



SESSION NUMBER & TITLE
Parallel Session 17 - One size does not fit all: Adapting and adopting international evaluation norms in the Asia-Pacific region
SESSION TAKE AWAY
Shared international evaluation norms and standards can create common language and facilitate collaboration – at the same time, evaluation must be locally owned and contextualised to the priorities and needs of local communities.
SUBTHEME
Inclusive partnership
ORGANIZATION/S
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • APEA • ISDB • MEA • UNICEF EAPRO • UNICEF China • OECD
PANELIST/DISCUSSANT #1: [Erdenechimeg (Chimgee) Ulziisuren, Founder & President, Mongolian Evaluation Association (MEA)]
<p>2 KEY MESSAGES</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Mongolian Evaluation Association has experienced significant growth in its two years of existence, largely driven by the challenges posed by COVID-19. Previously reliant on international evaluators who faced travel restrictions, the association adapted to connect national evaluators and facilitate knowledge transfer, consultancy work, and the development of a national evaluation system. 2. The association is actively working on aligning its evaluation standards and norms with international best practices. They have engaged in a participatory approach to translate and adapt evaluation criteria and a code of ethics to their local context. Additionally, they aim to professionalize the field of evaluation in Mongolia by exploring the possibility of credentialing evaluators, drawing inspiration from international examples like the Canadian evaluation society's credential evaluator program.
PANELIST/DISCUSSANT #2: [Ahmed Abdelgawad, Evaluation Specialist, Islamic Development Bank (ISDB)]
<p>2 KEY MESSAGES</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Standard evaluation norms and standards should be adapted to fit the specific context and culture of the region or country where they are applied. This customization process requires a consultative and rigorous approach involving stakeholders from different backgrounds. 2. The importance of evaluation standards goes beyond their development; it also involves their practical utilization and adaptation to specific contexts. To ensure their usefulness, it's crucial to involve various stakeholders and not impose them from a remote perspective. The role should be one of coordination, organization, and integration of these standards into the regional direction, aligning them with global norms and standards while respecting local needs and perspectives.
PANELIST/DISCUSSANT #3: [Ana Erika Lareza, Board Member, APEA]

2 KEY MESSAGES

1. **Professionalization of Evaluation and Capacity Building:** Importance of professionalizing evaluation and building the capacity of evaluators, particularly in regions where evaluation is not institutionalized. Organizations are scattered worldwide and focus on capacity building for evaluators, advocating for evaluation, and providing support to young and emerging evaluators. The challenges faced in Asia Pacific, such as linguistic and cultural diversity, and the need to adapt international norms to the regional context.
2. **Adapting International Norms to Local Contexts:** The adaptation of international evaluation norms and standards to specific regional contexts, particularly in Asia Pacific. Efforts to translate and contextualize materials, such as OECD criteria, into multiple languages for parliamentarians and the development of toolkits and competency frameworks tailored to the needs of young evaluators and organizations in the region. Emphasizes the importance of making evaluation tools and guidelines accessible and relevant to local stakeholders.

PANELIST/DISCUSSANT #4: [Jane Mwangi, Regional Advisor, Evaluation, United Nations Children's Fund East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (UNICEF EAPRO)]

2 KEY MESSAGES

1. **Promotion of a Strong Evaluation Culture:** UNICEF is committed to fostering a robust evaluation culture, driven by the goal of improving outcomes for children. They emphasize the importance of high-quality evaluations, rigorous methods, and evidence-based decision-making to make a positive impact on children's lives, especially as we approach the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) deadline. UNICEF acknowledges the significance of partnerships with UN agencies, governments, and other stakeholders in advancing this culture.
2. **Comprehensive Support for Evaluation:** UNICEF is actively involved in various aspects of evaluation, including policy development, capacity building, and supporting country-led evaluations. Their recently revised evaluation policy places greater emphasis on partnerships and collaboration. UNICEF is dedicated to working closely with other organizations and governments to ensure evaluations are conducted effectively, taking into account the varying capacities and needs of different countries.

PANELIST/DISCUSSANT #4: [Xin Xin Yang, Multi-Country Evaluation Specialist (China, DPRK and Mongolia), UNICEF, China]

2 KEY MESSAGES

1. Translation is a means not an end and serves a tool for the leaning by doing approach in evaluation. The key to the compliance with OECD/DAC criteria is to ask and answer the right questions, not mechanically apply evaluation criteria without sufficient consideration of the evaluation context and intended purposes.
2. Mongolia, UNICEF is actively promoting the translation of OECD documents, such as the Better Criteria for Better Evaluation, in collaboration with the Mongolian Evaluation Association. This translation effort is part of a broader initiative to professionalize and institutionalize evaluation practices in the country. UNICEF's approach involves providing technical support, engaging government and VOPE actors, and offering training programs to enhance evaluation capacity. The goal is to improve the availability and accessibility of OECD standards and guidance, ultimately transforming the evaluation landscape in Mongolia.

MODERATOR: [Megan Kennedy-Chouane, Head of Evaluation Unit, Development Cooperation Directorate, OECD]

3 KEY MESSAGES

1. **Adaptation of Evaluation Norms:** The session highlighted how evaluation norms and standards, such as those from the OECD, are adapted and applied in various countries across the Asia Pacific region. These standards serve as a valuable framework for generating evidence, particularly concerning the sustainability of infrastructure projects.
2. **Common Language and Evidence Generation:** The use of international standards provides a common language for evaluators to communicate and generate evidence. This common framework can facilitate discussions and comparisons across different countries and regions.
3. **Balancing Standards and Meaningful Questions:** While standards are beneficial for consistency and evidence generation, it's essential for evaluators to maintain their primary goal: asking meaningful questions. Evaluators should use standards as a tool for improvement rather than as a rigid imposition that does not add value. Balancing standards with the pursuit of meaningful insights is crucial in the evaluation process.

Q&A SUMMARY

1. How do you encourage or motivate others to engage in the evaluation process, given that having the necessary documents is not enough, and people also need training and awareness of standards?
 - a. **Promotion of Norms and Standards in Evaluation:** The speaker emphasizes the importance of making evaluation norms and standards more accessible and widely adopted. They discuss the challenges of voluntary work and tight schedules but express a willingness to cooperate with international organizations to spread awareness and effectively implement evaluation standards. Their goal is to make these standards a common practice.
 - b. **Importance of the Enabling Environment:** The discussion shifts to the significance of creating an enabling environment for evaluation. While institutional-level work and individual skills development are essential, the speaker highlights the importance of political buy-in from top leadership and the role it plays in setting the tone for evaluation culture within an organization. They also stress the need for real, demand-driven evaluations to demonstrate the value of evaluation concepts.
 - c. **Learning by Doing:** The importance of learning by doing is emphasized. Practical application of evaluation concepts, particularly on specific projects, can lead to a better understanding of evaluation criteria and their relevance. It's suggested that working on real evaluations helps build a pathway towards effective evaluation practices.
2. Have you conducted any studies or undertaken any initiatives that are utilized by various countries? Specifically, when you develop strategies for specific regions and translate them into local languages, how do these strategies prove useful and how are they implemented by other countries? Have you conducted any studies or research in this regard?
 - a. **Participatory Approach to Strategy Development:** The strategy discussed in the text was not developed overnight but through a year-long participatory approach involving consultations with academia, professionals, young evaluators, and government officials. These consultations were aimed at identifying regional needs and defining appropriate actions for each need.
 - b. **Complexity of Thematic Areas:** The strategy is structured around thematic areas, each with its own theory of change model. This complexity required a considerable amount of debate and discussion during the development process.
 - c. **Importance of Collaboration and Ownership:** Collaboration was a critical element of the strategy's development. Each thematic area had its own working group, including international experts, who volunteered their time and expertise. This collaborative effort aimed to ensure that participants had a sense of ownership of the strategy.

3. "How do we consolidate and provide a more global perspective when working with evaluation standards that often prioritize a mechanistic approach and don't take into account the local context, making it challenging for local evaluators to have their voices heard and adapt the standards to better serve grassroots-level needs?"

a. **Contextualization and Flexibility in Evaluation Criteria:** One size does not fit all in evaluation. It's essential to adapt evaluation criteria to the specific needs and contexts of the projects or interventions being assessed. Whether you're evaluating relevance or effectiveness, the criteria should be flexible and serve the ultimate purpose of the evaluation. Different emergencies or situations may require different evaluation criteria, and it's crucial to recognize this diversity and adapt accordingly.

b. **Clarifying the Boundaries of Evaluation:** There's a need to clarify what evaluation means, especially when dealing with government officials or stakeholders who may confuse it with monitoring. It's not about imposing a rigid definition but understanding the specific needs of stakeholders and responding to them professionally. This involves distinguishing between self-evaluation conducted by the implementing government and independent evaluations. It's about providing clarity and guidance on what evaluation entails and ensuring that it serves its intended purpose.

c. **Global Trend Towards National Evaluation Policies:** The global trend is moving towards the establishment of national evaluation policies and systems. With only 35 countries worldwide having such policies in place, Mongolia's commitment to joining this group is a significant step forward. These policies help provide a structured framework for conducting evaluations and promote a deeper understanding of what evaluation entails. By embracing this trend, Mongolia aims to clarify the boundaries of evaluation and ensure that it serves its intended purpose effectively.

d. **Effective Communication and Accessibility:** Communication is often an overlooked aspect of evaluation. Evaluation materials need to be communicated effectively and made available in multiple formats, including digital platforms like Google Forms, websites, and social media. It's 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.

e. **Resource Efficiency and Potential Harm:** Evaluations consume resources, and it's essential to recognize that sometimes the most effective action is to refrain from conducting an evaluation. Evaluations should not be undertaken for their own sake but should be driven by the goal of serving a purpose and generating meaningful insights. Moreover, evaluations should be approached with caution, as they have the potential to cause harm, and the decision to conduct an evaluation should take into account its potential consequences.

SESSION COORDINATOR

Michelle Angielina Dantayana