

Building Evaluation Capacity in Nepal: An Inquiry into Opportunities and Challenges

Thakur Prasad Bhatta

The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system is increasingly considered an instrumental approach for development effectiveness. In the context of the dynamic and complex development field, the M&E system has become an important policy agenda in developing countries. It is widely recognized that strengthening national evaluation capacity is an essential component of development management. In the case of Nepal, the M&E system has been more rhetoric than reality in terms of its institutionalization. This issue has become more pronounced with the recent shift to a federal governance system, replacing the previous unitary political structure. However, this does not mean there are no opportunities for developing and using the M&E system to enhance development effectiveness. Indeed, there have been some important initiatives in recent times in Nepal aimed at building national capacity.

However, there is a severe inadequacy of research assessing the M&E policy and its practice in Nepal. This paper aims to explore the M&E policy and its practices in Nepal to identify the opportunities and challenges of the M&E system. To achieve this, the paper analyzes the role of evaluators, evaluation commissioners, and users in promoting and using evaluation. The paper is based on qualitative research and draws data from thematic reviews of selected literature, including the government's policy on evaluation, and the author's substantiated experience working as a professional evaluator. This paper argues that the evaluation field in Nepal is highly fragmented, which hinders the generation of knowledge and learning. It also reveals that the M&E field is not institutionalized and is practiced on an ad hoc basis, lacking coordination between the government, donors, and development NGOs.

As a consequence, national evaluation capacity is lagging far behind the rapidly growing and increasingly complex development landscape, viewed from the perspectives of stakeholders and diversity in approaches and models. Though the Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluators (VOPEs) are striving to expand their roles, they have not been adequately developed to influence the state and donor authorities, which are the main commissioning agencies for evaluations. Hence, arguably, there is a need for collaborative efforts among these three key actors of evaluation to contribute to the institutionalization of M&E, developing a national framework, and creating an enabling environment for the practice of M&E for development

effectiveness in general and for realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in particular, at present.

Key words: Monitoring and evaluation; M&E policy and practice in Nepal; opportunities and challenges; institutionalization