

2 NATIONAL EVALUATION SYSTEMS IN LATIN AMERICA: CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED FOR OTHER REGIONS



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National evaluation systems (NES) are defined as the sum of all processes, institutions, proceedings and structures that define and allow the evaluation of national public policy in a country. To be functional, NES should have minimum set of characteristics to be effective: formal existence, under the authority of the executive branch; regular monitoring and evaluation activities, bolstered by the development of appropriate tools and instruments; intention of global coverage; use of information; explicit articulation of users' and system functions; and a regulatory role within the public administration system.⁶⁰

NES are relatively new in Latin America. Although not all countries in the region have systems that regulate and standardize the planning, implementation and use of evaluations of public interventions, many countries have made great strides along these lines.

As mentioned by Martinaitis et al.,⁶¹ the existence of NES has a great impact on decision-making processes at the political and institutional levels, as well as the use made of the evaluation results. The existence of robust NES is considered vital, generating relevant and timely information oriented to decision-making and increasing the commitment of the actors involved to use the evaluation results.

In the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, NES might enable the technical, conceptual and political conditions to evaluate the progress of a country towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), review programmes from a holistic point of view or facilitate inclusion in the public agenda of civil society, academia and the private sector.

FOCELAC (Fomento de capacidades en evaluación en Latinoamérica – Capacity development in evaluation in Latin America) is a project on evaluation capacity development and articulation of actors in evaluation in Latin America, implemented by the German Institute for Development Evaluation, known as DEval, and the Costa Rican Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy (Ministerio de Planificación

60 Adapted from Pérez, G., & Maldonado, C. (2015). *Panorama de los sistemas nacionales de monitoreo y evaluación en América Latina*. Ciudad de México: CIDE CLEAR.

61 Martinaitis, Ž. et al. (2019), "Evaluation systems: How do they frame, generate and use evidence?", *Evaluation*, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 46-61.

Nacional y Política Económica (MIDEPLAN), which aims to strengthen the NES in Costa Rica. It has also recently initiated support to strengthening the culture of evaluation in Ecuador.

Following its interest in the experiences of these countries in the construction, implementation, strengthening and management of their NES, as well as the challenges faced and the lessons learned, FOCELAC organized an exchange with experts from the two countries and from Mexico and Colombia, using their NES as examples of good practice.

The discussion is embedded in a context where state democratic institutions are fairly consolidated, but still face extralegal, antidemocratic interests. Against this background, civil society's trust in public institutions is very low, which is another challenge for NES. This context allows us to point out strengths and challenges in the consolidation of NES from the regional and integrative perspective of the Regional Evaluation Network.

CHALLENGES FOR COSTA RICA IN THE PROCESS OF STRENGTHENING THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF EVALUATION⁶²

FOCELAC has been working with MIDEPLAN, supporting the institutionalization of evaluation. Even with this support, it has faced challenging issues, such as:

- Strengthening the linkage between the evaluation and the systematic use of its results in the public management cycle for development results
- Assuring continued support to the NES and National Evaluation Agenda during each presidential period
- Developing incentives for the practice of evaluation, as well as linking it with the public policy cycle
- Promoting evidence-based decision-making to improve the design, implementation and results of public interventions
- Deepening the scope of evaluations, to have better measurement and assessment of the effects of public interventions (databases and information systems)
- Integrating the participation of different public sectors in evaluation processes to strengthen the transparency, accountability and legitimacy of public actions
- Evaluating the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda

62 Based on the participation at the National Evaluation Capacities (NEC) conference of Carolina Zúñiga, Evaluation Analyst, Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy, Costa Rica.

IN MEXICO, POLITICAL CONTEXTS DETERMINED THE CREATION AND CONSOLIDATION OF NES⁶³

As stated by Krapp and Geuder-Jilg,⁶⁴ enabling conditions in the political context that allow the consolidation of NES in a country are important. Mexico is a particular case since it did not have this enabling context. Rather, the lack of adequate political conditions led to the creation of the NES.

Some of the lessons learned from the creation of the NES in Mexico are:

- The balance of power between Congress and the Executive is important.
- Credibility and trust should be at the centre of the overall institutional set-up.
- Academic council members are independent and objective regarding public interventions, which make them key members of the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy.
- Maintaining the fine balance between accountability and policy improvement is important.

STRATEGIC ALLIANCES TO STRENGTHEN A NATIONAL EVALUATION BODY: ECUADOR⁶⁵

For the fulfilment and sustainability of a strong NES, it is necessary to generate strategic alliances with the diversity of actors involved. To this end, in Ecuador the Evaluation Platform was created as a space to create such alliances, based on the experience of MIDEPLAN in Costa Rica and with the support of FOCELAC.

The Platform intends to achieve concrete consensus and agreements, promote collaborative work and structure articulated actions that aim to boost evaluation in the country and the active participation of civil society.

The institutionalization of evaluation is a task and responsibility of all evaluation-related actors in the country. Therefore, the public sector, civil society, academia, voluntary organizations for professional evaluation and international cooperation partners should establish synergies and strategic alliances.

Beyond political will, strengthening the role of organized civil society and academia is essential to promote the sustainability of the actions carried out.

63 Based on the participation at the NEC conference of Gonzalo Hernández, evaluation specialist in the public sector, former director of the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy, Mexico.

64 DEval Policy Brief 7/2018.

65 Based on the participation at the NEC conference of Viviana María Lascano Castro, Director of Public Policy Evaluation, Technical Secretariat of Planning, Government of Ecuador.

THE EXPERIENCE OF COLOMBIA IN EVALUATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA⁶⁶

Colombia has adopted the 2030 Agenda in the National Development Plan since 2018, integrating the global, national, local and sectoral agendas to comply with the SDGs.

The *Strategy for the implementation of the SDGs in Colombia*⁶⁷ consists of: (1) a monitoring and reporting scheme; (2) alliances with non-governmental actors; (3) a territorial strategy; and (4) access to open data for monitoring compliance with the objectives.

Some of the challenges faced by the NES are:

- Improving knowledge of ways to ensure that evidence is used to inform decisions
- Disseminating evidence to different audiences
- Using behavioural science to help understand motives
- Democratizing evidence by making it accessible
- Working with local partners

INSTITUTIONALIZING EVALUATION SYSTEM PROCESSES AND CONSOLIDATION OF AN EVALUATION CULTURE IN LATIN AMERICA: RELAC⁶⁸

The Latin American and Caribbean Monitoring, Evaluation and Systematization Network (ReLAC) conducted a survey on national priorities, the SDGs and evaluation during the first quarter of 2019. The survey aimed to identify national priorities regarding the SDGs and their evaluation in the region. The survey was completed by 15 national voluntary organizations for professional evaluation from Latin America.

Some of the conclusions of the analysis show that:

- The historical opportunity of the SDGs is recognized as a means to address the issue of development with a more comprehensive approach and a view to sustainability.
- The outlook in the countries is very diverse in terms of national priorities, the SDGs and their link to the evaluation.
- Several countries have favourable measures for institutionalization of the evaluation, but only three countries reported having NES.
- The role of the evaluation should be the supervision and monitoring of policies and strategies to demonstrate progress and compliance with the SDGs.
- To make a qualitative leap in the commissioning, conduct and use of evaluation in response to the SDGs, it is necessary to strengthen both the multisectoral dialogue and collaboration.

66 Based on the participation at the NEC conference of Fernando Bucheli, Senior Evaluation Advisor, Public Policy Monitoring and Evaluation Area, National Planning Department, Government of Colombia.

67 National Council of Economic and Social Policy Republic of Colombia (CONPES 3918).

68 Based on the participation at the NEC conference of Janett Salvador Martínez, ReLAC board member.

EVALUATION CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT IN LATIN AMERICA: FOCELAC

The DEval capacity development project, FOCELAC, is conceived as multi-stakeholder platform to support evaluation capacity development in Latin American countries. It applies a systemic approach which stresses the necessity to work on three levels: individual, institutional and contextual.⁶⁹

Some of the main lessons learned from the use of a systemic approach for an evaluation capacity development project are that in stable systems which do not yet have adequate evaluation structures, there are good starting points to promote the use of evaluations in political decision-making processes. The willingness of stakeholders plays a considerable role in the success of the systemic approach, and even under difficult conditions, stakeholders' awareness of the usefulness of evaluation can be raised and the discourse on evaluation can be encouraged.

Below are some strengths and limitations of the systemic approach to evaluation capacity development:

Strengths

- Relevant actors collaborate and increase their ownership of evaluation processes.
- As different actors are involved in evaluation systems, the sustainability of the system is guaranteed, even if there is a change of government.

Limitations

- In authoritarian systems and fragile contexts, it is almost impossible to implement this approach. Favourable entry points for timely evaluation capacity development activities may be difficult to find.
- In such countries, calling for transparency and accountability may jeopardize the safety of strategic actors.

To promote the use of evaluation capacity development approaches in other regions, DEval has gathered some **lessons learned** for donors, state authorities and voluntary organizations for professional evaluation.

FOR DONORS/INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING EVALUATION CAPACITIES

- The process of applying a systemic approach in evaluation capacity development is gradual and requires meticulous work with strategic public sector and other partners.

69 **Individual capacity:** Individuals such as civil society representatives, evaluators, public staff and parliamentarians are aware of the potential of evaluation and can conduct, use and/or steer evaluations. **Institutional capacity:** Organizations such as public and private institutions, voluntary organizations for professional evaluation, academia, parliaments and civil society are oriented to use, train on, conduct and/or gain a foothold on evaluation matters. **Enabling environment:** The country has the political and technical conditions that embed evaluation as a key matter for decision-making.

- It is necessary to understand the culture of the countries in which to develop evaluation capacities, how they prioritize evaluation and at what political levels project impacts can be possible.
- It is necessary to have a strong public sector partner which can eventually lead evaluation actions on its own.
- The application of the model in authoritarian national systems, complex contexts and fragile democracies could have more moderate results. Favourable entry points for timely evaluation capacity development activities may be difficult to find.

FOR STATE AUTHORITIES THAT ALREADY HAVE SOME EVALUATION SYSTEM

- The systemic participation of actors from all sectors (public, private, civil society, academia, voluntary organizations for professional evaluation) is essential to ensure the creation of a robust and sustainable evaluation culture.
- Standardize the use of terminology, tools and procedures for the development of evaluation throughout the public sector to enhance a common understanding and coordination among state actors.
- Evaluation capacity development is not an objective per se but should ultimately aim at enhancing the use of evaluations for decision-making processes. Mechanisms should be designed accordingly.
- Public institutions must ensure the availability of financial resources for sustained training processes and the execution of evaluations (financing should not depend on international cooperation).

FOR VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL EVALUATION

- To fulfil their essential role in consolidating an evaluation culture, evaluation networks must be robust, committed and active actors with strong links to the evaluation community.
- Working with emerging young evaluators is key to ensuring the sustainability of capacity development at the individual level, making it important to include them in different evaluation missions and networking spaces.
- Voluntary organizations for professional evaluation should integrate emerging young evaluators into their governance structures and strategies to ensure that leadership is created and maintained over time.