2 FORMULATING GUIDING PRINCIPLES TO MAKE SURE EVALUATION LEAVES NO ONE BEHIND

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INTRODUCTION

As part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 193 United Nations Member States have pledged to "leave no one behind" and committed to ending extreme poverty. Their commitments include promising to act on bridging the inequality gap and ensuring that those left behind have a chance to catch up and share in global economic growth and progress in a more equitable manner.[19] For Governments, development partners and practitioners working in the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) space, this global commitment to act explicitly on issues of inequality and poverty should include how evaluation is practised and experienced by everyone at all levels.

This paper is a report on a workshop at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) National Evaluation Capacities Conference in October 2019, which sought to develop a set of principles to ensure that evaluation rises to this challenge and that it also "leaves no one behind". The paper describes the participatory process followed in the workshop to develop the six principles and concludes by suggesting how they could be taken forward and improved, and notes that their strength arises from the fact that they were developed collaboratively by a group of experienced practitioners working together in a short, intense working session.

Practices in monitoring and evaluation across projects and programmes have largely been guided by the requirements of international development. For example, bilateral and multilateral donor agencies along with many foundations and other investors have adopted and prescribe the use of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development evaluation criteria across the international development ecosystem. As a result, the main guiding criteria for evaluating projects and programmes entail assessing relevance, determining their effectiveness, efficiency and impact and the sustainability

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19 UNDP, "What does it mean to Leave No One Behind? A UNDP discussion paper and framework for implementation", UNDP, New York, 2018. https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/what-does-it-mean-to-leave-no-one-behind-.html

of projects.[20] These criteria are ubiquitously applied, driven in many instances by the agenda of international institutions and normalized through the routinized, uncritical application by evaluation practitioners and consulting firms.

International development systems are often shaped by influences that prioritize a particular economic and social perspective but which have not been effective in addressing inequality across the globe. In many developing countries, ordinary people are not involved in making decisions about the systems that should serve them, and development initiatives and interventions replicate historical unfairness and sustain privilege and exclusion, with benefits continuing to accrue to historical elites. Despite their stated intentions, the effect of many international development systems is to sustain and replicate inequality and exclusion, and as a key element of development management, the role of monitoring and evaluation in reinforcing these problematic dynamics requires scrutiny and attention.[21]

In many instances monitoring and evaluation contribute to inequality and exclusion because they prioritize the delivery of evidence that supports accountability to the providers of development assistance,[22] rather than enabling learning or accountability to communities and citizens. The challenge to the world of development is that as it seeks to close the gaps between men and women, rich and poor, North and South, through programmes guided by frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals, there is a danger that the systemic and structural inequities embedded within these systems could exacerbate rather than ease existing problems and present significant challenges to authentic efforts to combat global inequality.

We need to remember that:

Institutions are not, as some liberals would have us believe, neutral arenas for the solution of common problems, but rather sites of power, even of dominance. The vast majority of weaker actors are increasingly 'rule takers' over a whole range of issues that affect all aspects of social, economic, and political life.[23]

The Center for Learning on Evaluation and Results – Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA) is at the forefront of efforts to strengthen the use of M&E systems by African Governments, academia and civil society. While it seeks to strengthen accountability systems within countries, it notes the paradoxical nature of its mission and recognizes the need to address the inequalities and inequities that could be exacerbated and deepened by

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20 Chianca, T. (2008). The OECD/DAC Criteria for International Development Evaluations: An Assessment and Ideas for Improvement. Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation, 5(9), 41–51.

21 Hall, P. A., & Lamont, M. (2009). Introduction: Social resilience in the neoliberal era. Social Resilience in the Neoliberal Era. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139542425.003

22 Hurrell, A. (2016). Global Inequality and International Institutions. Metaphilosophy, 32(1), 113–134.

23 Ibid.

its success. CLEAR-AA consistently reflects on the need to take account of debates on governance, neoliberalism and decolonization (among others). These concerns play a major role in shaping the approach taken by CLEAR-AA and informs the conceptual framework that underpins our academic research and the technical and advisory support we provide to Governments and other national evaluation system stakeholders in the countries where we work.

CLEAR-AA engagements with government institutions at national and regional levels, with executives and legislatures alike, reveal that not including the voices of vulnerable and marginalized people in shaping development agendas is a threat to long-term sustainability and prosperity. This is particularly true when the failures of development projects are attributed to factors determined through narrow diagnostics of the situation undertaken prior to interventions and with limited engagement with the actual context.

Monitoring and evaluation are value-laden exercises where judgment calls are made, often drawing from a wide and diverse variety of influencing factors, underpinned by values and ideals subscribed to by decision makers whose interests are other than those of the people whose development they manage. The findings and recommendations arising from M&E processes have a profound effect on projects and programmes. They influence funding decisions and have a key role in the design and targeting of programmes and projects, giving M&E practitioners enormous power that needs to be recognized and wielded with care and caution. When implementation choices around strategies, methods and approaches exclude important individuals and groups, there is a heightened risk of misidentifying problems and choosing inappropriate methods for monitoring and evaluation, which leads to unhelpful and potentially harmful analyses and inaccurate perceptions of performance and results. This makes it essential that M&E processes not leave anyone behind if they are to contribute meaningfully to the achievement of development processes.

FRAMING THE CONVERSATION – WHO GETS LEFT BEHIND IN EVALUATION?

As part of the 2019 NEC Conference in Hurghada, Egypt, CLEAR-AA facilitated a workshop to develop foundational guiding principles for leaving no one behind in evaluation practice. The workshop drew participants from government, UNDP, other United Nations agencies and members of the non-governmental organization and civil society communities from across the globe. Through an engaging and interactive process, participants drew on several frameworks to guide the conversation around the issues of exclusion and inequality in the conduct of monitoring and evaluation.

To guide a frank discussion on the issues of citizen and public participation, power, inclusion and agency, Sherry Arnstein's 1969 Ladder of Participation was used as an

initial framework to start the conversation with participants on what it means to leave people behind in development generally and in monitoring and evaluation specifically.

The purpose of the conversation was to situate the subsequent discussion within the context of a growing global concern about inequality and exclusion and the need to find ways of ensuring inclusion and authentic participation. Presenting the framework helped initiate a discussion on the power dynamics inherent in development processes, and on how meaningful participation is fostered when people who are usually powerless are purposively included in M&E processes and how doing so can be both the cause and effect of a shift in power. The group agreed that Arnstein's statement from 50 year ago, that "participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless", remains as true today as it was then.

After setting the tone by discussing levels of participation, the focus shifted to gaining an understanding of the reasons why people get left out of M&E processes, or in the language of the United Nations system, get "left behind". The workshop used the UNDP 2018 framework for implementation entitled "What does it means to leave no one behind" to initiate discussion among participants on their personal experiences. There was broad agreement that the following five key factors identified in the framework are a very helpful starting point for understanding the drivers of exclusion:

- Discrimination
- Shocks and fragility
- Governance issues
- Socioeconomic status
- Geography

During the workshop, a number of interesting and illustrative examples were used to highlight the issues. These examples included a description of the situation of cattle herders in mountainous regions of Lesotho who are cut-off from services because of geography, among other reasons. There was also a lively discussion on climate change and how its effects on livelihoods are becoming a reality for many people all over the world, particularly the most poor and vulnerable who are already living on the margins.

There was strong agreement that despite efforts to combat gender inequality, it remains a major problem and driver of inequality. Many of the workshop participants noted that several of the factors listed above often work in tandem to exacerbate the situation faced by many people experiencing exclusion. Participants acknowledged that progress in addressing these factors is often slow and incremental and requires sustained and thorough analyses by development practitioners to fully understand the contexts in which development processes take place and how results are really achieved. And there was agreement that this alone is not enough: there needs to be a deliberate and purposeful focus on implementing adequately resourced processes

that empower people who are often excluded to participate in development and M&E processes.

DEVELOPING THE PRINCIPLES

The workshop then turned its attention to evaluations specifically, and used BetterEvaluation's Rainbow Framework[24] as a prompt to reflect on the range of inter-related tasks that need to be undertaken to do evaluations well and consider how equity and inclusion can be addressed throughout the evaluation process.

The seven clusters of evaluation-related tasks identified in the Rainbow Framework are:

- Defining the intervention
- Framing the evaluation
- Describing results
- Understanding causality
- Synthesizing data from various sources
- Reporting and supporting use
- Managing evaluations

Having been reminded by BetterEvaluation what has to be done to do good evaluations, the workshop considered three evaluations conducted in Bangladesh, the Islamic Republic of Iran and South Africa as examples of evaluation practice. Participants suggested who had been left behind in the three cases and why, and used the case reviews to propose how things could have been done differently in each case to make sure "no one got left behind". The suggestions of what could have been done better were then clustered into five areas where practices needed to be improved.

The five areas of potential improvement were then rephrased as guiding principles. The GUIDE approach to principles (described in Michael Q. Patton's book "Principles-Focused Evaluation")[25] was used to support the exercise of turning the five areas of practice into principles and to ensure that they were clear, meaningful and actionable. In terms of the GUIDE approach, principles should:

1. Provide guidance on what to do, how to think, what to value and how to act to be effective.

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24   Better Evaluation. (2014). Rainbow Framework. Better Evaluation, 12.

25   Quinn Patton, M., & Campbell-Patton MESI, C. E. (2017). Principles-Focused Evaluation. Retrieved from http://www.cehd.umn.edu/OLPD/MESI/spring/2017/Patton-Principles.pdf

2. Be useful in informing choices and decisions.

3. Inspire by evoking a sense of purpose.

4. Be developmental and adaptable, applicable to diverse contexts over time and provide a way to navigate complexity and uncertainty.

5. Be evaluable, meaning that it should be possible to judge and document whether it is actually being followed and what results emerge from following the principle.

During the process of phrasing the principles, a sixth was added that recognizes the special care that needs to be taken in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

The six principles developed in the workshop are the following:

Principle 1: Map evaluation stakeholders thoroughly and in detail at the outset of the evaluation.

Undertake detailed and thorough stakeholder mapping processes at the outset of every evaluation, taking care to consider who may be being left behind, in order to facilitate thorough public participation and engagement. This will lead to better evaluation results, greater credibility of findings and more ownership by the publics.

Principle 2: Sustain stakeholder engagements throughout evaluation processes

Ensure regular engagement of diverse groups throughout evaluation processes so that they have an opportunity to have their voices heard and provide space for them to contribute in respectful and enabling environments.

Principle 3: Use diverse and appropriate evaluation methods

Make use of diverse, appropriate and inclusive evaluation methods that are tailored to the needs of the evaluation participants, especially the users of the evaluation, and which take account of the possibility of people being left behind, in order to produce accurate, evidence-based and actionable findings and recommendations.

Principle 4: Always consider and be sensitive to the context

Carefully consider the socioeconomic, political and legal context throughout the evaluation process in order to achieve validity, ensure appropriateness and take account of who may be being left behind.

Principle 5: Disseminate evaluation findings

Disseminate comprehensive evaluation results transparently and equitably, taking care to make sure that they reach people who may be left behind, in order to contribute to an inclusive culture of evidence-based decision-making.

Principle 6: Be particularly vigilant about leaving no one behind in conflict-affected and fragile contexts and in humanitarian crises

In fragile contexts and in situations of humanitarian crisis, the principles that seek to ensure evaluation leaves no one behind should be applied even more rigorously and conscientiously since the risks are higher and the possible consequences of exclusion are potentially even more damaging

CONCLUSION: USING THE PRINCPLES

The principles developed in the workshop were presented by representatives of the workshop participants as part of the main NEC conference proceedings, where they were enthusiastically received. There was widespread recognition that the process of developing the principles was made special because it was inclusive and participatory and that this heightened their usefulness and applicability.

While the principles were warmly received, there were concerns that they do not address certain important issues, especially the need to consider the effects of human activity on natural systems and on our fellow non-human beings. The general consensus was that the principles are a good start with room for further development.

Overall, the principles were recognized as a useful contribution to growing the evaluation field and as a good starting point for the process of growing an evaluation practice that complements and adds value to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Ways of taking the process forward will have to be determined but the role of the UNDP in providing a space for this important conversation is gratefully acknowledged.