Week 2025

The 2025 Asian Evaluation Week, jointly organized by ADB's Independent Evaluation Department and the Asia-Pacific Finance and Development Institute, brought together evaluation leaders, policymakers, and practitioners to examine how institutions can navigate crises through stronger evidence, learning, and collaboration. Drawing from discussions anchored in the Evaluation Knowledge Management Results Framework, the synthesis highlights emerging priorities for reinforcing evaluation culture, advancing evidence-based decision-making, accelerating institutional learning, and enhancing the influence of evaluative knowledge on public policy. Key messages emphasize the importance of context-responsive evaluation norms, real-time and “right-fit” evidence, whole-of-government coordination, shorter learning loops, engagement of young evaluators, and stronger national evaluation capacities. The insights underscore that in an era of complexity and uncertainty, adaptive, timely, and independent evaluation is essential for shaping effective development strategies and driving more resilient, inclusive outcomes across the Asia-Pacific region.

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