16. MEXICO

INCENTIVES IN THE USE OF EVALUATIONS AS A TOOL FOR IMPROVING PUBLIC POLICY

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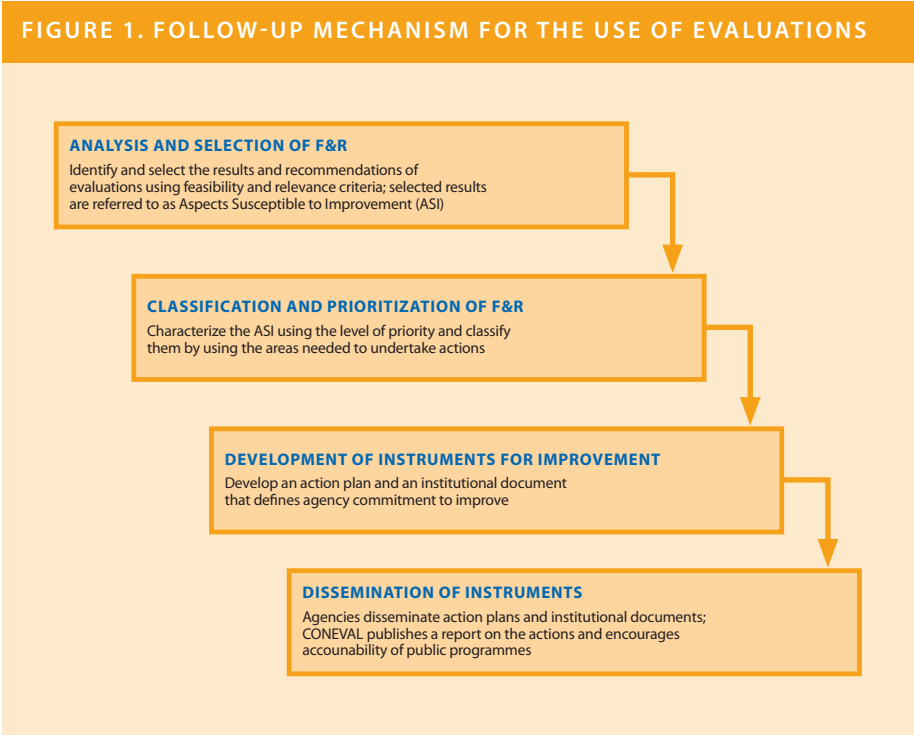
INTRODUCTION

Given the current challenges of social and economic inequality and poverty faced by developing nations, governments must continuously improve public policies in order to secure the conditions for the population to exercise their social rights.

One of the primary tools adopted by the Mexican federal government is the use of evaluations as a key element of improving government performance and measuring the results of public action. Therefore, since 2008, Mexico has built an enabling environment with one principle: to create the right incentives for the programmes' operators to use the evaluations.

For this reason, the National Council for Social Development Policy Assessment (CONEVAL), the Secretary of Finance and Budget, and the Secretary of Public Administration issued the Follow-up Mechanism for the Use of Evaluations, with the objective of institutionalizing the use of external evaluations' findings and recommendations. This paper aims to demonstrate the positive incentives created by the Follow-up Mechanism for using evaluations to improve social programmes in Mexico from 2008 to 2012.

M&E IN THE MEXICAN SYSTEM

In 2005, the General Law of Social Development established the creation of CONEVAL, a public organization with autonomy and the technical capacity to generate objective information on the social policy in order to improve public programmes, decision-making and accountability. The main functions of CONEVAL are to conduct national, state and municipal

FIGURE 1. FOLLOW-UP MECHANISM FOR THE USE OF EVALUATIONS

ANALYSIS AND SELECTION OF F&R
Identify and select the results and recommendations of
evaluations using feasibility and relevance criteria; selected results
are referred to as Aspects Susceptible to Improvement (ASI)

CLASSIFICATION AND PRIORITIZATION OF F&R
Characterize the ASI using the level of priority and classify
them by using the areas needed to undertake actions

DEVELOPMENT OF INSTRUMENTS FOR IMPROVEMENT
Develop an action plan and an institutional document
that defines agency commitment to improve

DISSEMINATION OF INSTRUMENTS
Agencies disseminate action plans and institutional documents;
CONEVAL publishes a report on the actions and encourages
accounability of public programmes

Source: Based on CONEVAL, 2008, 2009, 2010-2011, 2012-2013.

poverty measurements and to regulate and coordinate the evaluation of social development
policy and programmes implemented by public agencies.

In order to achieve its evaluation responsibilities, CONEVAL has established, in part-
nership with the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Service, an M&E
system. The purpose of the system is to generate information from the results and the
overall performance of government programmes. Since institutionalizing the M&E system,
CONEVAL identified the absence of clear incentives for using evaluation results. The evidence
of improvement of public policies as a consequence of evaluations was almost non-existent.

FOLLOW-UP MECHANISM TO EXTERNAL
EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS

CONEVAL, the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Service designed
the Follow-up Mechanism for the Use of Evaluations[75] to institutionalize the process of

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75 The Follow-up Mechanism for Use of Evaluations identifies aspects that are susceptible to
improvement. These include the findings, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified by the
evaluator, the external evaluation and/or reports that can be addressed to improve the programme.

FIGURE 2. EVOLUTION OF THE PARTICIPATION OF GOVERNMENT AGENCIES IN THE FOLLOW-UP MECHANISM

PERIOD	NUMBER OF SECRETARIES	NUMBER OF PROGRAMMES	NUMBER OF ASPECTS SUSCEPTIBLE OF IMPROVEMENT DEFINED IN THE ACTION PLANS
2012–2013	13	113	641
2011–2012	14	108	413
2009–2010	15	150	871
2008–2009	11	91	930

Source: Based on CONEVAL, 2008, 2009, 2010-2011, 2012-2013.

results follow-up to facilitate evaluation use. The mechanism's main objectives are to establish a general procedure to monitor improvement areas identified in the evaluations, and to disseminate the commitments made by programme operators to improve public programmes. The mechanism applies to all federal agencies and has an annual implementation cycle.

The Follow-up Mechanism for the Use of Evaluations encourages the participation of several actors, including those in programme units, evaluation units, and programming and budget departments inside agencies. Furthermore, as part of the feedback process, continuous meetings are held between evaluators and programme operators in order to consider the opinions of all stakeholders involved.

As observed in Figure 1, the mechanism is integrated by four stages. In the first stage, stakeholders select aspects they will define as susceptible of improvement by using feasibility, capability and explicitness criteria. Stakeholders do not have to address all the recommendations. In this stage, the main assumptions are that, having the results of the evaluation, programmes operators have more knowledge and information about the most effective actions that can improve the programme, have certainty regarding constraints (e.g. budgeting, human and technological) to define actions to improve, and have the most information about the political arena that will affect the effectiveness of the improving actions.

In the second stage, stakeholders define the responsible areas that must take action in order to improve the programme. Because implementing any programme entails interactions among several areas (e.g. operation, budgeting, targeting), the improving actions cannot be undertaken by a single area.

The third and fourth stages consist of the elaboration of the action plans and its publication on CONEVAL Web pages and those of each agency accountable for the plans. The last stage encourages the operation responsible for performing the commitments defined in

FIGURE 3. ACTIONS IMPLEMENTED TO IMPROVE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

ACTIVITY	2011	
	ACTIONS	PARTICIPATION
Improve activities or programme processes	163	71%
Modify programme's services or goods	27	12%
Substantially reorient the programme	35	15%
Increase or reallocate the programme	3	2%
TOTAL	228	100%

Source: CONEVAL, 2010-2011.

the action plans to improve the programmes and report the advance of each action during specific dates in the cycle.

RESULTS OF THE FOLLOW-UP MECHANISM FOR USE OF EVALUATION

The Follow-up Mechanism for Use of Evaluation, designed under an incentive scheme, has motivated agencies to take concrete actions to improve programmes. In Mexico, evidence suggests that evaluations are becoming a key factor driving public policy change. In 2011, according to the classification established in the mechanism regarding the priority level (high, medium, low), 55 percent of improvement areas identified were listed as high priority concerning the purpose of the programmes, 32 percent were classified as medium priority and 13 percent as low priority.

In addition, since 2012, CONEVAL has measured the improvements' characteristics using only the aspects susceptible of improvement that were fulfilled at the time. Figure 3 shows the outcomes of the changes implemented in 2011 as a result of using the findings and recommendations of evaluations.

The greatest achievement of this exercise is to show the increase and systematic use of evaluations. However, there are several challenges that Mexico still needs to overcome in order to enhance the culture of the use of evaluations, such as increasing the quality and relevance of the evaluations themselves.

CONCLUSIONS

Countries must develop incentives tailored to their own context in order to achieve the efficient use of evaluations. All actors involved in the evaluation process must be committed to considering the information derived from the M&E process and attaining continuous

improvement in the cycle of public policy. Mexico's methodology includes positive incentives that can be used by other M&E systems. In Mexico, recommendations derived from evaluations are not legally mandatory.

There are two main reasons that explain the mechanism. First, there is the assumption that programme operators know the programme best, and if they are unwilling to adopt the necessary recommendations, there will be fewer possibilities for success. Second, internal and external evaluators can easily undermine the importance of change in the political arena. As evaluation does not often demonstrate these conditions on time, programme operators will be unable to implement proper modifications.

In essence, it is important to find the right incentives that will motivate operators to obtain the necessary information and implement the changes they consider most appropriate. So far, Mexico has provided proper incentives by raising awareness of evaluations and by going public in the media with a call for action in evaluation use. With constant effort, these strategies may continue to be successful and fulfil the expectation of higher participation.

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