10 years International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth

The International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth is jointly supported by the United Nations Development Programme and the Government of Brazil.

One pager No. 272

ISSN 2318-9118

December, 2014

The Use of Data in the Monitoring and Evaluation of **Public Policies**

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From 1 September to 14 November 2014 the National Evaluation Capacities (NEC) Community, with support from the UNDP International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) and the Brazilian Ministry of Social Development (MDS), promoted an online discussion on 'The Role of Public Registries, Administrative Records and National Statistics in the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of Public Policies'.

The aim of the NEC Community is to discuss and present how national governments and partners are cooperating to implement the 18 NEC commitments[1] agreed on by the NEC conference participants in the lead-up to 2015, the International Year of Evaluation. The main ideas and perspectives shared in the latest e-discussion are presented here:

- In Sri Lanka, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have helped to target social interventions, to facilitate the collection of data on provincial distributions of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which helped the government formulate the 'Vision for the Future' national development framework, focused on inclusive growth and development.

- Mexican evaluations often feature questions that are considered to be far too open-ended and make it hard to generate statistics. Sometimes they also lack key indicators and do not adhere to standard formats, which hinders the process of extracting data to create a database. This becomes a challenge when evaluators try to compare institutions and statistics.

- In Malawi, cooperation between governments and statistics offices depends on whether they are part of the government or independent. When governments consider data produced by the statistics office as negative, there is a tendency to shy away from them. A solution would be to promote the independence of statistics offices, while sensitising top officials as to the importance of accurate data and employing research-based evaluations. Better funding is also an issue, as statistics institutions often depend on donor funds.

- Brazilian participants mentioned that it is necessary to dedicate more resources to collecting data and evaluating policies targeting vulnerable groups. Two suggestions were proposed: strengthening techniques to generate more disaggregated primary information, in partnership with local experts, and developing a federated infrastructure of government data, supported by agencies at federal, state and local levels, to promote cooperation between governments and national statistics institutions. To achieve this, it would be necessary to aggregate state and local databases. In addition, if there were more applications for government data, then demand for high-quality data would also grow.

- Uganda has implemented measures to produce disaggregated data, which has helped make issues such as gender budgeting and M&E become more institutionalised. However, these processes are more developed at central than at local government levels. Other highlights are the Ugandan Poverty Eradication Action Plan and the Participatory Poverty Assessment Process, which introduced the use of qualitative data in decision-making. It was also mentioned that qualitative data must be woven with quantitative data for meaningful interpretation of people's livelihoods, policy evolution and programme impact.

- Census, evaluations and administrative data are the main sources of accurate data in Australia. The 'Closing the Gap' data collected on indigenous issues are often used by policymakers. Census data, in general, are extensively used in policymaking, though sometimes they are used to justify decisions that have already been made.

- In Peru, concerns about confidentiality prevent government entities from using National Statistics Office data. It was also mentioned that the best way to conduct M&E is to use the right data, so it is necessary to align the objectives of social programmes with the data collected by institutions.

- Egypt has strong data and information collection capacities, although the public and policymakers do not always have access to it, due to bureaucracy or security issues, which is often the case in heavily militarised countries, where data are perceived as a key security issue. Nevertheless, the production of MDG reports has been useful in promoting inclusive data.

- In Madagascar, the last national census was conducted in 1993, which enhances the argument that frequency is a major issue. Often, data are neither available nor free. To obtain high-quality data, it would be necessary to promote an M&E culture, and to ensure the quality of administrative registries, it would be interesting to compare this information with studies conducted by other stakeholders.

- A participant from Panama shared insights on methodology: longitudinal panels are useful for historical follow-ups, which are important in domains such as poverty eradication, usually considered a long-term goal. Cross-sectional research should complement it, to capture changes in behaviour of critical variables. Descriptive analysis is useful to understand what has transpired, but not impacts. Inferential analysis allows for projections of the future, helping policymakers in their decision-making process. M&E in results-based management organisations should be enhanced, and research capacities in social fields must be increased, to use sophisticated technological research designs. Above all, it is necessary to sensitise policymakers to the fact that policies are a mix of political processes and scientific knowledge.

- The Evaluation Society of Kenya is a key actor in promoting a multi-stakeholder approach to M&E. Media and public awareness are also key tools in promoting the role of statistics in evidence-based decision-making. The declaration of 2015 as the International Year of Evaluation and other international initiatives, such as the NEC Community, are helping increase awareness of M&E. The necessity of promoting an M&E culture was emphasised by all the participants.

Data are the main pillar of the planning cycle for public policies. Enriched data are fundamental to good policy formulation, implementation and M&E. Evidence helps identify gaps in poorer regions to support programmes, since figures are important for budget allocations. This is especially relevant in sectors such as health, agriculture and trade. To be of use for policymakers, data must be credible, clear and gathered on a regular basis; they should also be transparent and readily available, to encourage feedback by civil society and crucial partners.

Reference:

National Evaluation Capacities Community UN Teamworks space <https://www.unteamworks.org/NEC> (accessed 19 November 2014).

Note:

1. <https://www.unteamworks.org/node/406397>.

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