Information and communication Technologies for Evaluation (ICT4Eval) –

Using Innovative Approaches to Development Evaluation

Welcome Remarks

by Director, IOE

Oscar Garcia

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1.   Ladies and gentleman, Good morning and a very warm welcome to IFAD.

2.   It is a great pleasure for me and my team at the Independent Office of Evaluation to have you with us over the next two days for this international conference on Information and Communication Technologies for Development Evaluation.

3.   Many of you have travelled long distances to share your experiences and expertise in applying new technologies to achieve greater development impact. I want to thank you all for your contribution to this collective effort.

4.   We will need such a collective effort to "Transform our world" as envisioned by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Frankly speaking, it was about time for such a vision of Sustainable Development to take centre-stage in the international agenda. A holistic vision that puts people at the centre and realizes that we can no longer live together if we do not take the environment and the capacity of the planet to host us into account. A holistic vision that recognizes that prosperity and economic development is necessary, but necessary to all the inhabitants of the planet, and not only for the better off.

5.   Furthermore, Agenda 2030 offers the world an action plan that tackles head-on the challenges of increasing inequality and aims to not leave anyone behind - neither women, children, youths, indigenous peoples, or other minorities. Finally, it is an agenda that understands that we are not alone and that no matter how big our country or organization may be, we need to work together, in partnerships to achieve collectively a secure and brighter future for our children and future generations. The new sustainable development agenda is a call for action and a call for transformative change. We cannot continue doing business as usual because the window of opportunity to act is closing.

6.   The innovative collective action required <u>must</u> be based on robust evidence. As representatives of the United Nations, we cannot accept a "post-truth" world. We are gathered today among development practitioners from a variety of disciplines and we believe that improved decisions, policies and strategies, improved programmes and projects that can transform and enhance peoples' lives should be informed by the evidence of what works, what does not work and most importantly by identifying the underlying reasons.

7.   Fortunately, there is greater appetite for robust evidence to inform the design of new policies, strategies, programmes and projects in the countries where we work.

However, there is a big gap between the information needed and the information available to achieve the sustainable development goals.

8. In November 2015, the evaluation offices of the United Nations Rome-based agencies organized an international conference on the evaluability of the Sustainable Development Goal number 2: namely ending hunger, achieving food security and nutrition and achieving sustainable agriculture.

9. The event provided a number of insights. First, the SDGs are dynamic and interconnected, thus a focus on only one or two SDGs may risk losing the holistic approach. Second, there is no single Theory of Change for achieving the SDGs. There is a multiplicity of valid approaches depending on the specific context. Third, the strong focus on equity, social justice and the sustainable use of natural resources, requires more granular data and analysis. Fourth, the SDGs are country owned and require commitment and capacity to be achieved, which entails adjusting the role played by international organizations. Finally, the SDGs because of their multi-sector, multi-layer and multi-stakeholder nature, require extensive collaboration for implementation.

10. Evaluation has a key role to play for the implementation of the sustainable development agenda. The global data architecture reveals uneven availability of

data among countries. This is sobering considering that what we cannot measure also matters.

11. The interagency and expert group for the SDG indicators has classified them into three tiers:

- A first tier for which an established methodology exists and data are already widely available;

- A second tier for which a methodology has been established, however, data are not easily available;

- A third tier for which an internationally-agreed methodology has not yet been developed.

12. Concretely in IFAD's work, this translates into a lack of systematic data on food storage, food losses and waste. We lack data on the nutritional status of children, adolescents or pregnant women. Agricultural statistics suffer from limited funding and lack of consistency. For example, it is challenging to assess the percentage of agricultural area under sustainable agricultural practices, the percentage of agricultural households using irrigation systems compared to all agricultural households or the percentage of agricultural households using eco-friendly fertilizers compared to all agricultural households using fertilizers. Similar challenges apply to a variety of the SDGs.

13. There is, however, a way forward that brings us to the heart of this conference. New solutions to these

challenges embrace the fourth industrial revolution that is taking place before us. This revolution includes machine learning and artificial intelligence, open data, open source tools, access to big data, crowdsourcing, mobile and wireless communication - all of which were either not available or were not economical until a decade ago.

14. ICTs show great potential in contributing to the quality of the work that evaluators perform, and are critical to strengthening evidence-based policymaking that relies on the evaluation of impacts, outcomes and shortcomings and lessons of development initiatives at all levels of activity.

15. ICTs may help us make evaluations more efficient through automation of hitherto manual processes. Or they may help us make evaluations more rigorous by enabling us to assess further along the theory of change. Or they may help us communicate better with a wide range of development stakeholders.

16. Organized along the three stages of the knowledge-creation chain - data collection, data analysis and knowledge dissemination - this conference seeks to address the following questions:

1) How are ICTs increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of evaluations?

2) How can ICT tools contribute to enhance evaluation rigor, and what potential do they hold for the future?

3) How can innovative approaches to dissemination enhance learning and strengthen impact?

17. Despite these new possibilities, and true to the nature of evaluators, we need to exercise optimism with a tinge of caution. As development evaluators, we need to be aware of the accompanying pitfalls that ICTs may bring such as concerns regarding privacy and inclusiveness. People-centric rather than technology-centric evaluations are the need of the hour. And ultimately, technology is just a tool for doing our work better.

18. Evaluators therefore need to keep abreast of important developments in the field of ICTs to stay at the cutting edge of innovation and to continue shaping the future of development evaluation. We want to learn from the front runners and each other. I encourage you to candidly share your experiences which I hope will provide us all with new ideas and approaches to meet the needs of poor people around the world. This is ICT4Eval.

19. Thank you and enjoy the conference!