Evaluation in a shifting development landscape: ten challenges for the post-2015 era

Robert Picciotto, King’s College, London

“What we are witnessing is the dilution of an outdated concept ... into a new complex breed of public policies that attempt to confront the challenges of a globalized world”

Jean Michel Severino and Olivier Ray
Ten interconnected challenges for development evaluation

• New priorities
• New actors
• New fissures in the evaluation community
• New units of account
• New objects
• New models
• New methods
• New technologies
• New alliances
• New mandates for evaluation associations
#1: Embracing a new agenda

- **Broader scope**
  - Poverty reduction targeting vs. pbs w/o passports
  - Human development vs. human security

- **From growth to sustainability**
  - War on poverty vs. war on inequality, exclusion, civil strife
  - Environmental sustainability at centre stage

- **From country focus to sector focus**
  - Country strategy vs. Global Public Goods
  - PRSPs vs. PCD (symbolic MDG8 vs. unbundled SDG 17)

- **More complexity:**
  - MDGs: 8 goals and 18 targets
  - SDGs: 17 goals and 169 targets
#2: Adapting to a new architecture...

- New cast of aid players: emerging market economies, private charities, foundations, business leaders and global partnerships
- End of ODA monopoly ($134b in 2011) vs. new donors ($11b-$42b) and rising philanthropic aid ($59 billion)
- From tight DAC to loose *Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC)*
- 1990: 90% of poor in LICs vs. 30% today:
  - Evaluation capacity building in MICs?
  - Focus on evaluation in fragile states?
...and to evaluation “beyond aid”

• Developing countries’ exports (about $5.8 trillion) are 45 times the level of official aid flows
• Remittances from migrants ($283 billion) are 2.2 times as large as aid flows.
• Foreign direct investment ($700 billion): 5.2 times as large as aid flows.
• Royalty and licence fees: ($27 billion) are over a fourth of aid flows (TRIPS making things worse)
• Huge damage to developing countries of OECD countries’ unsustainable energy practices
#3. Bridging the cultures

• Policy ‘sticks’ vs. ‘carrots’ vs. ‘sermons’

• The philanthropies use modern business management techniques; ignore the divide between doing well and good; take risks and mobilize financial resources; fashion new development instruments, etc.

• Development evaluation will be called upon to bridge public/private/civil society perspectives
#4: Adopting new units of account

• The *country* was the privileged unit of account in the MDG era

• Given the new focus on global public goods *transnational networks and coalitions* will be the units of account

• Evaluations will emphasize collective global and regional impacts

• Hence the need to evaluate partnerships in a more rigorous way
#5: Filling evaluation gaps

A large array of new market based approaches and instruments, (e.g. International Finance Facility; Airline solidarity fund; Clean Development Mechanism; Advance Market Commitments; Social impact investing; Certification; Corporate social responsibility; Prizes and challenges; Risk reduction insurance products; Diaspora related initiatives, etc.) has escaped evaluation. Why? Is this a supply problem, a demand problem or both?
#6: Adopting progressive evaluation models

- Income disparities within developing countries are more unequal than in developed countries
- Undemocratic governance (and democracy capture) on the rise and environmental sustainability is threatened
- A transformative, affirmative, engaged evaluation model should supplant the client-controlled and goal-based approaches that currently dominate the field
- New evaluation models would
  - give far more weight to ethical concerns
  - emphasize **equity** and **sustainability**
  - incorporate new metrics
  - assess policy distortions
  - focus on governance
#7: Refurbishing the tool kit of development evaluation

• Results chains and experimental methods only fit static, predictable development contexts

• Emergence, conflict, uncertainty and non-linearity call for developmental evaluation driven by values and real time evaluation inspired by systems thinking (perspectives, boundaries, inter-relationships) and complexity theory

• Towards mixed models, designs and tools: observation, experiments, models, surveys, focus groups, interviews, benchmarking, natural experiments, contribution analysis, process tracing, qualitative comparative analysis, social network analysis, etc. etc.
#8: Putting IT to work

- There are more mobile phones in developing countries than in developed countries.
- The social media (Web 2.0) connect evaluators, program managers and beneficiaries for information sharing; analytic software; content; new ways of presenting results; etc.
- Big Data (Web 3.0) taps digital data stored on mobile phones, ATM machines, personal computers, pads, tablets, etc.
- Analysis of “digital data exhaust” secured from service providers under ethical protocols can help track impact in real time.
9: Minding the gaps

• Governance of development cooperation has become intricate, disaggregated and fluid

• Evaluation can help connect development knowledge creation and use through evaluation alliances on a global scale

• Improved connectivity of development evaluators across borders is needed through links among topical interest groups of evaluation associations

• Evaluators should reach out to other professional groups and academic disciplines to close the gap that currently separates development evaluation, social science theory and behavioral research
10: Empowering evaluation associations

- Evaluation is still a small, fragile, embattled and fledgling knowledge occupation
- Its market is being captured by consultants and auditors
- Evaluation associations will have to expand their memberships; work towards expanding education and training programs; move towards harmonization of guidelines; initiate credentialing, defend the evaluation brand; and promote evaluation excellence and utilization through professionalization
Possible essay topics

• Are the SDGs relevant to development evaluation?
• Is the end of the DAC monopoly a good thing or not?
• Is unity of purpose in evaluation a fool’s errand?
• Can evaluation help bridge the cultures?
• Are private sector actors mostly interested in self evaluation with help from pliable consultants?
• Have evaluators what it takes to tackle emerging conceptual, technical and measurement issues?
• Will evaluation be hobbled by data shortages and the immaturity of the new information technologies?
• Can the evaluation community summon sufficient leadership to do what needs to be done?