

5. SOUTH ASIA

WHY NATIONAL EVALUATION POLICIES MATTER IN SOUTH ASIA

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INTRODUCTION

Developing and strengthening evaluation policy in South Asia is important for many reasons. South Asia has a high level of poverty. In addition, most of the countries in South Asia depend on donor funds and foreign loans for development projects. Many public-sector development projects do not achieve host countries' goals and objectives. Monitoring of public-sector projects is poor, and political intervention to ensure M&E implementation is limited; evaluation practitioners often blame legislators for not taking action. In this context, a group of committed parliamentarians organized efforts to establish national evaluation policies in their respective countries and to ensure transparency and accountability in public-sector development projects.

The practice of evaluation is yet to be fully institutionalized in South Asia. As compared to other regions, there are some countries that are at an equal or higher level and some countries at lower levels in terms of national level evaluation practices. India and Sri Lanka are good examples of countries where a stronger evaluation culture is being institutionalized. India is currently implementing the Performance Monitoring and Evaluation System, which covers 80 departments and 800 responsibility centres (in addition, 15 states have adopted the system, cutting across political lines). In Sri Lanka, there is a strong evaluation culture, with civil society participating in evaluation through the Sri Lanka Evaluation Association. At the public-sector level, the Sri Lanka Ministry of Planning has a national operations room

that links most of the ministries for monitoring of public-sector development projects. In addition, Sri Lanka was the first country in the region to develop a national evaluation policy. However, due to the lack of an enabling political environment, the national evaluation policy is yet to be legislated.

The South Asian subregion has a growing evaluation culture and strong civil society engagement. The Community of Evaluators is the main regional evaluation network.

There are country-level evaluation networks in many South Asian countries. The Sri Lanka Evaluation Association has the longest history as a country network in the region. The association work closely with the government of Sri Lanka to strengthen evaluation policy in the country and runs professional capacity-building workshops and international conferences. The Sri Lanka Evaluation Association is the first national evaluation body to have advocated for a national evaluation policy, which was brought up to a draft policy at the cabinet level. The Pakistan Evaluation Network also has many years of experience working with evaluation professionals and policymakers. The Network is working with parliamentarians towards national policy development. The Centres of Excellence in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Nepal and the Development Evaluation Society of India are the other country-level evaluation networks.

Teaching Evaluation in South Asia is another initiative in South Asia to enhance professional development in the region. The Evaluation Conclave is now becoming a regular event that brings together evaluation professionals from around the world to share experiences. The Parliamentarians Forum on Development Evaluation complements this process, contributing value to South Asian evaluation policy development efforts.

The Parliamentarians Forum on Development Evaluation is focusing on attaining achievements in line with EvalYear 2015 goals. EvalYear will be a unique opportunity to focus on diverse approaches to evaluation. The forum will act as a catalyst for important conversations and thinking at international, regional, national and subnational levels on M&E's role in good governance for equitable and sustainable human development. Evaluation can enable leaders and civil society to develop and support better policies, implement them more effectively, safeguard the lives of people and promote well-being for all. Evaluation can enable leaders to consider social, political, technical and financial factors, and help leaders report to their constituents about the impact of their decisions and elicit feedback from every group. However, if evaluation is to play these roles, more dedicated efforts, systems change, capacity building and resources will be required.

The intention of EvalYear is to position evaluation in the policy arena by raising awareness of the importance of embedding M&E systems in the development and implementation of the forthcoming Sustainable Development Goals and all other critical local contextualized goals at the international and national levels. EvalYear is about taking mutual responsibility for policies and social action through greater understanding, transparency and constructive dialogue.

MAIN CONTENTS

None of the South Asian countries have a national evaluation policy in place, although each country has a fairly satisfactory M&E mechanism in its respective public sector. This issue has been discussed in many regional evaluation conferences, but it has not yet been possible to bring policymakers and evaluation practitioners together on the same stage. To address this challenge and create an environment to establish national evaluation policies in South Asian countries, a group of parliamentarians initiated the Parliamentarians Forum on Development Evaluation, a group committed to development evaluations in South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation countries. The forum's goals include advancing an enabling environment for nationally owned, transparent, systematic and standard development evaluation processes that ensure aid effectiveness, achievement of results and sustainable development in line with country-level national evaluation policies. The forum's objectives are:

- National evaluation policies endorsed by the respective South Asian governments are in place and effective;
- A space is created for dialogue between legislators and the evaluation community;
- Improved capacity of parliamentarians who are committed to development evaluation in the country; and
- Established country-level mechanisms that are in line with national evaluation policies, ensuring results-oriented and sustainable development.

The forum has conducted a panel on enabling an environment for development evaluation in Kathmandu, Nepal. A representation of all South Asian country parliamentarians is planned in Colombo, Sri Lanka, to coincide with the Sri Lanka Evaluation Association's international conference. The forum will conduct a panel on Why National Evaluation Policies Matter in South Asia.

The forum has planned several strategies to achieve its intended results. A mapping exercise will help to understand the current global situation, with specific information on South Asia. Based on the mapping's findings, strengths in countries with national evaluation policies and gaps in other countries can be identified. The mapping's findings will be presented to consultation delegates when the development of the model policy and country plans start. The consultation will allow policymakers, evaluation professionals and activists to come together and develop a product to promote the establishment of national evaluation policies. After the consultation, country teams will take the policy development process forward with expert technical support. The forum will work closely with governments and evaluation networks on inaugurating EvalYear at the country level.

The mapping exercise will map out the status of national evaluation policies, mechanisms and guidelines at the country level on a global scale, and will identify success stories in select countries. The mapping exercise will focus on detailed evaluation mechanisms in South Asian countries, which will be presented in a three-day regional consultation. The mapping exercise will be based on a desk review, Internet search, electronic media and communication. Based on the findings, the study will be extended to a comprehensive exercise in the long term.

Expected achievements: A mapping report outlining the status of national evaluation policies, mechanisms and guidelines at the country level, with special focus on South Asian countries. The report will include a table or chart that shows each country's status.

South Asia regional consultation with parliamentarians will develop a model national evaluation policy and country work plans to establish a policy.

Participation will include parliamentarians, representatives from national evaluation networks in each country, a representative from each regional evaluation network, representatives from the United Nations and other donors, stakeholders, EvalPartners and Parliamentarians Forum representatives, and experts from other regions.

Expected achievements: A draft model of national evaluation policy and the development of individual country work plans to lobby for the policy.

A small team of experts will provide technical support to country teams to adapt the model policy to their country contexts and to lobby for legislation.

Country teams include members of the Parliamentarians Forum on Development Evaluation, other interested policymakers, national evaluation network representatives, interested government officials and representatives from donors.

Participating countries are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. There is no cost involved for Sri Lanka, as two experts bear the cost (if there is any).

Expected achievements: Country teams receive necessary technical support to take the national evaluation policy forward.

Advocacy support will be provided to country teams to lobby legislation of the draft national evaluation policy. There is a need to identify who can do what regarding advocacy for lobbying national evaluation policies at the country level.

Advocate for the establishment of a national evaluation office hosted by the parliament, president or prime minister's office.

Expected achievements: A national evaluation office is established in at least one country in the five-year period.

Country-level inauguration of EvalYear 2015: Working with governments and evaluation networks to identify concrete activities and achievements for EvalYear (e.g. declaring evaluation week to get public attention and emphasize importance; decision to establish a national evaluation office hosted by the parliament, president or prime minister; development of evaluation guidelines in line with national evaluation policy; organizing public dialogues on national evaluation policy).

Expected achievements: EvalYear is used as an opportunity to get public attention and emphasize the importance of evaluation and evaluation policy.

CONCLUSIONS

There is a need for national evaluation policies in the region to promote the use of evaluation in development interventions in the public and private sectors.

Promote regional political champions to work with other stakeholders in taking forward policy development dialogues.

Parliamentarians' engagement in policy development processes at the country level is a needed and important element that should be supported by civil society.

REFERENCES

Eval Partners. 2013. "EvalYear Innovation Challenge announcement". Available at mymande.org/evalpartners/innovation_challenge. Last accessed 5 February 2014.