

9.4 | Session D4: Ethics and evaluation

Moderator

- ◆ Tina Tordjman-Nebe, Senior Evaluation Specialist, IEO, UNDP

Panellists

- ◆ Professor Nicoletta Stame, Vice-President, A Colorni-Hirschman International Institute, Italy
- ◆ Laura Fantini, independent consultant, advisor to Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- ◆ Adeline Sibanda, former president African Evaluation Association, South Africa



Ethics and Culture in Evaluation: Moving from guidelines to practice.

Ethics in evaluation is usually discussed in terms of the role of the evaluator who, together with being competent and independent, should be careful of “doing no harm” to the evaluand. This does not take into consideration the challenges met by evaluators in situations where change happens in unexpected ways, as a consequence of a multiplicity of factors and reverse causalities, involving different kinds of actors. To this end, recent guidelines and contributions have identified a larger area of ethics in evaluation, spanning from “tackling bad” to “doing good”.

- ◆ **Ethical scandals periodically engulf public institutions**, including the United Nations, and are deeply troubling given the reputational risk and our collective mandate to fight disease, hunger and climate change, and protect those most at risk.
- ◆ **As evaluators and evaluation commissioners, we have a duty to support oversight on ethical questions** (e.g. disability inclusion, environmental standards, leave no one behind), and also to model behavioural independence and integrity while “doing no harm”. There is great reputational risk associated with ethical issues.

- ◆ **Recent ethical guidelines of national, multilateral and bilateral organizations have shifted focus from “tackling bad” to “doing good”** (sometimes called the principle of “beneficence”). Three panellists shared their insights on what this means in practice:
 - ◆ The African Evaluation Principles firmly embed ethics into “made in Africa evaluation”, emphasizing indigenous knowledge and inclusion/connectedness. The principles are meant to empower Africans and support evaluation that is robust, ethically sound and rooted in local realities.
 - ◆ ‘Doing good’, ‘doing no harm’, ‘tackling bad’ and ‘preventing bad’ are four complementary but distinct ethical perspectives. A theoretical framework was presented outlining how these stances can shape the future of evaluation ethics, going beyond “what works” to focus on “what needs to be done” and “what would help”.
 - ◆ Two practical case studies were shared, showing how evaluators can help foster development practitioners’ evaluative and ethical compass. Insights included the need to be sensitive to the values of the people being evaluated, to consider diversity and inclusion throughout the process, and to think of implementers as partners in the evaluation process.
- ◆ A lively discussion brought out several **behavioural standards** for evaluators and evaluation commissioners (see conclusion).

Conclusion

The session brought out suggested behavioural standards for evaluators and evaluation commissioners, to include:

- ◆ Make sure ethical issues are included when an organization decides *what* should be evaluated, as well as within the scope of each individual evaluation. Make sure evaluations cover the things that matter to people on the ground.
- ◆ When designing an evaluation, be mindful of power asymmetries, consider equity (not just equality) and try to give voice to affected populations, including direct beneficiaries.
- ◆ Use available processes for external ethical review of evaluation designs and methodologies. Make sure evaluations go beyond doing no harm and strive to do good.
- ◆ Give value to local knowledge and identify and collaborate with local champions. Learn from indigenous communities and adapt.
- ◆ Be flexible and reflective, and value critical feedback.
- ◆ Identify potential unintended effects on affected populations, both of the intervention under scrutiny, and of the evaluation itself.

Quotes

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“The discourse of evaluation sometimes remains hidden so there is a role for evaluators as activists...activists against what we see in the field”

— **Laura Fantini**, independent consultant, advisor to Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

“We (evaluators) must learn and adapt global south and learn from Indigenous communities.”

— **Adeline Sibanda**, former president African Evaluation Association, South Africa

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Watch the session



Video recording of the Session D4:
[NEC 2022 | Stream D4 - Ethics and Evaluation - YouTube](#)

