Strengthening National Evaluation Capacities
to Evaluate Sustainable Human Development

by Ariane Cassoli Alvarenga,[1] Ana Rosa Soares[2] and Lívia Maria Da Costa Nogueira[1]

From 27 April to 22 May 2015 the National Evaluation Capacities (NEC) Community of Practice (COP), with support from the UNDP International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) and the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office (IEO), promoted an online discussion[3] linked to the upcoming NEC conference in Bangkok, on 'How the 2015 NEC Conference in Bangkok: 'Blending Evaluation Principles with Development Practices' can enhance national evaluation capacities and help to develop and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals'.[4] The following is a series of key ideas shared by participants regarding how governments can develop and strengthen the necessary national evaluation capacities to evaluate sustainable human development, and what the most effective process might be for the identification of indicators related to cross-cutting issues.

According to experts on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from UNDP Brazil, governments will need to be able to negotiate the final parameters of the post-2015 SDG agenda, guided not only by the aspirational nature of goals and targets but also by the reality of their societies as translated into indicators (either already available or to be constructed).

A monitoring and evaluation (M&E) specialist from Cameroon stated that evaluation networks that already exist in the country should spread across the national level, and there should be efforts to build capacities and engage more members. Indicators for cross-cutting issues should collect data considering gender, vulnerability, human rights, governance etc. and identify and engage beneficiaries in participatory activities. There should also be a specific mechanism in place, dedicated to the post-2015 agenda, to differentiate goals and target indicators.

Participants from Kenya mentioned, regarding indicator selection, that it is critical to understand the wider context that affects changes in individual and institutional attitudes, practices and behavior. The first step is to articulate the purposes of the sustainable development component of specific programmes/projects and the Theory of Change (ToC). The second step is to select one or more core purposes for the monitoring of any SDG-related ToC and set clear goals. Strengthening research and evaluation capacities of government collaborators and partner institutions is crucial to achieving the SDGs. Capacity assessment approaches and the design of strategic investment plans should be recognized as key strategic pillars with which governments can increase impact, learning and the adoption of innovation for sustainable development. An all-inclusive, multi-stakeholder approach allows for organisations specialised in certain areas to identify indicators. A key aspect is that data must be easily and cheaply available, and that will be a significant challenge.

In a more straightforward manner and from a short-term perspective, a contributor from Algeria wrote that countries should target SDGs related to the MDGs that they have failed to achieve. This means setting clear priorities for development, since the SDGs are interdependent. To monitor progress, developing capacities to collect and process disaggregated data would be helpful to establish targeted policies.

According to a participant from Sri Lanka, the SDGs need to be localised and contextualised according to each country, and countries' national evaluation systems need to be strengthened by establishing national evaluation policies and linking evaluation to planning, budgeting and policymaking. The Key Performance Indicators need to meet the SMART[5] criteria. Appropriate interventions, programmes and strategies to achieve the SDGs need to be well designed and objectively described, with strong ToC and intervention logic. Project, programme and public policy evaluations are vital to guide whether the intervention logic and ToC work as envisioned. Evaluation should expand beyond projects and programmes to cover thematic areas so that the SDGs will be monitored and evaluated at outcome and impact levels. Managing for Development Results (MfDR) should be introduced to complement evaluations. Sri Lanka's national budget will need to be aligned to locally contextualised SDGs and national development strategies (as defined by the National Development Framework).

According to a participant from the Dominican Republic, the country needs to strengthen its MfDR tools—especially the M&E sector—to achieve the SDGs. The National Development Strategy 2030, which also proposed the creation of the national M&E system as part of the National System of Planning and Public Investment (SNPIP), has been established in law. The Ministry of Public Administration leads the implementation of the Development model, while the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Planning and Development conducts M&E.

From Jamaica, it was mentioned that there is a need for countries to strengthen their civil registries, as they can be useful in the M&E process for the planning and implementation of development projects.

A participant from Niger outlined how essential it is to convince policymakers —especially in developing countries—of the importance of evaluation in the programme/project cycle.

A contributor from Mexico stated that, regarding cross-cutting issues, the path forward is to clearly define objectives and results. Indicators should be able to reflect changes in each one of the thematic components in holistic interventions.

Overall, COP participants agreed on the importance of setting clear goals for each national context to properly assess results. National capacities for evaluation need to be strengthened if the SDGs are to be achieved.

Notes:
1. UNDP/IPC-IG.
2. UNDP Independent Evaluation Office.
3. See <www.unteamworks.org/nec>.
4. Indran Naidoo, Director of UNDP IEO; Ana Rosa Soares, Evaluation Advisor from UNDP IEO; and Haroldo Machado Filho, Programme Specialist and SDGs Specialist from UNDP Brazil, were content moderators for this e-discussion.
5. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-focused, and Time- bound.