

BRAZIL'S NATIONAL EVALUATION CAPACITY: GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS BUT STILL A LONG WAY TO GO

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Introduction

The effort of a nation to undertake such a complex task as the evaluation of public programs and policies is an inglorious object of investigation. Measuring such an effort would require an inventory of past evaluations or the definition of proxy indicators that could grasp the volume and capillarity of this effort. In this paper we will attempt the second endeavor, with much simplicity. Additionally this paper will describe and critically assess one of the pillars of Brazil's evaluation capacity: the evaluation system linked to Quadrennial Development Plan (PPA) of the central Government of Brazil (GoB). Two analytic challenges remain.

First and foremost, a key challenge arises from the fact that evaluations are only worth the trouble if they are effective inputs to change. If evaluations themselves do not become a cause for program overhaul, our proxy measures can be misinterpreted as indicators of a strong 'planning-implementation-evaluation-planning' rationale, when there isn't one. On the other hand, few but effective evaluations will be interpreted as insufficient. To partially tackle this flaw we will try to draw some conclusions on the effectiveness of the evaluation system of the PPA.

Second, it is never easy to define "evaluation". Fortunately that can be reasonably solved by assuming that:

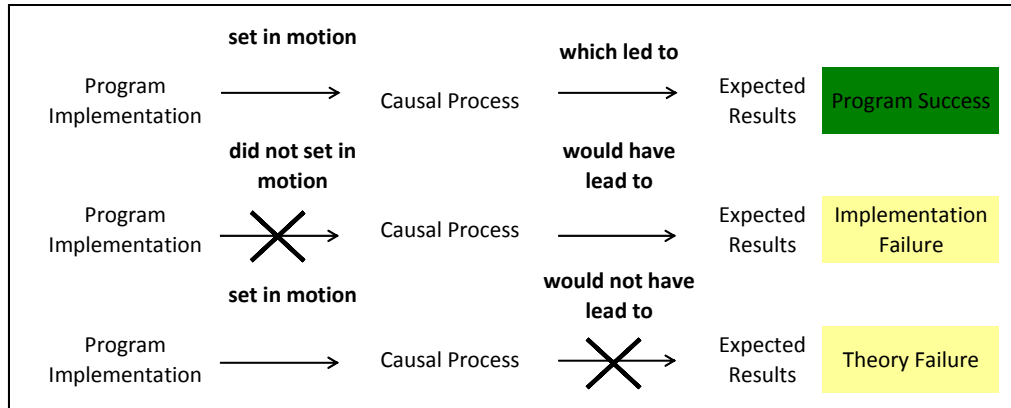
"Evaluation is the *systematic assessment* of the *operation* and/or the *outcomes* of a program or policy, compared to a set of *explicit* or *implicit standards*, as a means of contributing to the *improvement* of the program or policy."¹

This assumption is not random, but rather it is in tune with the current dialogue within the Brazilian evaluation field. The adoption of the above definition of evaluation is indeed linked to a pragmatic necessity of investigating, not only final impacts, but program operation and the causal processes put in motion by government interventions. In fact, most of GoBs effort regarding evaluation refers to the questions derived from the figure below.

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¹ Weiss, Carol "Evaluation: methods for studying programs and policies", Second Edition, New Jersey, 1998, page 4.

Figure 1 - Explaining the Effect of a Program or Policy



Source: Weiss, Carol *Evaluation: Methods for Studying Programs and Policies*, 1998.

In essence, program impact has to be traced back to a reliable/faithful description of program components (which are usually quite distant from the declared program components and processes condensed on official resources and speech), and to the validity of the transmission mechanisms or causal processes put in motion by the program. If not, program success or failure cannot be explained, thus, cannot be maintained, improved nor corrected. Therefore, for government, it is equally important to evaluate final impacts, interim results, as well as process adherence to program theory.

Brazil's Evaluation Scene: actors, institutions and recent developments

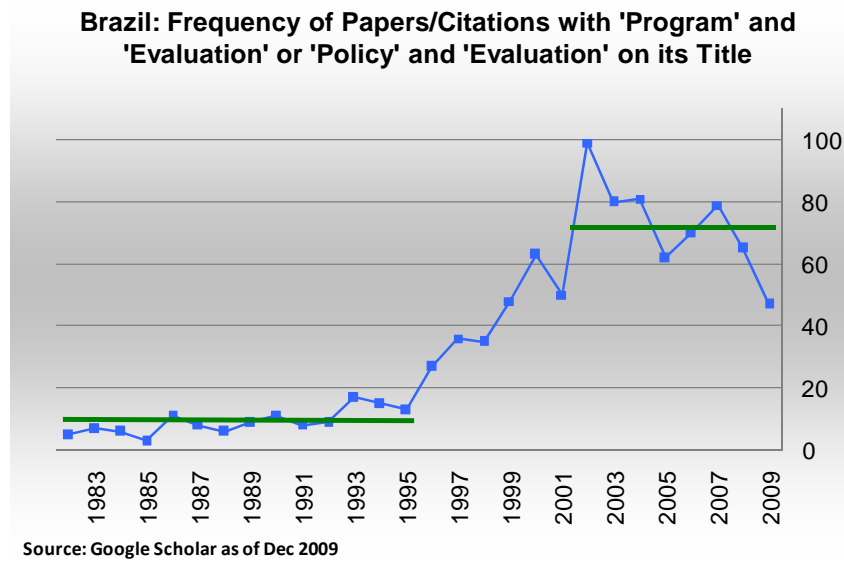
In recent years, Brazilian evaluation field has radically shifted from virtually no activity to a vibrant dialogue and practice. It is difficult to trace the first supporters of this renaissance, but there is little doubt that an important push came from the multilateral and foreign government development agencies.

Most of the evaluation effort in Brazil is either implemented directly by government ministries and associated research institutes, or contracted out by government to Brazilian public universities. Thus, like in many other countries, it is basically government that evaluates (or commands the resources for evaluation of) its own programs and policies. The figure below summarizes these institutions and products. For a contact list refer to annex 1.

Figure 2 - Brazil: The Evaluation Scene (2009)

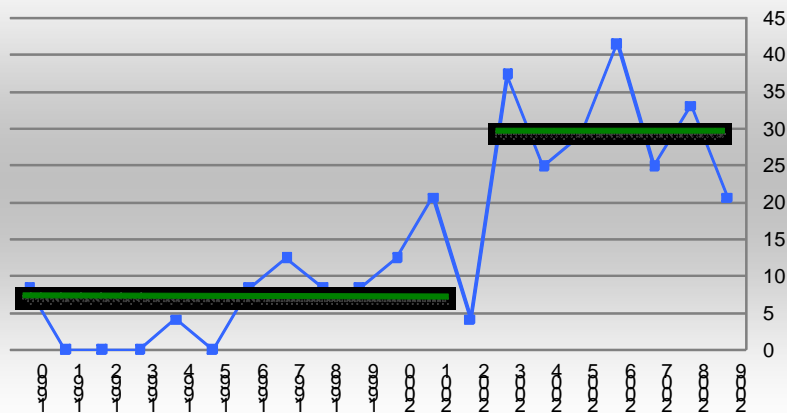
Paradigm	Program Implementation	Transmission Mecanisms	Results
Evaluation Focus	Delivery of Goods and Services	Intermediary Impacts	Final Impacts
State Processes	-Laws, Norms, Regulations -Production and Expenditure Monitoring	-Implicit Theory of Change -Interim Indicators for Internal Monitoring	-Ex-Ante: government development objectives -Ex-Post: government popularity and re-election
Specific Brazilian Institutions Involved	-Auditing: TCU (legislative branch accounts court) -Sector Ministry -Min. Planning: PM/SPI -Min. Budget: PM/SOF (secretariat) -Vice-presidency	-Sector Ministry -Min. Planning: PM/SPI -Research Institute (IPEA)	-Sector Ministry -Research Institute (IPEA) -Federal and State Universities -State Level Research Foundations -Marginal evaluations implemented by WB, UN, IDB
Products	-Operational Audits - Quadrennial Development Plan (PPA) Annual Evaluation -Government Priority Programs Annual Evaluation	- Quadrennial Development Plan (PPA) Annual Evaluation	-Sporadic formal evaluations, mostly executed by government agencies or contracted out to public universities. - Quadrennial Development Plan (PPA) Annual Evaluation

The academic production on evaluation is quite straight forward to assess. In a simple Google Scholar (scholar.google.com) search we have found surprising figures that confirm the novelty of the evaluation effort in Brazil. The graph below reveals that the frequency of papers whose title include the words “program” or “policy”, and “evaluation” has raised from an annual average of 10, between 1981 and 1995 to over 70 from 2002 onwards.



The same trend was found by the following citation analysis.

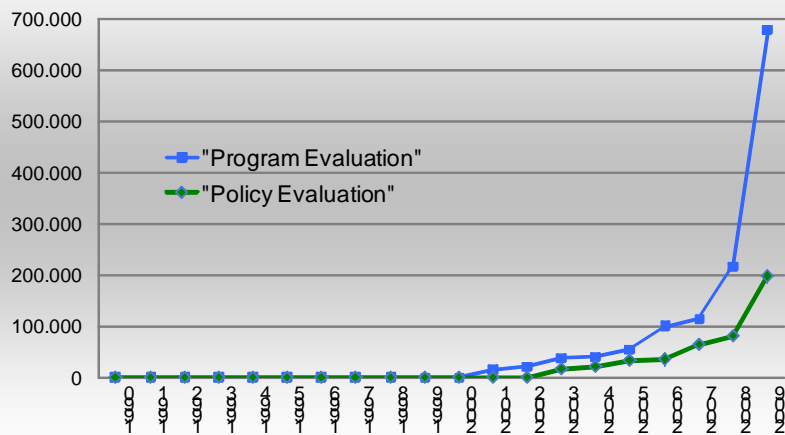
Brazil: Frequency of Articles that Cite Campbell, Heckman, Weiss, Shadish, Cronbach or Rubin



Source: Google Scholar as of Dec 2009

Finally, government has increasingly publicized, produced and discussed program and policy evaluation, as can be seen from the indicator below.

Brazil: Frequency of Government Webpages Mentioning "Program Evaluation" and "Policy Evaluation" and the Specified Year, but not the Subsequent Years



Source: Google as of Dec 2009

Notwithstanding the past evaluation effort, assessing the potential capacity for evaluation is a rather different matter. A survey on professors' profiles, post-graduate courses that include evaluation disciplines and the institutional capacity built within government would be ideal. Nevertheless, the number of graduation and post-graduate courses that should, at least in theory, promote evaluative knowledge and culture is somewhat illustrative of this potential.

In the last 7 years we observed the emergence of 7 public policy management graduation courses which might indicate a trend of renewed interest in public administration, already well established as a field.

Table 1 - Brazil: Number of Selected Graduation and Post-Graduation Courses (2009)

Graduation and Technical Courses		Post Graduate Courses	
Public Policy Management	7	Environment and Ecology	62
Public Administration	49	Public Health	75
Social Sciences	98	Education	142
Economics	55	Economics	70
		Urban and Regional Planning	29
		Sociology	75
Total	209	Total	453

Source: Ministry of Education website and Capes website, Dec 2009.

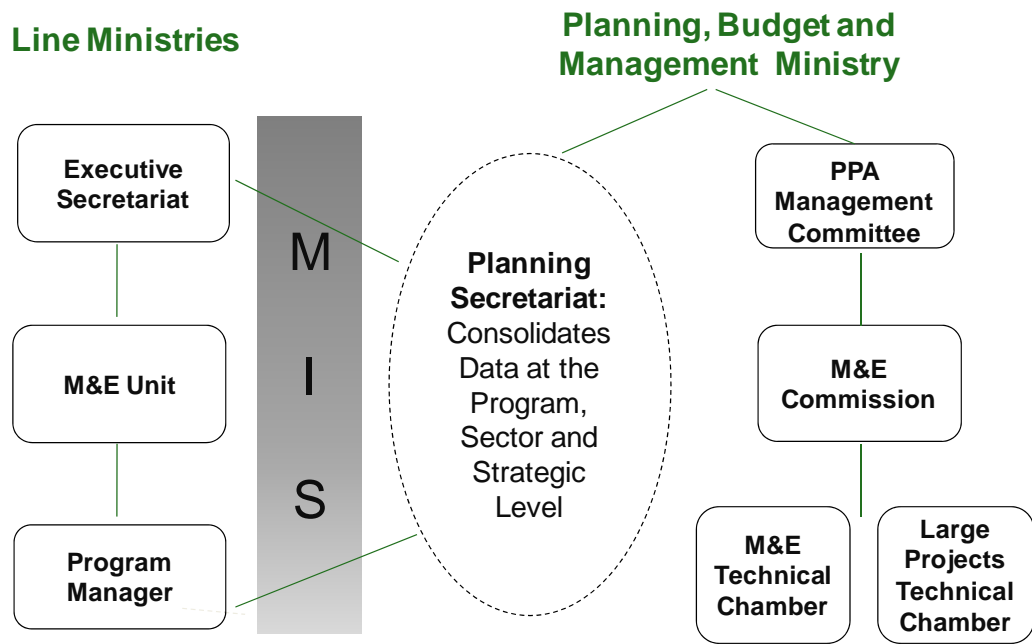
The federal government evaluation system

During the 1996-1999 Quadrennial Planning Cycle (PPA), federal government piloted a radical planning reform to integrate planning activities with budget and management tools. The intention was to promote constant monitoring and revision of planning as well as budget, based on measured results. This model changed the organization of budget categories, condensing and simplifying the previous structure into programs. These corresponded to the “solution to problems precisely identified” and measured. The idea was then to integrate an evaluative tool to monitor the goals set for each program. The full expansion of this idea came in the 2000-2003 cycle².

The evaluative system under the PPA was institutionalized in 2004, with the creation of an M&E Commission, under the Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management, for specific M&E guidelines and support. In the same year M&E Units were established to function in every line ministry as a technical support for evaluation effort and reporting. Below, the flow of information between line ministries and planning, which is supported by a management information system (MIS-SIGPLAN).

Some of the basic characteristics of the evaluation system under the PPA are: (i) it is recommended to all programs, but is not mandatory; (ii) it is an annual process; (iii) ex-post; (iv) it intends to evaluate process and outcomes; (v) there is a self-evaluation questionnaire by which the program managers report the indicators measured; and (vi) it is summarized at 3 levels (priority level, ministry level and program level).

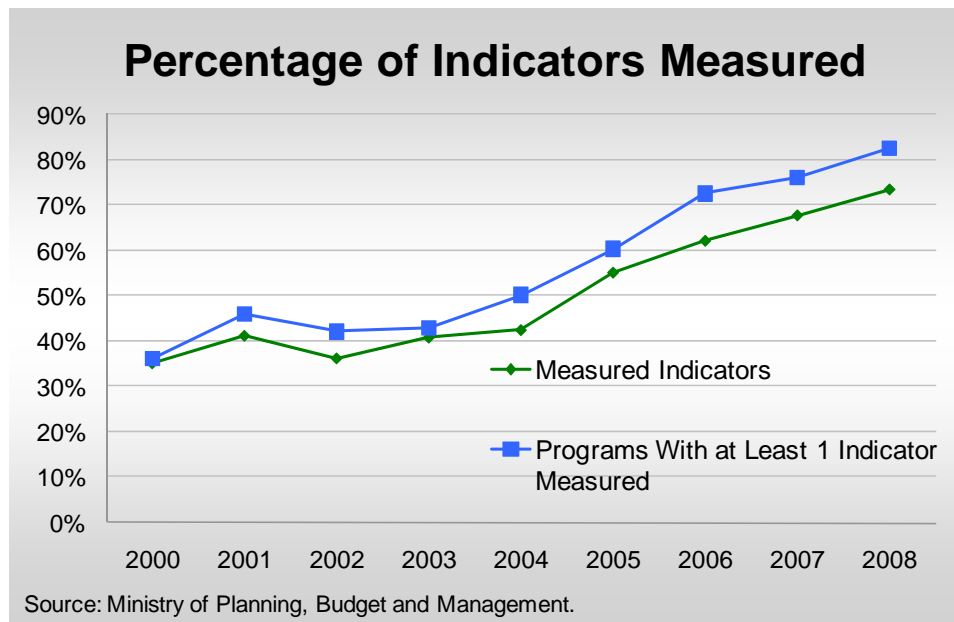
² Garcia, Ronaldo Coutinho “A Reorganização do Processo de Planejamento do Governo Federal: O PPA 2000-2003”, Texto para Discussão n. 726, IPEA, May 2000. At http://www.ipea.gov.br/pub/td/2000/td_0726.pdf.



Notwithstanding these previous efforts, an important leap for the evaluation culture within government was put in motion by the formulation of a specific methodology by the Research Institute of Applied Economics (IPEA), a federal government research agency linked to the planning ministry. The methodology uses Logic Models as a basis to explicit program theory and performs evaluation planning³. The IPEA logic models were applied to over 60 programs, involving around 700 civil servants between 2007 and 2009. This contributed immensely to harmonize program objectives between managers, organize program structure and set valid, relevant and quantifiable indicators for each program.

Over the years, the system was able to improve monitoring and evaluation practices within line ministries as shown by the percentage of indicators actually measured over those that were originally intended to be measured. In 2008 a total of 778 indicators were set to be monitored at the beginning of the cycle and 571 were actually computed, totaling 73%. This was 41% five years ago, in 2003.

³ For the methodology see: Helder Ferreira, Martha Cassiolato e Roberto Gonzalez "Uma Experiência de Desenvolvimento Metodológico para Avaliação de Programas: O Modelo Lógico do Programa Segundo Tempo", Texto para Discussão n.1369, IPEA, Jan. 2009. At http://www.ipea.gov.br/sites/000/2/publicacoes/tds/td_1369.pdf



The federal government evaluation system: challenges and the way forward.

One fundamental challenge arises from the fact that the evaluative effort is under a planning and budget process. Basically, it is supposed to inform planning of challenges faced by programs on the assumption that the ministry of planning is empowered enough to promote changes. Is this the case in Brazilian recent government history? Hardly.

Our main argument is that a technical solution for evaluation reporting does not make up for the loss of technical and institutional capacity, in all ministries, during the recessive 80's and 90's. Furthermore, structural adjustment times have developed a culture of short-run, budgetary cash control over medium-long run planning capacity and, thus, management. The embedded knowledge that budget decisions prevail over planning and management really puts evaluation efforts into discredit. In this environment, where planning doesn't really have enough power to promote change, nor can it favor planning over budget short-run restrictions, evaluation becomes meaningless. It serves a purpose of transparency and reporting rather than transformation.

Additionally, another challenge emerges from the fact that PPA implied a total fusion of budget and planning. This forced planning to lose its selective nature. As a result, the PPA evaluation end up producing poor indicators for all budgetary items, whilst concentrated effort could be put into good evaluations of government priorities and novel proposals. Not to mention the fact that there ends up being no planning or evaluation for non-budgetary activity.

Some of the operational challenges related to the PPA evaluation system are: (i) the program structure is not detailed enough for MIS-SIGPLAN to be used as an internal management tool, causing duplication of work; (ii) the indicators end up being too broad to encompass activities that lie under each program; (iii) the annuity aspect and the questionnaire do not account for program diversity (such as investment with longer maturities, decentralized expenditures and implementation); (iv) the self evaluation aspect implies a greater conflict of interest (which in any case is present in every evaluation

sponsored by the program manager); and (v) low institutional capacity within ministries to generate, contract and oversee formal evaluations⁴.

The challenges are great, but the effort that has been done until now shows the viability of moving forward with positive expectations. There is little doubt that government would benefit from continuing the logic models effort. It should also try to deepen selectivity of planning and evaluation efforts. There have been some recent changes but priorities are still too broad. Finally, it is desirable, at this point, that government organizes an institutional and funding structure to support rigorous evaluations, be them qualitative or quantitative.

In conclusion, Brazil is showing a growing institutional capacity to further boost evaluative efforts. The recent growth in evaluative activity has been substantial, both in government and academia. In this setting the design and improvement of an evaluation system linked to the Quadrennial Development Plan (PPA) has increased incentives to evaluate government programs and contributed to a results-based public management over these last 9 years. Nonetheless, challenges remain, given the low level of formal qualitative and quantitative research, specially using experimental or quasi-experimental methods.

Annex 1

Public Sector Think-tanks With Proved Evaluation Capacity

Horizontal

Applied Research: Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada (www.ipea.gov.br)

Research: virtually all federal and state universities – USP, UNICAMP, UNESP, UFMG, UFRJ, UERJ, UFPE, UFBA, UFRG, UFSC, UFPR (www.'university_acronym'.br)

Auditing court: Tribunal de Contas da União (<http://portal2.tcu.gov.br/TCU>)

Sectoral

Health: Fundação Oswaldo Cruz (www.fiocruz.br)

Education: Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais (www.inep.gov.br) and Secretaria de Educação Continuada, Alfabetização e Diversidade (www.mec.gov.br)

Social Assistance: Secretaria de Avaliação e Gestão da Informação (<http://www.mds.gov.br/sagi>)

Environment: Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente e dos Recursos Naturais Renováveis (www.ibama.gov.br)

Agricultural Develop.: Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária (www.embrapa.br)

State Level Research Centers

São Paulo: Fundação Sistema Estadual de Análise de Dados (www.seade.gov.br),

Fundação de Desenvolvimento Administrativo (www.fundap.sp.gov.br)

Minas Gerais: Fundação João Pinheiro (www.fjp.gov.br)

Pernambuco: Fundação Joaquim Nabuco (www.funda.gov.br)

Bahia: Superintendência de Estudos Econômicos e Sociais (www.sel.ba.gov.br)

⁴ Many of these critiques are shared by a World Bank qualitative evaluation of the PPA evaluation system, which has not yet been published.