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Evaluation 2030

What Does the Future Look Like?

Remarks by Caroline Heider, Director General, Independent Evaluation Group
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WHAT WORKS



Evaluation 2030 – What Does the Future Look Like?

2015 brought together three important development agendas. Central to them are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Created through an extensive consultation process, the SDGs set out a vision for 2030, adopted at the UN Summit in September. The SDG summit was preceded by the Addis-Ababa conference on Finance for Development (Fin4Dev), which brought together key development actors to discuss options for funding the ambitious SDGs. The Paris conference on climate finance (COP21) brought a particular focus on commitments – both in terms of goals and finance – to achieve greater sustainability of development processes and outcomes.

The agendas agreed at these three conferences are large, complex, and involve many different stakeholders, actions, funding sources, new partnerships, and so on. Each individually and together they have implications for evaluation, which pose challenges as much as they provide opportunities. We summarized IEG's findings relevant to the SDG Summit and the Fin4Dev conference in short publications.

I see four opportunities to change what we evaluate, and how. They will require growth and development of the evaluation profession, in terms of skills, methods, and practices. They offer opportunities for partnerships with new professions – from scientists dealing with behavioral change, complexity, Big Data, and game theory – that will strengthen evaluation without compromising its independence.

Opportunities to Overcome Fragmentation. The risk of fragmentation – parceling SDGs out into sector silos – was demonstrated as the MDGs got under way. One lesson we (should have) learned was that goals like reduced maternal mortality rates quickly got relegated to the health sector. However, they clearly required multi-sectoral responses. Progress suffered as interventions from a cross-section of sectors did not come together towards this goal. The SDGs try to preempt this risk of fragmentation: some cross-reference others to explain connections. While well intentioned, this might not stem institutional incentives to act otherwise. An opportunity exists to form alliances around areas of specialization, including in evaluation such as the one of the Rome-based evaluation offices to undertake an evaluability assessment of SDG2. However, a further challenge lies in areas that cut across SDGs and various aspects of climate change. Here evaluation needs to join up efforts to ensure we shed light on complex interrelated development challenges and outcomes. For specialized agencies this will require reaching out to other related actors. At the World Bank Group, solutions areas have come together that bridge some of these sectoral divides. At IEG we are realizing that one of our comparative advantages lies in evaluating complex issues that cut across various sectors or issues. For instance, an evaluation of the World Bank's work on health finance brought together practitioners from a number of practices. Or our evaluation of Bank Group assistance to resource-rich countries showcased different approaches taken and what can be learned from them. Our evaluations thus stimulate dialogue across the three Institutions of the World Bank Group, and across different practices within them. We have developed **Strategic Engagement Areas** that focus on the World Bank Group's goals – reduce poverty to 3% by 2030 and boost shared prosperity – but break them down into more cohesive sets of issues. This approach provides us with

- A platform for a more sustained engagement with Managements around a set of issues (from strategic choices about what gets evaluated to follow-up discussions),
- The opportunity to increase synergy between evaluations, enhancing their collective impact, and

- A focus to our methodology work. Our next step is to integrate complexity theory and methods into our evaluations to shed more light on interrelated development dynamics.

Opportunities to Assess Trade-Offs among Competing Priorities. Parts of the discussion in 2015 appeared as if it will be easy to achieve growth, zero poverty, and sustainability all at the same time, and under adverse climatic and economic conditions. Integrating these challenges requires a much better understanding of synergies and trade-offs. Efforts are being made to optimize positive synergies. But in many instances, positive synergies will be harder to identify. Competing needs and interests will put pressure on resources, institutions, and goals. Deeper changes in, for instance, consumption patterns will be needed. Policy-makers have always needed to make trade-offs, but these will become tougher as they have to balance growth, poverty, and sustainability. For evaluators the challenge is to assess how the trade-offs were made, whether they were right, and what their consequences were for development progress and outcomes. Our theory-based approaches that assess interventions against their own objectives are important, but do not shed sufficient light on values that drive choices, techniques that help inform decision-making, and their consequences. In IEG, we have assessed World Bank Group programs that aimed to balance difficult challenges and diverse objectives. For instance, evaluation of the World Bank’s forestry strategy unpacked how economic, social, and environmental goals were addressed. Or, the evaluation of the Bank Group’s Investment Climate Reforms looked at them from a point of view of enhancing the business environment and from the perspective whether they aimed to improve employment opportunities and conditions. IEG will continue expanding our understanding and methods to come to terms with values embedded in decision-making and our evaluative thinking, as well technical ways to assess the quality of trade-offs.

“An example of optimizing positive synergy lies in a new integrated approach to food. It links the entire production (agriculture) and supply chain (transport and warehousing) of food to sustainable consumption (health and nutrition). It aims to have positive effects on people and planet (less health issues, less waste, less emissions).”

Opportunities to Deepen Data and Understanding. The development sphere is increasingly crowded with many more players than tradition bilateral and multilateral institutions, whether new donor countries, private sector, foundations, and others. Sometimes they gather in partnerships, sometimes partnerships are set up and become agents in their own right. This has significant implications for understanding which action(s) lead to which results, and will further deepen challenges to accountability. In part, these issues can be addressed as we embrace complexity theories and methods to construct evaluation frameworks and questions. In addition, experimental and quasi-experimental evaluation methods have generated evidence to demonstrate the effects of specific interventions and controlled for intervening factors, where possible. Now, data science, especially Big Data and game theory, offers new opportunities to undertake “virtual” experiments in controlled environments. Using technology, game theory, and behavior change science can support evaluators fill data gaps by complementing traditional evaluation methods, help with identification of patterns, and test theories of change. Such applications will require testing and adaptation. They also create opportunities to make evaluations faster, less costly, and test whether or how experience from the past is a predictor for the future. IEG has evaluated cost-benefit analyses in the past and done some recent work on value-for-money that needs to be expanded and incorporated in our evaluations.

Opportunities for Faster Feedback Loops. Data science holds the additional promise to make feedback loops shorter and faster in monitoring, self-evaluation, and independent evaluation. Potential risks of, for instance, Big Data needs to be managed (just like for any other method) to ensure its results do not mislead

policy-makers and practitioners. Evaluators will need to grow into playing two roles: becoming educated in data science as consumers of Big Data and users of game theories, and become proficient in evaluating the use of Big Data and data science to determine whether and what effect these technologies have on development progress and outcomes.

In addition to these growth opportunities, I see several challenges that we need to face.

- **Conflict of Interest.** As technical areas become more and more sophisticated, it is difficult to find experts who can act as independent evaluators. They often will be part of the programs that are evaluated, or have an opposing view that may affect their impartiality.
- **Evaluation Effectiveness.** Regardless whether we produce demonstrable value, such as by rising to the opportunities mapped out above, or not, we are increasingly asked to demonstrate that evaluation has actually resulted in change. Our current method of reporting implementation rates of recommendations is inadequate. Just like development practitioners, we must set measurable objectives for our evaluation work, track progress, and allow independent verification.
- **Joint Evaluations.** Many of the opportunities discussed above suggest joining up evaluation work. Anyone in the profession who has managed joint evaluations knows the challenges: different practices, processes, norms, cultures, rating systems, yardsticks, all of which make joint work complicated.

Last but not least, the future of evaluation involves a much stronger focus on **evaluation capacity development**. The Fin4Dev conference set out that domestic public finance will become a more important source of finance by 2030. They – governments and citizens – will want to know how effective and sustainable their investments are. Together with the long-term trend of increasing interest in evaluation in client/partner countries, there will be a continuing and increasing demand for evaluation capacity development. I see evaluation capacity as a counterpart to statistical capacity, which the World Bank Group and UN have committed to strengthen, and needs to cover demand for evaluation (educating users of evaluation) and supply of evaluation (evaluation practitioners, including developing skills, professional standards, and good practice). IEG has strategically repositioned its evaluation capacity development work through CLEAR, and is working on a curriculum review of IPDET and possible changes to its business model. We are also exploring opportunities for the World Bank to embed evaluation capacity development in its country-level work.



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