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

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"What we are witnessing is the dilution of an outdated concept … into a new complex breed of public policies that attempt to confront the challenges of a globalized world"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