



## CONFERENCE ON NATIONAL EVALUATION CAPACITY 2009

### CONCEPT NOTE

#### 1. Introduction

There is general consensus that evaluating the performance of public policy is an important instrument for good governance. There is however a gap between this general agreement and the actual implementation, use and sustainability of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems, processes and tools on the ground. Well-intentioned efforts to develop these systems face obstacles associated with institutional design, political dynamics, poor managerial and/or technical capacity and resistance to change. At the same time, innovative practices developed within particular contexts in developing nations may yield important lessons worth sharing.

The Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reiterated an earlier request to UNDP to support national evaluation capacity in programme countries. The UNDP Evaluation Office will organize an international conference on National Evaluation Capacity to provide a forum to discuss issues that face programme country partners, to deepen their understanding of evaluation as a powerful tool for public accountability and to learn from solutions in other developing countries and, possibly, to identify common strategies to establish evaluation systems that are relevant and have a sound political and institutional basis.

The conference organized by UNDP Evaluation Office in December 2009 in Morocco aims to provide a platform for sharing experiences in strengthening the institutional capacities and/or enabling conditions for evaluation of public policies, programmes and institutions.

#### 2. Background

Many governments have gained an increased understanding of the value of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) to assess what public initiatives work well, which do not work well and most importantly, why. Monitoring and evaluating

the performance of public policies, programmes and institutions can help increase their effectiveness, providing more accountability and transparency in how public resources are used, informing the prioritization in the allocation of public resources, and assessing their effectiveness in attaining their desired development results such as reducing poverty, improving welfare, or enhancing the equality of opportunities. When M&E systems and tools emphasize the results of public policy, a virtuous learning cycle generates opportunities for improving the systems, structures and processes associated with successful policy implementation.

Many national governments are conducting evaluation of public policies, others are designing centralized M&E systems for national development plans and programmes. There is great diversity with respect to the functions played as well as the models and tools developed, and much variation can be observed in their degree of maturity and institutionalization within each country's public administration.

Key challenges include setting up appropriate institutional structures and incentives to motivate both the supply of and the demand for solid evidence to inform public decision-making; developing managerial and technical capacity to ensure sustainability and the application of robust methodology; and developing a results-oriented public sector culture that embeds the effective use of M&E within the broader purpose of generating credible evidence to enhance understanding and support decisions about development results. While the systems for monitoring and evaluation are conceptually linked, the conference will pay particular attention to evaluation, more specifically, to the evaluation of national development projects, programmes or policies and to the creation of national results-oriented M&E systems in service of development effectiveness.

In this vein, two problems represent a common denominator to most M&E experiences and tend to slow the institutionalization of results-oriented M&E systems. The first is the low demand for evidence about performance and the scant use of the information generated through evaluation efforts from the part of its expected consumers; of particular concern are, on the one hand the poor quality of the evidence generated by M&E systems, and on the other, the disinterest from legislative bodies and citizens, key players in democracies with authority to demand accountability for results vis a vis public investments. The second problem is the poor integration of various institutions and actors associated with the effective evaluation of public policies, programmes and institutions, as well as the lack of convergence

among cycles of various public administration processes relevant to broad M&E efforts, such as planning, budgeting and personnel.

Information sharing and collective reflection among peers as well as opportunities for reciprocal learning can support national capacities. The conference brings together national partners, regional experts in evaluation and UNDP professionals for awareness building and sensitization on the importance of evaluation, and to discuss institutional, technical and methodological issues in the institutionalization of national M&E systems. These initiatives provide a good platform to discuss experiences, identify challenges and draw lessons that can later take the form of technical assistance, under the umbrella of south-south or triangular cooperation.

### **3. Objectives**

The broader purpose of the conference is to provide a forum for open discussion on issues confronting evaluation in countries, enabling participants to draw on the recent and innovative experience of other countries. The conference will also promote understanding of international standards in evaluation, and advocacy for evaluation as a means of managing for development results, improving public accountability and learning.

To enhance the understanding and appreciation of evaluation as a powerful tool of public accountability in the countries, the conference has the following three specific objectives:

- a) to share experiences from countries with different levels of development of national M&E systems including those who may be considering creating one and have important experiences with other types of evaluation efforts;
- b) to identify lessons and constraints in implementing national M&E systems; and,
- c) to identify supply and demand for technical assistance in strengthening institutional capacity for national M&E systems under the umbrella of South-South cooperation.

#### 4. Agenda

The agenda will cover specific institutional issues regarding the normative framework to conduct evaluation, and technical and methodological issues such as selection of evaluation methods, randomized approach, outcome evaluations and the MDGs, underpinning evaluations from human development and human security lens. The conference will focus on how national evaluation capacity issue can be addressed through a collaborative approach of national governments, national professional associations, and development partners.

The framework proposed by Ospina (2001)<sup>1</sup> and developed by Cunill y Ospina (2003)<sup>2</sup> identify the challenges associated with the institutionalization of M&E results-oriented efforts by inquiring about three questions:

1) “*evaluation for what?*” which refers to the purpose of evaluation; 2) “*what to evaluate, and at what level?*” which refers to the scope of evaluation; and 3) “*how to use information yielded by evaluation?*”, which links information usage to evaluation purpose. Two more questions of relevance to evaluation capacity development can be added for the purpose of the conference: 4) “*how to ensure an enabling environment?*”, which pinpoints obstacles and opportunities for capacity development; and 5) “*how to enhance evaluation practice?*”, which refers to evaluation expertise and know-how.

Using this framework, the conference will invite participants to reflect on issues clustered around five areas of inquiry, vision, purpose, structures and capacity, methodology and accountability.

Not all the areas will be necessarily covered during the conference, since it will be organized around the particular areas emerging from the papers and conversations with participants. Yet this framework can still be considered as the base to ensure that discussions address state of the art concerns in the field.

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<sup>1</sup> Ospina, Sonia. (2001) “La evaluación de la gestión pública: conceptos y aplicaciones en América Latina”. En *Reforma y Democracia*, No. 19, 2001, Venezuela, CLAD , pp. 89-122.

<sup>2</sup> Cunill, Nuria y Sonia Ospina (ed.) (2003) *Evaluación de Resultados para una Gestión Pública Moderna y Democrática. Experiencias Latinoamericanas*. Venezuela, CLAD - Editorial Texto, C. A.

## 5. Process

The conference will be structured around papers commissioned for the occasion. Participants will be asked to present brief papers on any of the topics identified, namely, challenges and opportunities associated with the purpose of the efforts, their scope and analytical boundaries, the use of information produced by evaluations, the generation of an enabling environment and the development of technical expertise and know-how. The conference will be organized according to the topics covered in the commissioned papers.

## 6. Participants

Participants will be senior policy makers of countries in which national M&E systems are taking shape, potential users of evaluation including parliamentarians and representatives from civil society, and national, regional and international evaluation specialists.

The conference will bring the supply (government officials in charge of national M&E systems and evaluation specialists) and demand (parliaments, finance ministries, planning ministries, funding agencies, and affected population) sides together to share experiences and expectations in the transition from individual or *ad hoc* monitoring and evaluation initiatives to a more systematic nation-wide monitoring and evaluation system and its capacity development challenges.

The following criteria will be used to invite countries and institutions:

- Variation in the degree of development/maturity of evaluation efforts, to ensure a range of experience represented, and to allow for reciprocal peer learning.
- Countries that have explicitly expressed interest and see the value of sharing experiences.
- Countries where innovative approaches have been tried and succeeded and that are sufficiently institutionalized to suggest that they may offer relevant lessons for others in an earlier stage of creation of systems.
- Coverage of geographical areas.

Using these criteria, a sample of countries and institutions will be invited to participate.

We expect the conference to be an opportunity for reflection and learning that identifies new trends for evaluation of public policies, programmes and institutions.

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